

CITY- COUNTY

Task Force on Disabilities

July 20, 2020

Task Force Members In Attendance

Paul O'Hanlon
John Tague
Karen Warman
Richard McGann
Sarah Goldstein
Cori Frazier
Joe Wassermann

Task Force Members Absent

Janet Evans
James "Chris" Noschese

Staff Present

Hillary Roman, City of Pittsburgh ADA Coordinator
Caylin Snyder, Allegheny County ADA Coordinator
Alex Holmes, Dept of City Planning Communications Specialist

Welcome & Introductions

Paul O' Hanlon called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m. and welcomed all attendees. Task Force members and members of the public introduced themselves.

Agenda

A. Review and Approval of Minutes

The motion to accept June's minutes was approved prior to the start of the meeting for time.

B. Membership update:

Hillary reported that the County has made their decision but the City has not. She will continue to inquire into the matter with Director Dash weekly and remains hopeful that we will have final decisions from the City soon.

C. Police reform: Councilpersons Bethany Hallam and Olivia "Liv" Bennett

- Paul welcomed the County Council Members and gave a brief overview on the concerns surrounding policing and disability, specifically around the intersection of disability and racial equity. He was specifically interested in whether there was something the Task Force could do to aid County Council efforts in these matters, including policy around tear gas and service animals.
- Liv thanked the Task Force for the opportunity to speak on these matters. She confirmed that legislation on tear gas came before County Council recently but failed to receive enough votes. She confirmed that another protective bill for residents of

nursing homes also failed and expressed her hope that Councilmembers will change their minds on these issues. She hopes that community members will reintroduce this legislation and raise another opportunity for its acceptance. Liv informed the Task Force of another bill, this one banning chokeholds, that has not been heard by City or County Council yet which may provide another opportunity for advocacy from the disability community and the Task Force.

- Bethany also thanked the Task Force for the invitation to the meeting. She also shared her disappointment in the failure of recent police reform bills in County Council. Bethany mentioned that the County had passed a ban on “no knock” warrants in the wake of Breonna Taylor’s murder by police officers in Louisville. She mentioned that the County is also looking into forming their own Civilians Police Review Board (CPRB), like the one the City has in place. She went on to say that there are 109 separate police forces in the area, of which Allegheny County is just one. Bethany asked that members of the public speak up and reinforce new policies at their specific local level in order to amplify the work that she and Liv are doing in County Council.
- Liv suggested that members of the disability community reach out to herself or Bethany about hosting listening sessions to help them receive feedback about these initiatives.
- Liv read a list of demands from the Black Activist Collective. These include:
 - Defund police and fund black communities
 - Demilitarize the police
 - End the criminalization of Black people
 - Remove all police from schools
 - Make all collective bargaining with police public
 - Terminate the Pittsburgh FOP President Robert Schwarzwelter
 - Disband all private police departments
 - End “no knock” warrants
 - Cease partnership with ICE
 - End cash bail
 - Release of all vulnerable individuals from jail
 - Create an independent, fully funded CPRB
- Paul inquired as to the most practical way for the CCTFD to support these demands. He and Cori will be reaching out to Liv to set up a follow-up session.
- Paul added that many of the problems with police use of force tactics come from “prone position” tactics, wherein an officer puts their weight onto the suspect’s back. This tactic can be deadly and should be reviewed along with chokeholds. He suggests using the Education Law Center as a resource.
- Rich McGann suggested education and training for officers on how to approach Deaf and hard of hearing individuals in police encounters. Liv assured Rich that CIT trainings are being added to improve the next round of legislation.
- Cori wondered whether CIT training is adequate, especially where officers encounter members of the autism community. They are also concerned about potential impacts of covert officer kidnappings happening in our region as they are in Portland.
- Paul inquired as to the time frame for upcoming CRPB legislation—Liv said most bills will be reviewed after County Council reconvenes at the end of August.
- Joe Wassermann brought up the White Cane Law under the PA Motor Vehicle Code, Section 3549, concerning citations against motorists who do not stop for

individuals with a white cane or a guide dog. He would like to increase public awareness of this law.

- Joe also mentioned the work that past Task Force member Gabriel McMoreland and Richard Meritzer did together on police policy as it pertains to disability. He suggested referencing past minutes to review the progress they made.
- Paul ended the session with Councilpersons Hallam and Bennett by alerting them to the need for the County to ensure voting is easily accessible for people in nursing homes.

D. Elections: David Voye, Divisions Manager

- David Voye gave a brief statement about Act 12 allows for Elections authorities to change dates and number of polling places in the wake of the pandemic. Locally, this resulted in the elections date being moved to June 2 and the number of polling locations to about 400. This Act expired after the primary election, and David is preparing for a large turnout for the national election this fall.
- Paul asked whether David anticipates having a difficult time obtaining poll workers. David said that the division has been proactively surveying poll workers and locations to formulate a plan.
- Paul asked when people can expect to have a ballot to be submitted by mail. David responded that the standard is for people to have ballots six weeks in advance and the County is trying to comply with that standard. He said that so long as he has valid ballots ready to be mailed 30 days prior to the election, the County electorate should be in good shape. Legally, Elections Divisions must begin mailing ballots to residents two weeks prior to an election, but he does not want to wait that long.
- David mentioned that voters are able to apply for permanent vote by mail status, wherein they will automatically receive mail-in ballots for every election. As of now, the Division is aware that they will be mailing out over 180,000 ballots.
- Karen Warman asked whether the Elections Division was preparing to reduce the number of polling locations again in the fall—David responded that he did not think so. As of now, they are planning on having 1300 precincts open for voting.
- A member of the public asked David whether Allegheny County had anyone who partook of the stopgap measure to make vote-by-mail accessible after the NFB Disability Rights of PA lawsuit. He responded that he believed there were only two voters who followed through with the process. This was less than a week prior to the primary election.
- Rich McGann made a comment about how difficult it can be to help deafblind people understand relevant details around registration, technology, and political party affiliation as they pertain to voting. He believes there needs to be more communication around making voting accessible, including the difficulty of obtaining Braille ballots.
- David told Rich that Express Voting Machines are ADA compliant and include a Braille interface, adaptable text sizing, and sip-and-puff capabilities but he agrees that there may be a few lingering accessibility issues. He believes that the state should step in to create a more accessible ballot. He also agrees that there are some education gaps at polling locations but would like to see more partnership with other organizations in that regard, mentioning the League of Women Voters for example.

- Paul requested clarity regarding Deaf and hard of hearing voters' right to interpreters at polling locations. David agrees that there should be more clarity on that matter.
- Caylin Synder added that there is a request for accommodation on the County website and they can also reach out to her as the County ADA Coordinator or reach out to the Elections Division. She agrees that there are more opportunities to communicate the availability of accommodations.
- Karen reported to David that when she worked as poll worker in the 15th district in Hazelwood, no one knew how to use the voting machine. David agrees that training has been a problem with Express Voting machines. They were only able to get several hundred poll workers trained out of about 6000. The complications surrounding the pandemic has increased this problem as fewer volunteers are able to work as polling technicians. They are working on training more workers now.
- Paul asked about jail and hospital ballots. David responded that there are administrators in place in these locations to ensure voter access, but gaps still unfortunately remain.

E. PLI - Changing accessibility prioritization

- Paul introduced lingering issues around amending the building code with the Dept. of Permits, Licenses, and Inspections (PLI), including the failure to require barrier removal according to common sense priority (1-entrance, 2-bathroom, etc). The recent appointment of Director Kinter presents renewed opportunity to correct this oversight in the City. The CCTFD was invited to be a part of a formal complaint against the City in order to change the policy. Paul raised the question of whether the other members of the Task Force are interested responding to the City on their decision.
- Rich offered support for helping to increase awareness on this issue.
- Karen expressed an interest in working with the wider County on this issue—Paul responded that the complications are such that it might make more sense to start with the City.
- Joe agrees that the City needs to be the starting place for amendments to the building code. He would like to support the Oakland for All effort with regard to the issue or else make a statement as a wider Task Force.
- Wes Speary, the Deputy Director of the Commission for Human Relations (CHR), added that there may be other departments, including the Dept. of City Planning (DCP), the Dept. of Mobility and Infrastructure (DOMI), and others who should be part of the conversation since they exercise some level of domain over public and private property. Paul clarified that it his understanding that PLI is the only department that enforces building code.
- Sarah Goldstein asked for a review of Oakland for All's stance, Paul described their position as similar to the CCTFD's. John Tague asked what action they are taking and Paul responded that he believed they were filing a complaint with the CHR.
- Cori Fraser moved to have the Task Force support all of Oakland for All's efforts on changing building code with exception to extenuating circumstances. Rich seconded the motion.

- Paul suggests having the Executive Committee convene to decide how to move forward with PLI and Oakland for All.
- Sarah requested that the Oakland for All complaint be shared with members of the Task Force. Paul said that it has yet to be completed.
- After further discussion, Cori's motion was accepted.

F. Maintenance of pedestrian right-of-way during COVID-19: Erin Clark, DOMI

- Erin Clark, one of DOMI's Policy Analysts, presented DOMI's structure for street and sidewalk modifications for outdoor dining and retail activity in response to COVID-19.
- Paul briefed Erin on several main concerns including the loss of ADA parking and burdens introduced into the pedestrian right-of-way.
- Erin acknowledged that DOMI removed one accessible parking spot in Oakland during the initial process without replacing it right away, but assured the CCTFD that the policy moving forward was to add two new ADA spaces for every one that is moved.
- Erin emphasized that all permits issued for this purpose are temporary and will expire at the end of September.
- A member of the public inquired as to how the changes to the sidewalk would be made apparent to a blind or visually impaired person. Paul agreed with the concern and called attention to the fact that the pedestrian lane should be alongside the building rather than the already obstructed and dangerous parts of the sidewalk.
- Wes asked whether there was any kind of technical criteria DOMI has been using in making changes to the accessible route.
- Rich added that some corridors are extremely narrow and should not be considered candidates for these sorts of modifications.
- Erin suggested that members of the public reach out to her or Hillary directly with feedback and suggestions for improvement to this structure.
- Paul reiterated his two main concerns: maintaining the part of the sidewalk nearest the building to avoid obstructions, and also the danger of directing pedestrian traffic outside of the traditional part of the sidewalk for blind people.

G. Highland Park Reservoir Drive closure (continuing discussion)

Tina provided an update on her grievance with the City regarding the closure of Reservoir Drive. She is set to receive a response from Hillary detailing the City's position on July 23rd.

H. New center for children and adults with special needs in Sheraden

Tina provided information on the new center July 1st email from Sophia Robison in City Planning to Mary Hartley explaining that Christy Porter would be in touch about the project. She has not reached out yet. Tina and Mary would like for the City to continue to reach out to Christy Porter to encourage her to contact interested community groups.

I. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn made by Rich and seconded by Karen. The motion was carried unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 3:13 p.m.

YouTube link with closed captioning:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBaWR3QSmQo>