



Commission for Accessibility

Meeting Minutes

Monday, June 9, 2025

Meeting Via Zoom

In Attendance: Christine Santori, Maureen Culhane, Michael Londrigan Debra Franceschini, Divya Dorairajan, Tony Phillips, Don Ciota.

5:06 PM CALL TO ORDER

N.B. There was one motions made during this session.

MOTION: To approve CfA minutes from May 12, 2025 meeting.

Motion by Christine, Second by Michael
APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

Memorial Day Parade **May 26, 2025**

The Commission participated in this year's Memorial Day Parade, which begins on Main street between Jessie Lee Church and the Hawley House, and ends at Ballard Park. There were more than a thousand marchers comprising many town

entities, local youth, non-profits and marching bands. Each member of the Commission participated in the march which included two convertible cars festooned with our new CfA banners! Thousands more lined the street and enthusiastically supported the marchers. As in the past, there was an Air Force fly-over at noon. We hope to make this an annual Commission event.

Yellow Envelope Bill (House Bill 7159)

Connecticut "Yellow Envelope Bill"

Connecticut House Bill 7159, known as the "Yellow Envelope Bill," aims to improve communication and reduce misunderstandings between first responders and individuals with cognitive impairments or physical disabilities. The bill mandates the creation of yellow envelopes containing essential information to aid first responders during interactions. It also promotes training for first responders and public awareness materials to enhance communication.

Here's a more detailed breakdown:

- Purpose:**

The bill addresses situations where individuals with cognitive or physical disabilities may struggle to communicate their needs to first responders, leading to misunderstandings and potential escalations.

- Yellow Envelope:**

The bill requires the development of a yellow envelope containing information that individuals with disabilities can provide to first responders to help them understand the person's

needs, such as details about their disability, preferred communication methods, or any medical information.

- **First Responder Training:**

The bill encourages training for first responders on how to handle interactions with individuals who have cognitive impairments or physical disabilities, focusing on techniques to enhance communication and promote safety.

- **Public Awareness:**

The bill also calls for the development of public awareness materials to educate the broader community about the yellow envelopes and the importance of communicating effectively with first responders.

- **DMV, Law Enforcement, and Emergency Services:**

The bill requires the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), law enforcement, and emergency services to provide these yellow envelopes to individuals upon request.

- **CWCSEO Training:**

The bill specifies that the Connecticut Commission on the Status of Women and Equity in the Workplace (CWCSEO) provides training, in coordination with advocacy organizations and SCSU, on handling incidents involving individuals with cognitive or physical impairments.

N.B. Tony has provided the following information on this bill:

Representative Aimee Berger-Girvalo replied the bill, which she spearheaded, has passed. And, she has expressed interest in launching it in Ridgefield, likely in September once they get all the details ironed out and will keep us informed.

ADA Employment – Enforcement

Title 1 of the Americans with Disabilities Act addresses employment discrimination in the workplace. As with the other Titles of this Act, enforcement by the DOJ is complaint-based. For each of the following examples, a person stepped forward to bring an employment issue to the intention of that law enforcement agency. This serves as an example of the power of this legislation and a further reason why educating the community in accessing this law is such an essential task for our Commission.

(See Below)

ADA Employment

Heart of Texas Goodwill Industries to Pay \$75,000 in EEOC Disability Discrimination Lawsuit

Heart of Texas Goodwill Industries will pay \$75,000 to settle a lawsuit after it refused to hire a deaf applicant, allegedly saying she couldn't do the job because she couldn't hear or speak. The EEOC said this violated the ADA and the settlement includes policy changes, staff training, and new procedures to support deaf and hard of hearing applicants.

Morton Salt to Pay \$75,000 in EEOC Retaliation and Discrimination Lawsuit

Morton Salt will pay \$75,000 to settle a lawsuit after an employee was allegedly fired and mistreated because of his race, disability, and for reporting discrimination. The EEOC said this violated federal laws, and the company must also provide training and monitoring to prevent future discrimination and retaliation.

EEOC Sues Criswell Chevrolet for Refusing to Accommodate Disabled Veteran

The EEOC filed a lawsuit against Criswell Chevrolet, claiming the company violated the ADA by refusing to let an employee with PTSD use a service dog at work. The worker, a veteran, was denied accommodations for panic attacks and ultimately had to quit, prompting the EEOC to seek damages and policy changes to prevent future disability discrimination.

Ned NoMad Hotel in New York to Pay \$100,000 in EEOC Disability Lawsuit

The Ned NoMad Hotel in Manhattan will pay \$100,000 to settle a lawsuit after it refused to let a host use a stool at the front desk, despite her medical need due to a knee condition. The EEOC said the hotel violated the ADA, and as part of the settlement, the hotel must update policies, train staff, and report on how it handles accommodation requests.

Public Comment

Perhaps the single most repetitive issue brought before this Commission is Transportation for the Aging and persons with Disabilities. Ridgefield is a low-density residential area, which makes it difficult to establish a route-based schedule. The following is an illustration of how Ridgefield compares with surrounding areas. For comparative purposes the counties for Fairfield and Westchester have been added as well as Manhattan.

Population Densities of Select CT Towns/Cities, Fairfield County, Westchester County, Manhattan

Location	population.	Density per sq/mi.	area sq/mi
Bethel	20K	1190	17
Bridgeport	145K	9250	16
Danbury	87K	2025	42
Norwalk	94K	3985	23
New Canaan	21K	936	23
Ridgefield	25K	728	35
Stamford	135K	3600	52
Fairfield Cty	960K	1532	625
Westchester	990K	2300	495
Manhattan	1.7M	73,000	23

* figures based on 2020 Census and have been rounded.

Prepared by the Commission for Accessibility, Town of Ridgefield

For information only.

The following page has been taken from the Ridgefield Commission on Aging website, which explains the several existent transportation

options including Rides for Ridgefield, the SweetHart Bus, and the Town Bus. Not mentioned are the Route 7 bus and the Hart bus to the Katonah Metro North Stations. These latter routes are not specifically for the Aging or persons with Disabilities, but I believe both are handicapped accessible buses.

Transportation Services for Ridgefield Seniors and Persons with Mobility Disabilities

Rides4Ridgefield.org

Rides For Ridgefield is a non-profit organization providing information and rides to seniors (60+) and those with mobility disabilities. Volunteers help identify transportation choices. Drivers are fully screened and trained. A completed Rider Agreement (found on website) and advance reservations are required.

Call 203-894-RIDE (7433)

Monday- Friday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m or leave a message.

Rides For Ridgefield is looking for drivers. For more information email: Rides4Ridgefield@ridgefieldct.gov.

hartransit.com/dial-ride

ridgefieldct.gov/community/pages/town-bus-services

SweetHART provides door-to-door transportation within the community to seniors (65+) and those with mobility disabilities. Rides can be for any purpose: medical, shopping, recreation, social visits, errands, etc.

Bus is available Mon - Fri 8:30AM to 4:15PM/Sat 9AM to 3PM Application form and advanced reservations are required. Phone: 203-744-4070

Town Bus Services offers transportation 3 days/week to seniors (65+) and those with mobility disabilities.

Tuesday: Out-of-Town Shopping Loop

Transports riders to destinations like Danbury Fair Mall, Trader Joe's, Target, Shop Rite, and Walmart

Wednesday: Ridgefield Loop 8:30AM - 2:40PM

Picks up and drops off riders at specific locations along Main Street, Copps Hill and Founders Hall.

Call Deborah at 203-970-2505 for Tuesday/Wednesday requests.

Thursday: Danbury Medical Bus Service

Transportation is for appointments beginning at 9AM and ending before 4PM. Schedule your ride by calling 203-431-2700 by Monday. Application required.

For more information/assistance with applications contact: Karen Gaudian, Municipal Agent for the Elderly
Email: Municipalagent@ridgefieldct.gov Phone: 203-431-2754

Tony said he and I are attending Transportation Committee meetings which are exploring ways of making transportation more effective. Tony also mentioned there is a line item in the town budget for a bus to replace the existing town bus. The new bus may have a lower capacity to circumvent the driver's requirement of a CDL with a special endorsement. This is a reason why it has been difficult to hire qualified drivers. Also discussed were other transportation services such as Waymo, Uber and Lyft, some of whom may offer medical center-based services. A contact is being made for a meeting with the Danbury municipal liaison where such topics can be discussed.

Best wishes for a speedy recovery to Commissioner Debbie Preiger, who is recovering from back surgery. And, a Happy Father's Day to all the fathers in our lives!

6:25 PM Adjourn

2025 Meeting Dates: July – August. N/A. Sept 8, Oct 6, Nov 10, Dec 8
All meetings are Via Zoom on Monday of the dates above at 5:00 PM.

**Minutes by Don Ciota, Chairman
Commission for Accessibility**

