



City of Cambridge

45.

IN CITY COUNCIL

March 30, 1998

COUNCILLOR DAVIS
COUNCILLOR BORN
MAYOR DUEHAY
VICE MAYOR GALLUCCIO
COUNCILLOR REEVES
COUNCILLOR RUSSELL
COUNCILLOR SULLIVAN
COUNCILLOR TOOMEY
COUNCILLOR TRIANTAFILLOU

WHEREAS: The License Commission has a new publication: *The Cambridge Consumer News* newsletter; and

WHEREAS: This newsletter is a wonderful effort at informing the public of matters that relate to the Commission; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the City Council go on record expressing its appreciation for the new Cambridge Consumer News Newsletter; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the City Council urges that the newsletter be widely distributed.

In City Council March 30, 1998.

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

D. Margaret Drury
D. Margaret Drury
City Clerk

- (3) That the Council go on record expressing its appreciation for the new Consumers Newsletter, ^{published by the License Commission.} It is a ~~step forward~~ ^{wonderful effort at} informing the public of matters that relate to the ~~license~~ Commission. Further that the Council urges that the newsletter be widely distributed.

(4) Whereas the DPN has ^{worked} ~~been~~ very cooperatively with neighborhood groups doing spring cleanups and deserves high praise for this effort
Whereas not all neighborhoods and community groups are aware that they can form a partnership with the DPN ~~and~~ ^{to} cleanup local parks

That the CM is urged to ask the DPN to make public information available by way of ~~newspaper~~ press releases or other means in order to foster these ~~spring cleaning activity~~ partnerships

CAMBRIDGE CONSUMER NEWS



ISSUE NO. 1 MARCH/APRIL 1998

Welcome to the first issue of the Cambridge License Commission newsletter—filled with news you can use!

Electricity Still Works... And It's 10% Cheaper!

by Paul Schlaver, Executive Director, Cambridge Consumers' Council

You may not have noticed, but the Massachusetts electric industry is undergoing major restructuring. Cambridge residents will still receive their electric bills from COMElectric, although some changes have begun and will continue over the next few months.

The first thing that customers will notice is a 10% reduction on the cost of electricity, based on a "standard offer" beginning March 1st. All Massachusetts customers will see these savings on their April bills. An additional discount of 5% is planned for September, 1999.

The new legislation also enhances current consumer protections and continues all low-income utility discount programs. Energy efficiency programs will be expanded, and state licensing will now be required of all competitive power suppliers. These new laws are designed to introduce competition into the electric industry, providing consumers with lower prices and expanded choices while assuring reliable service. In the next few years consumers may choose competitive power suppliers to maximize

their savings. These suppliers will provide electricity to customers through the local distribution company, COMElectric.

Many residential or small business customers may not want to face the potentially confusing process of choosing an electricity supplier unless the savings will be much greater than the "standard offer." Consumers should know that no supplier company has yet been able to beat the current 10% "standard offer" discount.

The new legislation also allows for the creation of aggregators, or "buying clubs", to further lower electricity costs through bulk-buying and group distribution. A municipality can become an aggregator on behalf of its residents, as can membership organizations such as the AARP, trade unions, churches and automobile organizations. The City of Cambridge is studying the impact of the new legislation on the City and will evaluate what improvements might be made on behalf of the Cambridge residential and business community.

The state has established a toll-free consumer hotline to answer questions about the electricity restructuring at (888)-758-4469. The *Consumer Guide to Understanding Changes in the Electric Industry in Massachusetts* is also available upon request. Inquiries may also be made to the Consumers' Council at (617) 349-6150.

Low-income utility discount applications are processed at the Central Square office of the

Salvation Army, 402 Massachusetts Avenue. If your annual income is below \$13,808, you may qualify. For further information call (617) 547-3400.

COMElectric is working together with the state and local government to inform consumers about the impact of these new laws. *Read your bill stuffers carefully!*

Taxi Meter Rates Increase 20%

by Richard V. Scali, Executive Officer

After six months of meetings with the taxi cab industry, the Cambridge License Commission has made several decisions affecting taxi fares and policies. Starting March 30, 1998, taxi passengers will notice a 20% fare increase. Meter rates will start at \$1.50, an increase from the current base fare of \$1.25.

The price of senior coupons will be increased to \$1.75. Taxi fares less than \$5.00 can be paid with one coupon, and fares greater than \$5.00 with two coupons. In order to fund the senior coupon program, the annual renewal fee for taxi medallions will be increased from \$140.00 to \$165.00. The additional \$25.00 will be collected during October inspections.

Passengers must now pay a \$3.00 toll in addition to their fares when traveling to and from Logan Airport. The fee for requesting station wagon service remains \$6.00, plus \$0.50 per piece of luggage. There is no charge for loading mobility devices.

A new Tourist Department brochure will now be available in cabs, hotels and other public places explaining how taxi passengers can file complaints, compliments and suggestions on taxi service. Company names, telephone numbers and medallion numbers will also be included.

Taxi drivers will be fined \$50.00 on their first offense for refusing short fares. Owners will be fined an additional \$25.00 for violations of their drivers. Taxi drivers will receive training on these procedures in taxi school, and will be brought in for disciplinary hearings when these new rules are not followed.

In a further effort to protect consumers, mechanical meters will be added to taxis when medallions or cabs are transferred or sold, making printed receipts available to customers.

The taxicab subcommittee, made up of taxi drivers, owners, hotels, the Council on Aging, the City Council, the Disabilities Commission and the License Commission, will continue to meet monthly to improve city taxi service.

If you have any questions about these changes in taxi service, please contact Richard Scali at (617) 349-6140.

About the Cambridge License Commission

If you're not familiar with the workings of our office, we are responsible for licensing all Cambridge restaurants, bars, hotels, and taxis, and raffles, bazaars, street-fairs—everything from fortune tellers to used car dealers.

We investigate inquiries and complaints against these businesses. Contact our Chief Investigator, Andrea Boyer, at (617) 349-6149 if you have questions or would like to file a complaint about any of our licensees. Our Consumer Council is responsible for handling

complaints against any establishment in Cambridge, whether or not it is licensed by our licensing division. Contact Laura Nichols at (617) 349-6150 if you have any questions or wish to file a consumer complaint.

In the Next Issue

- Information on improvements in the Cambridge Senior Citizen coupon program.
- Information on the new Harvard Square community RESPECT program.

Notes On Our Upcoming Agenda

The next License Commission meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 24, 1998 at 6 pm in the Lombardi Building located at 831 Massachusetts Avenue. The public is welcome to attend our meetings. Please bring your questions and concerns. The agenda is published in both the Cambridge Chronicle and TAB.

New restaurant licenses, liquor licenses or management changes for the following establishments will be discussed:

- Boston Duck Tours
- Porter Square Café & Diner
- Grateful Deli
- Campo de Fiori
- La Crosta
- American Academy of Arts & Sciences
- The Cheesecake Factory of Cambridge
- Cottonwood Café/Snakebites
- North Point Café
- Nick's Beef & Beer House

Taxi licenses, gasoline storage licenses, entertainment licenses, taxi medallion transfers will also be discussed.

Useful Telephone Numbers

LICENSE COMMISSION (617) 349-6140

Chief Investigator: Andrea Boyer
(617) 349-6149

CONSUMER COUNCIL (617) 349-6150

Administrative Assistant: Laura Nichols

SALVATION ARMY, CENTRAL SQUARE (617) 547-3400

Utility Discount Applications for
Low-Income Cambridge Residents

MASSACHUSETTS ELECTRICITY HOTLINE (888) 758-4469

TAXI COMPLAINT HOTLINE (617) 349-6146



City of Cambridge

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IN CITY COUNCIL

March 30, 1998

COUNCILLOR DAVIS

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Consent Order #45

R-397

Councillor Davis re: Appreciation to the
License Commission for the publication
The Cambridge Consumer News.

In City Council March 30, 1998

ORDER ADOPTED