

City of Pittsburgh/Allegheny County
Task Force on Disabilities
Monday, November 16, 2015
Meeting Minutes

Task Force Members in Attendance

Karen Warmen, Paul O'Hanlon, John Tague, Kate Seelman, Sara Goldstein, Richard McGann, Jeff Parker, Joe Wassermann, Milton Henderson

Task Force Members Absent

Gabe McMoreland, Aurelia Carter-Scott, Janet Evans

Also in Attendance

Sheron D. Clark, Alicia Grishman, Joy Dore, Janelle Tipton, Don Kovacic, Henry Glitz, Aiden Barrett, Travonne Henderson, Angela Jefferson, Emily Galfond, Fizza Shah, Kim Mackey, Richard Meritzer

Welcome and Introduction

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

Review and Approval of Minutes

Mr. McGann made a motion to accept the minutes for the September and October Task Force meetings. The motion passed unanimously.

Report from TIRES Meeting

Ms. Dore explained the origins and goals of the TIRES organization and brought up changes the committee was to enact soon. Ms. Dore explained the group's connection to the American Cancer Society, wheelchair accessibility in transportation, and transportation accessibility for seniors. Mr. O'Hanlon asked about the accessibility and for more information on the transportation services Ms. Dore mentioned.

Mr. McGann asked about how the program accounted for Uber and similar services. Ms. Dore explained and promised to send a list of useful links out to Task Force members. Ms. Goldstein asked about stops TIRES makes throughout the city, but Ms. Dore explained that TIRES is less a single specific program and more a committee working for transportation accessibility. Mr. Meritzer suggested making a spreadsheet to compile services TIRES provides.

Mr. O'Hanlon asked Mr. Tague what the danger was of funding being diverted from Port Authority's ability to provide transportation hours to the disabled. Mr. Tague replied that there was some concern stemming from the changes in funding procedure for transportation.

Mr. Wassermann asked if ACCESS patrons would be able to use the services. Ms. Dore answered in the affirmative. Mr. McGann suggested the creation of an internet presence for TIRES to improve availability and visibility of services. Mr. Meritzer reiterated that TIRES's fundamental role was to encourage accessible transportation coordination.

SSP Services Presentation

No one from the organization came, but SSP provider Kim Mackey in the audience stepped up to discuss the program. Mr. O’Hanlon and Mr. Meritzer asked what services SSP — Support Service Providers — provided and Ms. Mackey defined the services as not interpreting and solely for individuals who are deaf-blind.

Mr. Tague asked what department the program was run through. Dr. Seelman clarified that it was the equivalent to a PAS program. Ms. Mackey announced a meeting Wednesday evening with officials from Harrisburg from 6 to 8 and encouraged Task Force members to attend. Mr. Meritzer, Mr. O’Hanlon, and Dr. Seelman discussed the Independent Living program in Pittsburgh and clarified that it is still in the “pilot” phase.

Ms. Dore asked how a deaf-blind individual would sign up for the program. Ms. Mackey gave a contact in Harrisburg whom deaf-blind individuals could speak with to sign up for the program. Mr. McGann elaborated on the process. He then discussed the need to smooth out and increase the hours of services for SSPs, especially in Pennsylvania.

Ms. Warmen asked what the training process is for SSP providers. Ms. Mackey explained the certification program in Harrisburg. Mr. Henderson and Ms. Dore asked whether the program was paid for out of pocket by the individual or partially subsidized by Medicare or Medicaid. Ms. Mackey explained the pay structure.

Mr. O’Hanlon asked that Mr. McGann keep the Task Force updated on developments with the program. Mr. McGann briefly discussed the Step 77 program in Sacramento.

Discussion on Changes to Remote Captioning

Mr. Meritzer discussed the positives and negatives to the new remote captioning system, including the plus of improving the pool of potentially available captioners and the minus of the captioner not knowing who is talking for the raw transcript. Ms. Dore asked whether the remote captioning would be more expensive than in-person captioning. Mr. Meritzer explained that the two cost the same.

Dr. Seelman agreed with Ms. Dore, saying that the remote captioning was less accurate. Mr. Meritzer reiterated that using remote captioning as a backup to in-person, as Dr. Seelman and Ms. Dore proposed, would be impossible to schedule the same day of the meeting and thus an unrealistic option. Mr. McGann warned that the remote captioning issue should not spill over to the tactile interpreters. Mr. O’Hanlon summed up the group consensus that a physically-present captioner is preferred to a remote captioner.

Thank You from Students for Disability Advocacy

Mr. Tague reminded the Task Force of the Students for Disability Advocacy donation made at a previous Task Force meeting. He then read the letter of thanks from the student leader of the group. Dr. Seelman brought up the importance of Mr. Mark Johnson’s advocacy with students.

Disability Agenda 2000 Retrospective

Mr. O’Hanlon discussed the language and media used to portray people with disabilities. Dr. Seelman praised the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and various radio and newspaper events locally in their improvement of the perception of disabilities. Mr. Tague discussed the importance of personal ties to disabilities in connection with a local news anchor who has a child with multiple disabilities.

Mr. McGann voiced concerns about the ‘mainstreaming’ of people with deafness and/or who are blind. Dr. Seelman stressed the importance of improving federal regulations in communications,

particularly in the age of the Internet, to be inclusive of individuals with disabilities, mentioning specifically section 255 of the federal Telecommunications Act and section 508 of the Rehab Act. Ms. Dore agreed with Dr. Seelman and expanded to discuss the impact of costs associated with an Internet connection on access for those with disabilities.

Ms. Mackey mentioned the importance of access for children and made a plea that services for the disabled, such as Mr. McGann's SSP provider, were being grossly underfunded. Mr. Parker praised Ms. Calabro in passing and discussed the importance of moving past the perception of individuals with disabilities as 'victims' in commercials and on television. Mr. Henderson responded that the most important goal was to increase the presence of individuals with disabilities in Harrisburg to fight for funding for programs like SSP. Mr. O'Hanlon agreed that language was important.

Discussion of Potential December Special Meeting

Mr. O'Hanlon discussed the process of setting up a meeting between the Task Force, the mayor, and the county executive for December. Mr. Meritzer and Mr. O'Hanlon talked about how city council chambers were unavailable the entire week of December 21—the tentative date for the meeting—and presented two possibilities to the Task Force. The choice was presented as between moving the meeting to January and finding another suitable location for December 21.

Mr. Meritzer responded to inquiries about having the meeting in the conference room at 200 Ross Street and preferring a larger rather than a smaller audience for the meeting with the mayor and the county executive. He qualified the Task Force meetings, particularly those with leadership like the mayor and county executive, as a forum for the disability community in the area.

Ms. Dore brought up concerns about accessibility for the meeting, and Dr. Seelman suggested that important issues be specified and articulated clearly at the meeting. Mr. O'Hanlon introduced his seven-point agenda for the meeting. The first point of this agenda concerned an overarching processing request, the second getting an informal toll of Task Force members, the third transit, including bike lanes and nighttime transportation for workers with disabilities, the fourth affordable and accessible housing development, the fifth county jail safety and accessibility, the sixth airport accessibility, and the seventh sidewalk issues.

Mr. O'Hanlon also advised that specific Task Force members be appointed to discuss specific agenda points, and a suggestion was made to hold a holiday-related reception afterwards. Dr. Seelman and Mr. O'Hanlon discussed funding. Mr. Meritzer, Mr. Parker, and Mr. O'Hanlon discussed potential meeting locations and how that decision would affect which members of city council and representatives from the county to invite. Ms. Grishman and Ms. Dore inquired about the presence of non-Task Force experts and interpreters at the planned meeting, respectively. Mr. McGann brought up the issue of inviting community leaders from outside the city limits.

Vox Pop

Ms. Dore announced a Tuesday accessibility meeting discussing transportation at the East Liberty Public Library and invited all interested. Ms. Clark complained of the excessive noise throughout the meeting from outside; Mr. Meritzer ascribed the noise to the temporary construction on the sidewalk outside.

Dr. Seelman again brought up the seven-point agenda, asking about specific policy goals. Mr. O'Hanlon reiterated the points he had brought up earlier and suggested organizing a conference call to continue discussion of the matter. Mr. O'Hanlon, Dr. Seelman, and Mr. Meritzer discussed the

development of realistic expectations for the outcome of policy proposals. Dr. Seelman cautioned that realism and idealistic long-term goals could be intertwined. Mr. McGann and Ms. Dore discussed the irrelevance of some laws relating to the field and the importance of communication, respectively.

The motion to adjourn the meeting was proposed and passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 P.M. The next meeting will be held on Monday, January 25, at 1:00 P.M.