

City of Pittsburgh / Allegheny County

Task Force on Disabilities

May 15, 2017

Meeting Minutes

Task Force Members in Attendance

Paul O'Hanlon, Joe Wasserman, Richard McGann, John Tague

Task Force Members Absent

Aurelia Carter, James C. Noschese, Milton Henderson, Sarah Goldstein, Jeff Parker, Janet Evans, Gabe McMoreland, Karen Warman

Also In Attendance

Richard Meritzer, Shirley Abriolla, Maria Driediger, Dustin Gibson, Kim Mackie, Katerina, Carla Brown

Welcome and Introduction

The program started around 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's report that was sent out was not the correct version, and he noted certain changes to the projects budget. \$200 of the \$500 annual report budget was spent in collaboration with Tina: a draft of that report exists and some additional expense could be connected.

Mr. Tague addressed additional funding in the budget for CART. As it sits right now, a balance of around \$1200 is expected by the end of the year, plus the approximately \$3400 that sits with side projects for the community.

Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes

The meeting minutes from September, October, March, and April were present but were unable to be approved without enough members to reach quorum. Mr. Meritzer asked for the possibility of email approval on the minutes, and Mr. O'Hanlon agreed that this was a viable option.

Annual Meeting and Election of Officers

Mr. Tague indicated that he would like to appoint a small finance committee composed of himself and others who would be interested in taking over his Treasurer position. Mr. O'Hanlon suggested that this become a formal request via email, as this would be the best way to reach out to Task Force members not present at recent meetings.

Mr. O'Hanlon said there are two individuals who have been recommended by the Task Force for membership, and asked for clarity on a timeline for membership. Mr. Wasserman and Mr. Tague agreed that although these individuals are not official members yet, they can be invited to

participate in Task Force activities. Prospective member Cori Frazier has been interviewed and Mr. Meritzer is going to follow up on Steve Fowler's appointment.

Mr. Meritzer asked whether committees are restricted to members only, and Mr. O'Hanlon said that committees are open to individuals regardless of membership. The question was then brought up by Mr. O'Hanlon as to whether a person who is not a member could become an officer, and it was agreed that an individual could not become an officer without membership in the Task Force.

Mr. O'Hanlon stated that individuals interested in becoming Treasurer can sit in on meetings to obtain more information on finances and other responsibilities without having to commit to running for Treasurer.

Businesses on Penn Avenue vis-à-vis the Letter

Mr. Tague requested a timeline of the events so far. Mr. O'Hanlon gave his interpretation of the situation and the central question: When the sidewalks were put in, could the Penn Avenue sidewalk have been adjusted to fix the one-step entrances to buildings which neglect accessibility? The reality of the situation was unclear, as some businesses have complied and some have not, and the sidewalk is uneven as a result.

There was an inquiry with the department of Public Works, and Public Works indicated that all of the businesses did not give permission to make the sidewalk equally accessible. Mr. O'Hanlon questioned whether permission was needed to reconstruct those barriers which violate the law.

Mr. O'Hanlon was forwarded an email from PennDOT which contained a template of the letters that go out to businesses when sidewalks are reconstructed. Mr. O'Hanlon brought attention to the fourth paragraph in this letter, which states "The pedestrian facilities will be constructed within the existing footprint of the sidewalk, however, in some locations the sidewalk is not completely within the department's right of way."

Mr. O'Hanlon expressed concern at the contradictory nature of this sentence, which went on to include: "The department is required to obtain permission from the property owner to perform work outside the public right of way. As such, the department is requesting an authorization to enter your property to repair and/or replace the pedestrian facility in front of your property."

Mr. O'Hanlon pointed out that the beginning of the letter acknowledges that sidewalk reconstruction triggers ADA concern and matters of policy. Mr. O'Hanlon asked the Task Force for input on the letter and its impact on the city's performance.

State Butler Street Letter as it relates to Penn Avenue

Mr. O'Hanlon stated that the first part of discussion is an issue of policy, and that the ultimate goal for the future is to avoid the reconstruction of concrete barriers in all parts of the city. Mr. Meritzer agreed, and expressed concern about the next project outlined in the letter: Butler Street. Mr. Meritzer met with Emily Gaspich, who is taking over the Penn Avenue project, and she invited him to an upcoming meeting of Phase 2 to discuss the issues with Phase 1 of the Penn Avenue project. Phase 1 is intended to be replicated in a number of other districts, and Mr. Meritzer hoped the Task Force could examine this issue globally.

Mr. McGann asked Mr. Tague if any problems would come from vaults or empty spaces underneath the sidewalks, particularly beneath the downtown section. Mr. McGann mentioned that weather would affect these mines beneath the sidewalks. Mr. O'Hanlon argued that other causes affecting the vaults are more pressing than mine subsidence. Mr. Meritzer stated that the areas relevant to discussion on Penn Avenue and Butler Street are composed of bedrock.

Mr. Wasserman proposed that they involve someone from the city to straighten out who is involved and responsible in these matters aside from PennDOT. Mr. Meritzer recalled meetings he attended in Garfield which addressed repairs in the street which went from property line to property line without taking into account the footprint inside the property lines.

Mr. O'Hanlon reminded the Task Force that the property owner has a responsibility to repair and maintain as per right of way, and asked who replaced the sidewalk. Mr. Meritzer informed him that the state contractor replaced the sidewalk.

Mr. O'Hanlon brought up whether someone from PennDOT should be invited to future Task Force meetings to discuss the project. Mr. O'Hanlon then raised the question of the city's role in the project, and whether or not the city had to approve what was done. Mr. Meritzer responded that the city signed off on all plans.

Mr. O'Hanlon proposed reaching out to someone above Pat Hassett to discuss policy, perhaps the Mayor or whoever sets city policy on issues like this project. Mr. Meritzer informed the Task Force that Pat Hassett is no longer in Public Works, and that the City Planning's transportation division is in a new department called Mobility and Infrastructure. Mr. Meritzer did not know the name of the woman who is effectively Pat Hassett's boss, but he will follow up on that information and see when she is available. Mr. Tague asked when Mr. Meritzer became aware of the new department, and Mr. Meritzer responded that it had been in the works for six months, but it was much unformed until recently.

Mr. Tague indicated that a meeting with representatives from PennDOT, Public Works, and the Mobility and Infrastructure Department would be helpful. Mr. O'Hanlon expressed hope that something can be done without change in policy required from PennDOT, but rather via policy from the city that would address the level/slope of barriers like one-step barriers in front of public accommodations. Mr. Meritzer's understanding was that the Mobility and Infrastructure Department would be responsible for coordinating this information.

Mr. O'Hanlon indicated that they might want to meet with the mayor about this issue. Mr. Tague brought up the new director of the Mobility and Infrastructure Department, Karina Ricks. Mr. Meritzer will check with Pat Hassett for her availability and follow up on a meeting with her.

An audience member asked about a long ramp on Butler Street and the difficulty it presents to the blind community. Mr. McGann responded that he is unfamiliar with that particular ramp, and redirected Mr. O'Hanlon's attention to the issue with getting permission from businesses to comply with ADA policy. Mr. O'Hanlon decided that Dan Cessna from PennDOT will be extended an invitation to come to a Task Force meeting in the near future.

Penn Avenue

Mr. Tague asked whether the work on Penn Avenue was completed, and Mr. O'Hanlon confirmed that it has been completed. Shirley asked the Task Force to take a strong stance on this issue and offered her support as a member of the community.

Mr. O'Hanlon suggested working with the City Commission on Human Relations to file group complaints against the non-compliant businesses on Penn Avenue – whether as individuals or as the City-County Task Force. Mr. Wasserman agreed, but addressed the lack of quorum at this meeting and recommended that it be pushed to next meeting.

Mr. O'Hanlon raised the possibility of an email survey asking Task Force members for authorization. The four present Task Force members recommend exploring the option of filing complaints with the City Commission on Human Relations for those businesses on Penn Avenue that recently allowed or prohibited the reconstruction of the sidewalk without eliminating one step barriers.

Annual Meeting

Mr. O'Hanlon suggested July as a possible time for the Annual Meeting. Mr. Meritzer proposed offering three dates in July and choosing from the three.

Mr. O'Hanlon asked for topic ideas aside from the selection of officers and approval of budget. Mr. O'Hanlon suggested discussing the Task Force's successes in becoming a more public-inclusive meeting and also the goal of becoming more proactive in the future – especially when working on infrastructure in new Pittsburgh neighborhoods.

Mr. Tague wondered whether a public hearing would be beneficial so that members of disability communities could provide input on the Task Force's doings. Mr. Wasserman agreed that being proactive is the goal, and emphasized that the sidewalk situation has to be a priority for the upcoming year.

A member of the audience, Carla Brown, suggested that having ambassadors from the disability community in different districts within the city would be helpful in strategizing and implementing proactive responses.

Mr. Meritzer recalled a point which came up in last month's meeting: promoting ASL policies in Pittsburgh schools. Mr. O'Hanlon emphasized its importance and suggested working with the school board to create policy around critical ASL education.

Mr. Meritzer also suggested that the four committees set up by the Task Force could present their progress and current projects at the Annual Meeting.

Mr. O'Hanlon asked the audience about location for the Annual Meeting, and whether it should be moved from the usual meeting place. An audience member suggested looking into Pitt's Law School; another suggested somewhere downtown or the David Lawrence Convention Center.

Mr. O'Hanlon suggested 11am-4:30pm as a rough timeframe for the Annual Meeting, and asked Mr. Meritzer to follow up on available dates in July.

Vox Pop

An audience member brought up the issues associated with the city's BRT plan and informed that Task Force that an idea for supplemental public transit is in the works.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 pm. The next meeting will be scheduled next month on Monday, June 19th at 1:00 pm in the first floor Conference Room of 200 Ross Street.