

**CITY OF PITTSBURGH/ALLEGHENY COUNTY
TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES
JULY 21, 2008
MINUTES**

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

Members Present: Jeff Parker, Chairperson, Katherine D. Seelman, Co-chair, Janet Evans, Sarah Goldstein, James C. Noschese, Paul O'Hanlon

Members Absent: Aurelia Carter, Linda Dickerson, Liz Healey, Milton Henderson, Rich McGann, John Tague

Others Present: Michelle Corkum, Steve Chopek, Holly Dick, Joe Elliott, Rachael Freund, Dianne Gallagher, Val Gawlas, Peter Harvey, Carol Horowitz, Charles Keenan, Danielle Lengle, Richard Meritzer, Charles Morrison, Teresa Nellans, Bill Newland, Matt Pavlosky, Tamara Siegert, Sally Jo Snyder, David J. Strager, Mary Esther Van Shura

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

Introductions:

Everyone introduced themselves. Mr. Parker read the agenda.

Approval of the June 2008 Minutes:

A motion was made by Ms. Evans and seconded by Ms. Goldstein TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES AS PRESENTED. The motion was passed unanimously.

Financial Report:

Both a July budget and final payments for June, finishing out the year, were handed out. In June there were two payments for captioning, one for the Task Force meeting and one for a hospital compliance meeting. We still have not been billed for the interpreters for either meeting. Ms. Healy negotiated our brochure design for \$400 and printing for \$600. This leaves \$2,600 remaining for the Still Small Difference project and \$425 for interpreter services. There is some additional money left over from last year's annual meeting. Sarah moved to APPROVE THE FINANCE REPORT. Motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

SECTION 8 USER MISCHARACTERIZATIONS

Mr. Harvey reported as follow up from the previous meeting that a Professor at Pitt is doing more investigation on source of income discrimination. He went on to report that there are a lot of myths and distortions about Section 8 housing being disseminated on the radio by Marty Griffin. The strategy is to send a letter to KDKA sponsors asking them not to advertise until KDKA retracts these statements. They are trying to get as many diverse groups as possible to sign the letter.

Mr. Parker added the letter states that Section 8 housing is a good allotment of funds for homeless veterans. He asked if we should write the station or the radio show about how we feel. Ms. Goldstein pointed out that she has friends in Section 8 housing. They have landlords that keep their apartments in better shape than her landlord. Section 8 has standards that landlord must adhere to. She suggested they go through community groups to write letters. Mr. Parker said Mr. Harvey has detailed a letter which includes standards. Mr. Tague asked if he has talked with Chuck Keenan about this. Mr. Keenan responded he echoes what Mr. Harvey is saying. The blame for the problems with the program is on a few individuals. They should focus on the bad eggs and not attack the program. It is a good program for people with limited income.

Mr. Parker asked how we should proceed. We could sign the letter presented by Mr. Harvey. Or we could write a letter of our own. Ms. Evans said she would like to see the letter. People do misuse letters. The housing authority has increased standards. Mr. Noschese said he would like to be involved in Section 8 as a landlord. Some of the problems with Section 8 come from children which can't be controlled. Mr. Harvey added we need to let political people know about this. He suggested we could do an Op-Ed piece. Mr. O'Hanlon said he votes to sign on to the letter and then consider other action. Dr. Seelman moved THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH / ALLEGHENY COUNTY TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES SIGN THE LETTER PRESENTED BY PETER HARVEY. Mr. O'Hanlon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

RAISING PERSONAL NEEDS ALLOWANCE FOR LOW INCOME PERSONAL CARE RESIDENTS

Rachael Freund reported that she has been working for several years to raise the personal needs allowance 50,000 to 52,000 low income person care home residents receive. They received \$60 a month for medical co-payments, transportation, clothing, toiletries and any other personal expenses they may have. Often most of the \$60 is eaten up by medical co-payments. House Bill 2253 has been introduced in the Legislature to rectify this.

Ms. Goldstein said she agrees 150%. At the Governor's Advisory Committee she asked Department of Public Welfare Secretary Estelle Richman to do this. But the money is not in the budget. Where can we get the money? Ms. Freund responded that the owners of these facilities received an additional \$45 for each person. There was never any question about where that money was going to come from. There is a crisis for these residents. Let the government figure out where this money is going to come from. Mr. Noschese suggested the Task Force send a letter in support of House Bill 2253. Ms. Evans agreed. When she was in this living arraignment she only got \$35. Mr. Parker asked aside from writing a letter, should the Task Force join the coalition. Ms. Evans said we should join. Mr. McGann asked which Department this would fall under. Ms. Freund responded the Department of Public Welfare. They were hoping to get to the Governor and the Secretary of the Department of Public Welfare now for next year.

Mr. O'Hanlon pointed out there are 50,000 people in personal care homes in Pennsylvania. That is the population of Altoona, the 10th largest City in the state. We consider them as being placed in the community. But they can't afford clothing, transportation or shoes. This is abysmal. This increase is not too much to ask for. He moved THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH / ALLEGHENY COUNTY TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES JOIN THE COALITION TO RAISE THE \$60 PERSONAL NEED ALLOWANCE. Ms. Evans seconded the motion. It passed unanimously. Dr. Seelman added that it was nice to have a Task Force member who has the experiences Ms. Evans has.

LAND USE AFTER MAYVIEW CLOSURE

Carol Horowitz reported that the land Mayview sits on is very valuable. The money should be used to help MH/MR clients. Bill 1441 has been introduced to insure the money follows the clients. Currently surplus property is sold off a surplus property list for fair market value and goes into the general fund. This legislation was introduced into the legislature to direct the money. The Land Use Task Force meets once a month. All the interests are at the table. They will recommend what should happen with the money. The last meeting many more people with interest in the MH/MR community show up. Senator Pippy said he would support the bill, but not necessarily charging fair market value. The property is 350 acres and most of it is usable. She asked that we support them in their talks with the legislature for the fair market value price to go back to the MH/MR community. There will be a hearing sometime in September.

Dr. Seelman asked if there were precedents elsewhere in this country and, if so, what model are they using. Ms. Horowitz said many states have legislation that sends the money to the Department of Public Health. The legislation under consideration is pulled from several of these laws. They don't want the money to supplant existing funding; they want to supplement it. This is not in other star legislation. They want to use it for housing.

Mr. Tague added that 80 people attended the last meeting. For the next meeting they are getting a bigger meeting room somewhere other than Mayview. He emailed Senator Pippy to invite Secretary Richman and the Secretary of the Department of General Services. The Land Use committee is weighed in favor of the communities. The Allegheny Land Trust made a good presentation at the last meeting. All the land should not be developed. He moved THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH / ALLEGHENY COUNTY TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES SHOULD SIGN UP TO HAVE A MEMBER TESTIFY AT THE PUBLIC HEARING. Ms. Goldstein seconded the motion. Mr. McGann asked will people with mental health issues be homeless. Ms. Horowitz responded that there will be places for them to live and they will be tracked. Mr. McGann added he had a former housemate who stayed in a homeless shelter and had stories of people with mental illness. Ms. Horowitz added the State is moving toward getting people with mental illness out of institutions, but hopefully not in homeless shelters. Mr. Noschese said 40 years ago Dixmont Hospital closed and people who were deaf went to Mayview. Nobody checked to see what happened to Dixmont. It is good that they are looking at Mayview. Mr. Parker reminded the Task Force members there was a motion on the floor and asked if there were any other questions. Mr. O'Hanlon asked after testifying DO WE WANT TO SUBMIT A LETTER? Mr. Tague and Ms. Goldstein accepted this as a friendly amendment. Ms. Horowitz said she would get the information to Mr. Meritzer. The motion was passed unanimously. Mr. Parker added we will need people to write the letter and the testimony.

NIMBY & PROPOSED GROUP HOME PROVIDERS REGISTRATION PROCESS

Mr. O'Hanlon reported that the issue of Not In My Back Year (NIMBY) was raised at the retreat. In a lot of places throughout the County housing for people with disabilities is being attacked. In the 1980s any housing for the elderly became housing for the elderly and people with disabilities. A number of people with disabilities moved into these facilities. Earlier this year neighbors complained that it was a group home and the magistrate fined them. There is an ordinance before County Council, 1174-08 – The Group Home Registration Program. Owners who provide housing for people with disabilities would need to pay a registration fee and meet increased requirements. This horrible legislation unfairly targets people with disabilities. It is also a violation of the Fair Housing Act. There will be a public hearing on July 30th. The legislation is in the Public Safety Committee. Police Chiefs are coming to testify on crime emanating from group homes. This smacks of a witch hunt. We are circulating a letter to be sent to James Burn, Jr., chair of the Committee. He asked us to sign the letter or consider other action. Those who forget their history are condemned to repeat it. The City had a restriction of three or less unrelated people as a family. This was a very restrictive limitation.

Mr. Meritzer pointed out that they no longer use that figure, the restriction is now eight unrelated people. Mr. O'Hanlon said this requires a fresh look in light of the Fair Housing Amendment. Ms. Goldstein pointed out the recovery is non-linear. Any traumatic event can cause someone to go into a traumatic state regardless of where you live. Mr. O'Hanlon asked do these kind of disputes in neighborhoods make people vulnerable or is this an individual occurrence. Ms. Goldstein said recurrence is an individual thing. People need prescreening and support groups.

Dr. Seelman point out that there were indications of health, safety and crime issues in the article handed out. Mr. O'Hanlon replied the bill covers only providers, not the tenants. Ms. Evans added people in her building are really acting up. But a person has a right to live wherever they want. Communities need to be educated. Seniors think the facility is just for them, but under the law it's a mixed bag. Mr. McGann related this to racism and sexism. Ageism and abilitism are hotter issues. We forget them. We must stop people from speaking negatively about groups. Mr. Parker pointed out that Dr. Seelman's issue is still open. Health and safety is still a concern. But Mr. O'Hanlon sees this legislation as targeting the owner. Mr. O'Hanlon agreed with Ms. Evans. Do we have a right to live there or not? Federal policy is based on a severe lack of accessible housing. Senior buildings are the most abundant accessible housing. The article on Homewood treats people with disabilities as not having a right to live there. The legislation speaks about health and safety, but does not address it. It puts special requirements on housing providers of people with disabilities. It is discriminatory on the face of it. It has at least a discriminatory effect and maybe that purpose. Mr. Tague added this is a slippery slope. They may require people to register next.

Mr. O'Hanlon pointed out the hearing will be July 30th at County Council at 4:00 p.m. It will be discussed at the County Council meeting the following Tuesday. Mr. Parker said we must do something at this meeting. Dr. Seelman added disabilities increase with aging. Any person with multiple disabilities needs housing. She supports the majority but the aging disabled are at greater risk and need more protection. Mr. McGann stated the in Baltimore Maryland the deafblind community sued the state for misusing funds. They were lying about vacancies to keep people who were deafblind out. Mr. O'Hanlon moved THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH / ALLEGHENY COUNTY TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES BOTH SIGN ON TO THE LETTER AND WRITE OUR OWN LETTER WITH OUR OWN PROSPECTIVE. Ms. Evans seconded the motion. Dr. Seelman pointed out that research shows people with disabilities across disability and age bond and this can not be explained by discrimination. Mr. O'Hanlon replied this does not speak to any health and safety concern for people with disabilities. Dr. Seelman responded if there is increased crime that affects people with disabilities. Mr. O'Hanlon reiterated the target of this legislation is the providers, not the individuals. Mr. Parker asked if Dr. Seelman can help write the letter. Ms. Evans added that in Garfield they eliminated the high-rise, but built accessible housing. The motion passed unanimously.

TASK FORCE UPDATES, STAFF REPORTS, VOX POP

Dr. Seelman said they were getting a tremendous amount of information. How does City and County Government get this information? Mr. Meritzer responded that both Mary Esther Van Shura from the County Executive's office and Yarone Zober from the Mayor's office are on the mailing list. Dr. Seelman suggested that we need to have better strategies to get them the information. Mr. Parker pointed out that Mr. Meritzer has gotten the Task Force additional information. We will think of way a way to get information to City and County Government.

Mr. Parker reported staff had been having meetings with hospital administrators and insurance companies to discuss services to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Task Force has asked that service users be at these meetings. The Task Force provided the funds for interpreters and CART for the meeting on the 28th. The City will reimburse the Task Force at a later date. Mr. Meritzer said he was getting together a contact for interpreters and captioners and could use this contact if necessary to provide services at a later meeting. Mr. Parker added this would only be necessary if we have a full contingency of meetings and we use most of the money. But if we have enough money in the budget we won't us the City contract. Mr. O'Hanlon asked if this was a Quid Pro Quo. We would provide the money early on in the year and the City could use its contact later. Dr. Seelman asked if there will be follow up on the results. Mr. Meritzer responded yes.

Mr. Parker reported that Ms. Healy as chair of the Nominations Committee has sent an email out soliciting nominations and will report at the next meeting.

Ms. Corkum reported that the hospital compliance meeting minutes with UPMC are on the back table. We also had a phone call meeting with Highmark. Mr. Parker said people could use Highmark benefits for interpreters. Dr. Seelman responded that they don't care much about sensory issues. They don't cover equipment for people with low vision. Mr. Noschese said he does not understand how insurance companies work. They will not pay for hearing aids but will pay for cochlear implants. Ms. Corkum said doctor's offices can't afford interpreters. Mr. McGann added last November at a hearing they told me they had limited funds. They labeled us as expensive people. We are not expensive people. We need to educate insurance companies. Focus on making it work. UPMC has a lot of staff that are deaf but they do not provide interpreters. They need to follow Act 57. There are sanctions if they don't hire interpreters who are certified. They say they can't find interpreters. They need to be educated.

Mr. Parker added on a related note that Mr. McGann has asked that a future agenda item be on training Interpreters. Mr. McGann and Mr. Noschese want a discussion on accessibility at the Airport. Ms. Goldstein has asked we discuss housing issues.

Dr. Seelman announced the Thornburgh Family Lecture Series on Disability Law and Policy will be October 30th and I. King Jordan, human rights activist and former President of Gallaudet University, will be the speaker. He is a strong supporter of the ADA. Anyone can call and ask for interpreters or Captioning / CART.

Mr. Tague announced the July 26th is the 48th anniversary of the passage of the ADA. From noon until 1:00 p.m. Three Rivers Center for Independent Living will hold a rally at market Square. Also, that Saturday there will be a web cast discussion with the Presidential candidates on disability issues.

Ms. Evans moved the meeting to be adjourned. Dr. Seelman seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 2:58 P.M.

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING:

DATE: August 18, 2008
TIME: 1:00 P.M.
LOCATION: Large Conference Room
200 Ross Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219