

August 17, 2015

City of Pittsburgh/Allegheny County
Task Force on Disability
Monday, August 17th, 2015
Meeting Minutes

Task Force Members in Attendance

Paul O'Hanlon, Joe Wassermann, Richard Meritzer, Karen Warmen, Aurelia Carter-Scott, Janet Evans, Rich McGann, Sara Goldstein, John Tague, Kate Seelman, Gabe McMoreland, James C. Noschese

Task Force Members Absent

Jeff Parker

Also in Attendance

Sara Kinter, Rob Oliver, Ali Abdullah, Chris Meyers, Julia Wallace, John Licina, Karen Hoesch, Joy Dore, Milton Henderson, Tina Calabro, Henry Glitz

Welcome and Introduction

The meeting began with the introduction of Task Force members and other individuals in attendance.

Review and Approval of the Treasurer's Report

Mr. Tague: There was no official report, but the amount of money we received increased from \$8,000 last year, to \$9,000 this year, and back to \$8,000 next year. The reason for the difference is, last year, a thousand dollars went to the disability connections to Judy Barcella, and since she's no longer here, that money came to the task force.

Mr. O'Hanlon: So next month, we're going to talk about the year's budget. We'll have some more money to do something with.

Disabled Youth-Oriented Event and Small Differences Video

Mr. O'Hanlon: We'll be looking at something that Kate is really spearheading with Mark Johnson coming into town. We're looking at a youth oriented event that we'll probably talk about more next month.

Dr. Seelman: I'd like to introduce Mark Johnson. He's this year's 2015 Thornburgh Lecturer and a pretty remarkable man. He was one of the initiators of the organization Adapt and is now head of advocacy of the Shepherd Center in Atlanta. He put together the Legacy Project, which gathered history of the disability community in the United States. He's worked with students on campus and is a wonderful role model. I'd like to see Duquesne University and others' disability advocacy bring together a small group of student leaders to meet with him to learn more about disability history in the U.S.

Ms. Carter-Scott: I think that's a great idea. We talked about the small differences video some time ago. Is that something we're just not going to do at all anymore?

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Mr. Tague: It kind of dropped, so I'm not sure where it stands.

Mr. O'Hanlon: I think there's an interest on our part, but the artistic element is the missing component and it's not clear where this project fits in the big picture.

Mr. Tague: We did put some money out towards the second video, but it just dropped.

Dr. Seelman: Do we know how much money that was?

Mr. Meritzer: It's in the records. For a couple years, any money we had left over we sent to them.

Mr. O'Hanlon: We can look into the small differences thing. In terms of the idea of this youth-targeted event, I think what we want to do at this meeting is find out who's interested in being part of a small group discussion fleshing the idea out.

Mr. Noschese: I want to go off point a minute for the deaf blind here; they aren't going to understand what it is. An important person just showed up here and I'd like for Mr. McGann to know that Mayor Peduto is here for the meeting. Because he's deaf-blind, I want to make sure Mr. McGann is kept up on who's coming into the room so he doesn't think this is just our regular task force meeting.

Mr. O'Hanlon: How about we finish the project thing? Any other questions on the budget? I want to take a moment to recognize Mayor Peduto in the office.

Mayor Peduto: I wanted to briefly sit in and get a firsthand understanding of some of your agenda items to start thinking of more ways we can work together. We're creating a point person to be able to work with starting next year. Our goal with the bureau of neighborhood empowerment is wellness, welcoming, veterans, and people with needs.

Overview of Bike Plan

Mr. Meritzer: We discussed the bike lanes through Oakland at the last meeting. As part of the transportation issue we also talked about bus transit and looked at how this would affect the disability community. Rapid bus transit is taking much longer. The bike lanes are moving more quickly. We recognized issues particularly with ACCESS that we need to check on more and gave Kristen input. She went off, met more with Karen, and told me they came to an agreement. She accepted Karen Hoesch's recommendations and she's in the process of drafting a policy to allow ACCESS to continue their door-to-door activities. There are some misconceptions about the bike lanes. There are proposed bicycle lanes and proposed cycle tracks. Cycle tracks are more protected. They're the ones with the poles. That's not what's recommended on Bigelow. It's just painted—there's no restriction for ACCESS vans to let people off at the curb.

Ms. Hoesch: Kristen has been very cooperative and willing to listen, which is why we've made such progress. There are a few overarching issues the committee needs to understand. The type of bike lane that most easily accommodates ACCESS vehicles is when they're not protected, so we can pull to the curb. ACCESS's request is to move slowly and consider alternatives before any more barriers are put up.

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They create extremely difficult situations for us, especially in high traffic areas. Number two, Kristen writing a policy memo won't be sufficient to override existing laws about which vehicles can pull in. That needs to be explored. Third, this is going to be an issue for public transportation. To be able to accommodate public transportation vehicles—ACCESS and Port Authority—is the ultimate goal. Bus rapid transit is more difficult. It's pulling in front of a bunch of Port Authority buses, not a bicycle. The dwell time is about four minutes, so pulling to the curb is not a viable option. Buses will have to pull around us or back up on Fifth or Forbes. We have to work harder for a solution that works in Oakland. We're here to think outside the box.

Mr. O'Hanlon: The primary concern is that there's a competition for the curb lane between buses, rapid transit, bikes, and ACCESS, and how we can manage that choreography is an issue.

Mr. Henderson: As we move forward with this issue, do we work with Karen and the city for this solution? Who's the contact person with the city as we move forward?

Ms. Hoesch: It's still Kristen Saunders. She's the bike-pedestrian coordinator for the city.

Mr. O'Hanlon: I think the Port Authority is the other missing link. It's critical that buses can get to the curb because there are times during winter when the street isn't shoveled or plowed.

Ms. Hoesch: It's also important that buses be able to get to the curb because we don't have lifts on buses any more. We have ramps and when the ramp isn't deployed at the curb it's too steep for someone in a large power wheelchair maybe to physically get up the ramp. It would render the bus inaccessible.

Mr. McGann: From time to time with the communication issues a deaf-blind person has, the ACCESS drivers have to remember to be patient. Often, bicyclists aren't patient. They don't understand there's a communication situation going on that needs to be respected.

Ms. Dore: One of the places that were talked about briefly is Neville Street in Oakland that has places like Family House and a lot of disabled clients. They were talking about making a bike lane there and taking away a lane of traffic from there. ACCESS frequently runs through there.

Ms. Hoesch: As far as I know, at this point there are no planned bike lanes on Neville. Are there share rows on there now?

Ms. Dore: It was one of the proposals.

Ms. Hoesch: If ACCESS can get to the curb, we have permission to pull over to the curb, understanding that bicyclists have the right of way in the bike lane.

Ms. Carter-Scott: I want to reiterate the importance of constant communication. Not only the disability community, but a lot of our seniors need to be able to get on and off buses safely. Constant communication regardless of where the bike lanes are located is needed. If not, it will affect a lot of people who need to get around and don't ride bikes or drive cars.

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Mr. Henderson: We fought hard for curb cuts and accessibility. We don't need to regress. They need to find a way to make it work for all. It's important that we be able to have mobility.

Mr. Noschese: It is very important to remember that the disability community likes to do things on their own and be independent. They don't want to be tapping the shoulders of strangers.

Ms. Warmen: I wonder if we could possibly get some people who are doing the bike lanes and Port Authority and ACCESS to get everybody on the same page.

Mr. O'Hanlon: I think that's part of the process. We're a little ahead here in that a lot of the bike lanes haven't happened yet and we're trying to fix things before they go wrong. The other thing is there are a lot of conversations in different groups happening. Port Authority is involved with the community for accessible transportation meetings. The players are talking. But yeah, I think you're right.

Mr. McGann: Is the only place with a bike lane Oakland, or are there other areas that have it? If so, what streets?

Mr. Meritzer: There's a whole program this year and next to do bike lanes. Oakland specifically came up because it's congested. There are bike lanes going up all over the city. So far, other than Downtown there haven't been problems with them. Buses seem to do well on East Liberty Boulevard; I'm assuming ACCESS does too. We can invite Kristen back to another meeting to discuss a larger bike plan she's proposing. They're all over the city.

Mr. McGann: Taking a step back from this specific issue, there's a big conversation about how to use streets and how to do urban planning that prioritizes cars and buses and ACCESS vans and bicycles in different ways. It's going on across the country—can we come up with a way to design cities that prioritizes people over cars? When people are talking about redesigning Downtown for pedestrians or bikes, how can we make sure our needs as people with disabilities are part of the agenda that the mayor is committed to? We as disability advocates can get our needs into the conversation. For example, Bike Pittsburgh. I push them every time I talk to them on pedestrian and bike issues and accessible crosswalks. Help them see our needs as part of their agenda.

Ms. Carter-Scott: To assure that people with disabilities' needs are part of the plan, we have to be a part of the conversation before the ball gets rolling.

Mr. McMoreland: There's an accessible meet-up group coming on Tuesday. They're having people talk about some of these issues with technology and accessible sidewalks. There's a company, if you take pictures of issues with the sidewalks and send them through the app, if sidewalks aren't accessible. I'd like to see collaboration.

Mr. McGann: I recall seeing in the past people with wheelchairs racing and some who were actually using scooters as well to make it easier for them to use the bike lane. Other people were getting stuck in traffic and congestion of people walking, they were racing down the bike lane. What's your opinion on that?

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Mr. O'Hanlon: I don't know if it's legal or not. Oftentimes, I'm on the bike lane because it's smoother than the sidewalks in a lot of neighborhoods.

Mr. Meritzer: The city has a policy for our trails, I assume for the bike lanes as well. They're restricted to non-motorized vehicles, because assistive technology is an accommodation that doesn't include scooters or other sources of assistive technology for people with disabilities. They can use the trails and I assume the bike lanes as well.

Ms. Warmen: Wouldn't that be discrimination against the disabled, that they can't use the bike lanes as well? If it becomes one, you should be ready for it.

Mr. O'Hanlon: It appears we can, so it probably isn't a concern.

Annual Meeting

Ms. Calabro: I'm here representing FISA, the ADA 25th Anniversary Committee. I want to thank the task force for all that it's done. It's been a very successful celebration. The actual anniversary was July 26th, so we passed that now. There was a press conference on the 27th. The mayor and the county executive were there. The community committee of about 25 members continues to meet and will continue through the next year. We see our work as drawing attention to the anniversary. We're helping to make the whole city and county aware of the ADA, where we've come from and where we need to go. We've been largely successful, so our committee is now discussing how to extend the momentum we're enjoying right now into the fall and through next year. We have a couple ideas for that. There's a subcommittee that's talking about community education.

There are about five different areas of education it's looking at. They're somewhat similar to what has been done with art accessibility, and we've had much success. We'd like to replicate that with other groups in the community. The other direction we're looking at involves the city-county task force on disability. At the last meeting, we talked about a community forum that would look at long-standing issues in our community, like plowing in the winter for access to curbs, and issues that are on the edge right now, like what Gabe is involved with in the accessibility meet-ups. Bike lanes are also a great example.

And then looking at the future, we look at things that we can do that perhaps we haven't discussed yet. We'd like to ask the task force to think about having an annual meeting, where the special guests would be the mayor, the county executive, and others who are decision-making people in our community. We'd like you to have an agenda similar to the past-present-future model I just described. The opportunity of the ADA 25th allows us to look for goals and solutions. Maybe look for facilitators who are champions of disability issues, maybe use part of your budget to get someone to work with to get the most out of it.

Dr. Seelman: The subject of abuse came up at the last task force meeting. The problem of deaf people—particularly deaf women—not having accessibility within the shelters is probably much broader than the

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city level. I didn't hear you mention that. Also, we never have finished with the jails. There are communication problems for deaf people in the jails.

Ms. Calabro: I'd suggest that you come up with a list of ten or so items that are very important for the agenda for the annual meeting.

Ms. Carter-Scott: That's a great idea. I hope we can get this information to the mayor. One of the issues that continue to come up for my son is living on his own. Pittsburgh is being built up, but not for lower income people and people with affordable accessibility needs. Whether we're talking about young people becoming adults or seniors aging in place, affordable and accessible housing is a huge topic.

Mr. McMoreland: So for the past two months in a row, our discussions about disability have been intersecting with other issues in the city—affordable housing and police. I have two questions about Tina's proposal, which I really like. Are you saying we do this in the fall or in 2016? How much time and resources did it take to put together the disability 2000 agenda?

Ms. Calabro: On behalf of the committee, I'm saying the fall. It would be good to accomplish this in the next four months. The disability 2000 agenda revisit probably took about two months. It was fairly complicated; we had to go back over every aspect and bring together the leaders of those areas. I really don't think it would take long to organize the annual meeting. Distilling the issues, finding a way to articulate them could probably happen over a month's time with some effort. Getting the word out and getting on the mayor's and county executive's agendas are also important. Maybe November is a possibility.

Mr. Meyers: The struggle with accessibility at the airport is still really important. There have been no improvements at all. We also need to focus on job discrimination against the deaf and the disabled. In a few weeks, there's going to be a protest at the White House because we aren't happy that we can't get jobs and feel discriminated against. That's what's happening in the next few weeks.

Ms. Dore: I'm a domestic violence survivor. I have major hearing loss and many of the city and county shelters aren't deaf accessible because they depend on intercoms instead of a video monitor. I commented at the last meeting about this. The Center for Hearing and the Deaf is fighting for federal and state level funding for affordable housing, because they're not getting money from the frozen budget.

Mr. McGann: We understand our needs at task force meetings, but many times the problem is people outside. Sometimes the law is the problem. Regarding job discrimination, transportation is also a big issue. Many people with serious disabilities can't drive, so they can't work at night because they don't have the proper transportation. It's wrong. Transportation needs to improve. Also, concerning domestic violence, I'd like to see officers' training for dealing with the deaf improve. They don't always understand how to work with a deaf person.

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Dr. Seelman: You mentioned accessibility for communication. Is there accessibility for women and men in wheelchairs? We don't know how many voting polls are inaccessible. Maybe we should count. I think we need this project, but we also need the funding.

Mr. O'Hanlon: I think we would need to have a very clear agenda with a real set of expectations to have that work. So it would require a lot of planning. Also, that meeting is probably not the meeting to get input from anybody; there won't be time. We might need an earlier meeting to discuss everything everyone wants to talk about. This is a several-step process, and November will be busy, but I think it might be worth striving for. Maybe there's something none of us would have thought about.

Dr. Seelman: There are some things that are very sensitive and won't be talked about at a public meeting. Some abuse problems are like that, but there are others. How do we get people to talk about it?

Ms. Kinter: There were a few comments regarding fair housing. Someone in a transitional housing program or who needs an interpreter or a specific accommodation is an issue of fair housing. That should be brought to the commission on human relations. Our services are free. Also, you're right, people aren't necessarily going to talk about their personal experiences to a big forum like this. But there's a forum called Deliberative Democracy where commissioners or task force members sit with smaller groups who might be willing to open up.

Ms. Calabro: It doesn't have to be that complicated. You have an opportunity right now because of the ADA's 25th Anniversary to say how our community is doing and what can be done. There's a lot of awareness. Also, how many people do you think would want to come to an annual meeting? It's not going to be huge. The focus should be what we know as a task force, what topics come up in our discussion, and how to move forward on them.

Ms. Carter-Scott: I think it's a good idea. I'd like to see more people come to the meetings. Yes, we are representatives of the disabled community, but I'd like to see other people as well. People really understanding what the task force is and what we do.

Ms. Evans: Do we have a committee to look for a space big enough for the group we're expecting? I'd like to help out with that.

Ms. Calabro: You probably need some help on this. Find a facilitator to find a venue and distill our issues and figure out how to articulate them.

Mr. O'Hanlon: Do we need to form a subcommittee on this?

Ms. Carter-Scott: I would definitely join this committee. Is this something that's doable by November, or will this take more time? I'm not sure if we can do this in the next few months.

Mr. Henderson: The full task force should be putting their heads together on how to do this. We shouldn't be breaking off into subcommittees.

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Mr. Noschese: I'd like to be involved. We need to have a schedule. I'm going to be out of town a lot and I want to be involved with this, but I don't know if I can without a schedule.

Mr. McGann: I'd be interested in joining. We could also have a conference call.

Mr. Meritzer: We've had some meetings via conference call before and they've worked well. We did have to provide some interpreting, but there's no reason why we can't now. I've been on conference calls with 40 or 50 people; it's doable.

Mr. O'Hanlon: There are limits to what can be done in a meeting or a conference call. We could have an e-mail exchange of ideas, a list of issues.

Ms. Warmen: We should give people a heads up before the call by e-mail or other mini-calls. Go into it with one or two issues and build up from there.

Mr. Noschese: We could have a big public meeting to hear from people who came to the meeting. That way we could focus on areas where people are really concerned about something. I also appreciate Dr. Seelman's comment about not wanting to talk about personal issues in a large forum.

Mr. O'Hanlon: Let's move the agenda. The first item of business with the conference call is to try to get a sense of what a good time frame is. I don't know if November is realistic. If we want to get on the mayor and county executive's schedules we need to do it soon.

Dr. Seelman: A good start is a timeline. General topic areas should be stated, as a number of issues can come up at every meeting. Purpose, scope, and timeline.

Mr. McMoreland: We already talked about getting someone who could help with planning. Are there a couple people not on the task force we might want to invite to the conference call?

Ms. Calabro: Just in here, we have four members of the ADA 25 Committee. We have as much representation as we need.

Ms. Goldstein: When are we picking the facilitator?

Mr. O'Hanlon: On the conference call. It's its own issue.

Disability Agenda 2000 Retrospective

Mr. Meritzer: We have Jim and Milton here from the original panel so we can discuss where we are with professionals and the disability community.

Mr. Costello: I'm a former member of the city planning committee and an advocate for several groups. The issues you've been discussing are the exact same as we discussed under the disability agenda 2000. The same problems are still here, some are worse. The airport, homeless and domestic abuse shelters. When an organization changes for the better, it's because they have someone—an employee, maybe—who needs that kind of thing. Nothing happens until you present them with a call for action. Change

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happens because someone says, "If you don't do this, we're taking something away from you." If you have a problem with an entity, find out where their money comes from.

As far as the final report for the professional service committee of the Disability Agenda 2000 goes, there's been some progress. Unfortunately, many who are accepted as professionals are only accepted in disability-related things. It's better than not having a seat at the table, but the talent is deeper than that. Sometimes, I think we're our own worst enemy. We need to show more talents and versatility to change things. Firms are not going to be more welcoming unless they see talent. There needs to be a personal experience for an employer with an employee.

Mr. Henderson: How do you think autism got funding? People in high places who had autism or knew someone personally with autism. Professionalism also touches on affordable and accessible housing. What good is accessible housing if you can't afford it? We didn't touch it before, but it needs to be addressed. We've made some progress, but we've also lost some things. Looking at what we've done, what we haven't done, and what we need to do, we're educating the public on what's going on. Bike lanes, employment, even going to the doctor's.

Mr. O'Hanlon: What we're trying to do is look at where our head's at today where it wasn't then. Why don't we tie into universities or other professional training entities? We need to get people with disabilities in at higher rungs instead of starting them out at the bottom. Also, the issue of professionalism is a subset of employment. Comparing our lack of success in this area to the progress we've made in the arts and culture. There's a different mentality now. We need a leader on this to really take the challenge on within those entities.

Ms. Dore: People in Lawrenceville and East Liberty are seeing affordable housing cut. We need affordable places for them to live. Also, we need to take advantage of federal funds, perhaps from the Council for the Blind.

Dr. Seelman: I don't know if there are any numbers on Accessible Oakland yet, but they were here with us, so I thought I'd mention them as a group that's working very hard.

Mr. McMoreland: There was a statewide piece of legislation that proposed allowing people with disabilities who are receiving benefits could maintain them while they worked part-time during college or high school. I also thought of how much networking and social connections affect getting into the professional sector. If people with disabilities can't access internships or socialize while in college, they're shut out. We could do something with people either still in college or recent graduates.

Mr. O'Hanlon: There are a lot of medical needs people with severe disabilities have that private insurance doesn't cover. Even if you get a good job with good benefits, it would be very difficult to replace Medicaid with private insurance. In the end, these public programs are designed to stop you from getting ahead.

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Dr. Seelman: I met a civil servant in Washington a week or so ago whose department is required to provide a personal assistant for job-related tasks but not for personal tasks like going to the bathroom. This person couldn't go to the bathroom all day. It's ridiculous.

Mr. O'Hanlon: We thought there were only three big barriers to employment for the disabled—physical barriers in the business, transportation, and education. But there are really many more.

Mr. Wasserman: Most of the physical barriers have been overcome, hardly any of the mental. We have to deal with intangible attitudes, and they change unbelievably slowly.

Mr. McGann: Another problem is with interviews, where the interviewer is overwhelmed with the situation. They might ask stupid questions. The interview process has to be more positive.

Mr. Costello: Adaptive sports have a real chance to push down barriers in attitude. These people in wheelchairs out there aren't complaining, they're out there doing something and finding away. This gets huge positive attention, even from big companies like UPS. 30 or 40 people with disabilities can change a business's policy, because it means business for them. There are some positive things happening.

Mr. Meritzer: For disability mentoring day, which meets every year in October, we'll get 25 students. Many of them get cold feet and drop out at the last minute. Or, if they're working in my office, when they get mildly reprimanded, they think they're getting fired. They're not getting the mentoring they need from their own. It might seem like a small thing, but it isn't to them.

Mr. O'Hanlon: I'm a product of segregated education; I only went to school with other kids with disabilities through 12th Grade. I wonder to what extent being isolated as a person with disabilities would affect one's integration into the general community. We have to overcome the feeling of isolation.

Ms. Warmen: We had a mix of all kinds of disabilities at my school. You need to have a general mix.

Mr. O'Hanlon: Maybe we can discuss this in connection with the youth event.

Dr. Seelman: That's one of the reasons we want Mark Johnson to meet with younger people—so he can be a role model. He has a job and a family and he's a leader.

Ms. Carter-Scott: As the parent of a young man with a disability, I'd like to point out that not all young people go to college. So maybe we could be open to looking at not just higher education, but what else you can do in life.

Mr. Meritzer: This is Julia's—my architecture intern's—last day. I wanted to get on record about how much I appreciate her being here and the great job she's done.

Adjournment

Next Meeting: September 21, 2015