



JUSTIN ELICKER  
Mayor

**COMMISSION ON DISABILITIES**  
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BILLY HUANG  
Chairperson

## Commission on Disabilities - Meeting Minutes

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

**June 13, 2022, 6:00 – 7:30 pm**

- Present:** Billy Huang (Chair), Tricia Palluzzi, Arya Singh, Annie Harper, Sally Esposito, Robin Tousey-Ayers, Grisel Aguilar
- Absent:** Nina Silva, Linda McDonough
- Staff:** Gretchen Knauff
- Guests:** John Wardzala (Director of Mobility Services at Kennedy Center), David Agosta, Alder Eli Sabin

### I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair B. Huang at 6:08 PM.

### II. Approval of May 9, 2022 Minutes

A Quorum was established, and the Commission Members reviewed and approved the minutes from March 14, 2022 and May 9, 2022.

### III. Old Business

#### A. Effective Communication

A. Harper – update about memo to Mayor demanding more resources be allocated to interpretation for people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHOH). She has organized a group of people including people with lived experience, they are working together on a memo. When it's ready/sent, this commission should write a letter to the mayor supporting the memo. Also consider having a press release, publicize the issue, especially as the Community Crisis Response Team (CCRT) – COMPASS is launched. B.Huang – should clarify that this important issue was highlighted during the community engagement process for COMPASS. G. Knauff – will connect A. Harper with Center for Disability Rights group meets regularly, D. Agosta – someone who needs ASL should be able to participate in these meetings. G. Knauff – if we had a person who was DHOH we would provide that.

#### B. Elevator Ordinance

G. Knauff – after last meeting, ordinance was supposed to go to legislative committee, but it wasn't ready, so was tabled to be able to refine it, including adding an education component. So is on hold for now but will be worth the wait. B. Huang – important not to lose the momentum.

#### C. Ordinance Language Update

G. Knauff – changes have been made to align with CT statutes (e.g. removal of word handicapped and other old terminology). Just need to attach cover letter, and has had no opposition to the changes. She will keep us updated.

#### **IV. Alder Sabin**

B. Huang - we're interested in hearing more about your 'Downtown for All' vision. E. Sabin – Downtown for All vision culmination of many years living in downtown area, serving as Ward #1 and now Ward #7 alder. The area needs to feel more like everyone's neighborhood – not just for Yalies. Needs to be engine of opportunity in the city – housing, jobs, tax base. Need more housing that is affordable/accessible for all, e.g. via zoning reform, more supportive housing, housing for people who are homeless. Transit and mobility are also key. As New Haven grows and more people live downtown, everyone needs to be able to get around. Need to invest in bus system, pedestrian, and bike safety infrastructure. Has been working with State Representative Lemar to get state funding, take opportunity of federal funding available for infrastructure. Got \$ to redesign State St. between Water St. and Audubon St. Seeking funding for better bus system, and Safe Routes for All Plan. Damaged sidewalks and curb cuts are a big problem – makes it difficult for folks with disabilities.

R. Tousey-Ayers – other cities have worked hard to be accessible. Has Board of Alders learned from other cities? E. Sabin – no, suggests that this commission make those connections.

S. Esposito – asks about elevator ordinance. E. Sabin – concern with older buildings that don't have elevators. S. Esposito - explains that key issue is maintenance to ensure that people are not stuck in their homes. Can we require that new buildings have maintenance contracts? E. Sabin – supportive of strengthening the ordinance.

B. Huang – how can we ensure that developers do what's good for the city – Community Benefits Agreements? E. Sabin – have these when someone builds on city land, or if zoning changes are needed we can ask the developer to do something then – e.g. 78 Olive St project will contribute \$150,000 to the city, will have some affordable housing etc. When no zoning changes are needed there is not much the city can do. He is considering whether we should spend some of the money from new tax revenue/permit fees on things that benefit the community.

A. Harper – affordability is a disability rights issue given the strong association between poverty and disability of all kinds. E. Sabin – housing affordability is at the heart of this. We have a huge gap, rents are rising. We must build more affordable housing. A. Harper – also concerned that as wealthier people move into downtown there will be pressure to 'clean up' the green which could look like pushing out/excluding people with psychiatric disabilities. E. Sabin – agrees.

S. Esposito – rents downtown are unaffordable, particularly if you have a disability and need extra space for equipment/helper. How do we make sure it is affordable for people with disabilities? E. Sabin – we passed inclusionary zoning ordinance; all new buildings will have to keep 15% of units affordable – 50% AMI. Also working on long-term supportive housing, public housing, more subsidized units. S. Esposito – will that include making more vouchers available to reduce massive waiting list for subsidized housing? E. Sabin – have to tackle from all sides – more housing etc. But there is a federal funding gap, only ¼ of people who qualify for a voucher can get it. Not the same as Medicaid.

G. Knauff – inclusionary zoning does not require that a certain % of units are accessible. We are trying to change this, including recognizing that people with disabilities do have families so can't all be one-bed/efficiencies. Also concerns about elimination of parking, option to use local parking garage does not work for people who need to be able to park adjacent to their building. E. Sabin – I will talk with City Plan staff about both of these issues. B. Huang – as downtown becomes denser and we move towards less required parking, how do we ensure that parking is still available for those that need it?

J. Wardzala, the Kennedy Center can advise on these issues.

E. Sabin – trying to keep buses free, got extension until December, will keep pushing.

R. Tousey-Ayers – recently started taking train to Hartford. V. convenient, cheaper. Saw people with bikes, people with disabilities. BUT a conductor told her that they will have to close service in July for repairs, will be a great inconvenience.

G. Knauff – downtown would be more welcoming if all buses were accessible.  
B. Huang – what is your vision for the next year, and how can we work together? E. Sabin – zoning reform, list of proposals/priorities for bonding for downtown investments.

#### **V. David Agosta**

D. Agosta – v. concerned about lack of sidewalk maintenance, and snow removal issues. Has submitted his comments to the commission in writing. Will not be able to leave his block. Multiple sidewalk violations. Some repairs have taken place, but totally inadequate, they don't see big picture. Have ramps that aren't accessible due to broken sidewalks, disabled parking spots that no-one can get to. Polling stations that no-one can get to. If I have to sue the city or sue protests that is what I will do. I really just want to solve the problem. Request – please put sidewalks on your agenda. The Mayor and alders should ride around the city in a wheelchair for a day to see how it is. He takes photos of the issues, has shared with the ACLU. B. Huang – thanks D. Agosta for bringing this to us, we need to continue this conversation. Identify who in city government needs to take responsibility for this. D. Agosta – there used to be only 2 people on this commission. We had first civil rights commission in the city, we have fallen behind. T. Palluzi – we should argue that a study needs to be done, hire independent party to assess the problem, including pathways between buildings and accessible parking etc. that gets the ball rolling. G. Knauff – the city is already working on this. S. Esposito – the Safe Streets project may have some relevant information. D. Agosta – white neighborhoods are usually well maintained/ADA compliant, e.g. Hooker school. Need to be aware of this.

#### **VI. Other**

All other agenda items were tabled until the next meeting, which will take place in August after a break in July.

#### **VII. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45pm.