

**CITY OF PITTSBURGH/ALLEGHENY COUNTY
TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES**

October 18, 2004

MINUTES

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

Members Present: John Tague, Chairperson, Paul O'Hanlon, Co-chair, Ruth Walter Brenyo, Aurelia Carter, Liz Healey, Rich McGann, Jeff Parker, Penny Perlman, Katherine D. Seelman

Members Absent: Bill Chrisner, Al Condeluci, Linda Dickerson, Milton Henderson

Others Present: Judy Barricella, Darlene Bartlett, Eugene Barton, Tina Calabro, Heather Hoffman, Arnette F. McCoy, Richard Meritzer, Lisa Moses, Kate Robinson

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Tague at 1:11 PM.

Approval of June 2004 Minutes:

It was moved to APPROVE THE JUNE 2004 MINUTES AS PRESENTED. All members voted in favor of the motion. Mr. McGann asked that no documents be sent out in PDF format.

Approval of the Agenda:

Mr. Tague added a discussion of "Small Differences" to the end of the agenda.

Introductions:

All members and guests introduced themselves.

Financial Report

Mr. Parker presented the Financial Report. There was only one item this month. Operation support costs for the file will be \$20,000 (\$1,000 per minuet. We have applied to FISA for a grant for the difference. Dr. Seelman said she had information on FISA. Judy Barricella asked how much Disabilities Connection was getting from our budget. Mr. Parker told her they would be getting \$10,500.

Emergency Management Conference:

Lisa Moses attended the Conference, which was held September 22nd through September 24th in Arlington Virginia. The conference was hosted by the National Capital Region, with the support of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, in partnership with the National Organization on Disability. The National Capitol Region has 4 million inhabitants, 20% or 800,000 who have disabilities (10% or 400,000 have severe disabilities). This was the first conference of this type. A second conference will be held in 12 months.

The conference was well attended by individuals representing various levels of government; public safety; emergency management; social service agencies; educational institutions; and utility companies. Panel discussions covered a wide range of topics, including mental illness; cognitive issues; chemical sensitivity; electrical sensitivity; the elderly; pediatrics; and non-English speaking populations.

The Honorable Tom Ridge was the keynote speaker. Secretary Ridge conveyed that every citizen has a role in an emergency. Secretary Ridge also stated that the Department of Homeland Security is starting an internship program for people with disabilities.

Practices in other cities:

Washington, DC's Metro transit line conducts emergency drills twice a year that include people with disabilities. Maryland law requires skilled nursing facilities to have generators. In Arlington, VA the Red Cross offers CPR in sign and Spanish. Washington, DC has family preparedness guides in Braille; on tape; and in 8 languages. Washington, DC has voice messaging and text alert. Comcast produces public service announcements on best practices and utilizes disabled individuals in these productions.

Suggestions for improvement:

Include the disabled community in the planning process. Have people with disabilities educate the disabled community. Include the disabled in community drills (we are doing this for the drill scheduled for PNC Park in May of 2005). Rally points for individuals requiring assistance are often overlooked in real emergencies. This point needs to be emphasized in the planning process and in drills. Design shelters that are able to accommodate individuals with special needs.

Personal 'to dos':

Develop your own emergency plan. Build an emergency kit. Consider sharing resources (especially people who are having financial difficulties). Let someone know what your needs are. Show someone how to operate your motorized chair or scooter.

Ms. Moses said we should work on developing rallying points. She asked for the input of Task Force members.

Dr. Seelman asked if we could put the minutes on the Web site. She said it would be nice to have a network of people. Ms. Carter thanked Lisa for her report. She informed the Task Force that the Allegheny County Agency on Aging puts together emergency kits. They solicit information from the community on what should be in the kits. Ms. Brenyo pointed out that she has an emergency police and paramedic call box for emergencies. Mr. McGann thanked Ms. Moses for her report. This is a serious subject. He would like to have several workshops with police and other emergency responders around issues like deafness.

Ms. Moses asked if the Task Force could help get volunteers. Dr. Seelman suggested that we could use the City Cable Station. Ms. Moses responded that the fates of the Pittsburgh cable station is up in the air. Ms. Brenyo pointed out that PNC Park has Public Service Announces.

Ms. Moses said she won a lift chair at the conference and it will be houses on the 6th Floor of the City County Building. Ms. Healy said that the school district has Carry Chairs.

Nominating Process:

Mr. Tague reported he drafted a letter to send out soliciting nominations. He will use a combination of our available mailing lists to send out the letters. Some contacts unreachable by email will still receive letters sent through the traditional mail. Responses will be sent to Richard Meritzer. Mr. Parker asked if there is a charge for processing these letters. Mr. Tague responded that there is a charge. Ms Healey said there was a charge per item. She asked if there was a time line. Mr. Tague said he wanted to review the letter. Mr. Meritzer said he would send the Email list to Mr. Tague.

Disability Awareness Month:

Judy Barricella of Allegheny County Disabilities Connection first informed the Task Force that she has been working with the Red Cross on Disability issues. She suggested that the Task Force request that leaflets on Emergencies be put in Braille and / or on tape. Mr. McGann supported her suggestion. He feels they are not very sensitive. Ms. Barricella went on to say that they have a committee representing all disabilities. The problem is that when people with disabilities are displaced, there is nowhere for them to live. Bob Stump is in charge of Emergency Management for Allegheny County. He should be invited to a Task Force meeting to report on their activities during the recent flooding.

Ms. Barricella went on to say that there was a kickoff for Disability Awareness Month on the portico of the City County Building. Proclamations were presented by both the Mayor's Office and the Chief Executive's office. Chris Fedimore was the M.C. Mr. Tague agreed that event was nice. He asked about National Mentoring Day. Ms. Barricella responded that it would be October 20, 2004. Joyce Bender is in charge of that activity.

Ms. Barricella went on to say that they were planning a film festival for next year. Dr. Seelman said she uses films in her classes. The Jewish Film Festival had films on disability issues last year. Ms. Barricella reminded everyone that the children in "Small Differences" are seniors in college now. Mr. Parker responded that this is a developing theme. Dr. Seelman added that Techlink children should be included in the next film. Ms Barricella said that transition issues are very important now. People need information on this.

Ms. Carter asked if we could with Disabilities Connection to develop and publicize a calendar of events during Disabilities Awareness Month. Ms. Barricella said very few groups are doing anything. Dr. Seelman suggested that we do an annual calendar. Ms. Brenyo said we could add events as they come in. Mr. Tague asked what the status of the Web site was. Mr. Meritzer responded the Bill Kulina had put all the pieces in place, but they still had to be sent to CIS. Ms. Healy stated that Chicago faxed out a one page newsletter. We should do something like that for email. There should be a central place to send information and then it would be sent out monthly. This would include City and County initiatives. Ms. Calabro supported the idea. She said it would appear in the media if we sent it to them. We need to have an ongoing dialog with participants of the long range plan. Dr. Seelman asked when the Website would be updated. Mr. Meritzer responded by next month.

Meeting With Dan Onorato:

Mr. Tague, Mr. Parker and Mr. Henderson met with Chief Executive Onorato for 50 minutes. They asked that Katherine Armstrong be reappointed to the Port Authority Board, that there be a local funding match for transit and that there be an advisory board appointed for the Kane Hospital Complex. Mark Wolosik came late to the meeting. He told them there were 280 inaccessible polling places. Mr. Parker suggested that there be voting outside the polling place. Mr. Onorato was interested in this. They were informed that people can vote at the County Election Board Office, but they are not set up for everyone vote there.

Mr. O'Hanlon asked what the alternative is. Mr. Parker responded people should vote early. Mr. O'Hanlon said that people with disabilities can vote by Alternate Ballot. Also Absentee Ballots will be accepted until the polls close, but they will only count the Presidential vote. Mr. Parker stated that Mr. Wolosik said all the inaccessible polling places were on a list. Access could be rescheduled to take voters to the County Office Building instead of their polling place. The County will have vans available. Access can make those arraignments. Mr. Onorato will be putting together a committee to make polling places more accessible.

Mr. Tague said he received positive responses to the idea of pay finders' fees to locate accessible polling places. Mr. McGann asked if people can vote at any polling place. If they could, then they could go to an accessible polling place. Mr. O'Hanlon pointed out that they could go to another polling place and vote with a Provisional Ballot. The law is unclear here. Federal law allows reassignment and curbside voting. We should put reassignment on our political agendas because it is illegal in Pennsylvania. Dr. Seelman said confusion will occur. We should keep track of problems. Mr. O'Hanlon responded that there were networks of people who are monitoring the situation. 1-866-OURVOTE is a clearing house in D.C. who will direct calls back to a local contact. Ms. Barricella said there was an issue with the wheel chair lifts in the County Office Building; Brenda Dare's would not fit on.

Ms. Healy moved to ESTABLISH A VOTING COMMITTEE TO DOCUMENT PROBLEMS AND ASSURE 100% ACCESSIBILITY. The main role of the Task Force is to provide advice and support to the City and County administrations. She wants a motion to be deliberated. Eugene Barton said the blind will not be able to vote independently in six months. Dr. Seelman asked Mr. O'Hanlon to chair the committee and bring a report of what happened in the election to the next meeting. Ms. Calabro was asked to send out a press release. Mr. McGann asked if Mr. O'Hanlon was the chairperson and he responded he was. Mr. McGann asked who will select the committee and Mr. Tague said people will volunteer. The motion was passed.

Mr. O'Hanlon said that the law requires the polling places be accessible by 2006, but Pennsylvania is moving to slowly. Ms. Dare can not use a voting machine and her election board would not let her vote on a blank absentee ballot. Dr. Seelman said we are going backwards on voting rights. But we must be careful as we push for change that we don't abet fraud. Ms. Healy said we should advise the Election Board to adopt an accessible voting machine. Mr. O'Hanlon said there is a national debate on paper verification on the new voting machines. Under the law there must be a paper trail. The question becomes in the case of a discrepancy, which is the real vote.

Design Committee:

Ms. Brenyo said she will set up a meeting date. Mr. Tague said the architect for the City of Pittsburgh who works on ADA compliance issues. Ms. Healy informed the Task Force that Paul Dick has been appointed to the City Planning Commission. Mr. Tague pointed out that this was the Mayor's idea. Mr. Dick will do an excellent job. He will do a follow up with Shawn Fox on County appointments.

Transportation:

Mr. Tague reported that in January there would be an increase in fares for Port Authority. And in March they will discontinue 70 bus routes and all service after 9:00 p.m. and on weekends. There are two bills in the State Legislature currently which will use sales tax revenues to fund public transportation. He urged people to attend the public hearing on November 4th. The State must find a dedicated funding source. Currently these bills are controlled by the Republicans in the State Senate. People should contact them. Representative Readshaw spoke at Let Our Voices be Heard and said they respond to phone calls. To sign up to testify call 412-556-5103.

Ms. Brenyo stated that Access charges people differently. Ms. Healy asked who would speak for the Task Force at the hearing. Mr. Parker said he wants to speak as an individual. Mr. Tague said he would speak for the Task Force. Darlene Bartlett said the Dan Debone spoke and the Pennsylvania Blind Association and asked for a letter writing campaign. There is also a petition going around. Mr. McGann said that people who work nights or weekends will be stuck. This will also make it hard to get to social events such as baseball or football games. People with disabilities will be stranded.

Strategic Plan:

Dr. Seelman asked that the Strategic Plan be held until the next meeting and be put at the top of the agenda. Ms. Healy said we need 30 minutes to discuss the plan. We can not do it justice at this meeting.

Allegheny County Consolidated Plan:

Mr. O'Hanlon reported that Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh are required to engage in a planning process. The County was invited to attend Let Our Voices be Heard. The process does not get a lot of input. The Task Force and Let Our Voices be Heard will have a joint meeting on November 17th either the Heinz Room in the United Way building or at 200 Ross Street. The County postponed the finalization of its plan to January.

Announcements:

Ms. Carter handed out information on Senate Bill #689. The bill will remove protections from Gas Company terminations. She asked that everyone make calls and circulate the information.

Ms. Healy said that the state requires that there be a consolidated plan for children. She asked that we invite Joe Carmillas to a Task Force meeting. Ms. Carter said we should be dealing with children's issues more. Mr. Tague responded that Ms. Healy and Ms Carter will keep the Task Force focused.

Mr. Tague said the January meeting will be moved to the following Monday since our normal meeting day falls on Martin Luther King Day.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 PM.

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING:

DATE: November 15, 2004
TIME: 1:00 P.M.
LOCATION: First Floor Conference Room
Civic Building, 200 Ross Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219