

# CITY- COUNTY

## Task Force on Disabilities

January 25, 2021

### Task Force Members In Attendance

#### City

Paul O'Hanlon, Cochair  
Joe Wassermann, Member at Large  
Mark Schmeler  
Leah Northrop

#### County

James "Chris" Noschese, Cochair  
John Tague, Treasurer  
Georgia Petropoulos  
Karen Warman  
Cori Frazer

#### 13<sup>th</sup> Member

Paul "Rich" McGann

### Task Force Members Absent

#### City

Janet Evans  
Kai Roberts

#### County

Sarah Goldstein

### Staff Present

Hillary Roman, City of Pittsburgh ADA Coordinator  
Caylin Snyder, Allegheny County ADA Coordinator  
Danielle Nicol, Dept of City Planning Senior Secretary

### Welcome & Introductions

Paul O' Hanlon called the meeting to order at 2:03 p.m. and welcomed all attendees. Task Force and staff members introduced themselves.

### Agenda

#### A. Review and Approval of Minutes

- Paul made a motion to approve the minutes from the last meeting in November 2020. Members expressed a desire to review them again since they were sent before the holidays. The motion was approved with the understanding that corrections could be made if errors were found after Hillary Roman resent them. The motion was seconded by Rich McGann and carried unanimously.

#### B. Treasurer's Report

- John Tague reported that the CCTFD has a balance of \$3872.50 out of \$9000. He inquired whether the Task Force should continue to analyze the remaining budget to include costs for hiring a captioner.
- Hillary clarified that Zoom recently updated their caption settings such that automated captions are now included can be turned on in settings for paid accounts, including the one used to host the CCTFD.
  - Danielle Nicol recognized that that setting had not been activated for the present meeting and corrected the error so that all attendees were able to view captions.
- Hillary confirmed that the captioner expense should no longer be necessary unless the CCTFD opts for a different mode of captioning than the automated Zoom tool.
- Chris Noschese noted the small size of the captions as well as their placement; Danielle increased the size but clarified that participants on the Zoom must adjust their own settings to change the font size. Heather Tomko, a community advocate attendee, confirmed this to be the case from the participant end. Hillary explained how the captions can be adjusted on the screen to remove visual obstruction. Paul noted that one can also enable the transcript function on the side panel.
- John mentioned the need to create a budget for next year's expenses, including the \$1000 Annual Richard Meritzer Award. He noted there is not much extra funding for other projects and proposed a budget committee to take a closer look.
- John responded to Paul that there should be enough funding to cover interpreters for the rest of the year.
- Paul made a motion to accept the financial report, it was seconded by Joe Wasserman and carried unanimously.
- John suggested an evaluation of budget allocation for CCTFD operations and projects. Paul informed the group that the Task Force's funding comes from the Human Services Development Fund (HSDF), which was cut a few years ago such that the CCTFD is left with only enough money to cover operational expenses.
- Chris offered that the group should get together to analyze expenses given that the end of the fiscal year is in June.
- Paul suggested a budget meeting be scheduled in the next couple of weeks and Chris agreed. A meeting will be scheduled and details will be sent to Task Force members.

#### C. BRT route: accessible mid-block parking

- Paul reintroduced the conflict surrounding the BRT's removal of accessible mid-block parking along Fifth and Forbes Avenues for the new bus and bike+ lanes.
- Paul was told at a recent BRT meeting that is a decision under City jurisdiction, not the Port Authority. He asked staff at DOMI whether this type of parking accommodation can be made along the route but hasn't gotten a meaningful response.
- Paul notes the difficulty of advocating for disability rights on the BRT project when authority over its facets is unclear.
- One part of the problem is that those who use accessible vans would be forced to exit the vehicle into oncoming traffic, which is a significant safety concern.

There are still no current plans to address midblock accessible parking. DOMI has been willing to reevaluate the concern, but the Port Authority is moving forward with its current plans.

- Rich added that he isn't confident that Port Authority is examining Uptown accessibility properly.
- Paul is frustrated that despite advocacy efforts dating back to 2014, feedback from the disability community about parking accessibility has not been accounted for.
- Chris noted that it has historically been difficult to work with the Port Authority on accessibility. He suggested drafting a letter to the Mayor's Office, the County, and others.
- Leah Northrop wondered whether it would be helpful to reach out to partner groups. Paul clarified that the public entities involved, as far as he knows, are the Port Authority, the County, and the City. Leah underscored Chris's suggestion to send letters to all of the entities.
  - Paul responded that the CCTFD had written letters in the past, the proposed resolution is allowing paratransit to block the bus lane when necessary. He feels this is an unsatisfactory solution but is confident they are at least aware of the issue.

#### D. Alterations to Allegheny County park bathrooms

- The group addressed concerns around binary gender park bathrooms being built/rennovated in Allegheny County that could present an accessibility challenge for individuals who require the aid of an attendant who may be of a different gender.
- Caylin Snyder has reached out to the County parks department to find out more information on the bathrooms. She asked for more information from the Task Force about their recommendation.
- Paul responded that in this case, it is less about the technical accessible design requirements and more about the binary gender specificity. Unisex or family-style bathrooms allow for those who require help in the bathroom to more easily have that access.
- Leah suggested that Caylin refer to the bathrooms in the Frick Park Environmental Center; they are single-person bathrooms, but they are large and unisex. She notes that adult changing tables would be an added benefit.
- Caylin will relay the feedback to the County.

#### E. COVID-19 vaccination equity

- Paul relayed that while was glad to see the CDC amend the vaccination priority recommendation to include those with pre-existing conditions, it remains unclear how implementation will roll out. He asked whether anyone on the call had updated information.
- Karen Warman offered to contact someone she knows at the Health Dept. to update the group.
- Rich added that the state vaccine rollout is lacking in communication with the community and medical authorities, including doctor's offices and pharmacies.

He hopes that he can request an ASL interpreter to help him better understand the process.

- Heather offered that she has received conflicting information from state representatives. Eligibility is now based on specific CDC conditions, however, the conditions specified are based on those conditions the CDC has a large quantity of data on. Thus, there are many rare conditions not on the list due to a lack of information about the associated risks.
- This amounts to irrational situations where someone like Heather, who has a neuromuscular condition that affects her lungs profoundly, is not currently eligible for the vaccine. She notes that the equity work to be done at the state and local level to help prevent misunderstandings about vaccine distribution priority.
- Heather offered that her work with Pitt's Family Support Center will be releasing a statement in the next few days to help ensure that unpaid family caregivers are included with other healthcare workers on the vaccine priority list. She asked for help in disseminating the statement to others.
- Cori Frazer noted that the vaccine shortage is still so significant that even though the 1A category has broadened, there is still not enough of it make a big impact. The authorities are still trying to ensure that frontline healthcare workers are able to receive the vaccine. They are also hearing from ODP on how to get direct care workers a letter of authorization for vaccination.
- Caylin mentioned that people can sign up for text updates including vaccine updates at [www.alleghenycouny.us/alerts](http://www.alleghenycouny.us/alerts).
- Paul emphasized the lack of options for community members who don't drive; Heather agreed that this is another equity problem with vaccine distribution.
- Heather suggested the CCTFD send a recommendation to the Health Dept. detailing these issues.
- Cori offered that there are a lot of factors that complicate the planning effort around vaccine distribution, including the fact that the approved vaccines must be kept cold, and the US's capacity to produce dry ice for a vast quantity of shipments is limited.
- Paul will follow-up with an email requesting suggestions for a letter.

#### F. Clear mask policy

- Caylin introduced deaf and hard of hearing advocate, Tommy Woods, who is raising awareness about the need for a clear mask policy as a public accommodation.
- Tommy emphasized the need for clear masks in public and private agencies for members of the public who rely on lip-reading for effective communication.
- Caylin read a statement from a staff member at SLIP underscoring the need for clear masks, especially in public entities. She notes that Safe'n'clear masks are anti-fog, anti-glare, and FDA-approved.
- Paul added that despite the fact that vaccines are currently available, we are likely to still all be wearing masks into the fall. This is an accommodation that public agencies should be taking into consideration. He thinks it might be most effective if the Health Dept. made a policy that could then be enforced throughout local government and private business.

- Rich offered that many deaf people do not use ASL and rely on lip-reading. Furthermore, ASL uses facial grammar that is obstructed by a regular opaque mask.
- Cori is concerned that disposable masks are not protective enough against the rise of more dangerous strains of the virus.
  - Tommy responded that the masks from Safe'n'clear are as protective as a regular FDA-approved mask that most people wear.
  - Caylin added that the masks being considered are distinct from clear shields that do not wrap around the mouth or effectively prevent disease.
- Leah offered her support to Tommy, noting that opaque face masks create communication difficulties even with non-hearing-impaired students at her school.
- Wesley Speary raised a question in the chat about whether data is available about clear mask effectiveness against the spread of disease.
- Ashley Molinaro from the UPMC Disabilities Resource Center commented that the Safe'n'clear masks are the safest option. They are FDA-approved but not approved for surgical settings.
- Hillary added that the Safe'n'clear masks are the ones she is trying to procure for City use. She noted that they are backordered up to five weeks, so it is important for agencies to plan ahead accordingly. She also noted that they seem to be the most cost-effective option at \$60 for 40 masks.
- Paul asked Caylin to keep Tommy in the loop about creating a proposal for a new Health Dept. policy on clear masks. He would like to circle back to this issue at the next meeting.

#### G. Facebook event: "Solitary Confinement and Mental Health"

- Paul informed the group about a Facebook event happening at 6:00 p.m. that evening about mental health abuses taking place at the County jail. It is being moderated by Councilperson Bethany Hallum.
- Chris added that there are a number of accommodations that need to be made for the deaf community in the jails, including interpreters and visual alert signals.

#### H. Meeting time next week

- Paul asked to change February CCTFD meeting date to the 22<sup>nd</sup> due to President's Day on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Hillary will check on the Zoom schedule and make sure she is able to take the timeslot. If the 22<sup>nd</sup> is available, she will move the date and notify the group.

#### Adjournment

Motion to adjourn made by Rich and seconded by Karen. The motion was carried unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

YouTube link with closed captioning: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-ZDs0mBu2c&t=7010s>