

City of Pittsburgh / Allegheny County

Task Force on Disabilities

Monday, March 20<sup>th</sup>

Meeting Minutes

**Task Force Members in Attendance**

Jeff Parker, John Tague, James C. Noschese, Richard McGann, Karen Warman, Joe Wasserman, Paul O'Hanlon, Sarah Goldstein, Milton Henderson

**Task Force Members Absent**

Aurelia Carter, Gabe McMoreland, Janet Evans

**Also In Attendance**

Ali R. Abdullah, Alisa Grishman, Mark Lee, April De la Cruz, Linda Warman, Barbara Arroyo, Karen Hesck, Jim Ritchie, Georganna Lingenfolter, Kim Morewood, Anthony Bale, Joy Dare, Jen Robison, Richard Meritzer, Justin Miller, Amy Silbermann, Monisha Nelson, Anthony Bell, Dustin Hershel, Tyrell Peppers, Peter Tolenko, Blake Norton, JP Leskovich, Danielle, Bobbie, Maria Driediger, Dawn Smidga, Jon Merker

**Welcome and Introduction**

The program started around 1:05 pm and began with the introduction of the Task Force members and individuals in the audience.

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

There was no Treasurer's report for this month.

**Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes**

The meeting minutes from February were approved, although a few corrections were needed.

**Presentation from the Emergency Management Office**

Barbara Arroyo, from the Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security for the City of Pittsburgh, presented on the responsibilities of her office in regards to emergency response planning. She explained that she is in charge for doing all of the emergency management operations planning for the City, including the First Responders.

Ms. Arroyo expressed that her office wants to revamp their emergency operations plan to include people with disabilities. Therefore, she wants to have a continuous dialogue as to what the needs of that community are so this can be taken care of. She wants to reestablish communication with the ADA office, which seemed to be lacking with the previous person in the position. In fact, Chief Jones has given Ms. Arroyo full authority to take responsibility for this new action plan and to work with the community to have something in place. Ms. Arroyo mentioned that this is a pressing matter as her office needs to revamp their protocols to comply with FEMA standards this year.

Ms. Arroyo then explained that there is a new program where her office trains individuals for emergency response preparedness to be leaders in their communities. She further stated that she actually teaches these courses and it is free of charge. This training would consist of meeting once a week for six weeks to obtain the certification. She explained that you would then be recognized by FEMA and the City as partners for emergency response. An example of this is the recent boiled water advisory where community members were handing out bottled water.

Mr. O'Hanlon asked the committee if anyone has any idea how they could proceed with this issue. For example, he mentioned that what if something like 911 or Katrina happened in the city of Pittsburgh, what would we do in regards to emergency management for those with disabilities? He further asked: does the city have an inventory list of nursing homes, senior centers and other facilities if something were to happen? Ms. Arroyo responded that her office does have a database with all of this data. Mr. O'Hanlon also gave the examples of flooding along the rivers or there is a lot of rail traffic through Pittsburgh. He asked: what is the response if there is a spill of hazardous materials? Ms. Arroyo responded that all of these potential threats are included in the everyday response plan and each item has its own annex. There are procedures already in place for threats like this. Ms. Arroyo then emphasized her office's willingness and eagerness to revamp all of the city's emergency response protocols and procedures to include those with disabilities.

Mr. Noschese expressed his concern that most public announcements or emergency response alerts are all auditory and they are not always visual, so the deaf community is not able to hear these when they are transmitted over the radio. He stated that this needs to be improved so they are accessible and understood to the deaf community as well. Ms. Arroyo responded that she would look into this. Ms. Grishman asked whether it is possible to have an email or text alert system that sends out these messages and warnings so that everyone can get them. Mr. McGann added that maybe an app would be better because maybe the office does not have everyone's number, but with an app, anyone interested or that needs it could download it. Ms. Arroyo stated that she would look into all of this and follow-up when she has an answer.

Mr. Abdullah asked: what organizations does your office partner with? For example, all the universities within Pittsburgh, do you work with their emergency response planning? Ms. Arroyo responded that all buildings downtown are required to submit their evacuation plans to the Office. She further explained that whenever a university has a fire drill or any training evacuation, it has to notify the department as well. The office also partners with Regent 13 Task Force, which works with all of the counties in Southwestern PA to better coordinate emergency response efforts.

## **Annual Meeting and Election of Officers**

Mr. Parker expressed his concern that there was still no Co-chair for the committee, so asked if that could be voted or at least decided on. He also wanted it to be agreed upon that June would be the annual meeting, where they would approve the budget for the next year and have the election of new officers as well. He further suggested that the current nominating committee also head the new members and election of officers committee. Mr. Tague mentioned that he would be stepping down as Treasurer, so that position is also open. Mr. Parker clarifies that he would be serving on this committee as a civilian as this is his last month serving the Task Force. Mr. McGann asked if there should be term limits to which Mr. Parker said there are and they are at least for a few years. Mr. O'Hanlon asked that 45 minutes be allocated at the next meeting to plan and brainstorm June's annual meeting. The last thing for this part of the agenda was that Mr. Noschese was made the interim Co-chair until the annual meeting to appoint new officers. The motion was passed unanimously.

## **Bus Rapid Transit Presentation**

Amy Selbermann, senior analyst for the Port Authority and Justin Miller, the principal transportation planner for Pittsburgh, presented on the proposed Bus Rapid Transit system for Pittsburgh. They explained everything from what a BRT is, details of the proposed project for Pittsburgh, various options for possible routes and what decisions still need to be made, what they hope to achieve from the public engagement phase and so on. They presented the following PowerPoint presentation, which can be viewed and found online at:

<http://www.portauthority.org/paac/CompanyInfoProjects/brt.aspx>

After the presentation, the floor was opened up for a Questions & Answers discussion. Ms. Goldstein asked for clarification on whether or not the 61 and 71s buses would still run. Ms. Selbermann clarifies that they will still run, but they will terminate and turn around in Oakland and will not continue downtown. They will not continue on past Craft Avenue to be specific. Mr. O'Hanlon asked whether making improvements to the current system would score higher than the new proposed BRT? He stated that it, in his opinion, would seem to save countless transfers and connection waiting times. Ms. Selbermann responded that since this is a project that the City is trying to get Capital money on, just doing bus lane improvements would not be enough to get that.

Mr. Parker expressed his concern for where Paratransit/ Access will be able to drop and pick up people with this new system. He further expressed that Paratransit already has issues in Oakland with the bus lanes, which makes it a lot harder for people taking Paratransit/Access to take advantage of all those places along Fifth Avenue like the buses are able to. Justin explained that enforcement will be the biggest challenge with the BRT, so there needs to be a discussion on whether or not they should step up enforcement. Mr. McGann stated that he predicts there will be a major accident in the first three years of the BRT if it goes forward as it is planned now; possibly even deaths. Ms. Selbermann responded that they are not predicting a rise in accidents at all, for either pedestrians or bus riders.

Mr. Noschese stated that he does not like the Uptown plan for the BRT, although the downtown and Oakland plans look very good. He recommended that they convert the Boulevard of the Allies Bridge right off of Fifth Avenue and Forbes so that it is all on one bridge, which would be

easier and simpler. Mr. Miller explained that originally they did consider that, but after analyzing it, it would involve serious alterations to put the BRT stops along this section of bridge and road.

Mr. O'Hanlon stated that unfortunately they would not be taking comments and questions from the audience because they did not get the full thirty minutes for a Q & A that they had asked for, so only Task Force members would have a chance to ask one last question. Ms. Warman asked about the new fare pricing: what would happen then if they have to transfer? What happens to their fare? Ms. Selbermann explained that this is something they are still analyzing and seeking input on. Mr. Henderson expressed his concern about traffic issues in Uptown if they go ahead with making that a one lane road.

The presenters mentioned that the next open meeting will be the BRT Open House on April 5<sup>th</sup> from 12-2pm and 4-7pm, hosted in the Alumni Hall at the University of Pittsburgh in Oakland. This concluded the BRT presentation and discussion.

### **Vox Pop**

There were no comments for Vox Pop.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:06 pm. The next meeting will be scheduled next month on Monday, April 17th at 1:00 pm in the first floor Conference Room of 200 Ross Street.