

City of Pittsburgh/Allegheny County
Task Force on Disabilities
November 19, 2012
Minutes

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

Members Present: Janet Evans, Richard McGann, Richard Meritzer, James C. Noschese, Paul O'Hanlon, Aurelia Carter-Scott, Katherine Seelman, John Tague, Joe Wasserman

Members Absent: Linda Dickerson, Liz Healey, Jeff Parker

Others Present: Shirley Abriolay, Audrey von Ahrens, Lester Bennett, Adolphine Birescik, Ben Carlise, Dianne Gallagher, Mary Hartley, John Heinzl, Katelyn Hill, Larry Hockenberry, Rob Kohlmeyer, Charles Morrison, Melanie Pfeiffenberger, Marlo Svidron, Randy Whitehare, Suzanne Yoder

The meeting was called to order by Mr. O'Hanlon at 1:00 PM.

ACTION ITEMS

Review and approval of July, September and October Minutes

Ms. Evans made a motion to approve the minutes from July, September and October which was seconded by Ms. Seelman and Mr. McGann.

Review and approval of financial report

Mr. Tague said there have been no expenses for October thus far.

The first expense of

November will be the CART being used at the meeting. There was no CART at the October

meeting. The balance is currently \$7,508.37. This is the amount of money that is remaining however this does not include the cost for interpreters from the October meeting and expenses for the November meeting. At the October Task Force Meeting Sally Alexander spoke for Blind American's Equality Day. It was agreed upon to give Ms. Alexander an honorarium. Food was also purchased for the meeting. For these expenses \$200.00 came from FISA and all but \$5.93 was spent. Mr. Tague asked if a thank you letter should be sent to FISA to which Ms. Evans and

several others agreed this was a good idea. Ms. Seelman asked what meetings are being skipped next year. Mr. Meritzer replied he sent in the calendar for next year and there will not be meetings for February and December. If this changes Mr. Meritzer must know as soon as possible because the calendar is publicized. Mr. Tague said there have been 9 meetings this year and there will probably be money remaining since 11 meetings were budgeted. Mr. Noschese made a motion to approve the financial report, Ms. Evans and Ms. Seelman seconded the motion. The financial report was approved.

PRESENTATION

Enforcement of Sidewalk Shoveling – Ben Carlise

Mr. Carlise said there are 8 people, including 2 interns, which will be sent out specifically to examine sidewalks for snow removal. This is a big step up from the 2 to 3 people used last year for the same task. Additionally, this year there will be a “Phase Alert” program implemented this year that will send out a media alert during every snowfall. This alert will indicate what kind of snow can be expected. At the end of each alert there is a reminder that residents are responsible for cleaning their sidewalks and there will be a fine. He said hopefully with the new alert system in place they can have sidewalk shoveling under control however they will deal with things as they come.

Mr. Wasserman asked if there is a specific number to call if an individual is having issues with a sidewalk that hasn't been shoveled. Mr. Carlise said his office works closely with the 311 Call system and recently had a meeting with Wendy Erbanik. A call to 311 should be made after 24 hours of the snowfall. A question was brought up concerning individuals with disabilities and if any message is attached to the alert to inform these individuals what number to call in the case they are unable to shovel their own sidewalks. Mr. Carlise said the alert gives a good indication of the amount of snow that is coming. He said the program “Snow Angels” is also a good program through the mayor's office. There is no message within the alert that tells individuals what number to call if there will be an issue clearing snow. There will be a general media notification concerning what responsibilities residents have after snowfall. He will try to include information such as the 311 call line in the general media notification.

A comment was made that the 311 phone number is not accessible for the deaf or for anyone who uses special phone equipment. The whole number must be used to access the line not the shortened extension. Mr. Meritzer said he will send out the full 10 digit number. He also mentioned the 311 extension cannot be used with cell phone. Ms. Evans asked what is going to be done with cases where bridges are covered in substantial amounts of snow. This could cause issues for emergency vehicles such was the case for Hazelwood. Mr. Carlise responded saying they now have GPS systems on snow trucks that allow them to know where trucks are in real time. After the blizzard they expanded their 5 page policy to a 35 page policy and also work with homeland security. Emergency vehicle calls are prioritized and in the case of an emergency snow trucks are immediately dispatched to that location. Mr. McGann mentioned that at his area in Mt. Lebanon residents shovel snow but some will shovel the snow towards his house. Mr.

Carlise said that they encourage people to shovel into parking spaces. The first choice is to throw snow on ones own lawn but in the case that is not possible parking spaces are also acceptable. Mt. Lebanon issues citations for improper snow removal and he is working with city police to implement similar policies.

Mr. O'Hanlon said 24 hours after the snowfall happens then it is appropriate to call 311. Mr. Carlise said if a house is not shoveled after that 24 hours then they issue a warning with a stuffer in the door of the residence. If after an additional 24 hours the walk way has not been shoveled then they issue a citation. With Snow Angels on board they will be able to handle different people with different handicaps, including heart conditions and individuals too afraid to shovel their walks. Mr. O'Hanlon asked what happens with owners renting houses. In many cases these individuals do not care about the stuffers since they don't live in the house. Mr. Carlise said they know who owns the property. Mr. O'Hanlon asked about leases that shift the responsibility of shoveling to the tenant. Mr. Carlise said those cases then become a fight between the landlord and the tenant. The city's plan of action is to find the property owner. There was a unique case last year where a maintenance man was shoveling snow in a timely manner from a business property, but was not shoveling the handicap portion. Mr. Carlise's office was notified and they now look out for that.

Mr. McGann said some residence in his area will shovel snow into the spots that ACCESS needs to use to pick him up. Mr. Carlise said the first place that is encouraged is the lawn and then parking spaces. They do not encourage people to shovel it off the curb into the street, only into their own property or their own drive way. The question was brought up what Mr. Carlise's office plans to do in the case someone has a heart condition and cannot shovel their sidewalk. Mr. Carlise said this is why they use the stuffers. Residents can call for the Snow Angel program and they should take advantage of this. Pittsburgh is one of the only cities that have this program.

A suggestion was made that a tag of some sort be given to residence to put on their doors if they are incapable of shoveling their sidewalks. Mr. Carlise said that sounded like a good extension of the Snow Angel program. This could be suggested to the mayor's office.

Mr. O'Hanlon suggested the agenda be moved around to allow the representative for the Snow Angel Program, Melanie Pfeiffenberger to speak after Mr. Carlise. He also mentioned that people must remember this has been a multi year initiative to change the culture of Pittsburgh. People were not shoveling walks and did not care since there was no consequence. We want to push people to either shovel their own walk or call Snow Angels to get help to shovel their walk.

UPDATE

Snow Angel Program – Melanie Pfeiffenberger

Mr. O'Hanlon introduced Melanie Pfeiffenberger to talk about Snow Angels.

Ms. Pfeiffenberger said this is her first year taking the position at the mayor's office as Snow Angels coordinator. So far there are 183 senior and disabled individuals who have requested a snow angel. This represents approximately 170 households in the city. There are 23 volunteers

and active recruitment has just started. Ms. Pfeifferberger was asked to give a brief description of what Snow Angels. She explained Snow Angels is an initiative that matches able-bodied volunteers with individuals incapable of shoveling their own walk during the winter. They have been sending out applications for volunteers and residents who need assistance.

Mr. Wasserman asked if 23 volunteers mean 23 organizations or 23 individuals. Ms. Pfeifferberger responded saying they only have 23 individuals currently but each volunteer often handles more than one residence. Last year 183 seniors were matched with 70 volunteers. She recently had a presentation at the University of Pittsburgh and is making presentations at Boy Scout meetings and high schools to recruit angels. They also do outreach through emails. Mr. Meritzer read into the record an email he received from Lucy Spruill who was unable to attend the meeting. In the email she expressed her excitement for the Snow Angels program she had used the previous year and has already prepared to use it again this winter.

Ms. Pfeifferberger said they try to match everyone they can with a Snow Angel but they cannot guarantee everyone will be matched with an angel. Mr. Tague asked if you must reapply every year. Ms. Pfeifferberger said everyone must reapply every year but they do reach out and try to get applications to those people. Ms. Evans said the Snow Angel program might want to contact the Resident Self Sufficiency Program within the City Housing Authority. The phone number is 412-395-3950 and ask for Juanita Fulton. Juanita Fulton is the head of the Self Sufficiency Program. They can pass Snow Angel information to the maintenance department.

Mr. Noschese asked Ms. Pfeifferberger when the 400 applications were sent out. He had not received his yet. She said they went out mid-October.

Ms. Carter-Scott asked how senior centers are going to have access to the information. Ms. Pfeifferberger said she was unsure about the outreach last year but this year she has a rough list of centers and organizations that she will contact. She can use more contacts or names of organizations if anyone has them. Last year was the pilot year and although Jack Daugherty did a fantastic job, some places were missed. Mr. Noschese asked if there is a way to help the older community or the deaf/deaf-blind community the help is needed. This includes getting around and getting food. Ms. Pfeifferberger said this cannot be addressed through this program however perhaps in the future a program could be organized. Mr. Meritzer added that inviting the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank to a meeting is also a possibility.

Ms. Hartley said this program sounds like a good idea to spread through social media. She also suggested sending out both alerts, who can help and who needs help, is important. Ms.

Pfeifferberger said an email will be sent out to everyone they can.

Dr. Suzanne Yoder an audiologist said she has older patients who could benefit from this program and asked for contact information. The website is pittsburghpa.gov/snowangels. From this page you can request to be a volunteer and both minors and above 18 are accepted. Minors must have parents fill out the forms. Ms. Pfeifferberger's number is 412-255-2280. The email for Snow Angels is on the website.

Mr. Bennett mentioned that last year there was a Facebook page. Ms. Pfeifferberger said although she is not sure if there is a Snow Angels specific Facebook page she will be doing

outreach through Facebook. Paper applications will also be sent to churches. If anyone has suggestions for places that could applications could be sent through contact her.

Mr. O'Hanlon asked if there are mismatches of volunteers and need. She also said some neighborhoods are harder to recruit from while some have an over abundance of volunteers. Oakland has plenty of volunteers but West End does not. She will be targeting the areas without many volunteers. The south such as Brookline and Carrick needs volunteers and parts of the west. Mr. Nochese suggested that volunteers in places with little need such as Oakland could possibly be issued vests to show Port Authority they are volunteers and receive free transportation to areas in need of volunteers. Mr. McGann says busses get stuck, but Access gets him lots of support. Could they use Access. Melanie said they try to match volunteer in their neighborhoods. Mr. O'Hanlon told here if there are any hard neighborhoods to match, let the Task Force know.

STAFF REPORTS

Audrey and John are leaving this term. Amaris will be staying.

Visitability Tax Credit – Audrey von Ahrens

This program is designed to encourage people to make their homes more accessible for people with disabilities or the frail elderly to visit. You need to meet five requirements that are listed on the web site. We are doing a lot of outreach. Prior to her starting we had developed a brochure. We are sending our brochures to municipalities outside the City of Pittsburgh and the community development corporations who do housing. We are looking a going to the Home Show. We are looking into doing a live Webinar.

Mr. Meritzer thanked Ms. von Ahrens for all her hard work.

Someone asked where there are trees branches near power lines what do you do. Mr. Meritzer advised them to call the Mayor 311 line and they will send someone to prune the tree.

Doctor's Insurance Project – John Heinzl

Mr. Meritzer pointed out Mr. Heinzl had been there for quite some time and worked on a number of projects, and even finished one.

The project was making sure that interpreters are provided for out of hospital doctor's visits. It is an offshoot of the Hospital Compliance Guidelines for the Deaf, Deaf-blind and Hard of Hearing. Through a series of meetings and emails we contact UPMC, West Penn - Allegheny and Veterans Hospital systems. Both UPMC and West Penn – Allegheny are providing interpreters. Veterans assured us that they are also providing interpreters although we were unable to find out which agency they were going through. We put together a summary of this information and sent it out to the public.

Mr. McGann thanked Mr. Henzl for all his hard work and requested that Mr. Meritzer make people aware of this. Interpreters are essential for us, as is CART. There should be a program at colleges to teach CART. Mr. Meritzer pointed out that interpreters need to be requested, it's a two party activity. The agencies that work with the deaf community should encourage them to request that service. CART is a bigger issue because it requires equipment. Doctors' appointments are usually one on one. Anyone who can use CART can use the written word, so it is overkill to have CART. Notes should work for the low hearing, but the doctor has to know that. People who have low hearing are not always obvious so it is incumbent on those of us who work in the community to impress upon people that if they need to see communication in writing they should make that known when they make their appointment. That way when the nurse comes in to take their blood pressure and asks them questions, she knows to write it down. There is only so much the City or the Task Force can do. Members of the community have to take responsibility to inform the medical profession about their needs.

Ms. Evans expressed her appreciation for the work Mr. Henzl did. She suggested there be a sign in the window when you check in that an interpreter can be available when requested in advance. It's a two way street. The Doctors' need to advertise that this service is available and the patients need to let the doctor or the nurse know ahead of time that they need the service.

Mr. Bennett asked if we knew that the interpreters are actually there. Mr. Henzl responded that we verified that doctors connected to UPMC and West Penn – Allegheny actually use interpreters. Mr. Meritzer pointed out that the interpreting services are sending out interpreters.

Ms. Yoder added that the patient needs to be their own advocate. Do not discount CART. They are sometimes deal with issues that are too complicated to write down in a timely manner. They might skim over it when they may go into more depth if they could speak at ease and have someone else interpreting it with CART. It depends on the person.

Ms. Birescik at the Center for Women with Disabilities at Magee Women's Hospital said when a person calls in who is deaf, deaf-blind or even speak another language, she immediately calls in for an interpreter. She said at both the Center and the outpatient clinic they do arrange for interpreters when requested.

Dr. Seelman added she sits on the UCMP Disability Advisory Board and there is a lot of discussion of electronic health records. They should have notations regarding the support that the person needs. There should be some follow up on this.

Mr. Nochese thanked Mr. Henzl for all his research. People who are deaf come to him about getting interpreters. The bigger problem seems to be emergency situations and ambulance rides. It is hard to plan for an emergency. Mr. Meritzer responded that these are two separate issues.

The Hospital Guidelines clearly state that when some come to triage, they should call for an interpreter. If that is not happening let him know and he will contact the Hospitals. This happened a couple of times and the appropriate person at the hospital has said they will discuss this with the staff. We have in the budget money for support for disability services this coming year. One of the items we are looking at picture books for all the ambulances. We can't expect all the paramedics to be fluent in sign, but we should be able for them to take out a picture book to find out what the needs are. We already priced that out. We are cognizant of that issue and moving to correct it. Larry asked if there is 24 hour emergency interpreting services. Ms. Gallagher from the Center for Hearing a Deaf Service responded most hospitals call them as soon as they know there is a person who is deaf coming in. Sometimes the ambulance even calls ahead. Some hospitals will only call when the person who is deaf arrives. There is 24 hour service. The ambulances could be made aware that they could call for an interpreter or let the hospitals know they are coming. But it is not possible on the ambulance.

Mr. O'Hanlon asked for clarification that what Mr. Heinzl is reporting on is doctors' appointment after the hospitalization is over. What percentage of appointment are made through the hospital? Are we talking about all of the follow-up or only those that go through the hospital? Mr. Meritzer responded that we did not ask why they are going to the doctor, just if their doctors can get interpreters for doctors' appointments.

Mr. McGann thanked Dianne for all her hard work. Interpreters are not always available. She is working to improve this situation. It is very important to strive to keep this service available. Ms. Abriolay added that she is a disability advocacy trainer. She has trained over 10,000 UPMC employees system wide. This issue is brought up at the training so the employees are very aware of the issue. They have an open communication with the UPMC staff and she advocates with them for the deaf and hard of hearing community.

Dr. Seelman stated that we should focus on the service, not the condition. If we want to focus on emergency services, itself that would be an interesting topic. Her friend needed a wheelchair during emergency service and the wheelchair never got there. The EMS is first of all in charge of your medical condition. EMS is an important service area for all of us.

Mr. Wassermann also thanked Mr. Heinzl for his work. He asked how far reaching geographically the manual has become. Mr. Meritzer answered that at this point it is just Pittsburgh, because that is our responsibility. We did get some calls from Cities outside of Pittsburgh and we got it to them. We are in the process of working with our Computer Information System to set up a web page to allow people to identify problems they have had. Once something goes on the web, there are no boundaries. This might encourage hospitals outside the City of Pittsburgh to become more involved. Also, UPMC and West Penn – Allegheny have hospitals outside the Pittsburgh area so even just working with them we are

going beyond the boundaries of Allegheny County. But our goal with this website is that more hospitals and patients can be informed and we can better get the word out.

Ms. Hartley added that working with Achieva it is very hard to find out who at a hospital is responsible for disability services. This group should reach out to the hospital association in order to have them start thinking about how they are going to do that statewide. Ms. Evans responded you need to call the administration. She was having problems and had to report it and she talked to a Linda. She got the problem resolved. Linda said anytime Ms. Evans had a problem she should call her. Dr. Seelman suggested that we put on our web site a point person for the hospitals. This would be useful information. Ms. Hartley clarified that she was talking about the state. Our region is better than most. In Philadelphia and certain other parts of the state you get your service needs met, but hospitals in the middle of the state have no idea. Mr. Meritzer pointed out that we have found the life expectance to an ADA Compliance Officer outside of UPMC is very short. We are now working on Hospital Guidelines for the Intellectually and Developmentally Disabled and the Mentally Ill and the people we worked with at West Penn – Allegheny and Veterans on the first guidelines are no longer there. And because, unlike UPMC, that is not their assignment, it is an additional responsibility. It is not necessarily the same number. We would need to constantly update it so that people are not calling a number that was good two months ago and now the person at that number does not have clue what you are talking about.

Mr. McGann said there was a meeting in October with Dr. Mathison of the Mental Health Task Force Collaborative. They are having another meeting December 6th at Panara Bread.

Mr. Hockenberry asked if a deaf prisoner has an emergency and goes to the emergency room and he is hand cuffed, how does he communicate? If his hands are tied, he can't even write. Mr. O'Hanlon suggested that is a different issue.

UPDATE

City Comprehensive Plan – Richard Meritzer

There has been a lot of activity happening. This is very important to the community. It will allow the City to enforce the ADA and even expand accessibility. This is a good opportunity for the disability community to make their needs known. There are 12 sections to the plan. We are in the final draft of the Open Space plan. As soon as that is finished I will be sending that out to the community. If there are any issues with trails or park accessibility in the draft please let me know. Preserve has been approved. Move is in the first draft. That is in the first draft. That includes all transportation issues including the pedestrian issues that Mr. Heinzl has been working so hard on, accessible traffic signals and accessible crosswalks, snow shoveling as well as public transportation. Design and Art are the parts I am most involved. We have an intern who is doing a policy statement on Best Practices in Accessible Public Art for the plan. We are looking at Braille on railings in front of art, verbal discretion, and sign interpreting for verbal art.

I requested to be on the design coordinating committee. Last week we have number of evening meetings to discuss these parts of the plan. This is an incredible opportunity and you need to spread the word. If you get an email send it to everybody. There is an education part of the plan and that would be the place for the City to encourage more interpreters.

Ms. Evans added people should fill out the survey, which is in the back of the room. We are spokespeople for the community. We have got to get it done. Would like to be on the agenda as to what she has been doing the past couple of months.

Mr. McGann Said people need to follow the rules. Mr. Meritzer responded that this is a way to spell out the rules I advance. It will also allow the City to better encourage compliance with the ADA regulations.

You can sign up to be part of the plan development at www.planpgh.com. If you need an accommodation for any of these meetings or for anything sent out on the plan, including people with cognitive disabilities, our office is available. Nothing is more important than getting this plan right.

VOX POP

Dr. Seelman said Judy Barricella sent out an email asking that we make sure the all disabilities are represented on the Human Services Block Grant advisory board. Allegheny County has decided to participate in the Block Grant pilot program. The deadline for application is 5:00 p.m. on December 7th. Mr. O'Hanlon added that the state decreased program funding for a number of services but created this block grant which allows them to waive certain legal requirements for services. The advantage is it increases local control. The disadvantages are there is less money and particular groups or services could find themselves without funding. Dr. Seelman pointed out that this could force disability groups into competition with one another.

Mr. Nochese stated 3 week ago Hurricane Sandy hit. His daughter lives in New Jersey. Both the Governors of New York and New Jersey had interpreters standing next to them at their news updates. So I was able to follow the news. Pittsburgh and Allegheny County should follow this procedure. At first the Governor of Pennsylvania did not have an interpreter the first day. I sent an email and finally they got on but the interpreter was not on the screen. I sent another email and finally they had half the interpreter on the screen, you could see one hand. The Pennsylvania Society for the Advancement of the Deaf (PSAD) has filed a complaint with the Department of Justice. Pittsburgh and Allegheny County do a good job and I applaud them. But I am embarrassed by Pennsylvania. Mr. McGann said television and the internet should have both captioning and interpreting at the same time.

Ms. Evans said a couple of weeks ago there was a Regional Asset District (RAD) hearing regarding Port Authority getting 3 million dollars. This was money that had previously been given to the cultural district. Mr. Bennett and I spoke at the hearing on behalf of Port Authority. Entities in the cultural district thought all the money should go to them. The busses are an asset too. If she wanted to go to a show she would take the bus. Mr. Bennett added that the Board seemed to understand. They Carnegie said they were going to use some of the money for accessible features. Ms. Evans and Mr. Bennett said that is fine, but if we cannot get there what good are those features. Ms. Evans made the point that when there is a hearing about transportation funding, people from the disability community need to show. It does make a difference.

Dr. Seelman said there is now a Student Disability Advocacy organization on campus. Mr. McGann sent an email about getting Personal Assistant Services (PAS) for people who are blind-deaf. Maximus is the service provider. In response Ms. Spruill said she never heard there was a TTD at Maximus.

Mr. O'Hanlon updated us on a number of issues:

The state only provided enough money for Port Authority until the end of August. At which point we may be facing the cuts in service again. Without dedicated funding source we may be faced with an annual crisis.

On Election Day a coordinated effort to get emergency absentee ballots in hospitals yielded 300 applications in 9 hospitals.

The voter ID Law is still in effect. He thinks it's a terrible law. The number of Allegheny County residents that could not be matched to state issued IDs was gigantic. This is going to be a big problem next election.

Mr. Bennett asked about the Parking meter discussion. We asked that we have people try out the meters. They are in. He got a call from a reporter for a statement. He said he was going to tell that reporter they requested a chance to give there input and that never happened. Mr. Nochese added that the meters are hard to see at night. They are very dark.

Mr. O'Hanlon asked that we announce when the next meeting was. Mr. Meritzer responded that there is no meeting in December and the meeting in January is a week later because of Martin Luther King Day. He will get notice out, both before the December meeting date, which we are not have and the January meeting date about the change in date.

Ms. Evens moved to adjourn. Dr. Seelman seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING

Date: January 28, 2013
Time: 1:00PM
Location: First Floor Conference Room
Civic Building, 200 Ross Street
Pittsburgh