

City of Pittsburgh / Allegheny County

Task Force on Disabilities

September 18, 2017

Meeting Minutes

**Task Force Members in Attendance**

Paul O'Hanlon, Steve Fowler, Karen Warman, Janet Evans, Sarah Goldstein, John Tague

**Task Force Members Absent**

James C. Noschese, Joe Wasserman, Richard McGann, Cori Frazier, Milton Henderson, Gabe McMoreland

**Also In Attendance**

Richard Meritzer, Joy Dore, Georganne Ligenfelter, Amber Ackley, Shannon Miller, Shawn Graham, Dawn Smidga, Ashley Mancine, Mary Esther Van Shura, Laura Drogowski, Maria Driediger, Andrew Favini, Sarah Kinter, Ali Abdullah, Dustin Gibson, April Delacur, Jonathon Robison, Nakita LaPrade, Philip Strickland, Kaitlyn Buss

**Welcome and Introduction**

The program started at 1:00 pm and began with the introduction of the Task Force members and individuals in the audience.

**Review and Approval of Treasurer's Report**

Mr. Tague started his report by reviewing last year's budget. He reminded the Task Force that outstanding charges include the bills from July and August's meetings. He has yet to receive the Annual Meeting's bill from the Center of Hearing and Deaf Services. Other charges include the cost from the ADA Anniversary Rally in July, and an expense from October for \$450 towards interpreters for a CLASS event.

This year's budget totals \$9,000. Mr. Tague pointed out the approximate cost per meeting on the financial report. Currently, \$650 is allotted towards interpreting services (this is in lieu of costly CART services). There is \$1,000 listed in June allotted for the Annual Meeting. Based on all of the expenses listed, he estimated a \$2,350 balance by the end of the year. Ms. Warman pointed out a typo in the budget, and Mr. Tague said he would correct it. He will also correct the dates listed on the budget.

Mr. Tague reminded the Task Force that current agreement that exists is that the County provides the Task Force funding, and the City provides the staffing. He wondered whether some sort of formal agreement was necessary – there are some County-mandated requirements (such as the Service Profile and Logic Model). Ideally, he would like the Logic Model reviewed and approved by the full Task Force in the future.

Mr. O'Hanlon noted that the Task Force was one member short of reaching quorum, and approval was tabled.

### **Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes**

The minutes from August's meeting were present, but unable to be approved without quorum.

### **Discussion with the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County Disability Staff**

Ms. Esther Van Shura from the County Executive's office spoke first. She delineated the three main leaders in Pennsylvania: Governor Tom Wolf, County Executive Rich Fitzgerald, and Mayor Bill Peduto. She explained that her job for the County Executive's office is to attend meetings as needed and facilitate interfacing with other authorities within the county.

She emphasized that Allegheny County is the second largest county by population in the state of Pennsylvania. Therefore, it is classified as a second class county. There are 130 individual municipal jurisdictions within Allegheny County. Each of these 130 municipalities have their own elected officials who are responsible for handling disability issues within their own area. These are separate entities. The Allegheny County's ADA Coordinator can advise each municipality and advocate for certain disability issues – but ultimately the County cannot dictate anything.

Ms. Drogowski from the City of Pittsburgh Mayor's office spoke next about the City's role. Similarly to Ms. Esther Van Shura, Ms. Drogowski works closely with the City's ADA Coordinator to coordinate Task Force support from the Mayor's office. She aims to elevate concerns and questions to the Mayor's office and emphasize public safety communication. She also works with the Mayor to present Task Force nominees for his review and approval.

Ms. Dore from the audience asked for clarification on funding for interpreters. Mr. Meritzer responded that all City requests for interpreters go through his office. Task Force requests also go through his office, but it should be noted that the Task Force has its own contract for interpreters and that money comes from the Task Force budget.

Mr. Meritzer continued with the discussion by speaking on his role in the Task Force. He works directly with disability issues on a day-to-day basis for the City, Urban Redevelopment Authority, and Parking Authority. He ensures that the ADA law works with the political needs and longterm goals of the community. He also staffs the Task Force, which falls under City-County jurisdiction and works with Ms. Smidga on issues that come up.

Ms. Smidga took over to discuss her role as ADA Coordinator for Allegheny County. First and foremost, she coordinates and ensures the accessibility of County programs, services, and facilities. She provides technical assistance and resolves complaints regarding the ADA. In conjunction with 19 various department representatives, she assists in planning, recommending, and coordinating actions in regards to the ADA and employment programs. She serves as the County's point of contact for information and compliance concerns. She works with various municipalities within the County, but strictly in an advisory role to inform and advocate. She informed everyone of an accessibility link on the County website where one can find resources and surveys to improve accessibility within the County. The Allegheny County accessibility link is: <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/ada/accessibility.aspx>.

Mr. Tague asked what happened to Disability Connections. Ms. Esther Van Shura responded that she will look into it and potentially arrange for someone to come and discuss it at a future Task Force meeting. She then spoke to why Ms. Smidga's department is within Human Resources: because employment of individuals with disabilities is a primary issue. In the City, Mr. Meritzer's office is within the Department of City Planning. Ms. Esther Van Shura proposed the idea of having Ms. Smidga discuss County updates and issues monthly.

Mr. Fowler asked who is responsible for enforcement at the County level. Ms. Esther Van Shura responded that each municipality's department is responsible, and Ms. Smidga works as an advocate with these departments to resolve compliance issues. Ms. Esther Van Shura also suggested that the Task Force develop a guide explaining the different positions and responsibilities.

Mr. O'Hanlon remarked on the complicated nature of these intersections, and emphasized that policy advisory groups exist outside the Task Force to handle many of these various issues. The Task Force initiatives are mostly city-focused, as that is the largest municipality within the County.

### **Review of the Annual Meeting**

Mr. O'Hanlon recalled the issues decided on at the Annual Meeting which the Task Force has decided to focus on in the upcoming year. The three main issues with the most votes were sidewalks, elections, and exposure. Education was also an issue brought up at the Annual Meeting. He proposed creating a grade school curriculum policy for learning American Sign Language in schools.

Mr. Meritzer noted that two of those issues are being addressed by interns from his office: Bridgette Quintana will be focusing on sidewalk issues as an ADA Policy intern, and Nakita LaPrade is tasked with increasing exposure as the ADA Office's (and by extension, the Task Force's) Social Media intern.

Mr. O'Hanlon suggested that all of the initiatives from the Annual Meeting have individual committees with Task Force members and community members working side by side. For example: a Sidewalk Accessibility Committee could be created under the leadership of one or two Task Force members, and then that committee could hold meetings to discuss problems and ideas relating to sidewalk issues. Interpreters and all accommodations would be provided for these meetings as far as the budget allows. These committees would be open for volunteers, and people will be invited to join.

Mr. Robison asked whether anyone has compiled a list of information regarding accessible voting, registration, and access to ballots. Mr. O'Hanlon responded that Mr. Robison could join that specific committee on Elections and Nursing Homes/Facilities when it is formed, and noted that guidelines of that nature do exist. Ms. Esther Van Shura clarified that as far as long-term care goes, nursing homes are licensed by the State Department of Health. Assisted living and personal care facilities are licensed by the State Department of Human Services. She stressed the importance to understand who has jurisdiction in each issue the Task Force tackles.

### **Membership Committee Report**

Mr. Tague recalled a meeting with the Membership Committee and the Mayor's office on August 28<sup>th</sup> to discuss the membership process. No changes to the guidelines are being

recommended at this time. The Task Force has received the request to provide the Mayor and County Executive with two candidates for each position for review.

He explained that having a disability is not required to serve on the Task Force, noting that one of the missing positions is that of a parent of a child with a disability. He also brought up the matter of resignations. He stressed that a clear, written notice given 30 days in advance would be recommended for future resignations. Currently there is nothing official on file for Gabe McMoreland's resignation, and Mr. Tague will follow up on that. He also explained that Task Force members will be replaced as needed after they resign – members will not have to serve until replaced.

To serve on the Task Force, a member must be a resident of Allegheny County. The Mayor can appoint someone who lives outside of the City of Pittsburgh, as long as they work within the city. With the exception of Mr. Fowler, none of the Task Force's City appointments have official appointment letters from the City. The Membership Committee has decided to wait until the upcoming November election to pursue this problem and will seek official City reappointments at that time.

Mr. Tague noted that one of the issues is the amount of time it takes for the appointments to go through – the Task Force agreed that this would be something to work on. Ms. Evans brought up that resumes and cover letters are required by both the City and County for Task Force reinstatement. Mr. Meritzer will facilitate gathering this information as needed.

### **Vox Pop**

Mr. Robison alerted everyone of the recent public transportation reduction in the budget passed by the House of Representatives. He urged the Task Force to take an official position on this harmful issue and ask legislators to oppose this reduction. Mr. O'Hanlon responded that without quorum, the Task Force can't make decisions on matters of that sort.

Ms. Mancine introduced herself as the Regional Housing Coordinator for the Self Determination Housing Project, which focuses on providing technical service to human service providers on housing issues. She asked whether there was any interest in joining a statewide advocacy group towards person-centered housing. Mr. Meritzer has included the information about this initiative in the weekly newsletter sent out by the ADA office.

Ms. Kinter from the City of Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations made an announcement about two upcoming community meetings that the Commission is holding. These meetings are to discuss systemic issues of discrimination. The first is September 20<sup>th</sup>, 7pm at Mt. Washington Senior Center. The second is October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7pm at Jewish Family and Children Services.

Ms. Dore reminded everyone of the October 10<sup>th</sup> deadline to register to vote.

Ms. Goldstein announced the NAMIWalk for mental health awareness on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 9am at the Waterfront.

Ms. Ligenfelter talked about the upcoming September 20<sup>th</sup> rally at noon on Forbes Avenue and Bigelow Boulevard.

Mr. Gibson emphasized the importance of the Port Authority decision and its impact on low-income neighborhoods. He spoke on federal legislation, specifically the education reform bill HR620. This bill plans to gut the ADA and will be important to pay attention to, as well as the

new healthcare bill being introduced. He stressed the importance of reaching out to jails in regards to upcoming elections.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:07 pm. The next meeting will be scheduled next month on Monday, October 16<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 pm in the first floor Conference Room of 200 Ross Street.