

City of Pittsburgh/Allegheny County
Task Force on Disability
Monday March 17, 2014
1:00 PM to 3:00 PM
Meeting Minutes

Task Force Members in Attendance: Paul O’Hanlon, Dr. Katherine Seelman, Jeff Parker, John Tague, Richard McGann, Janet Evans, Joseph Wassermann

Task Force Members Absent: James Noschese, Sarah Goldstein, Linda Dickerson, Aurelia Carter-Scott, Liz Healy, Milton Henderson

Also in Attendance: Richard Meritzer, Diane Gallagher, Joy Dore, Robin Smith, Cindy Glynn, Lucy Rooth, Gabe McMoreland, Daniel Barrett, Ali Abdullah, Judy Baricella, Alexander Polinsky, Talon Scott, Peter Bombara, Mai Nguyen, Bo Ai, Will Cenk, Alexa Shannon

Welcome and Introduction

The meeting began with introductions of Task Force members and other individuals in attendance.

1. Review and Approval of February minutes and Financial Report

The February minutes and financial report were approved by a unanimous vote.

2. Open Data legislation – Daniel Barrett and Gabe McMoreland

Mr. McMoreland described his work with “open data”. Open data is the process of putting the information and statistics collected by government agencies into a format that is easily accessible to both humans and computers, with transparency being the main goal. This data could be used to create charts and graphs, or smartphone applications for bus routes, trash pickup, and parking. The legislation for this open data project was recently approved in City Council by unanimous vote. McMoreland and his colleagues are in the beginning stages of developing a website for citizens to vote on which data is most important to them.

Mr. McGann asked whether this project is local or national. Mr. McMoreland responded that the project is local to the City of Pittsburgh, with hopes that the county will adopt it as well.

Mr. Abdullah asked if information related to legislation and policies will be included on the website. Mr. McMoreland responded that the information is already available, despite being difficult to find, and that the project will develop according to the votes of citizens.

Mr. McMoreland added that open data will allow the city government to serve citizens with disabilities better, in addition to creating new ways for citizens with disabilities to help themselves.

Ms. Evans asked if Carnegie Library is involved in the project. Mr. McMoreland responded that they are aware of the project and have expressed interest in making some of their data available to the public, but that they haven’t yet developed a well-defined plan to begin contributing to the project.

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Mr. Wassermann asked if the project will make charts and graphs more easily readable to screen readers. Gabe responded that the project will allow the data used to create the charts and graphs to become available to programmers who could then create accessible formats for the data.

Dr. Seelman asked who will implement the next step of the project. Mr. McMoreland responded that the project will be implemented by the Mayor's office. Mayor Peduto has hired a staff person with open data experience, Laura Meixell, specifically to implement this policy, and to work with Allegheny County to work towards their implementation of open data.

Dr. Seelman inquired as to the project's timeline. Mr. McMoreland stated that the project will be ongoing and does not have a completion date. Dr. Seelman asked when the project will yield something to demonstrate or present to the public. Mr. McMoreland responded that the website for the project will be up soon.

Richard McGann asked if the project would help the deaf-blind. Mr. McMoreland responded that the first step is making the data available to people who could develop technology for the deaf-blind.

Dr. Seelman asked Mr. McMoreland to summarize his intent in sharing the information today. He said that his goal is for people involved with disability to think about how open data could be used to better their lives, and to advocate for that change.

Mr. McMoreland and Mr. Barrett can be reached at 412-255-2131 or at Daniel.BARRETT@Pittsburghpa.gov

3. Accessible Dreams – Lucy Rooth

Ms. Rooth from Accessible Dreams described her work. Accessible Dreams' motto is "An accessible home is life-changing. Independence starts with a home you can navigate." Accessible Dreams is a housing developer and real estate services provider. It is classified as a 503 C nonprofit, and is sponsored and supported in part by a grant from the Pennsylvania Disabilities Council. Accessible Dreams covers clients in Southwestern PA. Their mission is to increase the inventory of accessible housing choices. Initially, their budget forced them to focus on those who could pay for their work, but they have recently been awarded a grant to build a four unit, low income apartment in Green County. Accessible Dreams focuses on three types of consumer: Low-income consumers, people who aren't low-income but don't make enough for a home addition, and private pay consumers. Ms. Rooth believes her greatest impact will be to educate the real estate community on how to sell accessible houses to people with disabilities. Ms. Rooth provided an example of a client her company recently served. She helped her client to take advantage of a grant for veterans. He had to understand all the laws and policies regarding renovations, how to budget for renovations, how to remodel, list, and sell his house, and how to buy and move into a new house. Accessible Dreams educated him on these processes. Ms. Rooth is always seeking opportunities to create accessible housing in any neighborhood, and suggested that vacant lots could be donated to Accessible Dreams. Ms. Rooth feels that one of her greatest challenges is to create

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a balance between the number of homes and the number of people she works with, because every accessible home must be matched with a potential occupant, so the number of each must rise concurrently.

Mr. Tague noted the proposed legislation to establish a land bank, and suggested that Accessible Dreams could acquire vacant lots through this project. Ms. Rooth thanked Mr. Tague for the suggestion, agreed, and asked for the support of the task force in disseminating information about Accessible Dreams. Mr. Meritzer agreed to disseminate information about Accessible Dreams.

Ms. Rooth can be contacted at 724-223-5115 or at LROOTH@AccessibleDreams.org.

4. Wheel Chair Proposal – Cindy Glynn

Cindy Glynn described her work in making wheelchairs available to people visiting Pittsburgh for use at events. She talked about how there was no wheelchair available for her aunt when she came to visit Pittsburgh and wanted to see the duck exhibit, and how she finally found a wheelchair by contacting her priest's mother. Ms. Glynn decided to present to the task force in order to receive input on her next course of action.

Ms. Evans and Mr. Scott described Pittsburgh Wheelchair Exchange, which provides wheelchairs and transportation for people with disabilities at the Pittsburgh Zoo.

Ms. Barricella suggested that Visit Pittsburgh should be responsible for providing wheelchairs.

Mr. O'Hanlon thanked Ms. Glynn for presenting, and asked her to return when she has a campaign that can be supported.

5. Staff Reports

Mr. Meritzer stated that Peter Bombara will be concluding his City Planning internship, and that the March task force meeting will be his last.

A motion to adjourn the Task Force Meeting was passed by unanimous vote.

The next meeting will occur on April 21st.