

**CITY OF PITTSBURGH/ALLEGHENY COUNTY
TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES
JANUARY 22, 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, Liz Healey, Milton Henderson, Paul O'Hanlon, John Tague

Members Absent: Eugene Barton, Linda Dickerson, Sarah Goldstein, Rich McGann

Others Present: Elizabeth Brown, Steve Chopek, Gary Donatelli, Chuck Keenan, Danielle Lenge, Joanne Lenge-Sharer, Kevin Maxwell, Denise McArthur-Turner, Richard Meritzer, Charles Morrison, Teresa Nellans, Amanda Reinsfelder, Terry Reynolds, David Rosenblatt, Allison Robinson PhD, Jason Tigano representing Congress Member Michael Doyle, Mary Esther Van Shura, Sara Walfoort

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Parker at 1:00 PM.

Introductions:

Everyone introduced themselves.

Approval of the November 2006 Minutes:

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

Financial Report:

Mr. Parker passed out copies of the report. So far this year most of our expenses have been for interpreters and our fiscal agent.

SPC Specialized Outreach Project:

Sara Walfoort introduced herself and informed the Task Force that the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC) is the designated transportation and economic development planning agency for the ten county area of Southwest Pennsylvania. This is 7,100 square miles with a population of 2,656,007 residents. They are currently working on the Long Range Plan. There is going to be an Electronic Town Meeting February 12, 2007 from 6:30 p.m. until 8:30 p.m. in the Regional Enterprise Tower, 425 Sixth Avenue, on the 31st Floor. There will be eleven simultaneous meetings linked by the web. People should call in advance if they have special needs. She then gave the web address www.spcregion.org/trans_otm.shtml or www.spcregion.org/pub_otm_get.shtml and their contact information.

Mr. Parker asked if there had been an email sent with this information. Ms. Walfoort said this information is new. Dr. Seelman asked if the meeting will be captioned. Ms. Walfoort responded that she will check. Mr. Parker asked what the topics will be. Ms. Walfoort answered it will be regional visioning. They will look at how transportation interlocks with development. They will look at how water and sewage infrastructure effects development and they will look at both urban areas and town centers in the areas of jobs, housing, development and investment.

Mr. Tague asked where the numbers for people with disabilities had come from. He said they seem low. Ms. Walfoort said they came from the last census. They reflect people who go out of their homes with disabilities over the age of 16. Mr. Tague responded that leaves out anyone ages 5 to 16. Dr. Seelman added there was a report done two years ago with better numbers. People with sensory disabilities and the blind should be included. She asked if she could get Ms. Walfoort the report. Ms. Walfoort responded that they have a longer power point presentation with better numbers. They are looking at who would be uncomfortable attending a meeting, particularly the elderly. Dr. Seelman added the report from two years ago looks at the elderly as well.

Mr. O'Hanlon asked if you need to be at the Electronic Town Meeting to participate. Ms. Walfoort said at this point they are just linking the meetings. They are exploring internet connections to individuals. Dr. Seelman added there will be disability issues at the meeting.

Mr. O'Hanlon said there is a historic dilemma that Public Transportation is county based. Companies from outlying counties can come into Allegheny County but they cannot pick anybody up. Ms. Walfoort said they cannot tell Transit providers how to operate but they are doing a ten county transit study to help foster the companies to work together. Mr. O'Hanlon responded that the transit operators act like victims of the policy. He wondered who sets policy or takes leadership. Ms. Walfoort said there are no clear ground rules. Our region has expanded to more counties. There are ten independent operators and they are sitting together and talking.

Mr. Meritzer asked how the February 12 meeting relates to the County Plan. Ms. Walfoort responded that eight of the ten counties have new plans. They are starting with these plans and looking for commonalities.

Dr. Seelman asked what the role of SPC is. Ms. Walfoort said they are the Metropolitan Planning Organization for Southwestern Pennsylvania. They are federally mandated and have state and Federal responsibilities for economic development. The Board consists of members from all ten counties and the City of Pittsburgh. Mr. Parker said he would get Ms. Walfoort's email address to everybody incase they had additional questions. Ms. Healy suggested their primary responsibility is Highway funding. Ms Walfoort responded that they have three responsibilities: the Long Range Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the work plan (what each staff person is paid to do). They also create a Comprehensive Economic Plan and a Transportation and Economic Development Visioning Plan. Mr. Parker said we will be glad to help.

Assistant Director Hearing Loss Association of Pennsylvania:

Teresa Nellans, the Assistant Director of the Hearing Loss Association of Pennsylvania, informed the Task Force that their mission is to open communication, educate the hearing loss community and their families, provide tools for self help, sensitize consumers and help to make the hearing loss community informed consumers regarding services. Most people with hearing loss want to be mainstreamed. They promote new technologies, medical research and legislation. They testify before government bodies. They affiliate with people with hearing loss (there are 200,000 people with hearing loss). There needs to be more captioning. People with hearing loss tend to get depressed and hyper vigilant. They need help with Hospitals because staff does not understand. They work with parents when children need equipment. They are fighting for more flashing smoke alarms and a hearing aid tax credit. Medicare could pick up some of this expense. There is now a captioning telephone. There are 13 chapters in Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania is one of 12 states that have state Hearing Loss Association Offices. This is an all volunteer organization. She has put her name in for the State Advisory Board. They supported the Governor's Office on Disabilities.

Ms. Evans stated the Maxine Owens got a TTY in her bedroom when she was in the hospital. Mr. Parker said the Task Force has been involved with deaf people who are incarcerated. Ms. Nellans added there are problems with hospital and emergency rooms. Mr. Parker pointed out that they had an Ad Hoc subcommittee of Mr. McGann, Dr. Seelman and Ken Puckett to work on issues related to deaf people who are incarcerated. Dr. Seelman pointed out that the task Force responds to problems from members in the community. Ms. Van Shura said she will talk to the County Executive about captioning covering emergency warnings on television. She reiterated that if people bring problems to us, we will help.

Ms. Healy moved that we SUPPORT MS. NELLANS NOMINATION TO THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON DEAFNESS AND HARD OF HEARING. A letter should be sent to Labor and Industry Secretary Stephan Schmerin and the Governor. S. Evans seconded the motion. Mr. Parker said he will write the letter. The motion was passed unanimously. Dr. Seelman said the Committee is in the department of Labor not the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). Joanne Lenge-Sharer responded it is in the Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing, not in OVR. Sharon Behan is the new head of that office. Ms. Healy said we should find who has authority in these issues.

Public Transit Funding:

Mr. Parker reported that the Task Force members had met with County Executive Onorato at his request to explain to the Task Force the Right Sizing plan. At their meeting there was concern expressed about the pension cost and about the ripple effect on County services. Calling it Right Sizing implies the service was not needed and may effect getting more funds from the State.

Mr. Tague agreed with Mr. Parker on the concerns about the ripple effect and calling it Right Sizing. Mr. Onorato said he wanted to eliminate the County match. This contradicts the State plan which says more local support is needed. Mr. Tague agrees the system should be redesigned. But his plan just cuts service to match the income numbers. Neither Port Authority, the County Executive nor County Council gets the economic impact of these cuts.

Mr. O'Hanlon added the cuts could be devastating to people with disabilities. The County Executive is relying on ACCESS to fill the gap. He said that if there is a dedicated funding source it would first be used to replace the County match. Port Authority should periodically reevaluate service decisions. But the two processes they are using, report card and Right Sizing, are contradictory. Every Route in Brookline is being terminated as is the Airport Flyer. This is an abuse of the report card process. How can the County shrink the system without redesigning it first? The County should be paying for the system if residents get the benefits. The local government is not stepping up to that. 26,000 trips a day will be lost. 13,000 people a day will start driving in (and where will they park?) or not come in at all.

Mr. Henderson said they are forced on busses because ACCESS double tickets. ACCESS is beginning to fail. Dr. Seelman added Mr. Parker said we are citizens and will take our fair share of responsibility. We must evaluate the plan to see the impact. Mr. Parker reiterated we must see what the impact is. He asked if we want to provide official comments. Ms. Healy moved THE TASK FORCE PROVIDE OFFICIAL COMMENTS ABOUT THE RIGHT SIZING PLAN. Dr. Seelman seconded the motion. It passes unanimously. Mr. Parker said he will draft something up and email it around.

Task Force Brochure:

Ms. Healy reported that the brochure is near completing. The sections on accomplishments and the history must still be written. The brochure was done by David Steidel.

Ms. Evans asked if it was more cost effective to print the brochure in color or black and white. Ms. Healy said the offset printing get less expensive per piece the more you print. Peal Center printed 3000 brochures for under \$1,000. It could be designed for under \$100. Dr. Seelman pointed out we have \$3,508 left in the budget. We could design it in black ink and print it on colored paper. We need a budget. Ms. Healy said she would get a price from Mr. Steidel. We could send it out as a PDF document. Mr. Meritzer pointed out that for the blind community PDFs do not work. Ms. Healy responded we could send it out in both PDF and ASCII. Ms. Carter said she supports whatever needs to be done. Ms. Healy asked that we authorize up to \$100 for Mr. Steidel. Dr. Seelman said the budget already includes interpreters but not the CART. Mr. Parker said \$100 is no problem.

Allegheny's Corrections' Response to Concerns with Inmates with Hearing Disabilities:

Mr. Parker reported that Mr. McGann and Mr. Puckett could not attend this meeting. He said he would like the committee reconvened. Ms. Lengle-Sharer said she is working on reconvening the committee.

Governor's Cabinet for Persons with Disabilities:

Mr. Tague reported that he and Evelyn Stypula are meeting with Secretary Estelle Richardson about how it will be staffed. There was some discussion about employment for people with disabilities at the new casino.

Governor's State of the Union:

Dr. Seelman said we should be briefed on the Governor's Health Plan. Ms. Healy said the Governor's office on Health Care Reform should come to a meeting. This should be a big meeting. Dr. Seelman supported that idea. She suggested we could do it with Sandy Fox. Ms. Healy added we should invite Credo. We need lead time to set this up. This would be two months out. Dr. Seelman suggested that we could do it at the annual meeting. Ms. Healy said she hates to wait for June or July.

Task Force Work:

Ms. Evans pointed out there is a Housing Committee meeting next Monday.

Ms. Carter pointed out that the Task Force has not met with the Mayor. He has not been invited to a meeting. Mr. Meritzer pointed out he is informed of all the meeting. Ms. Carter said we should ask him to come. Dr. Seelman pointed out that this is an election year and we should think about this. Ms. Carter said we should still engage the Mayor. Ms. Evans agreed with Ms. Carter. Ms. Healy added we should have a dialog with the Mayor. We have done Voter Information sessions before. The real action is in the Primary. There are two clear candidates. Ms. Evans said she could get information to the Mayor.

Ms. Van Shura pointed out that both the Mayor and the County Executive have liaisons to the Task Force. We should list all the committee on each agenda so that they know what is going on. Ms. Carter added we should outline the issues and update them monthly. Ms. Evans suggested that we list the chairs of the committees. Mr. Meritzer responded that we can do that in the Directory. Ms. Healy said that Ms. Van Shura gave us good advice to include committees and goals on the agenda.

Dr. Seelman announced two events, The Thornburg lecture, which is unique in the United States, and the holocaust display at the Andy Warhol museum. The holocaust display includes people with disabilities. It delivers a real message on Human Rights. Ms. Evans asked when the display is here. Dr. Seelman said it opened in December and will close in March.

Task Force Guidelines:

Mr. Parker reported that Gabe Mazefsky asked if the Task Force vacancy was the Mayor's the County Executive's or the At Large seat. Mr. Parker suggested it was time to relook at the Guidelines and asked if the Guidelines Committee could reconvene. Ms. Healy reminded everyone that Mike Murphy drafted the original guidelines. Mr. Parker asked if Mr. O'Hanlon could help. He also expressed concern that the current guidelines create a class system by year. Ms. Healy said the Task Force members serve at the pleasure of the person who appointed them. Mr. Parker responded that they serve four year terms to correspond to the term of the Mayor or County Executive.

Staff Reports:

Mr. Meritzer introduced Elizabeth Brown, the new ADA Compliance Intern. She will be working on updating the Special Events Permits to reflect the needs of people with disabilities and adding disability access symbols to the City Summer Recreation booklet and the City Web Page. Ms. Brown then said how happy she was to be working on this project.

Announcements:

Ms. Healy handed out information of the Peal Conference. She said the focus of the conference is education and deals with policy issues. She thanked us for distributing the conference brochures.

Mr. O'Hanlon said the City does a so-so job of cleaning sidewalks. This forces seniors and others to stay home. We have not taken this seriously. He wants to get this issue on the agenda. Mr. Meritzer said there were legal problems with the City citing homeowners who don't clean their sidewalks. He suggested this is something that can be tackled in the Pedestrian Plan. Ms. Healy said we should use a carrot and stick approach. Currently we are only using the stick. We should do public service spots. Dr. Seelman pointed out that seniors have a problem keeping their walks clear. Mr. O'Hanlon said United Cerebral Palsy is looking for ways to help as a good neighbor. He went on to say the impasse is with Code Enforcement. Mr. Meritzer suggested that we invite the chief of the Bureau of Building Inspection. Mr. Parker asked if Mr. Meritzer could invite him.

Dr. Seelman moved that the meeting be adjourned. Ms. Evans seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 2:59 p.m.

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING:

DATE: February 19, 2007
TIME: 1:00 P.M.
LOCATION: Large Conference Room
200 Ross Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219