

TOWN OF SOUTHTON

> COMMISSION ON DISABILITIES
> JUNE 12, 2007 MEETING MINUTES

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> The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chairperson Wendy Henderson in the Southington Water Department building, West Queen Street, Southington, CT.

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> Present: Wendy Henderson, Chair; Terry Dickinson, Vice Chair; John Noel, Secretary/Treasurer; Karen Cavanaugh, Lyn Johnson, Wesley Babkirk, Sharon Neupaver. Also present: Dolores Longo, Council liaison.

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> Unexcused Absences: Charles Bosworth, George Sanchez.

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> There were over 50 other people in attendance.

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> Determination Of Quorum: Yes

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> Public Forum:

> Chairperson Henderson welcomed everyone to the public forum to discuss transportation needs in the Town of Southington. She noted that flyers with information explaining the DisAbilities Commission were available. She believes it is one of the best kept secrets in town. They are a volunteer group appointed by the Town Council. Ms. Henderson has been on the commission for the past 7 or 8 years and has found it very rewarding.

> She reminded everyone that there is a respite reimbursement program in town. Applications are available at the Library and the Town Hall. They are also distributed to the schools and social services. The program gives a little financial reimbursement to families who have extraordinary needs. At this time she introduced the members of the commission. Dolores Longo, representative of the Town Council serves as liaison. The meeting was opened up for public comment. The following persons spoke:

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> 1. Diana Boorgian. Ms. Boorgian has been a teacher for 39 years, most of them at the high school. She was at the meeting with her student, Michael Hamlin. She is concerned about what will happen to him when he graduates from school. He wants to work but one thing stops him - transportation. He needs some kind of public transportation. She lives in a small town of Canton and they have a small bus that goes to Hartford. A large town like Southington should be able to have something.

> Ms. Henderson commented that the commission is not in a position to determine whether or not Southington gets public transportation. The purpose of the forum is to determine needs which could be presented to town leaders who could advocate for funding, etc. She looked at the 2000 U.S. Census report and found 5,916 people over the age of five who are living with some sort of disability in the Town of Southington. This number does not include people who live in an institutional setting or group homes. Of that number, 3,598 people are between the ages of 16 and 64.

> 2. Michael Ruzzett said he is president of A New Way, and there is a great need for transportation in Southington. It would be a "giant leap for mankind".

> 3. Judith Roberge read a letter from a Southington High School who could not attend (Jason Soto). The letter stated that because there is no public transportation in Southington, he was riding his bicycle to Wal-Mart when he

was hit by a drunk driver. He suffered serious injuries to his neck, leg and other injuries and could not attend school for several months. Ms. Roberge also spoke as recreation director of the ARC of Southington. People work and need transportation to get to their jobs. It is a very, very important issue and feels it will be addressed.

> 4. James Dolan, 140 Hightower Road. He has a daughter at the high school who could not attend and he spoke on her behalf. He noted that, in his job as a human resource professional, employers look at cities and towns when they relocate and consider what transportation opportunities are available. Public transportation is a convenience to the population but helps employers as well. People talk about tax issues but you have to figure the more people working, the more people are paying taxes. Mr. Dolan believes the people in this town always come around to doing what is right for the community. From an economic standpoint it would be good for the town but also for those with disabilities.

> 5. Ryan Mitchell said transportation is a big issue. His mom has been driving him around but he needs to be able to get around by bus so he can do things on his own and be independent.

> 6. Michael Hamlin is a senior at Southington High School. He believes that special needs people and people who do not drive need public transportation to get a job, go shopping or go to the doctor's. Southington can really benefit from this.

> 7. Tom Ryan said that Todd goes all the way to Canton to work. His mother drives him everywhere. He noted that he sees several handicapped people walking from Darling Street to Stop & Shop - there are no sidewalks so they walk in the road. Something should be done.

> Ms. Henderson stated that first the town has to get a bus transportation route. Then about a year later you get the ADA.

> 8. Brenda Anderson said her husband is disabled and unable to drive and must depend on her and others to get to doctor's appointments or anywhere else. It is very difficult. She works, too, so it is hard to make arrangements.

> 9. Lyn Johnson is a member of the commission but she works for the Department of Mental Retardation as a case worker for clients in Plainville and in Southington. It is a very different experience because of the difference in transportation. Plainville does have transportation. The client might have a job lined up but it becomes very difficult to get them there after they are out of the school system. Most families have both parents working or are one-parent homes. Ms. Johnson believes there is a huge need in the Town of Southington.

> 10. Niki-Ann Heiss. Since her stroke she has been unable to drive. Her independence is gone. She must depend on her family and friends to take her anywhere. She asked people to think of how inconvenient it is when you don't have a car for a day because it's being serviced. Then imagine how it would be if you couldn't drive every day.

> 11. Bill Haas, Whipporwill Road, Southington. For the past three months he has not been able to drive because of a medical condition. He gets around a bit with a scooter but it is tough on Queen Street. Sidewalks are bad, too. Mr. Haas believes we do need buses in Southington and very badly. Will need even more because the police necessarily are getting stricter on seniors driving; we need buses for them, too. Will have to fight to get it. Petitions, whatever we need to do. We have to talk to our representatives. We voted them in and we need to tell them what it is we need and want. Put the word out.

> By a show of hands, about half the audience would use public transportation on a regular basis if it were available. This does not take into account the thousands reported earlier who are not in attendance.

> 12. Betty Theriault. She drives her son, Todd, everywhere he needs to go - almost 500 miles a week. It would be a nice break if we had transportation.

> 13. Debra Ruzzett, mother of Mike Russett, can't go anywhere because she has to drive Michael to and from work. It stops her from doing anything. She'd really appreciate transportation.

> 14. Kim Antol complained that parking is a problem and she has to walk a long way to get to a store. She believes everyone in this room should get a handicapped sticker to be able to park in the handicapped spaces. Ms. Henderson stated that Ms. Antol could get a sticker for herself and then use it in any car she is riding in.

> 15. Holly Melnick made a similar comment. After working all day her feet are tired.

> There were no other persons who wished to speak at this time. Ms. Henderson reminded everyone that there were forms in the lobby if people wished to make a statement. They could fill it out now and hand it in or mail it to the commission. She encouraged folks to take the forms for others who may wish to make a statement. Ms. Henderson said the more statements we have from citizens of Southington the more we can represent you.

> Dolores Longo, Council liaison, said this was a fabulous group of people. She was overwhelmed by the amount of people who came out and told their stories. She said she is behind them 100%.

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> The public forum portion of the meeting closed at 6:40 p.m. There was a brief recess.

> The commission reconvened at 7:00 p.m. Discussion followed on strategies and next steps.

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> It was decided that they should take the information - the videotape of the meeting, the minutes, statements from citizens - and give copies to our representatives, members of the Town Council. Wes Babkirk will call Leslie Cotton, Town Clerk, about possibly getting the meeting shown on the town access channel on TV. He would have the tape formatted in whatever format would work. Sharon Neupaver said the Transportation Commission at the State Capitol needs to see this to get their backing. There is no one from Southington on that board.

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> It was agreed to pay the two man video taping crew from Southington High School \$30 each for taping this evenings public forum.

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> Some discussion followed about whether any newspapers covered the meeting. A nice article would help. There was a reporter from The Observer in the audience at one point.

> Plainville has buses, why not Southington, a larger town? Ms. Neupaver stated that Plainville is the connector between Bristol and New Britain and that is why they have buses.

> Ms. Longo suggested that the first step would be to approach the town by requesting to get on the Council agenda. Everyone felt they wanted to get material together first and send it to the Council before the meeting so they have time to review it. Lyn Johnson would take care of the letter to the Council and would prepare nine packets of information. Ms. Longo offered to

hand them out to save on postage. Since the Council has only one meeting in July and one in August, the group would probably wait until September.

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> Poster Contest:

> Terry Dickinson presented the posters made by fifth graders at Hatton, Thalberg and Kelley Schools. They were the only posters received. She asked for a motion from the commission to change the poster contest to be held in the fall (October) by fifth graders, before they move on to middle school.

After discussion, motion was made by Sharon Neupaver, seconded by Karen Cavanaugh, to have the poster contest in the month of October, to be voted on the second Tuesday in November and presented at the Pyne Center. John Noel asked if the BOE would have a problem with it since we just had a poster contest but Ms. Dickinson said they are on board with it. It would be a different set of kids. Motion carried unanimously.

> The commission reviewed the posters at this time and would give the names of the selected winners to Dolores Longo to have Council Citations made up. There would be one town wide winner and one winner from each participating school.

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> Next Meeting: There will be no meeting in July due to our summer break. Our next meeting will be on August 14th 2007 at 6:00 p.m. at the Southington Water Department.

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> The regular meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

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> Respectfully submitted,

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> John Noel, Secretary

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