

City of Pittsburgh / Allegheny County

Task Force on Disabilities

January 23, 2017

Meeting Minutes

Task Force Members in Attendance

James C. Noschese, Joe Wasserman, Richard McGann, John Tague, Janet Evans, Karen Warman, Gabe McMoreland

Task Force Members Absent

Paul O'Hanlon, Sarah Goldstein, Milton Henderson

Also In Attendance

Richard Meritzer, Georganne Lingenfelter, Bill Wesielewski, Karen Brean, April Delacur, Gabrielle Bucci, Maria Driediger, Dawn Smidga, Paul Mente, Sarah Kinter, Ashley Muwernz, Alisa Grishman, Ali Abdullah, Jonathon Robison

Welcome and Introduction

The program started around 1:15 pm and began with the introduction of the Task Force members and individuals in the audience.

Review and Approval of Treasurer's Report

The treasurer's report was initially tabled until February's meeting. Once Mr. McMoreland arrived, quorum was reached. Mr. Meritzer agreed to go over the CART rate increases and check with Amy Hart to see what is going on. The report was approved. There was discussion on communication problems with the captioning systems, and it was agreed that the Task Force would be interested in setting up a committee to research various proposals for communication.

Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes

There were no minutes present at this meeting: approval was postponed for a future meeting.

Annual Update to Allegheny County's Consolidated Plan

Bill Wesielewski and Karen Brean provided a brief background on the Allegheny County annual consolidated plan as part of the CDBG 2017 fiscal funds. The county is required to provide these federal funds to projects that provide safety to affordable housing, sustainable living environments, and economic opportunities. Mr. Wesielewski stated that the purpose of this meeting is to have an update on a plan as a result to housing development involving persons with disabilities and low income persons. Mr. Wesielewski said the planning process involves interviewing providers and stakeholders across the country, along with creating an online survey for additional outreach that will last from February 1st to March 3rd, 2017.

The public hearing on the plan is set for March 15, 2017 in county offices. The community input and information garnered from those hearings will be incorporated in a draft document for the county's review. Around April 5th, the county is required to put that document on public display for a period of 30 days. May 3rd will require a second public hearing, and the county will then submit the plan to close. Come July 1st, it'll be approved by HUD in the county's federal fiscal program.

Mr. Tague asked whether the plan recommendations made by the public last year were incorporated in the documents and carried out. Mr. Wesielewski responded that all comments made are incorporated and provided to the County for review. The comments also go into the document itself in an appendix under "Public Participation." Ms. Brean affirmed that detailed notes were submitted and that the County strives for full participation.

Mr. Noschese asserted that economic development is the most important issue to focus on, particularly in conjunction with housing and community developments. He emphasized jobs as an important area in the disability community. Mr. Wesielewski agreed and noted that this would be a good opportunity to draw focus to those issues and needs.

Ms. Evans asked whether Kane Regional Centers would be included in the annual plan, noting that these facilities seemed to be unaware of Regional Asset District funds. Mr. Wesielewski confirmed that Kane Regional Centers would be included. Ms. Brean clarified that Ms. Evans was talking about perhaps being able to use some of those RAD funds to allow people at these facilities to enjoy cultural events.

Ms. Warman asked if the previous mentions about housing included those with disabilities in homes. Mr. Wesielewski confirmed and said that both the CDBG Community Development Program and the Home Investment Partnerships program are allowed to do home repairs including accessible improvements and new construction of affordable rental housing. He stated that the funds could be spent anywhere in Allegheny County and also clarified that on the rental side, the Housing Authority and Section 8 landlords have the ability to provide accessibility improvements.

Ms. Kinter, Assistant Director the City of Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations, noted that while the City and County have their individual CDBG funds, both of them have the obligation to further fair housing. She stressed the importance of information sharing about the funds so that the money has more impact. She noted that CDBG funding typically goes to developers, but suggested that the County and other jurisdictions provide funding in the form of grants directly to homeowners for retrofitting housing for more accessibility.

Mr. Noschese redirected the conversation to job opportunities, and proposed that training and communication about available jobs would be beneficial. Ms. Brean suggested an insurance concierge of sorts – someone guide people through this job process.

Mr. Tague asked what other input is helpful, bringing up the accessibility issue with curb cuts and curb ramps which are impacted by CDBG funding as an example. Ms. Brean explained that there are other methods to gather input and information (such as online surveys), and asked what other methods would be best. She stressed that the upcoming hearings would be accessible upon request. Mr. Wesielewski reminded everyone that the document will be on public display for review and comment.

Mr. Wasserman asked whether that website would be accessible to screen readers, and it was confirmed that it would be. The possibility of telephone surveys was mentioned as an option. Ms. Evans suggested spreading awareness about the hearings by appearing on local news and talk shows.

Nominating Committee Report

Mr. Tague presented the Nominating Committee report. There are four members on this committee: Karen Warman, Jeff Parker, Aurelia Carter, and himself. He stated that a total of 13 resumes and applications were received for the open position and three individuals will be interviewed. Those interviews will take place in February. Once the interviews are complete, a recommendation will be made by the Nominating Committee to the County Executive. The intention is to bring that nominee to the March meeting.

Representatives for the Complete Streets Advisory Committee

Mr. Meritzer reminded the Task Force that this committee will be meeting once or twice a year to review what is happening with the Complete Streets policies. The Task Force's aim is to appoint somebody from the Task Force onto the Advisory Committee. Mr. Tague asked whether this matter could be tabled, as there were only 6 members present at this meeting and Mr. O'Hanlon was also absent. He intends to email Mr. O'Hanlon to establish a speedier process for this appointment.

Mr. Noschese asked who the representative from the Task Force would be. Mr. Meritzer responded that he is unsure – the matter was presented at the last meeting and ended with the base decision to select somebody.

Mr. McGann asked Mr. Meritzer what the Task Force representative's responsibilities would be. Mr. Meritzer replied that there are supposed to be two individuals and citizens who are not from the Task Force, and they can be people with disabilities. They will review how policies around Complete Streets are developing and how well they are being enforced. It is crucial that this person be interested in Transportation as a broader issue. Mrs. Grishman suggested that the Task Force at least temporarily assign a person for this role. Mr. Tague agreed, and stated that he would be willing to temporarily accept that position as a placeholder.

Vox Pop

Mrs. Grishman invited everyone to the 2017 Pittsburgh Resistance Inaugural Ball held by the 14th Ward Democratic Club. The event is Sunday the 29th, it goes from 1pm-4pm, and she will provide more details as they come.

Mrs. Grishman alerted everyone of a dinner and discussion night with AccessMob regarding the intersections of disabilities, civil rights, and feminism. The event is Tuesday, 2/7 at 5pm at Smallman Galley in the Strip District. She confirmed that there is an accessible side entrance and also noted that people would have to bring their own interpreter.

Mrs. Grishman announced an Affordable Care Act Phone Bank on Monday, 1/30 from 5pm-9:30pm at the Panera Bread on the Boulevard of the Allies. People will be calling legislators to discuss the unique healthcare needs of the disability communities. There will also be letter-writing and a Videographer from the I Will Die campaign to collect testimonies.

Also from Mrs. Grishman: On Saturday, 2/11 a planning session from 12pm-3pm will be taking place at that same Panera Bread to plan a piece of advocacy involving putting wheelchairs in non-handicap spaces. Alisa Grishman and AccessMob's website have more information.

Ashley Mancini from the Regional Housing Coordinator spoke on a South Hills residence with two units available. They are looking for applicants. The units have hearing and visual impairment features and the property is subsidized. The property manager can be contacted for more information.

Dave from the City of Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations stressed that the commission is looking at systemic disparities. He posed two questions: 1) Are there large systemic problems that seem like they could be discriminatory towards people with disabilities in the City of Pittsburgh that should be noted for investigation, and 2) are there disparities within disability services in the City of Pittsburgh? Any responses should be directed towards the Commission on Human Relations.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30pm. The next meeting will be scheduled next month on Monday, February 27th at 1:00 pm in the first floor Conference Room of 200 Ross Street.