

**CITY OF PITTSBURGH/ALLEGHENY COUNTY
TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES
AUGUST 20, 2007
MINUTES**

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

Members Present: Jeff Parker, Chairperson, Katherine D. Seelman, Co-chair, Aurelia Carter, Janet Evans, Sarah Goldstein, Paul O'Hanlon, John Tague

Members Absent: Linda Dickerson, Liz Healey, Milton Henderson, Rich McGann

Others Present: Judy Barricella, Jennifer Behun, Leslie Cooke, Henry Decker, Mary Figlar, Doug Glovier, Amy Hart, Chuck Keenan, Danielle Lenge, Susan Lichtenfels, Richard Meritzer, Cheryl Noschese, James C. Noschese, Amanda Panosky, Susan Schaeffer, Arlene M. Sler, Evelyn Stypula, Milt Wolfson

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Parker at 1:05 PM.

Introductions:

Everyone introduced themselves. Mr. Parker announced that Bill Crean and the Mayor would be speaking at today's meeting.

Approval of the June 2007 Minutes:

Ms. Evans moved TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES. Ms. Carter seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously.

Financial Report:

Mr. Parker passed out copies of the report. The final budget for the 06-07 fiscal year has \$1,277.15 remaining which the Task Force voted to encumber for the Annual meeting during the July monthly meeting. Mr. Parker presented the July expenses to date which consisted of the monthly fiscal agent charge and then projected that for interpreter and CART expenses which should be approximately \$12,720.00 for the year, the annual budget will need an additional \$1,612.00.

Dr. Seelman expressed concern about needing funds for task Force activities. Is there any money for additional programming? Mr. Parker said there is no money for anything but our fiscal agent and providing accommodations at the meetings. Dr. Seelman responded that activities are important as well. She asked that the Task Force negotiate \$2,000 to \$3,000 more for programming. Mr. Tague asked if we have a plan to ask for additional money. Mr. Parker said he has spoken with James Faulks about this issue. Mr. O'Hanlon moved TO ACCEPT THE FINANCIAL REPORT. The motion was seconded by Ms. Evans. The motion passed unanimously.

Department of Public Works – Bill Crean:

Mr. Parker pointed out that it was a hectic time for Public Works now because of the storms and appreciated Mr. Crean taking time out to attend. We want to do some work in advance of the snows. We have already talked to other departments. Mr. O'Hanlon pointed out that part of what we aspire to is a City that facilitates everyone getting around all year. Some people shovel their walks and some don't. Those who don't get ice buildup. People with disabilities can't get around so they hibernate all winter. How do we break that cycle? We have very unequal attention to sidewalks. What needs to be done to get different results next winter and how can we cooperate?

Mr. Crean said the problem is with Code enforcement. There are laws on the books. But there are lots of rental units in the city and the tenants don't care because they are not concerned about liability. Changing the mindset is the biggest challenge. Who is accountable under the law?

Dr. Seelman asked who enforces the Code. The City does Public Service Announcements. Can this topic be one? Mr. Crean responded the City has its own channel produce announcements. Mr. Meritzer added that they are under CIS and currently they do not have the staff to do original programming, but they can provide technical assistance.

Mr. Tague said curb cuts and bus stops are also a problem. The snow plows push the snow into the curb ramps and the bus stops. Getting on a lift when that happens is problematic. Mr. Crean responded that opening commercial streets and allowing parking there is the City's first concern. They lost a number of staff under Act 47. They don't have the staff to do the job. Sidewalks are the responsibility of the home owner. They could do select stops in each neighborhood. Mr. Tague said the technique of plowing is the problem. At times we get inundated with snow, but with some foresight they can plow more sensitively. Mr. Crean responded he will talk to the supervisors about being more sensitive and angling the plow blade. Ms. Carter pointed out that she understands they are understaffed, but it would cost the City more if they were sued. She then asked who is responsible for City owned lots. Mr. Crean said he did not know. Ms. Carter then asked whom she would contact. Mr. Crean answered if somebody does not know who owns the lot they should contact him. Mr. Tague added many properties owned by the City are houses. Public Works is responsible for them.

Mr. O'Hanlon stated we have a lot of disconnected ideas. The culture of various cities is different. We need a campaign to change the culture of this City around snow removal. He encouraged us to go through the process of such a campaign, like the "Redd Up Pittsburgh" campaign. Mr. Crean said he can make a start in The Department of Public Works by changing the attitudes of the snow plow drivers. Changing the culture is more important. Dr. Seelman said she heard ideas on enforcement and public education. Fragmentation is a problem with enforcement. Mr. Parker suggested Mr. Crean take what he heard back to his office. A lot of work the Task Force does is work in progress.

Mr. Parker also asked for Mr. Crean's opinion and help involving OVR's move to 531 Penn Avenue. The rear alley is the secondary access. Drainage is one of the problems with this alley. Mr. Crean said he was aware of the alley. There are a number of issues with this alley. The sewer issue would be addressed by PWSA. The alley needs to be repaved. The Task Force should pursue this. Dr Seelman added OVR serves those with employment need and the more vulnerable people use this building.

Mr. O'Hanlon brought the conversation back to snow removal by stating that snow removal is a patchwork quilt. We need a campaign to weave together city functions and raise public awareness. This is an issue we share with a lot of people. Ms. Goldstein suggested we get the schools involved and get student to shovel walks. It can be an activity like selling Girl Scout cookies. Teach them about tickets. Students have strong backs.

Dr. Seelman moved that WE INVESTIGATE, IDENTIFY AND COMMUNICATE THE CAMPAIGN TO PEOPLE WHO DO PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS (PSAS). Ms. Carter seconded the motion. She cautioned that seniors should not be penalized. More and more people with disabilities are home owners. Mr. O'Hanlon said it can be tough to figure out who is responsible. Sometimes it is a hardship to shovel the walk. We need to look at programs that assist homeowners. Getting the City to do PSAs is one of a range of things. We should also talk to City Council. Dr. Seelman revised her motion to DEVELOP A MULTIFACETED APPROACH INCLUDING PSAS, COUNCIL MEETINGS AND OTHER STRATEGIES. Ms. Carter seconded the revised motion. Mr. Tague asked who was going to implement this motion. Ms Cater said she would co-chair the committee and Ms. Goldstein volunteered to work on this project. Dr. Seelman volunteered to work on the PSA. Mr. O'Hanlon said we need to find a co-chair to work with Ms. Cater. Mr. Parker point out it need not be a Task Force member. Mr. Keenan said the City has done these kinds of campaigns before on jay walking. There were items on the news everyday. We could get BBI to publicize that they are ticketing people and then get the news crews to follow them. He said he will help on the committee.

Staff Update – Hospital Survey:

Ms. Cooke presented her report (see attached.).

Dr. Seelman said this points out the importance of bringing young people into the system. They can continue to work on projects like these. There are differences between the deaf and hard of hearing communities. Assistive Listening Technologies are different. We need training for professionals in the field. She thanked Mr. Meritzer for bringing Ms. Cooke on. Ms. Stypula said she appreciates the work Ms. Cooke did. She asked Mr. Parker to put together a committee to follow up on this survey because the project should not stop here. Dr. Seelman pointed out that Susan Schaeffer is present. She is responsible for training at UPMC. She is beginning the training in Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic. She has counterparts in other hospital systems. Ms. Schaeffer said she would be happy to work with the Task Force. Milt Wolfson representing the Hearing Loss Association thanked Ms. Cooke for her work and said he would take the report back to the Association. He volunteered to work on the Committee. Mr. Parker pointed out that we are planning on using the Annual Meeting to pursue this issue. Ms. Evans said she would work on the committee.

Meeting with the Mayor:

Mr. Parker thanked the Mayor for attending. He explained that the Task Force appreciated the opportunity to meet with him and that they serve him as advisors. The Task Force members then introduced themselves. Mr. Parker went on to explain there are currently 11 members on the Task Force. The purpose is to advise the Mayor and County Chief Executive on issues of importance to the Disability Community. The Task Force had held public hearings to learn of the concerns of the community and three subjects; housing, employment and government interaction were emphasized. Of particular interest were concerns of persons with hearing disabilities. The Task Force has also been very involved in visitability and accessible voting. We worked with the City and County personnel departments on employment issues. The Task Force also worked with the County Jail and now the hospitals on issues regarding persons with hearing disabilities.

Mr. O'Hanlon added a major accomplishment was accessible polling places. Two years ago there were 150 inaccessible polling places in Allegheny County. Now there are less than 10. This was more a county issue, but it was a major leap forward. Statewide about 20% of the polling places are inaccessible. That is where we started. Mayor Ravenstahl asked how many inaccessible polling places remain in the City. Mr. O'Hanlon said none. The issue in the City is accessible parking at polling places. They have been asking the City for designated spaces on Election Day. It's not simple but do-able. It requires mobilizing an army of workers on Election Day.

Mr. Tague said one of the things the Task Force wanted to do was raise awareness of employment in the City and the County. The City disability web page has a section on employment services. The Task Force has received a high level of cooperation from the City and County on this issue. Ms. Carter added the Task Force is also concerned about issues that affect children. When the Pittsburgh School system right sized, there was an outcry from the community and we met with the Superintendent and discussed the community's concerns. Mr. Parker asked Mr. Meritzer to update the mayor on the status of the Visitability tax credit. Mr. Meritzer related that subsequent to the City passing the Tax Credit, the State enabling legislation changed some of the language. These changes had been drafted but the Law Department was pursuing further clarification. The Bureau of Building Inspection was also determining how to verify to County Assessment that the work qualifies.

Mr. Parker said that the City contributes staff to the Task Force and the County provides the operating funds. Mr. Tague then asked the status of the ADA Coordinator position. Mayor Ravenstahl responded the ADA Coordinator position will be reinstated in next year's budget. They are getting the funding together now. He went on to point out that he has worked to diversify City Government to reflect the City. We have an administration that cares. He is also working on improving the special events permits applications. He encouraged the Task Force to get him recommendations to fill the existing vacancies on authorities, boards and commissions. Ms. Goldstein asked if the ADA Coordinator will be a person with a disability. Mayor Ravenstahl said it is hard to say. We would take that into account. That makes sense if possible.

Mr. Parker asked the Mayor for assistance on several other issues including OVR's move and the alley behind the building. Mayor Ravenstahl said a Department of Public Works representative; a Task Force member and someone on his staff should look at the alley together. His office will help.

Dr. Seelman added a Public Works staff person talked with us about snow removal. We thought about including snow removal in the “Redd Up” Campaign. She thanked him for coming. Mr. O’Hanlon amplified the snow removal issue. They met with Bureau of Building Inspection and the Department of Public Works. This is a complicated matter that requires coordination. We need a campaign. Enforcement is part of the issue but first we need public education. Identify a strategy for those who can not shovel their walks. Even ownership is a complicated issue. This is a mobility and transportation issue. Currently people with disabilities hibernate. Snow removal from the sidewalk will make the City livable for everybody.

Ms. Carter applauded the Mayor’s effort in hiring people who reflect the population of the City. She urged him to consider employing people with disabilities. Some cities have an office for disabilities. The County has Disability Connections. Mr. Parker pointed out that budget constraints make that difficult. Ms. Evans said she applied to be on the Housing Authority Board. She applauded him for caring. More people with disabilities should be on boards. We should make a list. Mayor Ravenstahl said he will send the Task Force a list of vacancies. Ms. Stypula remarked they have set up a State Office of Disabilities which is a cabinet position and works with a Task Force. She would like to work with the Mayor to set a similar office up. Mayor Ravenstahl replied that reestablishment of the ADA coordinator is a priority. That would be the right person to fill this responsibility. Mr. Parker said we appreciate the Mayor being here and we are here to help him.

Pedestrian Report:

Amanda Panosky presented the Pedestrian Safety Report (see attached).

James C. Noschese said emergency vehicles don’t look for pedestrians. They should add strobe lighting. Ms. Evans added Washington has timed crossing lights but they are larger. Replacing the walk lights should start on the main streets. Ms. Panosky said the ones we are getting are bigger. This was one of the most popular suggestions.

Vox Pop:

Mr. Parker reminded everyone about the Diversity Festival and for the record thanked Dee Delaney for working with the Task Force to answer all our questions about the Festival.

Ms. Evans moved that the meeting be adjourned. Mr. O’Hanlon seconded the Motion. The meeting was adjourned at 3:10 p.m.

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING:

DATE: September 17, 2007
TIME: 1:00 P.M.
LOCATION: Large Conference Room
200 Ross Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219