

**CITY OF PITTSBURGH/ALLEGHENY COUNTY  
TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES  
ANNUAL MEETING  
SEPTEMBER 18, 2006  
MINUTES**

**Location:** Three Rivers Center for Independent Living  
900 Rebecca Street  
Wilkesburg, PA

**Members Present:** Jeff Parker, Chairperson, Katherine D. Seelman, Co-chair, Aurelia Carter, Janet Evans, Paul O'Hanlon, John Tague

**Members Absent:** Eugene Barton, Linda Dickerson, Liz Healey, Milton Henderson, Rich McGann

**Others Present:** John G. Bertoty, Ed Buran, John Cahr, Diane Cagey, County Councilmember Joan Cleary, Jim Costello, Steve Chopek, Brenda Dare, Frank Demes, Joe Elliot, Mary Figlar, Clare Ann Fitzgerald, Rachel Freund, Sarah Goldstein, Amy Graves, Brenda Gressman, Brian Heywood, Stanley Holbrook, Christie L. Johnson, Diana Nelson Jones, Chuck Keenan, Beverly Krautz, Amanda Lapina, Lashanna Martin, Denise McArthur-Turner, Rick McWilliams, Richard Meritzer, Roy Miller, Charles Morrison, Jessica Murphy, Beth Nicholson, Jim Osborn, Lynne Pishitto, Dana M. Phillips, Lois Quinn, Jessica Seabury, Shawnell Smith, Lucy Spruill, Sandra Stewart, Evelyn Stypula, Lloyd Wright

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Parker at 1:05 PM.

**Introductions:**

Mr. Parker introduced the Task Force members.

**Tributes:**

Mr. Parker led a tribute and a moment of silence for Ruth Brenyo.

He then led a tribute and a moment of silence for Mayor Bob O'Connor.

**Report of activities the past year:**

The subject of the annual meeting last year, the Task force addressed barriers to voting this year. There remain only 7 inaccessible polling places in Allegheny County. We are also working to make voting machines more accessible.

In the wake of Pittsburgh Public Schools being closed without adequate notification, Ms. Healy brought Superintendent Roosevelt to a Task Force meeting to discuss a variety of issues.

At the request of members of the deaf community we started working with the Warden of the County Jail to improve services for the deaf and hearing impaired. The Warden came to a Task Force meeting and said he wanted to make our County Jail the best in the Country.

Two years ago our annual meeting focused on Employment. Since then John Tague has chaired the employment Committee. They have had procedures approved to make it easier to employ people with disabilities with the City and the County. They are also looking into the operations of Careers Links.

We supported the Report Card legislation at County Council. Aurelia Carter is chairing an implementation committee for that project.

In addition, we have worked on evacuation planning and the displacement resulting in the closing of the Altoona Residential Center. Mr. Parker then introduced everyone who helped the Task Force.

He then turned the meeting over to Mr. Tague. Mr. Tague announced that the state had recognized Evelyn Stypula and Senator Jane Orie for their work on disability issues.

**First Panel – Partnership with the Housing Authority:**

The panel was moderated by Janet Evans and included Chuck Keenan of the Pittsburgh Housing Authority, Paul O'Hanlon of the Disability Law Project, and Stanley Holbrook, Executive Director of Three Rivers Center for Independent Living (TRCIL). Janet Evans started the discussion by pointing out that she was initially denied housing in a Housing Authority High Rise because they thought she would be requesting help from the seniors. Now she is a leader in her Housing Authority community.

Mr. O'Hanlon said that under Act 504 the Pittsburgh Housing Authority had to renovate 1000 units to make them accessible. They did not make the deadline and were sued. They have now entered into a two year process. The City Housing Authority has some of the biggest challenges. They started with a minimum 5% of households. Pittsburgh has more seniors and it is a magnet for people with disabilities because of the proximity of several highly-rated medical centers. It is cheaper to build accessible housing than to retrofit old housing. They are trying to accommodate the Authority's building schedule. When the program is completed 10% of the new housing will be accessible and the 5% of existing accessible housing will remain. That will make this one of the most accessible housing Authorities in the Country.

Mr. Keenan added it is important to involve the community in the process. He attends monthly TRCIL meetings and meets month with the design committee. TRCIL is going to do a training session.

Mr. Holbrook said housing has always been had systematic barriers – both attitudinal and legal. There was a fundamental change to create a dialog with the Housing Authority. They did many demonstration projects. Without accessible housing we can not break down barriers. There are cuts in 811, a HUD program that allows disabled persons to live independently by increasing the amount of accessible rental housing and support services. Work needs to continue, especially in housing.

Janet Evans pointed out that she is working with Tenant Councils to have a rally Friday at 8:00 a.m. downtown. The Pittsburgh Housing Authority is losing 5 to 10 million dollars in Federal Funds.

Someone from the audience asked if they were using universal design in all of their housing. Mr. Keenan responded they must comply with a number of different laws. They are to make the unit accessible to everyone. Ms. Evans added that in 1995 they built six accessible units in Glen Hazel.

#### **Second Panel - Nursing Home Transition:**

The panel included Lucy Spruill, Director of Attendant Care at United Cerebral Palsy, Lynn Baculli of TRCIL, Frank Demes of Action Housing and Steve Chopek of the Department of Human Service. Ms. Spruill said she works on Nursing home transition. The people who do this work are TRCIL and CLASS. They provide a number of crucial elements. Officials acknowledge that providing services in the home makes consumers happy and is cost effective. They provide much needed resources. This is effective stimulation for long term care and coordination is at the state and local level. What do we need to do next? New Jersey reduced their institutional population by 10%. We can do better. We need to keep resources coming. New housing must be usable by all people. Senate Bill #1158 will create tax incentives for visitable housing.

Lynn Baculli pointed out that there are five areas where the state provides funding: (1) security deposits, (2) moving expenses, (3) cleaning and pest eradication, (4) set up fees for utilities and (5) furniture. There are 400 to 500 transitions a year and 1/3 of the cases are from our area. It is a collaborative effort between Area Agency on Aging, Community Health Coalition and the County. They can do minor home modifications. Allegheny County is one of six counties targeted with this money. The process takes four months to a year. Ms. Spruill added there has been a real lack of information. This program increases awareness. They try to focus on “front door rollout,” that is, transitioning people into an accessible home as soon after they have moved into a nursing home as possible.

Mr. Demes said that the Allegheny County Redevelopment Authority received 1.2 million since 2001 in state grants and has put that into affordable housing and Community Development Block Grants. The money has made 192 households accessible in Allegheny County. Most of these units were for people already in housing, not transitioning from nursing homes. 54% of the recipients were 62 years of age or older, 33% were 18 to 61 years of age and 13% were 17 or under. 12% are in rental situations. This money can not be used for the County Housing Authority. Any changes must stay in the footprint of the original house. They have only turned down four requests for assistance. These requests were turned down because the modifications could not be made due to the condition of the house. The average job costs \$11,000. There are not enough qualified contractors to do the work. The County can not apply for more money until the money allocated is spent.

Mr. Chopek spoke on self determination housing services. He distributed a number of handouts. He is doing outreach to landlords and developers. Education is important particularly on rights and responsibilities. The Department of Human Service website has been updated.

Mr. Demes added that there are 280 people on the waiting list since November. The number for the program is 412-281-2102 X27. He will talk to everyone who calls and will try to refer people to the correct program if possible. Someone asked him about the area served and the income requirements. He responded they serve Allegheny County. The program is very generous but they are required to do low income applicants first.

Ms. Stypula said many people in nursing homes should not be there. She asked if they work with Social Workers. Ms. Baculli said yes. Ms. Spruill said often the process is started by the social worker. Part of what is missing is doing successful transitions. Ms. Stypula said that they may want to keep the patients because that brings more money into the nursing home. Ms. Baculli replied that family members may make referrals.

Someone asked about restrictions to the program. Mr. Demes said there are state regulations. Sanctions have held up county matching funds. The questioner then asked who decides what contractor is used. Mr. Demes responded that Action Housing has contractors fill out applications. They do not get paid until the job is done. Someone else asked if there is an opportunity for people to partially pay for the work. Mr. Demes said they will refer contractors for people who want to pay. Clients contribute close to \$50,000 in funds. And they offer technical services for people over income.

Brian Heywood of area Agency on Aging added a lot of people in nursing homes could go home. The major thrust of this new program is to do just that. They are speaking with nursing home administrators about this program and going on visits to do direct presentation of this program.

### **Panel Three – The Future - Technology:**

Dr. Seelman moderated this panel which also included Jim Osborn, Coordinator of Carnegie Mellon University Life Science Initiative and John Bertoty of Blueroof Technologies. Dr. Seelman defined Universal design as a product anyone can use. A product comes from an idea. Then prototypes get tested. Then there are marketing and feasibility studies. And then there is a product.

Mr. Osborn reported he received a grant from the Nation Science Foundation to create a center to improve and sustain quality of life. There have been 60 such centers established. They are end-user driven. They are changing the engineering mindset to include end-users at the beginning of the design phase. This national project is focused on Western Pennsylvania. They have received a 10 year grant. Everyone can get involved in the Center.

Mr. Bertoty said Blueroof was formed four years ago to get technological jobs in the Mon Valley. They looked to seniors as a market. Their housing was inefficient. They designed housing where the construction was accessible and the universal design technology allows the house to change as the owner changes. Modular houses are built as boxes and have no waste. They are built from two to five days in a factory. They are high quality. If you build in universal design at the beginning the cost increase is under 10%. They limit artificial barriers and include technology that is reactive. They support the individual interfacing with the building. The individual must be able to interface with the infrastructure. They need access to the outside World. Universality Security Affordable.

Mr. Osborn added that you can control the house through a cell phone and this can be done affordably. Lloyd Wright from Senator Jim Ferlo's office announced the Senate pass bill #1158 and sent it to the house. This legislation would encourage visitable housing. Dr. Seelman added these systems can be set up.

Someone from the audience commented that they have been involved in smart homes for many years. We must look at what people are using now. Every task you animate must be able to be done manually. Work in redundancy.

**Closing:**

Mr. Parker reminded everyone that the purpose of the Task Force is to advise the Mayor and County Executive. He urged people there to join the housing committee.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:05 p.m.

**THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING:**

DATE: October 16, 2006  
TIME: 1:00 P.M.  
LOCATION: Large Conference Room  
200 Ross Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219