

City of Pittsburgh/ Allegheny County

Task Force on Disabilities

Monday, January 25, 2016

Meeting Minutes

Task Force Members in Attendance

Aurelia Carter-Scott, Janet Evans, Paul O' Hanlon, Milton Henderson, Richard McGann, Gabe McMoreland, James C. Nochese, Jeff Parker, John Tague, Karen Warmen, Joe Wassermann

Task Force Members Absent

Sara Goldstein, Katherine Seelman

Also in Attendance

Ali Abdullah, Matt Berwick, Tina Calabro, Sheron Clark, Greg Crowley, Joy Dore, Maria Driediger, Lisa Freeman, Jessica Garofolo, Dustin Gibson, Megan Hammond, Grace Hartley, Mary Hartley, Lloyd Hedland, Karen Hoesch, Daisy Huans, Ralph Hughes, Lou Ann Jenenko, Chaz Kellem, Sarah Kinter, Bruce Krause, Shani Lasin, Mark Lee, Richard Meritzer, Brett Morgan, Matt Pavlosky, Georgia Petropolous, Mavis Rainey, Erin Ryan, Fizza Shah, Robin Smith, Sally Jo Snyder, Jordan Stanga, Sam Stedford, Kathy Stefani, Mark Steidl, Janelle Tipton, Kristie Trautman, Mary Esther Van Shura, Rachel Whitman

Welcome and Introduction

The meeting began at 1:00 P.M. with the introduction of Task Force members followed by other individuals that were in attendance. Mr. O' Hanlon explains that the Mayor and County Executive would leave at approximately 2 P.M., at which point the Task Force would begin fielding questions and comments from those in attendance. In addition, it was clarified that, like January, February's meeting will take place on the fourth Monday again instead of the third because of President's Day.

Review and Approval of Minutes

Mr. O' Hanlon addresses that the Task Force is way behind on minutes. The Task Force still needs to approve May and November. Mrs. Evans makes a motion to approve the minutes, Mr. Parker seconded the motion. The motion passes.

Preliminaries before Discussion

With the arrival of Mayor Peduto and County Executive Fitzgerald, Mr.O' Hanlon explains that one of the goals of the Task Force, with the ADA 25th Anniversary, was to celebrate and do an assessment on where the ADA has worked well, where it needs improvement, and the massive differences it's made in our society in order to make accessibility a priority and not an afterthought. The goal of this meeting was to see how the Task Force could work collaboratively with the Mayor and County Executive to address problems that have been around for some time. For example, the Task Force feels there should be an ADA Coordinator in place at all times. Mr.

Fitzgerald states that they are in the process of replacing the ADA Coordinator who recently retired. Mayor Peduto explains the importance of space and how we must utilize what is already built in order to expand accessibility inward. Both Mayor Peduto and County Executive Fitzgerald both stress the importance to make Pittsburgh a place that includes everybody.

Housing

Mr. O' Hanlon addresses the fact that accessible housing can be extremely difficult to find and that an extremely large percent of people with disabilities are on SSI and Social Security disability income (around the 13th percentile of Allegheny County median income). With the construction of new neighborhoods and new cutting-edge technology, how can we ensure we don't make the same limitations? In addition, how can programs like the Section 8 Home Ownership idea become viable and alleviate the costs of being a prudent home owner?

Mayor Peduto answers that although the city's goal is to have 20,000 new residents over the next 10 years, affordability is one of their most immediate concerns. Pittsburgh is behind the times meaning that we can observe and learn from the mistakes that cities like San Francisco have made. There is a potential for 10,000 housing units from Hazelwood to Homewood in which incentives for affordability could be provided. On the public side, policy can shape housing. *Bridges beyond Blight*, for instance, will hopefully take abandoned homes and use non-profits and faith based institutions in order to renovate them after 20 or 30 years to create affordable housing. Regarding income, any form of income must be accepted for rent payments. The opportunity to rent property in the city is a right.

County Executive Fitzgerald agrees with Mayor Peduto and echoes that the market as well as the population is growing. Over the last year, affordable and accessible housing has been provided in Wilkesburg, Ross Township, Plum, Duquesne, Turtle Creek, and East Pittsburgh. There are projects built and being built with all of this in mind. Moving forward, putting our heads together and solving these issues is key.

Criminal Justice

Mr. McGann describes the situation regarding police and jail protocol in dealing with the deaf and hard of hearing. When a policeman came to his house on multiple occasions, they don't understand that as a deaf-blind person, he needs tactile signing. The police should hire interpreters that can arrive and make light on a situation so that everybody is accommodated and respected. There are just as many communication problems in the prison system. There is one deaf-blind prisoner in jail with no interpreter, no video phone, and no understanding of what is going on. There are many situations whether it involves the police, jails, mental health, or domestic violence where these needs must be met.

County Executive Fitzgerald thanks Mr. McGann for his suggestions and confesses that he doesn't know much about the communication materials in the facilities but he will pass along the information to the warden and the county manager to try and accommodate them. Mayor Peduto also follows up suggesting creating a special committee with the Sheriff's Office and the County

Executive to meet and address the issue. The Mayor assures Mr. McGann he will have full access to the police chief.

Mr. O' Hanlon introduces Mrs. Carter-Scott to address the second section of the Criminal Justice topic. Mrs. Carter-Scott explains the need for police training in communicating with young people. Family members of people with disabilities often worry about the interaction they may have with the police. Language is also a problem in our society today. Outdated terminology only increases the stigma revolving around the disabled community. One way to help both problems is police meet and greets where people have the chance to interact with the policeman to reduce any anxiety or fear. Finally, training videos need to be reflective of the community. Videos should include people of all genders, race, disabilities, etc. Any boards or committees working on these issues should also be inclusive of people with disabilities and of color.

County Executive Fitzgerald reinforces the idea that everyone, not just police officers should be respectful with their language and interactions. He agrees with all of Mrs. Carter-Scott's ideas and says that a focus should be placed on breaking down barriers. Mayor Peduto also agrees and explains that meet and greets are already taking place in some police zones ("Coffee with a Cop"). He assures Mrs. Carter-Scott that her message on training videos will get back to the cable TV station. He invites her as well to work with Mr. McGann on the committee with the Sheriff's Office to further discuss these problems.

Transportation

Mr. Parker praises the new Sixth and Liberty bus stop for bringing more people into the cultural district. He explains that the model was extremely effective and should be used in the future as it brought everyone to the table to solve the issue. While protective bike lanes have been successful in protecting civilians, they do prevent ACCESS from reaching the curb in some places. There is a huge problem as both bike lanes and accessibility are increasingly important. With the emergence of the BRT, perhaps another summit meeting should be arranged to ensure that the same features of the Sixth and Liberty bus stop that accommodate disabilities are utilized in the BRT so the system works for everybody.

Mayor Peduto concedes that mistakes were made early on in the process of implementing bike lanes. Intersections that are the deadliest need heightened awareness and extended, elevated curbs so cars slow down to give preference to pedestrians. Pittsburgh is now focused on people-centric planning. For instance, the BRT could have elevated buses so people can get on, just like the subway. County Executive Fitzgerald echoes the need to make stops and lanes more accessible to everyone now that cars are no longer the focus. In other words, we need to take the best practice of existing models and apply them to our situation.

Airport Accessibility

Mr. Nochese explains how the Pittsburgh Airport is far behind on accessibility. The PA system is not sufficient in announcing changes in times and gates as the deaf and hard of hearing often miss these announcements. Perhaps there could be waiting areas implemented that have captioning of what is being said on the PA system. There is a new device, mentioned by Mr.

McGann, which connects to the PA system and gives a read out of the announcements in Braille. Implementing new policies and solutions to fix this issue could give Pittsburgh a good reputation for inclusion.

County Executive Fitzgerald asks more about the Braille device and is interested by the similar ones seen in some restaurants. He assures Mr. Nochese he will encourage the airport folks to look into these things and have them reach out to us. Mayor Peduto asks Mr. McGann to look into alternatives for audible communication systems and piggy back with the county.

Employment

Mrs. Hartley praises Pittsburgh and Allegheny County's supported employment efforts but recognizes that a large percentage people with disabilities still live in poverty. 21 and Able with the United Way, partnered with Giant Eagle, the University of Pittsburgh, and Allegheny County, work to place young adults with disabilities into professional workplaces in order to change the culture and have a positive impact on the community. In addition, there is a challenge for people with disabilities to work because of the lack of overnight transportation. This adds to the difficulty in finding jobs.

County Executive Fitzgerald assures Mrs. Hartley that he can get someone from Port Authority to work with the Task Force and figure out a solution. He then praises the United Way and 21 and Able stating that people in the disability community are some of the hardest, dependable workers there are. Mayor Peduto tells Mrs. Hartley that he will work on the city becoming a partner of 21 and Able by next year.

Neighborhood and Business District Accessibility

Mr. Wasserman thanks Mayor Peduto for the attention paid towards Snow Angels, demonstrating that snow is one of the largest obstacles people with disabilities face. In addition there are several other obstacles that need to be removed such as old bike hitch posts and out-of-date traffic boxes. Mr. Wasserman also addresses the need for audible signals on barricades and obstacles such as sandwich boards, detour signs, sandbags, and broken sidewalks. These just need to be more carefully placed and managed (sand bags placed awkwardly on the sidewalk).

Mayor Peduto clarifies that the budget has been increasing to take audible signals from downtown into more neighborhoods and he wants to start identifying where the best places are to put these. The Snow Angels' website is now searchable by neighborhood, but it is not yet completed automated. The Mayor's goal is to work with the engineering, planning, and public works departments to have recommendations and proposals to remove/reduce obstacles ready by next year's budget.

Mr. O'Hanlon concludes the discussion with the Mayor on sidewalk issues in business districts and residential areas. The ordinance gives businesses up to 50% of the sidewalk for activities such as dining but doesn't recognize which half trees, posts, and other obstacles fall under. Secondly, some business districts that have one-step problems are replacing the sidewalks and not accommodating for the step. It would be worthwhile to look into raising the level of the sidewalk to the step and contouring it to prevent recreating the same limitations as before.

Mayor Peduto asks Mr. O'Hanlon for any examples of this and explains that businesses were originally designed this way because of floods. He assures Mr. O'Hanlon that the city will work with the Task Force to try and figure out how it can work by taking the best methods from existing examples.

Vox Pop

At this point the Mayor and the County Executive had left as scheduled.

Joy Dore points out, concerning domestic violence, not all shelters fall under the Department of Human Services. Some are private and some are public, but not all of them are accessible for the deaf. Mr. O'Hanlon agrees with Joy and states the Task Force should start looking into domestic violence shelters.

Lou Ann Jenenko addressed a project by Penn Avenue to widen the streets where they created a combination of stairs and ramps. The project probably could have been done only using ramps and would have saved some money. She hopes this is not the model the city was using.

Mr. McMoreland asked the Task Force and others present how we can hold the Mayor and County Executive accountable now that we have met with them. The responses they gave were not very specific and a plan with publicly reported progress should be created. Mr. O'Hanlon generally agrees stating that they demonstrated a willingness to work with the Task Force and that in the future, the Task Force should make more directive requests. Mrs. Carter-Scott echoes Mr. McMoreland in that we need a plan to address the public and to follow-up with the community. Mr. Henderson states that the Mayor and County Executive were just doing their jobs and now we must follow-up and make sure that something is accomplished out of this meeting.

Rachel Whitman addresses the need for more diversity and youth participation in the Task Force. Young people will eventually become policymakers and workers in nonprofits. How can the Task Force attract a more diverse group (disabilities, race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.)? Mr. Meritzer states that he did everything he could to reach out to the youth community (including Facebook, Twitter, announcing at disability meet-up, etc.). We need people in the disability community who are young to reach out and attract younger people to support these ideas and get involved. Mr. O'Hanlon restates that we need more opportunities that would be more attractive for younger disability advocates. Mr. Nochese suggests we discuss moving the time of the meeting to the evening. Joy Dore states that people in the disability community are their own best advocates.

Kristie Trautman resounding earlier sentiments that we need some form of accountability. She suggests we should prioritize our committees and do research prior to forming the Task Forces so we may start with the best practices that have already been used. People with disabilities should be well represented on these boards and committees. Dustin Gibson concurs with Mrs. Tautman's opinions. Accessibility should be a priority and not an afterthought.

Sally Joe Snyder recommends we take a cross-disability focus when looking at diversity in addition to race, gender, sexual orientation. Mr. McMoreland suggests we look at the racial disparities within disability issues and find a way to address them.

Mr. Tague requests you talk to him if you know any individuals looking to serve on inclusive boards. This is a program set up with Temple University.

Mr. O'Hanlon concludes by offering that in the next few meetings, the Task Force should begin to identify which working groups will be formed to handle various issues and lets everyone know to email Mr. Meritzer with the heading "Meeting with Mayor and County Executive" if there are any specific topics of interest such as police training that would create new opportunities.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:02 P.M. The next meeting will take place on February 29, 2016 at 1:00 P.M. in the first floor Conference Room of 200 Ross Street.