

**CITY OF PITTSBURGH/ALLEGHENY COUNTY  
TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES  
April 19, 2010  
MINUTES**

**Location:** First Floor Conference Room  
Civic Building, 200 Ross Street  
Pittsburgh, PA

**Members Present:** Paul O'Hanlon, Chairperson, Katherine D. Seelman, Dr., Co-Chair, Janet Evans, Milton Henderson, Rich McGann, James C. Noschese

**Members Absent:** Aurelia Carter, Linda Dickerson, Sarah Goldstein, Liz Healey, Jeff Parker, John Tague

**Others Present:** Judy Barricella, Ed Buran, Gerhardt Egri, Marion Damick, Holly Dick, Dianne Gallagher, Shreya Gopal, Megan Hammond, Ryszard Janik, Danielle Lengle, Chuck Keenan, James Kindler, Lisa Mendler, Richard Meritzer, Charles Morrison, Teresa Nellans, Matt Pavolsky, Asia Pruden, Kate Rakus, Tamara Siegart, Mary Van Shura, Joseph Wassermann (phone), Emily Wilcox,

The meeting was called to order by Mr. O'Hanlon at 1:05 PM.

**INTRODUCTIONS**

**ACTION ITEM**

**Review & approval of March's minutes**

Mr. Noschese motions to approve March's meeting minutes.

Dr. Seelman seconds.

All in favor. The motion passes.

**Review & approval of financial report**

Mr. O'Hanlon motions to table the financial report to a later date.

The motion is seconded and it passes.

**UPDATE**

## **Annual Meeting**

Mr. O'Hanlon said that they had not reached a consensus on a subject for the annual meeting. The annual meeting usually occurs in the late summer or early autumn. The Task Force welcomes anyone to suggest annual meeting subjects.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Development Process for the City – Patrick Hassett and Kate Rakus**

Mr. Wasserman joins the table via the phone.

Mr. Meritzer explains that the Golden Triangle Association for the Blind requested this topic. They are interested in how members from the disability community can be involved with the design process.

Kate Rakus from the Department of City Planning and Ryszard Janik from Public Works join the table.

Mr. Wasserman explains that the Lancaster Chapter of the Council of the Blind, asked their Department of City Planning to be let in on development changes. It seems to be working nicely. He forwarded that email from Lancaster to Mr. Meritzer and asked if something like that could result here in Pittsburgh.

Ms. Rakus explains that she works in the Zoning Review Commission. Zoning is the City's land use regulations. It affects residential and commercial. She also works on urban design. For any development to happen, the first approval is from zoning department. First you get the project in, they make an evaluation on the scope of the project, where it is, what zoning classification it falls under, and then what the process will be. If you are adding on to a house, as long as it complies with the zoning code, it can be stamped at the zoning counter. The Zoning board meets Thursday mornings. Someone can apply to get an allowance even though it may not comply with the zoning code. The Zoning board agendas are posted a couple weeks in advance on the Department of City Planning website. Community groups are added to the mailing lists and so disability groups could be added as well. They typically are smaller projects but will range in size. The second way is through the Contextual Design Advisory Panel (CDAP). The panel is comprised of architects and planners, who are experts in the field to review projects. The public is welcome at these meetings and they will accept written comments at these meetings. The agendas for CDAP meetings are posted one week before. The third way to comment is by coming through the planning commission, which deals with projects like the arena, the casino, any Downtown renovation that exceeds 50,000 dollars, and possibly master plans. The Planning Commission meets every other Tuesday afternoon in this room. The agendas for the Planning Commission meetings are

posted on the Department of City Planning website as well. There exists a community group mailing list for that to which the disability community could also be added.

Mr. Meritzer clarifies that he sends the planning commission agendas to the Task Force.

Patrick Hassett, the Assistant Director for Engineering and Traffic from Public Works joins the table. Ryszard Janik leaves the table.

Mr. Hassett explains that his job deals with anything in the public right of way like streets, sidewalks, and traffic. He opened up the floor to discussion and questions.

Dr. Seelman: Has the Disability Community been involved?

Ms. Rakus: We recently lost Mr. Dick on the Planning Commission, and he had involved the community. Richard (Meritzer) has been sitting in.

Dr. Seelman: The position needs to be filled. What issues did Mr. Dick bring?

Ms. Rakus: He brought to the table issues like bikes on sidewalks.

Mr. O'Hanlon: What is CDAP and contextual design? The Disability Community is on the receiving end of contextual design. For instance, there are always steps.

Ms. Rakus: There are eight different members with different opinions. It is advisory as staff. The staff and the Commission decide.

Mr. O'Hanlon: How do you get on the Panel?

Ms. Rakus: We just revamped the way we do that in January after five years. Now the staff makes recommendations to the Director. They should have a range of skills and diversity.

Mr. O'Hanlon: Are citizens involved in Community Development Block Grant projects?

Mr. Hassett: We make requests in the budget but the CD (Community Development) office makes those decisions.

Mr. O'Hanlon: Neither of you are responsible for CD input?

Mr. Meritzer: That would be Rich Bellisario.

Mr. McGann: I am concerned why the City and Federal Government worry about the cost when these are our needs.

Mr. Hassett: We do as many as 200 ramps a year. The cost of building ramps varies to as much as 1000 dollars. There are as many as eight ramps per intersection.

Mr. Noschese: Our sidewalk ramps are not all updated. What percent is done?

Mr. Hassett: There is a range of what we define as done. Some do not have ramps, some have old ramps, and some are not accessible because of paving. If there is a development project, they must put in ramps, if it is a 311 request, if it is feasible and falls under the ADA, or if we are paving, we will install ramps.

Mr. Meritzer: The first grapple is the cost. We can make exceptions in Zoning unless there are documents that include the ADA.

Ms. Rakus: No. Only the State can waive the ADA.

Mr. McGann: Mr. Wasserman says that Audible Signals are great but it is harder to train dogs for audible signals where there are not any ramps.

Mr. Hassett: Ninety percent of our ramps are in non-signalized intersections.

Mr. Wasserman: Mr. Hassett said where a development is occurring will have new traffic signals?

Mr. Hassett: Yes, that is what is happening with the Consol Energy Arena.

Ms. Barricella: Are you responsible for benches and flower pots?

Mr. Hassett: We are.

Ms. Barricella: There are benches and flower pots located on the sidewalks with accessible parking and it makes it difficult to open the vehicle's door to exit.

Mr. Janik: Action starts when 311 is contacted.

Ms. Barricella: I can call 311 but you should have a policy.

Mr. Hassett: I will look into it.

Ms. Evans: How soon after you call 311 can you start making improvements?

Mr. Hassett: It depends on who gets the request.

Ms. Evans: There are curb ramps that need to be fixed.

Mr. Hassett: That would go from 311 to Ryszard Janik.

Mr. Janik: The response is about a couple weeks. We go to the 311 site and give replies.

Mr. Noschese: There is no problem with 911 accessibility but 311 needs to be upgraded. I tried it and it was very frustrating.

Mr. McGann: The point is not the cost, 311 must be accessible.

Mr. Meritzer: Maybe we can set up a committee for that with Mr. McGann, Mr. Noschese, and Ms. Nellans.

Ms. Damick: It is hard to maneuver the cobblestones at the Market Square construction.  
Mr. Hasset: My understanding is that it is ADA compliant. The requirement is it must be offset. I will check it out.

Mr. Henderson: What about variances in new construction? Do you allow them in new construction? When it comes to the Zoning Board?

Ms. Rakus: The ZBA can not grant variances to the ADA but it can grant variances to the City Code. As I understand from Bureau of Building Inspection, if someone wants to get a variance for that, they must go to the State board.  
When it comes to parking stalls, I will go to Richard (Meritzer) with my interpretation of how the parking lot should look and he then give his interpretation. I believe that BBI reviews the layout after the ZBA reviews.

Mr. McGann: The ADA is almost twenty years old. When will they get on board?

Mr. O'Hanlon: We are all experienced persons with disabilities. At any point in time, we face a built environment where decisions were made before in concrete. There are limitations in what came before. Fixing old mistakes is really expensive. We are interested in getting as far ahead of the curve as possible. As soon as we can give input in design issues, the less expensive it will be. Development seems Byzantine with all these different chiefs, and departments, and counsels. What is the easiest way to give input and suggestions? What is the easiest way to have an impact?

Ms. Rakus: This is something we hear from community groups often. My quick answer is always your neighborhood planner. So for you, I would say Richard Meritzer. I know personally that the ZBA and Planning Commission take public input very seriously. The Planning Commission can put conditions on a project. Design is not final once it reaches Planning Commission. The Department of City Planning is coming out with a new computer system for city staff in the fall and then online to the public in a year or so, to see what projects are going on with your neighborhood that you are interested in.

Mr. Henderson: Can you say no to an architect unless he or she eliminates the one-step entrance?

Ms. Rakus: We can but it is not enforceable by law.

Mr. Meritzer: Yes, it is. The issue is not with new construction but with older buildings that update and change use. Once they change use, they must be brought up to compliance.

Mr. Henderson: If we are building new construction, we need to change the mindset. Architects and developers are thinking step. We need them to think no step.

Mr. O'Hanlon: Mr. Wasserman do you have any questions?

Mr. Wasserman: Thank you for making your presentations and clearing up a few things. If a representative from the Task Force can be part of these meetings, we should do it right from the beginning.

Mr. O'Hanlon: I will just give a rundown of disability concerns. Are there any plans for more accessible parking?

Mr. Hassett: Accessible meters are Parking Authority. I clearly need to get involved to make sure nothing gets placed in front of blue meters. Mr. Janik is sensitive to the community. Anything that comes up, I refer to Ryszard (Janik). Anything not in guidance with the law, we try to interpret or we refer to Richard Meritzer and who may at his discretion bring a committee in. We are now starting to make a policy for APS.

Ms. Nellans: Do speakers deal with acoustics on new buildings?

Mr. O'Hanlon: That brings up the questions about blind spots.

Ms Nellans: Media in Pittsburgh and Loop American. A loop is a wire that goes around the room and links into accessible hearing designs. Are there any loops in Pittsburgh?

Mr. Meritzer: We will ask Bureau of Building Inspection.

Mr. Egri: Bus stops have barriers so people can not get in.

Mr. McGann: I agree with Teresa about the loops. Some of the blind are losing their hearing.

Mr. O'Hanlon: I would like to thank you both. This has been a good process.

Ms. Rakus: I would be glad to come back.

Mr. Noschese: It would be nice if some of the staff came to our meetings occasionally.

Ms. Rakus: Please be involved in our Comprehensive Plan meetings and survey.

Mr. Henderson: What is the projected date for Market Square to be completed?

Mr. Hassett: It is expected to be done by late August.

Dr. Seelman: There are situations where only people with disabilities can test designs. We use regulations like ADA and ADAAG.

Mr. O'Hanlon: From a historical perspective, before Adaag, people with disabilities went over the plans and looked at things. Now we are substituting that with regulations. What could we do to encourage it?

Mr. Keenan: ADA Inc. does that for larger development for profit.

Ms. Dick: When Paul and Ruth did that it was the committee on architectural barriers. When Paul was on the Planning Commission, he did look at developments.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Distribution of the Hospital Compliance Guidelines**

Mr. Meritzer: The Hospital Compliance Guidelines are too massive to email. They are sitting on a City-wide drive. We met with Director Ismail and discussed rolling it out with the public. We would be delighted to house it but we wanted to ask the Task Force where they wanted it to be on the web.

Mr. O'Hanlon: My scope is limited to the Western PA. I am not sure how to get it to a large audience. Is it worth going to the FISA foundation?

Mr. Noschese: We should put it on a website for green purposes, the City or another.

Ms. Gallagher: Could we see a rough draft?

Mr. Meritzer: The draft has already been approved by the Law Department and is in its final stage.

Mr. O'Hanlon: The City could host it.

Mr. Keenan: I would suggest Health Bridges.

Ms. Lengle: There are the Accommodations Card people.

Mr. O'Hanlon: There is also the Hospital Council.

Mr. McGann: It is important to have an accessible website. Make it available to be viewed with large print.

Mr. Noschese: The manual will be outdated in five years, which we should think about.

Mr. O'Hanlon: We can look at doing

Ms. Lengle: There is also the NDA (National Deaf Academy). You also have to take into account state laws if we are thinking of distributing this nationally. Laws differ depending on the state.

Mr. Meritzer: Eventually we will be doing a webpage for the manual which includes an interpreted questionnaire for them to evaluate hospitals. Hearing and Deaf Services has agreed that if we get the money to be the conduit.

## **STAFF REPORTS**

### **Meetings Scheduled**

Mr. Meritzer: The Comprehensive Plan has started its public process. The Disability community needs to be more engaged. The phase we are in right is the cultural heritage plan. What is a cultural heritage plan? This will be the first Comp plan that Pittsburgh has ever had. It will entail all the elements that the City has input in. The plan will guide the City in making decisions. Cultural heritage is historic preservation and monuments. It is a public process with meetings and a survey, which is through survey monkey – I tried to make it accessible but it happened before I knew it was happening. I am concerned that disability community is not going to be involved. It will make it much harder. We have the opportunity to make these decisions at the beginning. I was involved in the County Comp Plan. They had a separate committee. Director Ismail said that no, we want people with disabilities involved in every step.

Mr. O'Hanlon: Can you email the survey again?

Mr. McGann: You confused me. You talk about improvements for new developments. What's the difference between renovation and new? Can you clarify how that helps accessibility?

Mr. Meritzer: Cultural Heritage Planning is taking existing historic districts and maintaining their cultural context. Years ago, we made a whole manual for Carson Street on historic preservation and visitability. There are guidelines we have. We want to make sure that accessibility is in the plan and that there aren't loopholes for people to say that they cannot make it accessible because it is historic preserved. It is more important than cultural heritage. This is important. Open space is next. I met with their consultant and they are good on accessibility issues. What they do on the West Coast is what ADA INC. does here. The City plan should say that parks and playgrounds must be accessible. The elements include: open space, cultural heritage, transportation, public art, economics, housing, infrastructure, public services, urban design, education, energy, and land use.

Mr. McGann: I love history and being proud of history but you must include individuals with disabilities.

Mr. Meritzer: ADA strategic planning team is making corrections as we evaluate City-owned facilities. We talked about snow removal during snowmagedon and most departments were defensive about what happened. They felt overwhelmed but understood they needed to be sensitive.

We discussed the transport. We are setting up a meeting with Public Works about that. We are meeting with Councilman Krauss to discuss snow removal and sandwich boards. Christina has finished her time here. Daniel Stiker will be starting here next month. He studies communication and media, and we will use him for projects like rolling out of the manual and the accessibility Pittsburgh spot.

Ms. Evans motions to adjourn. Mr. Noschese seconds. All are in favor. The motion passes.

**ADJOURN**

Mr. O'Hanlon adjourned the meeting at 3:05 PM.

**THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING:**

DATE: May 17, 2010  
TIME: 1:00 P.M.  
LOCATION: Large Conference Room  
200 Ross Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219