

# FAIRHAVEN COMMISSION ON DISABILITY

Meeting Minutes February 2, 2023

Held at Town Hall, 40 Center St., Fairhaven, MA. 02719

Contact: [cod@fairhaven-ma.gov](mailto:cod@fairhaven-ma.gov)

Present: Town Hall: Eleanor Chew(secretary), Annemarie Chagnon, Cameron Durant (staff liaison), Angie Lopes-Ellison (town administrator)

ZOOM: Marcus Ferro (chair), Glenn Gabbard (treasurer), Ronnie Medina, Donna Maino Lavallee

Guests: Fairhaven Cable TV, Jonathan Alves, Justin Alves, David Alves, Jessica Fidalgo

ALL VOTES WERE TAKEN BY ROLL CALL VOTE

**I. CALL TO ORDER:** Eleanor Chew, Secretary, read the meeting call to order and the state guidelines and chair, Marcus Ferro called the meeting to order at 5:08 p.m. Cameron informed Marcus there were three people here that wanted to speak under section 8 on our agenda.

**II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** Annemarie made a motion to accept the minutes and Glenn seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**III. MEMBERSHIP:** Marcus shared that Jenna Benoit had resigned thanking her for her participation and her help with the educational resource list. He noted that we have two openings on the commission. Cameron asked if we wanted this posted on the website with Marcus responding yes.

## IV. TOWN ACCESSIBILITY:

**A. Town Hall:** Marcus asked Cameron for an update on the closed captioning. Cameron said it is up and working but he did not know about the cost. When someone ZOOMS in what is being said is shown on the screen. Cameron thanked the COD for bringing up this issue and for Cable TV for making it happen. Marcus said Donna took the lead on this raising the need which is very important for the town, saying he was glad it was here. He also thanked Cable TV, and the Select Board. Eleanor shared this was mentioned at the Select Board meeting by the town administrator, but the COD was not recognized and felt that when we accomplish something we need to be recognized for what we do. They did the work, but it started with us, and it needs to be corrected so people know that we are doing something. Marcus said it was conceptualized here and that's important and he thought there were a lot of boards and committees that were not taken as seriously as others. He said over the last couple of years we've been taken a lot more seriously. We've gotten the wheelchair and the beach mats for the town beach, got the registry set up for people with disabilities to voluntarily register with the police department and we are working to make town hall more accessible. The COD is making facets of town government and services more accessible. Glenn asked if all meetings were using this now. Eleanor said yes and that it is also on Channel 18 when meetings are broadcast and Glenn asked if all meetings were reading the information at the start. Eleanor said the paper was on the table where the chair sits. Annemarie shared that this is really important for her personally and she is grateful and asked if it was easily accessible. Eleanor

responded that the information she read tells people how to access this option. The representative from cable tv said if it does not show up all you have to do is click on more options and it will come up.

**B. Public Safety:** Marcus said we still have the seat belt covers from the sheriff's office and wants to post this on social media. Marcus explained what they were as Annemarie asked. Jessica Fidalgo, resident, suggested we contact the school department and Eleanor offered to call Morgan at the School Department's Family Center.

**C. Infrastructure:** Glenn reminded us that this needed to be removed from the agenda.

**D. Special Education/ Fairhaven Public Schools:** Marcus asked if there were any updates. Annemarie spoke about the issue with the handicapped parking spots at the high school, saying people without placards are parking in those spots and others are blocking the curb cuts so if the students wanted to go out they could not do so. Marcus said this was important and that he would talk to someone from the school committee. Marcus said this was a major problem and this was under our purview. Annemarie said this happens three out of 5 days a week, explaining where the physical issue was.

**E. Housing:** Marcus asked if there were any questions or comments. He mentioned the newsletter and said Pam was taking the lead on this.

**F. Social Media:** Marcus said we need to be more present on social media. Cameron said he would post the vacancies on this, and Marcus asked Cameron to post it with his email. Annemarie mentioned there was an autism center in town with Donna responding there are two with paid personnel. Marcus read what the covers say acknowledging they are not right for everyone. Donna said that the Autism Center in Swansea is pretty up to date, suggesting they could maybe do a presentation at some point.

**G. Mission Statement:** Marcus said he is working on this and that Jeff from MA. COD had sent the template for by-laws and he will have it for the next meeting. He did one last year which was approved by the Select Board and not posted so he wants to redo it. Glenn said he had provided a draft last year and that he will send it to Marcus. Once the draft is done, we can vote on it and then post it.

**5. TREASURER'S REPORT/BUDGET:** Glenn reminded us that we have \$1,000.00 within these line items: \$525.00 for training, \$475.00 for seminars and \$75.00 for office supplies. He said we can move money around and we just need to contact the town treasurer to do so. He suggested that at the March meeting we talk about needs. Cameron said he also spoke with the treasurer, Anne Carreiro, who said we need to spend it or justify why we did not spend it. Annemarie suggested that we buy auditory processing devices so people that are hard of hearing or have auditory processing disorders or use sign as a first language can access this without trying to focus on small words on screen with everyone's faces. If this is on tv we should buy a bigger tv, so the print is bigger and also for those with vision deficits. Marcus

responded saying we would need more money than is in our budget and this might need to go to town meeting for approval. Annemarie asked how we move the money. Angie responded that we have \$1,000.00 that we could use towards it but it will cost far more than \$1,000.00. Annemarie asked if we could find something to spend it on with Angie responding that we don't want to use it just to use it. Angie said there were a number of options that come into play and asked what the community really needed saying that there were a number of balance points, asking how do we expand the closed captioning or something along those lines? Annemarie responded that if it's not going to do what we need it is no help. Eleanor stated that this was really new and that it's too early to be talking about purchasing new tv's or doing something differently until we see how this works and that we needed to talk to cable tv about the need and how it can be expanded. She said adding more tv's is more work for cable and she knew they would do it and the system can only accept so much input so let's wait a few months to see what the needs are. We don't want to spend a lot of money on tv's if we don't need them. Marcus agreed that we need to study it but that he liked the idea conceptually. Glenn suggested that we think about ideas and costs for the next fiscal year. He also felt it was easier to make decisions when we know specific costs. Marcus agreed.

## **VI. NEW BUSINESS:**

**A. Acceptance of report for Annual Town Report:** Glenn asked if there was space for conversation asking if we could use the terms people with disabilities and not differently abled. Eleanor will make that change. Glenn moved that we accept the report with the change and Ronnie seconded it. The motion passed unanimously.

**B. Comment from a member of the community:** Joshua Alves was invited to speak, and he said he wanted to address today an issue with a recent jury verdict where 1.2 million dollars was awarded to him due to discrimination based on disability against Michael Meyers and Mark Reese. He said he believes that someone needs to do more for persons with substance use disorders as far as a disability and handicaps go. There's a lot of training that's missing and my brother is going to speak on that as he's an expert in the field. He thanked us for our time and our role. Marcus said he was familiar with his story but this frankly needs another place. There are some good points to be brought up without taking a side on the lawsuit. I think you make some good points that there needs to be a conversation about substance use and treating it. But I need to schedule it I think on the agenda rather than having an impromptu sort of presentation. I do appreciate you guys coming in but I think it's more appropriate to do this than to just have it right here. He asked the commission what they thought but was interrupted by Joshua Alves who spoke saying he believed they had spoken earlier with people about public comment, and everyone was in favor about the public comments. Cameron said yeah, I think the question is simple that with closing comments do closing comments count as public comments? I think there should be a public comment section. Marcus said you know agenda sure. Listen everyone's here if you would like to speak. Angie asked if she could help saying that for guidance purposes you may talk about the issues of disability which is within the purview and let them speak, but if it's the issue of the case then I would say you as a board don't have authority. They can publicly speak to the issue of disability. Eleanor said they need to talk about the disability and not the case.



The stigma in town Marcus responded that this was something he was comfortable with and I think we can do it right now. Joshua Alves responded saying I would just like to make it known that what you're saying is our speech is going to be censored. His brother told him to stop. Marcus said that was not what we're saying actually what we're saying is we have a particular purview here for our purposes to advocate for people with disabilities not to discuss litigation that I believe might still be pending. Joshua Alves said that whether or not we are in town we are not here to discuss litigation, we are here to discuss disability or substance use disorder. He yielded to his brother, Jonathan Alves. Eleanor spoke saying but you wanted to in your beginning comments and what we need is with Joshua Alves interrupting her. He responded that it's certainly relative to disabilities and discrimination due to it. I believe no one has any problems with it, right? Eleanor said we have no issue. Angie responded that as long as it's broad and open and has nothing to do with the lawsuit. Donna said she felt we had made that clear and that we should let him speak. Marcus agreed. Jonathan Alves greeted us. Annemarie asked him to look at us and not at the people listening as she needed to see his face when he was speaking. He shared that he lives in Roslindale, but he lived here for twenty years. He said one thing I think I want to point out that in Fairhaven since 2015 we have lost 45 people to opioid OD's. If we extrapolate these numbers to those of individuals with alcohol use disorders in town using MA. General Statistics we have about 96 people with alcohol use disorders in town. What's really important is to consider when thinking about drug use disorders as a whole is they are a disability that employers need to identify as such, and they need to be able to help people and actively identify their need. He went on to say that one thing we see in litigation and other issues is the stigma that drives people to continue to use substances and this has only gotten worse over the pandemic. He said he felt that this town suffers disproportionately to other similar sized towns. He thought it was due to the stigma and discrimination based on a disability. He encouraged the board consider strategies in our next year's plan that would take on the stigma in town being able to identify this as a disability like one needing past abstinence or a person needing a wheelchair, makes a difference for people suffering to know they are heard, wanted and belong. That's all I really wanted to say. I think the litigation, verdict is public record that anyone can find. I think what's really important is that this needs to come to attention beyond, so it can be fully addressed. Annemarie asked if he had specific things that he was relating to specifically to the disability of substance use? Pie in the sky kind of like best case scenario, these things you would like to see happen or things he felt are like bottom line, need to happen. Jonathan Alves responded that when we think about this I work as an addiction educator for the state and he offered technical assistance to us. One thing I think we know is effective in towns similar to Fairhaven there are things that can be done for people using so they use safely and not alone, if those drinking can find a community outside of where they drink. When there are actual plans in place in how we effectively connect them to treatment that gets them help so they can live well that can be done in town. Annemarie said she knew several people struggling and she hears from them how access to treatment is difficult to get across the board. Angie reminded us that if we have comments, the comments should be if you want to make this a discussion item you have to put it on the agenda to talk about more. Marcus replied that was what he was saying earlier, if he wants to make a comment but if we start having a broader discussion it needs to be scheduled. Jonathan Alves replied that he thinks it needs to be talked about and

offered his services to this commission as you try and implement different strategies that might be helpful. Marcus said he had Dave's number and he would be in touch to see if we can get something going on one of our future meetings on the books and more concrete so we can hash this out as to what we are able to do. Joshua Alves thanked everyone several times saying he wanted everyone to know that we need to do something about this in town. Substance use disorder is real and they're disabilities and he and his brother are willing to help in any way, so reach out and ask for help. He thanked us multiple times and Marcus thanked them for coming in.

**VII. New Meeting Date:** Marcus shared how one person cannot make it at 5:00 and asked if we could go back to 6:00. Marcus made the motion that we meet on Thursday, March 9 at 6:00 p.m. with Glenn seconding it. This passed unanimously.

**VIII. Closing Comments/Adjournment:** Eleanor asked if Marcus would send the documents from the MA. COD and said she would like to reach out to other town departments to see how we can work together. Glenn, Marcus and Cameron expressed interest in this also and Marcus said he would start a thread for everyone. Eleanor asked if anyone was checking the COD email and Marcus said he was but he would reach out to IT as there hasn't been anything in a while. Marucs made a motion to adjourn with Annemarie seconding it. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Eleanor Chew  
Secretary

