

CITY- COUNTY

Task Force on Disabilities

August 16, 2021

Task Force Members In Attendance

City

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

County

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

13th Member

Paul "Rich" McGann

Task Force Members Absent

City

Janet Evans

Staff Present

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

Welcome & Introductions

Chris Noschese called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m. and welcomed all attendees. Task Force members introduced themselves.

Agenda

A. Minutes approval

- Rich McGann made a motion to approve the minutes from July's meeting. The motion to approve the minutes was seconded by Joe Wassermann and carried unanimously.

B. Treasurer's report

- No report this month.

C. Master Firefighter and Disability Service Facilitator, Lisa Epps-Cuda: accessible smoke alarms

- Lisa Epps-Cuda introduced herself to the Task Force. She informed the group about the accessible smoke alarm program, funded by a grant the City Fire Dept. received from FEMA.
- Lisa talked about the four devices included and demonstrated how they work. Devices include the smoke detector, a flashing alarm, a pocket pager that vibrates, and a vibrating alarm that goes under a pillow or mattress.
- These devices, worth about \$750, are free of charge for those who with hearing loss living in the city.
- Interested residents must attend a brief training on the use of devices. Residents sign up at the Center for Hearing and Deaf Services (HDS) website: smorris@hdscenter.org, or call (412) 281-1375.
- Rich asked whether the batteries are rechargeable or need to be replaced. Lisa explained that the detectors are rechargeable and have back-up replaceable batteries.
- Cori asked about whether the trainings are online or in-person and the kinds of COVID precautions being taken. Lisa responded that the trainings take place at HDS, 1945 Fifth Ave. Sessions will only be eight people per class and masks are mandatory.
- Chris asked about carbon monoxide detectors. Lisa explained that accessories, including carbon monoxide detectors, can be purchased. Anyone attending the training will also receive a list of accessories they may choose to purchase.
- A member of the public requested information be available at the Oakland Ramp Crawl. Hillary Roman agreed to coordinate with Lisa to make the information available at this event. Lisa added that information is also available on Facebook and other social media. John added that he would also help coordinate.
- Chris pointed out that residents may need more like four or five flashing lights for each room in a home. Lisa explained that the pillow shaker alerts someone resting in the bedroom and the pocket pager will alert someone anywhere in the home. More accessories can be purchased through HDS.
- Chris said that he wasn't sure how useful the pocket pagers would be since people who need them often have to carry quite a few similar devices on their person.
- Joe asked whether trainings will be continuing in October and November. Lisa confirmed that the program will be available for two years.
- A member of the public asked about virtual participation; Lisa responded that they are working on adding a virtual option.
- Rich asked about how current the technology is; Lisa responded that the devices are the newest available, they are "Silent Call Medallion Series."
- Karen Warman asked about availability outside the city. Lisa responded that the Red Cross has some of these devices, but this program was granted only for city residents.
- Chris commented that the City should work with the County to extend this program to those living in Allegheny County outside of the city. Lisa agreed that there is a wider need and said it took six years for the City to receive this grant. She would certainly share information with other municipalities who are interested in this program. Rich agreed that residents in other places should reach out to their entities to apply for similar grants.

D. Fair Housing Partnership, Megan Confer-Hammond: reasonable accommodation requests within the Fair Housing Act

- Hillary introduced Megan Confer-Hammond to the group, the Executive Director of the Fair Housing Partnership. She will be discussing two types of reasonable accommodations related to housing: emotional support animals and requests for accessible residential parking.
- Megan presented background on the Fair Housing Partnership (FHP) and the laws that protect residents with disabilities. She gave examples of ways in which disabled individuals continue to be discriminated against despite these laws.
- Megan reviewed the definition of reasonable accommodation under the Fair Housing Act (FHA) as a change to a rule, policy, or procedure for a disabled person to have equal use and enjoyment of a dwelling, including public and common areas.
- Disability is broadly defined under the FHA and it covers many different types of housing transactions.
- Reasonable accommodation requests may be written or verbal and do not have to identify the type of disability. The housing provider may request documentation that the accommodation is necessary.
- It is illegal for landlords to charge extra fees for reasonable accommodations or for them to require the request to be submitted a specific way.
- Requests may be legally denied for failing to meet the accommodation threshold, undue financial burden on the landlord, or fundamental alteration of services.
- Emotional support animals are a type of reasonable accommodation under the FHA.
 - Pet policy does not apply to emotional support animals (ESAs).
 - A landlord cannot restrict ESAs by breed or weight.
 - ESAs are to be regarded as an extension of the person and should follow all licensing and health and safety rules.
 - College students must be permitted ESAs in dorms.
 - The ADA currently only protects service animals in public places, not ESAs.
 - In 2020, the Air Carrier Access Act removed protections for ESAs on airplanes. HUD, however, reiterated that ESAs are still protected in housing situations under the FHA.
 - Third party verification can come from anyone who has reliable knowledge of a person's disability, including a medical professional, peer support group, or nonmedical service agency. Documentation over the internet alone is not a sufficiently reliable form of verification.
 - If the person's disability status is readily identifiable, no documentation is required.
 - Verification does not have to include the disability, only the disability-related symptoms and the nexus between the symptoms and request.
- Municipalities that receive federal funds are obligated to provide residential accessible parking provision under the ADA, Title II and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.
 - Applicants must have disability parking credentials from the PA DMV.
 - A municipality may not limit the number of parking places in any designated area.

- A municipality may not limit the exact disabilities it will provide for. It may only ask about the related symptoms and nexus between symptoms and request.
- FHP is seeing issues in the county wherein very small municipalities are not fully aware of their obligations to provide this program under federal law.
- FHP is pushing for Allegheny County municipalities to hire ADA Coordinators and formalize their processes around reasonable accommodations.
- Paul expressed an interest in having the CCTFD help FHP with this initiative.
- Chris asked whether FHP would also look into sidewalk policies among all the municipalities. Rich added that landscaping and signage can be a barrier along sidewalks.

E. Complaint against Dept. of Permits, Licensing, and Inspections (added during meeting)

- Paul acknowledged the complaint he filed against Dept. of Permits, Licensing, and Inspections (PLI) on 8/5/21. He believes that their failure to enforce priorities in building accessibility discriminates on the basis of disability.

Adjournment

Chris made a motion to adjourn, it was seconded by Joe and the meeting was adjourned at 4:01 p.m.

YouTube link with closed captioning: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzFS7gObMTY>