

**CITY OF PITTSBURGH/ALLEGHENY COUNTY
TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES
NOVEMBER 21, 2005
MINUTES**

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

Members Present: John Tague, Chairperson, Ruth Walter Brenyo, Aurelia Carter, Liz Healey, Milton Henderson, Jeff Parker

Members Absent: Paul O'Hanlon, Co-chair, Eugene Barton, Linda Dickerson, Viswa P. Mohanty, Rich McGann, Penny Perlman, Katherine D. Seelman

Others Present: Jennifer Behun, County Council Member Joan Cleary, Holly Dick, Joe Elliot, Jerry Laychak, Amanda Leppina, Richard Meritzer, Katherine Osche, Evelyn Stypula

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Tague at 1:10 PM. Mr. Meritzer apologized for the problems with the room. He was asked to check for a microphone with a speaker on the internet. Check with Dr. Seelman to see what she needs. Five members informed us they would not be coming to this meeting.

Approval of the Agenda:

Mr. Tague suggested that we add the Birmingham Bridge presentation after the Budget report. Joe Elliot will update us on Disabilities Connection and the Aging and Disability Resource Center.

Introductions:

Everyone introduced themselves.

Resignation of Penny Perlman:

Mr. Tague informed the Task Force that Penny Perlman had resigned. She represented the Mental Health Community and her replacement should come from that community. The nominating committee is Ms. Carter, Ms. Healy, Dr. Seelman and Mr. Tague.

Budget:

Mr. Parker reported that the budget last year was \$25,500 up from \$24,500 the previous year. This year the County cut our budget 20% to \$23,409. Disability connections get \$10,000. This leaves us with about \$5,000 of unprogrammed money. Last month we spent \$75 for meetings and \$439 for interpreters for 6 hours.

Mr. Tague informed the Task Force that there were four interpreters at the voting machine session. Holly Dick added that there was a deaf person in attendance, but no blind / deaf people. The blind / deaf interpreter stayed until noon and left.

Legislation:

County Councilmember Joan Cleary said she will introduce the updated Report Card Legislation in January.

Birmingham Bridge Presentation:

Jody Sherman of the Henson Design Group gave a presentation. The Birmingham Bridge is inaccessible. There is no pedestrian access from Fifth Avenue and steps to Forbes. The travel lanes are 78' wide and there is an 11' center strip. It would be easy to insert a 16' or 17' center Bicycle / Pedestrian path which would be isolated by barriers. All the state would need to do is move the lane lines. The next part of the project is to focus on the connections on either end.

Mr. Tague pointed out that this path would be for every type of mobility. Evelyn Stypula asked if they had a time table. Mr. Sherman said at this point it was indefinite. They are talking with PennDOT and working with the Oakland groups and the South Side Local Development Company.

Ms. Healy said she like the idea. She questioned that there was access from Fifth Avenue to Carson Street across the bridge, but not from Forbes Avenue. Mr. Sherman pointed out that Forbes is more of a vehicular route. Ms. Healy suggested they use the sidewalk along the bus lane. Mr. Sherman responded that the problem with that are the proposed connections with the Boulevard of the Allies. They are looking at resignalizing the light at Fifth Avenue and connecting to the north side of Fifth Avenue. They are working with PennDOT in other communities and with Community groups to pressure PennDOT to make pedestrian improvements. Ms. Healy asked if PennDOT funds these types of improvements. Mr. Sherman said the money is available from the Home Town Streets program.

Ms. Dick asked if there was a center barrier now. Mr. Sherman responded that there was, but they would propose building new barriers. Mr. Parker asked if they had any idea what they were going to do at the ends of the bridge. Mr. Sherman responded they would resignalize the traffic lights with pedestrian phases. Mr. Tague suggested audible signals. Mr. Sherman pointed out that there were no curb cuts on either side of the bridge.

Mr. Tague suggested that someone from the disability community should be involved in the process. Mr. Sherman said he will come back and give the Task Force updates. First they are looking for funding then they will start design work. Ms. Healy asked what he needed from the Task Force now. Mr. Sherman responded that they have met with the Oakland groups, the South Side Local Development Company and the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership. The first stage is to get more support. This is a complicated project. It is expensive and the bridge is owned by PennDOT. Ms. Dick suggested they come to a Bellefield Area Community Association meeting. Ms. Healy moved TO SUPPORT THE CONCEPT OF AN ACCESSIBLE ROUTE ACROSS THE BIRMINGHAM BRIDGE. Seconded by Ms. Carter. The motion was approved. It was decided that the Task Force would send a letter to Bike Pittsburgh and the Mayor Elect with copies to PennDOT. Mr. Tague said he would get some people involved in the process and get their names to Mr. Sherman.

Disability Connections and the Aging and Disability Resource Center:

Joe Elliot reported that the Murderball screening was a big success. 80 people attended. Judy is putting the final touches on the Annual Report. There was a soft opening of the Aging and Disability Resource Center last Thursday. It is located at 1 Smithfield Street. Mr. Elliot is in charge of it. It is administered by the Governor's office on Health Care Reform. It will make access to publicly funded services more accessible by coordinating intake. This includes state and county services. The targeted populations are people with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 59 and all people over 60 years of age. This office could help others. The Grand Opening will be this spring, but the center is operational now. They started with a receptionist and a field service worker. Clients can come in now. There will be two physical locations and two virtual programs. Judy will work with the Center 30% of her time. Mr. Elliot is the Program Coordinator. They will also have one person to do outreach and one staff rotating from senior services to provide aging referrals.

Ms. Healy asked how they got their database. Mr. Elliot said they get them from the state call center. They have five 800 numbers and a website (www.helpnpa.com). Ms. Healy added that the Children's Commission looked at the website and it was not as complete as it could be on the local level. Can new providers be added? Mr. Elliot said yes, they can add new providers. Ms. Healy said they are also working on a database and would like to share. Mr. Elliot responded that they can designate all unmet needs and report them to the State.

Ms. Stypula asked if there was any follow-up. Mr. Elliot said 30 days after the initial contact they will follow-up. Ms. Stypula asked what if there is an agency that they want to work with but the agency does not have the money for the additional workload. Mr. Elliot said they will look at that on a case by case basis. The state can pull off all of the data contents, referrals and time frame.

Ms Healy asked if there was still going to be a brochure. Mr. Elliot said they were working with students at the Art Institute to develop a marketing tool. Mr. Tague added they decided to use palm cards because they were easier to handle than trifolds. The Committee includes Mr. Elliot, Mr. Tague, Lucy Sprull, Sam Holbrook, Sue Martone, Don Clark, Jessica Seaberry and others.

Approval of the October 2005 Minutes:

Mr. Parker moved TO APPROVE THE OCTOBER 17TH MINUTES. Mr. Henderson seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Voting Committee:

Mr. Tague reported for Mr. O'Hanlon who was in Harrisburg. We looked at the voting machines. We met with County Executive Dan Onorato last year. We had follow up meetings with County Council members DeFazio and Fawcett among others. We were active in the Voting Fair. Once the state approves vendors, the County can select machine(s).

Ms. Dick pointed out that the process moved more slowly than expected. A large number of people with disabilities attend the fair. CMU provided the research material. How can we explain the new machines to senior citizens? Ms. Healy asked if we have any confidence the recommendation would be listened to. Ms. Dick responded that other criteria must be considered. Mr. Tague added that the vendors tried to sell the machines to the participants. All four machines seemed to be acceptable. We need to have a debriefing.

Employment Committee:

Mr. Parker reported that at the last meeting the employment plan was distributed. Action items included a list serve on what jobs are available and the committee working with the City and County on resources to help people get jobs. We are now developing a list of agencies on the list serve to put on the City website and gathering names of agencies.

Ms. Healy pointed out that there is an association of supportive employment agencies. Mr. Parker said they will tackle the private sector next. Ms. Healy asked if the Job Accommodation Network would differ from what the County would do. Mr. Tague responded we want people to know about City and County jobs. Mr. Parker said the next committee meeting will be December 2nd. Ms. Healy said she will find a link to the JAN and find out the name and contact for the supportive employment association. Mr. Parker said every City and County job posting will go out to the list and be on the website. Mr. Tague added midsize employers have not been tapped for disability employment. He attended an employers meeting with Joan Carney (ergonomist).

Transportation:

Mr. Tague said the price of gasoline is going down for now. There was a special steering committee on surcharges for Access. Mr. Parker pointed out this was a meeting of the CAT. The CAT started out as a work group but became the Port Authority advisory group. Access asked to meet with the Executive Committee to discuss a fuel surcharge. This seemed like a logical step.

Ms. Dick explained that this is a state Department of Transportation rule. The state will help systems that spend more on fuel. Since July Access spent an extra \$480,000 on fuel. If they institute a surcharge, they could get \$500,000 more from the state. They will add 2 cents to the price of the green and brown tickets and 3 cents to the yellow tickets (senior citizens).

Ms. Stypula said that Port Authority has both battery and fuel vehicles. Mr. Tague responded that Port Authority has 6 hybrid busses to track fuel economy. But these busses cost twice as much. Access does not have any hybrids. The surcharge goes to Access. If the price of fuel goes down the surcharge will be removed. Mr. Parker said Port Authority offered to pay the surcharge themselves and the state refused. If gasoline does not drop below \$2 by next July there will need to be a fare increase. Ms. Healy asked how much the surcharge would generate. Ms. Dick said they don't know. Not a large amount. Most of the \$500,000 will come from lottery money. Ms. Healy asked if people could make contributions. Ms. Dick responded the state said it must be surcharges.

Mr. Tague added it was an equity issue. Should Port Authority riders also pay a surcharge? Additional riders bring in less than the increase in fuel cost. Mr. Henderson said it is unfair to just charge Access riders. Port Authority riders should pay as well. Ms. Healy said that since lottery dollars are used for both Access riders and Port Authority riders, the surcharge should be bore equally. Mr. Henderson suggested they find a better solution. Mr. Tague said this is a fare increase; should there be a public hearing? Mr. Laychak suggested they start something like the dollar energy fund. Mr. Henderson said there should have been another solution. Ms. Dick pointed out that all programs that pay for clients will pay the surcharge. Mr. Tague responded they did not come to the CAT and there was not vote taken on the steering committee.

O'Connor Transition and Boards & Commissions

Mr. Tague reported that when they met Bob O'Connor, he said Lucy Sprull would be on the Transition team. Everyone on City Boards and Commissions were asked to resign. The City Work Force Investment Board has Joyce Bender and Linda Dickerson on it. The County has 90 Boards and Commissions. Some of them are small and do not meet often. Get names of interested people to Shawn Fox.

Ms. Healy asked if Mr. Meritzer could send the list of City Boards and Commissions again. The City is in transition now. Mr. Tague said we should find out if the diversity in hiring legislation passed. Mr. O'Connor should consider members of the disability community for Director and Deputy Director positions.

Emerging Issues:

Ms. Healy reported that 10 years ago a law suit (the Gasken Suit) made the Department of Education responsible when local school districts will not place students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Now Boards of Education are saying this is an unfunded mandate. The Governor may be having second thoughts about this whole issue. People are being encouraged to send letters in support of the settlement. She also wants to set up a meeting with the Governor's representative (Alan Kukovich). She asked the Task Force to participate. It could be a single letter that the organization signs on to. She moved THE TASK FORCE AGREES TO SIGN A LETTER AND PARTICIPATE IN A MEETING WITH THE GOVERNOR'S REPRESENTATIVE. Mr. Henderson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Carter brought up the issue of meetings around the school closings. This will impact students with disabilities. Ms. Healy suggested we invite someone from the school board. Mr. Tague said he would put that on the agenda for the next meeting.

Announcements / Upcoming Events:

Ms. Healy moved that the Task Force be listed as a cosponsor of the Celebration of National Inclusion Education Week.

Katherine Osche of the Uclido Center announced they are having a conference on April 7th on youth in transition to adulthood.

Ms. Healy asked if we have a brochure. Mr. Tague responded we didn't. Ms. Healy said she would work on it. We should look at our strategic plan and see what has and hasn't been accomplished. Mr. Parker said we should do that at the retreat. Ms. Carter said she would work on the brochure.

Mr. Tague announced that because of a mix-up with the room, there would be no December meeting. The next meeting will be January 23rd. We will look at next years schedule at the retreat. He will chair the nominating committee for officers for next year.

Public Comments:

Mr. Laychak ask how someone can access employment with the City and County. Ms. Healy said that both the City and County web sites list job openings. Mr. Tague added that we are putting a list serve together.

Ms. Stypula thanked everyone for their help with Bill #1479. It is out of Committee and in the State House of Representatives.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:07 p.m.

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING:

DATE: January 23, 2006
TIME: 1:00 P.M.
LOCATION: First Floor Conference Room
Civic Building, 200 Ross Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219