

**CITY OF PITTSBURGH/ALLEGHENY COUNTY  
TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES  
SEPTEMBER 19, 2011  
MINUTES**

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

**Members Present:** Janet Evans, Richard McGann, James C. Noschese, Paul O'Hanlon  
Chairperson, Katherine D. Seelman, John Tague, Joe Wasserman

**Members Absent:** Aurelia Carter-Scott, Linda Dickerson, Sarah Goldstein, Liz  
Healey, Milton Henderson, Jeff Parker

**Others Present:** Judy Barricella, Cindy Bednar, Lester Bennett, Jack Dougherty,  
Mary Duranti, Evan Gross, Jessica Kolkhof, James Kindler, Karin  
Morris, Charles Morrison, Teresa Nellans, Lucy Rooth, Ryan  
Uhrig, Rui Zuo

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Meritzer at 1:00 PM.

**ACTION ITEMS**

**Review and approval of financial report**

Mr. O'Hanlon would like to have financial report reviewed. Mr. Tague states that there are two pages missing from the report and he will resend it when he gets home. Mr. Tague discussed the budget from the department of human services is \$9,000 of which \$6,500 is for meetings, a meeting averaging \$650. Mr. Tague cautioned the task force that the budget will most likely only allow for 9 or 10 meetings this fiscal year. Mr. Nochese made note of the parking expenses listed on the budget and was shocked that he was not aware parking was covered. Mr. Tague stated that parking and things like ACCESS could be claimed and submitted by task force members but no one has done so to this point. Ms. Evans stated that she wrote off her own ACCESS expenses, and as far as the budget for meetings January and February could be eliminated because they are typically bad months due to weather. Mr. McGann supports. Mr. O'Hanlon is in favor of dropping bad weather month's meetings but the task force should meet between meetings to decide what criteria there should be to cancel meetings. Dr. Seelman supports Mr. O'Hanlon and suggests sending an e-mail to establish such criteria.

**DISCUSSION**

## **Update Smart Phone Navigation Application**

Mr. Meritzer discusses the meeting that he, Mr. Wasserman, and Mr. Uhrig attended at Carnegie Mellon University regarding the application. The meeting was a presentation requesting a letter of support from the department of city planning for funding. The application is basically GIS mapping for public areas and buildings for people who cannot see to make it easier to travel. Mr. Wasserman thought it was a good project and that Pittsburgh is lucky to have a research institution like Carnegie Mellon University that works on such projects. Mr. Wasserman talked about a feature of the proposed application that would give detailed information about bus routes and available seating capacity aboard busses. Mr. Wasserman also stated that the lead researcher would be attending a Golden Triangle meeting in the future. Dr. Seelman wanted to clarify that the application ideally would be downloadable on one's personal cell phone, and what kind of smart phones they were working with. Mr. Uhrig stated that the researchers were working with Android phones currently and having issues with phones that did not have tactile buttons on the phones; Mr. Uhrig agreed that the project could be very beneficial. Mr. Meritzer stated that Mr. Uhrig had already drafted a letter of support for the project and that they would set up a supervising committee which we were invited to be on. Dr. Seelman wanted to commend those that got the ball rolling on this project and wanted to state the importance of advanced information communication technology research. Mr. Meritzer stated that the person who got the ball rolling was the city's Transportation Planner Pat Roberts because the grant for the project is a transportation grant.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Snow Angels Initiative**

Mr. Dougherty said that he is working with Rebecca Kotlier-Wein and the mayor's office on the Snow Angels Initiative and that he wanted to give an update on the project and then open the topic up for discussion. Mr. Dougherty says that Mayor recognizes that Pittsburgh is a city of neighborhoods and wanted to cultivate an environment of neighbors helping neighbors to make the city a safer place. The snow angels program is designed to bring neighbors together to address a unique problem that Pittsburgh has, snowfall. The program's goal is to connect those that need assistance in clearing snow from their walk with volunteer's in their area that are willing to assist them. Mr. Dougherty states that the program is tentatively set for launch in mid-October by releasing applications for snow removal assistance. To qualify for the program one must be aged 65 or older or have physical disability, do not have resources to have snow removed (financial or family/friends), and live within the city limits. Mr. Dougherty stated that those who qualify will be matched with a volunteer from their neighborhood who would shovel the sidewalk and walkway up to the person's door after each snow storm. Volunteers would be provided snow shovel, melting salt, and safety vest and would like to match the volunteers with applicants from their own neighborhoods so that there are no travel concerns during a storm. Mr. Dougherty had three questions he would like the task force to consider; does this sound like a good method to approach this initiative with the supplies and requirements that have been listed, what are some neighbor or community groups the city could go to that would connect us with volunteers

and people who would need assistance, and are there any partnerships with anyone present moving forward with this program? Mr. Meritzer said that this initiative has come out of meetings with Public Works about people being cited for not having their walks shoveled; Public Works has been apprehensive about citing people for not having their walks shoveled in fear that people whom need assistance shoveling their walk may get cited and that this program is a prerequisite of that for public works so that they may fine people for not clearing their walks. Mr. O'Hanlon this issue came up as a task force initiative about how we can make Pittsburgh travelable in the winter, especially for people with mobility impairments because people have not been shoveling their sidewalks in a lot of communities. Mr. O'Hanlon wanted to applaud those involved in this initiative because he thinks it will be beneficial and that it was ironic when they found out that the reason the city did not enforce the shoveling requirement was out of concern for people who had difficulty shoveling but those are typically the people that depend on others to shovel their own sidewalks so that they may be able to get around in the city. Mr. O'Hanlon questioned the requirement issue of financial need; how would that be investigated in practice? Mr. Nochese wanted to know how vacant lots would be dealt with. Mr. Meritzer stated that vacant lots that were not shoveled the owners of such lots could be fined in the future and that some of the lots are in fact owned by the city. Mr. McGann wanted to know if other communities, such as Mt. Lebanon, would work with the city in a similar type of program. Mr. O'Hanlon stated that eventually this may move outside the city, but at this point it would not be fair to ask the Mayor to be working on this for communities outside of the city but perhaps in the future. Mr. Meritzer said that having the program work in the city, which is the biggest municipality around, then other communities, could take from Pittsburgh's example. Mr. O'Hanlon agreed and added that a good place to find volunteers for the program could be; churches, high schools, boy and girl scouts, and neighborhood organizations. Dr. Seelman also agreed and said that a press release should be given to independent living centers, deaf clubs, and other places that the task force has addresses for to raise awareness of the program. Mr. Kindler also questioned how the city could prove financial need of applicants. Mr. Dougherty stated that the financial requirements on the applications is mainly just to imply that the service is only for those that need it and that the city would not be looking into anyone's financial records and that the program will be run, more or less, on the honor system. Mr. Wasserman said that there are benefits for other emergency situations that could be gained from having a database of where elderly and people with disabilities are located gained from the snow angel's initiative. Ms. Barricella added that she thinks there is a definite need for this sort of service and that we should be able to recruit volunteers for this program. She also had a question of whether the city has considered liability protection for the volunteers to which Mr. Dougherty responded that the Mayor's legal department is working on a waiver that the volunteers will have to sign. Mr. O'Hanlon agrees with Dr. Seelman that a release that they could give to community organizations could definitely help in raising awareness for the program and help bring in more volunteers. Mr. O'Hanlon also is worried about getting people to request the assistance for a couple of reasons like being unaware of the program or just being reluctant to ask for help. Mr. Dougherty really hopes that the task force can be of assistance in being a resource to find people that need assistance. Mr. Dougherty would also like to get feedback from the task force about supplies that they will be giving

volunteers (shovels, vests, and salt) and that the city may not have the funding to provide these supplies and if the task force believes that all the supplies are necessary. Mr. McGann wanted to remind the task force that there are accessibility issues for the 311 system and that it is not accessible to those who are deafblind. Ms. Morris added that she believes that salt is a must have for volunteers but they may not need to be provided shovels as that many families may have shovels and that she would most certainly be interested in volunteering in a project such as this. Dr. Seelman was curious whether the city's salt would be used and that they need to provide salt that does not damage the sidewalks. Mr. Dougherty said that they would not be using the city's salt. Mr. O'Hanlon agreed that many volunteers may have their own shovels, and that the city should look into a possible corporate sponsor that may be interested in getting involved with the program. Mr. McGann agreed that the city should provide salt that does not damage the sidewalks. Ms. Nellans added that the salt they use should be animal friendly, not hurt animal's paws, and it should state that on the packaging. Ms. Duranti added that because the elderly are a vulnerable population that the city should be cognizant of who may be volunteering. Ms. Barricella stated that volunteers should have no contact with the homeowners. Ms. Evans inquired about the application process and Mr. Dougherty replied that there would be their office's phone number on any potential flyers that would go out and that they would handle the application process. Ms. Evans added that after the snow season the volunteers should be thanked, potentially by the Mayor. Mr. Dougherty added that their goal is to match fifty volunteers with fifty recipients and inquired whether they think that is a good goal. Mr. Wasserman inquired if 311 records from the previous winter would be obtainable, to which Mr. Dougherty replied, no. Mr. O'Hanlon thinks that it would be a good place to start but if it would be exceeded it would be great, he also added that a lot of people know in their own neighborhoods who needs assistance shoveling their walks. Upon discussion of possible avenues to get volunteers, Mr. Dougherty stated that the city is aware of several volunteer groups and that it is his opinion that there will be more of a challenge getting recipients than volunteers.

## **STAFF REPORTS**

Mr. Meritzer informed the task force that interns have been changing out and new interns have come in and it has been very busy in his office. Mr. Meritzer informed the task force about a Duquesne nursing program with Charles Larew that deals with medical patients receiving assistance in their home, this year they are going to deal specifically with mobility and notate what improvements need to be made in the city, such as sidewalk improvements and this information will be added to the GIS database. Mr. Meritzer also stated that the first part of the two parts of legislation for the One Step Program has passed; the public works side. Mr. Meritzer added that city council was enthusiastic about the idea and recommended that a flow chart be made to show how one goes about getting the permits; which Elijah has created and added to the One Step packet. Mr. Meritzer stated that the second part of the legislation hearing is on Tuesday October 11<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 and that accessible seating has been requested, and if anyone wants any other accommodations please get those in to Richard as soon as possible. Mr.

Meritzer also stated that he had been very active on 311 requests with interns Elijah and Ryan, and that he has been regularly going to city events committee meetings and making sure everything is as accessible as possible. Mr. Meritzer said that this coming month is his staff's kick-off of the MovePGH which is the third section of their comprehensive plan; he will get in touch with the community to see how they can get involved to make the city more accessible through the comprehensive plan. Mr. Meritzer added that the Monday visitability marketing committee is meeting and hopefully the brochure will be at that meeting. Mr. Meritzer stated he would be attending a meeting next Tuesday on emergency management training on special needs community. Mr. Meritzer also stated that the city has committed to twenty staff members for disability mentoring day, where children with disabilities shadow city staff for a day.

Ms. Zuo stated she is working on audible traffic signals within the city. She stated that they are looking into funding for the project and that it can really help to make the city more accessible. She said the local Lions Club on the North Side has reached an initial agreement with doing the project together. The goal of the program is to change all of the traffic lights into audible traffic lights throughout the city. She added that if anyone has any additional resources that could help the project to bring the information to her or Mr. Meritzer.

Mr. Uhrig stated that he is working on 311 calls as well as the snow angels initiative from the office of city planning's side. He stated his major project that he is working on right now is working to improve accessibility within the Pittsburgh International Airport. He stated that they have received a good amount of feedback from the community and that they are in the process of compiling that. Mr. Uhrig also stated that Monica Jones the ADA coordinator for the Pittsburgh Airport has stated she will be in attendance of the October CCTF and that the project will move forward from there. Mr. Nochese added that he received some information that during hurricane Irene deaf people that were flying during the storm had flights diverted and they were not informed while in the air and they were lost once they landed. Mr. Uhrig stated that proper training when dealing with people with disabilities, especially during emergency situations, is needed for airport staff and that some of the feedback they have received has attested to that.

Mr. Gross stated that he is working on a project to make public art more accessible to people with disabilities. He stated he is researching how other cities are making public art more accessible for people with disabilities.

Mr. Meritzer added that he is thrilled with the new interns and the work that they have started. Ms. Nellans asked for clarification as to what public art they are wanting to make more accessible. Mr. Meritzer stated that any art that is open to the public; paintings, murals, statues, light shows, and how do they make that accessible to all people. Mr. Meritzer stated that the goal is to make all kinds of art accessible to everybody without interfering with someone else's appreciation of the art. Dr. Seelman added that the Smithsonian has a longstanding accessibility program.

Mr. McGann inquired about an intern that was from Galudet University? To which Mr. Meritzer replied that she pulled out of the internship two days before orientation.

Mr. Nochese stated that a group of deaf people who went to the flight 93 memorial service were not able to participate in the service because the interpreter was too far away from their seats to be able to see. He just wanted to inform the group of this and that they had filed a complaint through the Department of Justice that the service was not accessible.

Mr. Wasserman wanted to ask Mr. Dougherty about how they should seek an update or follow up with the Mayor's office regarding a prior meeting the task force had with the Mayor. Mr. O'Hanlon stated he would send an agenda to task force members about the task force's prior meeting with the mayor's office.

## **VOX POP**

Ms. Kolkhof is interning at Consumer Health Coalition and they are beginning a post card advocacy effort focusing on the potential cuts to Medicare called Now and Later based on if cuts were made what would happen now and what would happen later. She stated if anyone is interested to sign up with her or on the back table.

Ms. Nellans wanted to ask a couple questions about people whom she knows that require help with hearing aides. To which Dr. Seelman responded that the audiology department at the University of Pittsburgh clinic has an arrangement for provision of hearing aides, and that Ms. Nellans should connect them with Elaine Mormer. Ms. Duranti from UPMC stated that the social services department that could potentially help them.

Ms. Rooth stated that she is the executive director of Accessible Dreams a non-profit organization that builds accessible housing for people with disabilities. They started a program in Washington County of a fully accessible home but the buyer is no longer able to purchase the home and is reaching out to the task force to see if they know of anyone who needs a fully accessible home that meets eligibility requirements.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 PM

## **THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING**

DATE: October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011  
TIME: 1:00 P.M.  
LOCATION: Large Conference Room  
200 Ross Street