

**CITY OF PITTSBURGH/ALLEGHENY COUNTY**  
**TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES**  
**JUNE 16, 2008**  
**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, Rich McGann, James C. Noschese, and John Tague

**Members Absent:** Linda Dickerson, Sarah Goldstein, Milton Henderson, and Paul O'Hanlon

**Others Present:** Michelle Corkum, Holly Dick, D. Filip, Dianne Gallagher, Val Gawlas, Peter Harvey, Carolyn Hess, Carol Horowitz, Danielle Lengle, Richard Meritzer, Charles Morrison, Teresa Nellans, Bill Newland, Lisa Paige, Frank Polito, Tamara Siegert, Robin Smith, Terry Reynolds, Mary Esther Van Shura, Joe Wassermann

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Parker at 1:04 PM.

**Introductions:**

Everyone introduced themselves. Mr. Parker read the agenda.

**Approval of the March 2008 Minutes:**

A motion was made by Mr. McGann and seconded by Ms. Healey TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES AS PRESENTED. The motion was passed unanimously.

**Financial Report:**

The balance in the Task Force account is \$3178.00. It is projected that the end of the year balance will be \$1,277.11. The captioning service reduced their fee by \$100 and the interpreters reduced their fee by \$10 an hour. At this time no bills have been submitted for the retreat. Dr. Seelman moved to APPROVE THE FINANCIAL REPORT. Ms. Carter seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Parker suggested we use the unspent money on to complete the brochure for the Task Force and for the Video. The Video will cost \$30,000. We are using the profits from the first Small Differences video, but will need additional money as well. Dr. Seelman said she supports the idea and asked for an update on the progress of the Small Differences project. Mr. Parker suggested that Tony and Chaz come to a future meeting. Ms. Carter says that she supports finishing the brochure and asked that the brochure be made in alternate formats. Ms. Evans moved that ANY REMAINING MONEY BE USED FOR THE BROCHURE AND VIDEO. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

## **ACCESSIBILITY AT THE THREE RIVERS ARTS FESTIVAL**

Ms. Evans reported that she and the Task Force staff met with the staff of the Three Rivers Arts Festival on May 20th. Last year she took 100 pictures on accessibility issues. Cory Cope of the Three Rivers staff worked with Ms. Evans. The food vendors were moved to a more accessible location and most were accessible to everyone this year. There was an accessible route to the stage using the curb cut at Fifth Avenue Place. All the trailers had ramps and there were people to help if needed. However, Ms. Evans did not see any accessible port-a-johns and some areas of the festival were still inaccessible.

Mr. Meritzer said he had received complaints about the handicapped parking spaces near the State Office Building being removed. He also said Mr. Cope was welcoming any other feedback the community wanted to provide. Dr. Seelman asked about interpreters and accommodations for people with hearing and visual impairments. Ms. Evans said she is encouraging people with hearing and visual impairments to work with her. Mr. Noschese thanked Dr. Seelman for bringing up the issue of people with hearing and visual impairments. The Deaf community is not very involved. The Pirates and Steelers have big screens for notices. It would be nice if the Arts Festival did that as well. Mr. McGann added that we need more interpreters and SSP (Support Service Providers) to guide the deaf/blind. Dr. Seelman continued that the blind low vision communities should have input. Danielle Lenge said she was at the festival and there were accessible port-a-johns, but she presented photographs of the barricades to restrict parking that did not give people adequate clearance to get in. Ms. Evans pointed out that someone moved the barricade for her.

## **INCOME DISCRIMINATION AND HOUSING DISCUSSION**

Peter Harvey, Executive Director of the Fair Housing Partnership, reported that they have been a non-profit organization for 25 years and have been fighting to end discrimination. They also do counseling. The Partnership is currently concerned about source of income discrimination. Currently, this is not a protected class. They would like to extend fair housing protections to cover source of income. They are looking first at the City of Pittsburgh. Several cities have passed measures covering this class which would ban denial for people who are using the Section 8 program for rent subsidies to pay rent. He asked if the Task Force wanted to partner with them, or if this is more an affordability issue.

Ms. Goldstein asked if landlords would be able to deny tenants with Section 8 vouchers based on any other standards. Mr. Harvey said other jurisdictions have closed that loophole. Ms. Healey asked if this would apply to buyers as well as renters. Mr. Harvey responded he was not sure, but it could apply. Ms. Healey asked whether the focus was just on the City or is it broader. Mr. Harvey responded that they are focusing on the City because it has an enforcement arm, the Human Relations Commission. They will start with the City and then go on to the State. Ms. Healey asked if Mr. Harvey was looking for support from the Task Force, whose main role is liaison with the Mayor and City Council. Mr. Harvey said promoting this issue with the Mayor and City Council would help. Mr. Wassermann moved that **THE TASK FORCE SUPPORT THIS LEGISLATION**. Ms. Evans seconded the motion. Ms. Goldstein asked whether a person who has a Section 8 voucher could live anywhere. Mr. Harvey responded affirmatively. The motion was passed unanimously.

Dr. Seelman asked if there were any discussions regarding the mortgage foreclosure problem as it affects low-income people. Mr. Harvey responded yes, they have a housing counseling service that works on this issue. There are also advocacy efforts going on. Philadelphia has a moratorium on foreclosures. PCRG is working on a similar program in Pittsburgh.

Mr. Parker told Mr. Harvey to let us know what he needs. Ms. Healey pointed out that she received an email about HUD funds that work like Section 8, but is used to purchase houses. Pennsylvania does not allocate these funds. Mr. McGann added that landlords are not willing to have accessible safety equipment in their apartments. Mr. Harvey pointed out that this would be a fair housing complaint. He has a brochure and a flyer. They are interested in this issue because it has been a screen for other sorts of discrimination. Dr. Seelman asked if information is available on local housing discrimination. Mr. Harvey answered there is Nation Data Base. It does not have information in aggregate, but it does have the information case by case.

### COMCAST DISCUSSION

Frank Polito, Director of Government and Community Affairs for Comcast Cable, reported that as of February 17, 2009, all analog local full power television station signals will be converted to digital. If you currently have cable or Satellite television you will not need additional equipment. If you don't have cable, you can order a government coupon worth \$40 and within 90 days purchase a converter box. You can get up to 2 vouchers per household. HDTV is a different technology. If you have HD all you need to do is get an antenna. Closed captioning should not be affected by the change, but if it is, it should be reported.

Dr. Seelman asked if there would be variations with different types of television sets. Mr. Polito responded that every television set is the same regarding the captioning. Dr. Seelman asked if there is an option to size the captioning. Mr. Polito said he had not heard of any. Dr. Seelman asked about the technical capabilities of public versus private companies. Mr. Polito responded that this does not affect the type, just the availability. Mr. McGann recommended that they look at the text size. Blue Tooth technology lets people watch in Braille. It uses a code list and can also change the size of the font. Dr. Seelman added the next generation of hearing aids has Blue Tooth technology. Mr. Polito said he was very excited about the new technology.

Dr. Seelman asked how we could expedite feedback. Mr. Polito said you can email him at [frank\\_polito@cable.comcast.com](mailto:frank_polito@cable.comcast.com) or he can come to our meetings. He will try to get answers to our questions. Mr. Wassermann asked what education could be done with descriptive video. It is done on SAP as voice over during programs. He then asked if HD affects voice over. Bill Newland said he would get two channels at once. Mr. Polito said it is up to the station. He will look into that. Mr. Noschese said there is unfair pricing for the deaf community. They are forced to have the extra channels. Why should they have to pay for channels that are not captioned? If you have a contract, they should all be captioned. Mr. Polito responded that he did not know that, they should all be captioned. Mr. Noschese pointed out that PCN is not captioned. Mr. McGann added that in 1992 Congress passed a law requiring captioning. The law was recently changed. He would love to get Braille for the games. There once was a disability channel. Danielle Lengle asked if there was any way to make the captioning easier to turn on. She says that with Comcast it is a very hard and long process that involves turning on and off the box. It is especially frustrating for aging populations. Mr. Polito said he could look into it.

Val Gawlas of the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank said they were looking into closed captioning for their ads and DVDs. Each television station either hires a captioner or doesn't. We should have universal captioning. Mr. Polito said he would look into this. This might require action from the Federal Government. Mr. Noschese said that when he watches a pay station there are no emergency warnings like those carried on the local stations. He suggested that when new technology is available just put a red light on the screen to tell people to turn to a local station. Mr. McGann pointed out the blind can hear and the deaf can see. Technology needs to help the blind see and the deaf hear. Mr. Parker said he would work with Mr. Polito on a return visit. Mr. Polito asked that he be sent the notes from the meeting so he can forward it to his technical staff.

### **TASK FORCE UPDATES**

Dr. Seelman announced the Thornburg Lecture Series would be October 30<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m. at the Pitt Law School. I. K. Jordan, past President of Gallaudet University will be the speaker.

Mr. Parker announced that Michelle Corkum will work on the Water Authority billing schedules in the future.

Mr. Parker announced the two-year election cycle is up. He asked Ms. Healey to chair the nomination committee. She said in the past this has been handled by email. She will send out an email asking who would like to serve.

Mr. Parker announced that Mr. Meritzer will put together the notes from the Retreat.

Ms. Healey suggested the Task Force be involved in the 18<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. TRCIL is planning three events: Market Square, Kittanning and Greensburg. The PEAL Center is planning to be involved. They are still fleshing out what they are doing. Mr. Parker said he would talk to Vicky. Mr. Tague suggested Mr. Parker might speak at the event for the Task Force.

### **STAFF UPDATE**

Ms. Corkum reported on the Hospital Compliance Project. The Hospitals thought they were providing interpreters as needed. However on the questionnaires we received back from the community, one third said they were not provided with interpreters. We are meeting with the hospitals to resolve this inconsistency. In addition we are looking at insurance companies providing interpreters for medical appointments. We have already met with the Pennsylvania Insurance Department and are currently setting up meetings with the insurance companies.

Dr. Seelman informed us that FISA is looking into the insurance issue. She suggested we check with Dee Delaney. One of the problems with the survey is that it did not get enough responses. Mr. Meritzer said he is asking for Ms. Nellans to be involved in the meetings. Mr. McGann brought up the discussion from the Behavioral Mental Health Committee meeting with Dr. Kim Mathos. The Hospitals missed the point about Act 57. The deaf-blind have a right to an interpreter, unless a waiver is signed in advance and that this should be known in advance. Emergency services do not understand about deaf-blind services. We should get Pitt and Community College of Allegheny County here to discuss how to provide more interpreters. The CCAC program is defunct. Interpreting services know the law but we need more people educated. Mr. Noschese added things are a bit different today. Everyone used to know everyone else. Today we are all just labeled like numbers. We do not need to be treated like numbers; focus on our names.

Mr. Meritzer reported he is developing a self-evaluation strategy to identify the need for audible traffic signals. The objective over the next several months is to identify which intersections are crucial. Holly Dick from Access is getting him data regarding trips taken by people with vision problems and he is planning to meet with the Golden Triangle Association for the Blind to determine which intersections are the most complex for persons who are blind. Dr. Seelman suggested we contact the Rehabilitation Center on Blindness for Carroll. Mr. Meritzer agreed. Ms. Carter added that the Children's Hospital signals work very well. Mr. Meritzer said that it's good to know and he thinks that their signals are the preferred method, but he is concerned with making assumptions until we have a standard. He cited the examples of ramps that have had to be redone because of changing regulations. It is important to be careful with public money and therefore changing regulations are the holdup.

Mr. Meritzer reported that he was also working with the Airport Corridor Transportation Association on model bus stops for non-urban areas. At the first meeting he encouraged them to consult with a sub-contractor who specializes on accessibility. Mr. Meritzer will put together a list for them. It was suggested he talk with Bob Lynch and Joan Stein. Dr. Seelman thinks she may know of an architect to contact.

### **VOX POP**

Ms. Gawlas from the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank announced they are continuing to work on locating people with disabilities in need of supplemental food. She also stated they are having open house meetings to educate staff from various organizations on how to provide supplemental food.

Ms. Healey announced the PEAL Center has produced a communication booklet for families with young children. They want to do a DVD. She asked for volunteers.

Mr. Tague moved the meeting to be adjourned. Ms. Goldstein seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 3:00PM

### **THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING:**

DATE: July 21, 2008  
 TIME: 1:00 P.M.  
 LOCATION: Large Conference Room  
 200 Ross Street  
 Pittsburgh, PA 15219