

City of Pittsburgh/Allegheny County
Task Force on Disability
Monday, September 21, 2015
Meeting Minutes

Task Force Members in Attendance

Janet Evans, Jeff Parker, Karen Warman, James “Chris” Noschese, Katherine Seelman, John Tague, Paul O’Hanlon, Sara Goldstein, Richard McGann, Joe Wassermann, Milton Henderson

Task Force Members Absent

Gabriel McMoreland, Aurelia Carter-Scott

Also in Attendance

Joy Dore, Michelle Sipple, Sharon D. Clark, Ali Abdullah, Roseanne Cooper, Jon Pearlman, Rory Cooper, Ashley Mancini, Donald Kovack, Sharon Clark, George Ann, Rebecca Tyres Brown, Brandon Daveler, Aidan Barrett, Henry Glitz

Welcome and Introduction

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

Review and Approval of Treasurer’s Report

Mr. Tague discussed the remaining money in the budget and whether it affects a potential December Task Force meeting. It would cost approximately \$650 to hold this meeting. The remaining \$3,000 in the budget might go to funding for Mark Johnson’s talk at the Thornberg Lecture Series or an annual meeting. Mr. Meritzer asked about the impact of the state budget impasse on the Task Force’s funding. Mr. Tague explained that he thought so, but that he would check with the Department of Human Services. A decision on whether to meet in December was deferred to next month’s meeting.

Update on Oakland Bicycle Lanes

Mr. Meritzer brought up the unannounced implementation of bicycle lanes in Oakland. He discussed efforts to communicate with the Port Authority and the police, as well as attempts to find or create a policy that would allow ACCESS or other personal paratransit vehicles to drop off passengers while in a bicycle lane. The technical and legal definition of being parked—that the vehicle in question is empty—is such that a specific policy is needed to address ACCESS drivers or others who would need to aid disabled passengers in getting into or out of a vehicle.

Mr. Parker asked to add to Mr. Meritzer's report and expressed his concern that the City had not kept to its agreement that the bike lanes would not be painted until a bike lane policy to assure drop offs was in place. He also expressed his concern that when the question was asked why the City's draft circulated to the community for review didn't include other vehicles with lifts like University shuttles, taxis and people's vans, the only response back from the City was that the policy will go into effect on October 1st. Mr. O'Hanlon asked why this could not be written into the policy. Mr. Meritzer explained that the City did not feel that was appropriate because there already was such a policy and the City was trying to locate it. Mr. O'Hanlon concluded this segment saying it was the advice of the Task Force that allowing other vehicles to pull over to the curb should be written into the policy.

Mr. Noschese asked about the possibility of disabled Uber drivers being taken to court and what Mr. Meritzer's office would be able to do. Mr. Meritzer re-emphasized the importance of finding or creating a policy to help these people. However, he warned that until a policy is introduced, the entire situation would remain somewhat chaotic.

Presentation on ACHIEVA Family Trust

Ms. Tyers-Brown gave a presentation about the ACHIEVA Family Trust, its projects in Pittsburgh, and how members of the disability community would be able to benefit. One of the projects Ms. Tyers-Brown discussed was the promotion of special needs trusts. This allows individuals who are receiving government financial assistance for disability and/or economic status to increase assets without necessarily losing benefits. Without these trusts, government agencies strictly limit the amount of allowed income and assets for benefit eligibility. Ms. Evans questioned, and Ms. Tyers-Brown elucidated, that special trust money could not be used for assets provided for through government benefits, including housing.

Ms. Tyers-Brown also discussed ACHIEVA's legal programs, which have trained seventy-two local attorneys in dealing with legal issues related to making future plans and wills among the disability community. Other ACHIEVA projects discussed included the publishing of a special needs personal planning guide, a special needs planning speaker series discussing housing, employment, and community inclusion. Various Task Force members, including Ms. Warmen, Mr. McGann, Mr. Meritzer, Ms. Evans, and Mr. O'Hanlon provided feedback and suggested how the speaker series might be more accessible for various disabilities.

Request from Pitt's Students for Disability Advocacy

Mr. Daveler, a PhD student at the University of Pittsburgh and president of the Students with Disabilities Advocacy campus group, described his group and requested funding from the Task Force. Students with Disabilities Advocacy is a student organization that provides a voice for students at the University of Pittsburgh, as well as networking for students with disabilities. Mr. Daveler requested funding in total of \$765 to go towards interpreters for a meet-and-greet between Mark Johnson and Pitt students with disabilities prior to Mr. Johnson's talk for the Thornberg Lecture Series. Some of the money would also go toward funding meetups with students from other local college campuses.

Mr. Wasserman made an initial movement to give the organization \$200, then \$500. Mr. Tague suggested that the request be funded in full, which Mr. Wasserman accepted. Ms. Evans seconded, and the measure passed.

Disability Agenda 2000 Retrospective

Dr. Seelman introduced panelists Dr. Rory Cooper, Dr. Roseanne Cooper, and Dr. Pearlman to the Task Force members. Dr. Rory Cooper discussed the development and state of the commercial and academic research in the Western Pennsylvania region as well as praising the improvement of Bakery Square into the home of local research departments and companies like Google. He discussed the movement of technologies previously primarily considered "assistive technology" into the mainstream. The academic programs concerning technology for the assistance of the disabled have grown considerably, and Pittsburgh's institutions of higher learning have become more attractive for students with disabilities.

Dr. Roseanne Cooper discussed the growth of clinical services and described the adverse effects of lack of funding on research efforts. Dr. Pearlman said that, although the growth of academic research resources in Pittsburgh had expanded significantly, there continues to be a problem with the entrepreneurial sector. Dr. Pearlman also called for the use of talent in the region to make Pittsburgh as an environment more accessible.

Presentation on Hospital Compliance Guidelines

Mr. Karolac presented the hospital compliance guidelines providing care for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. He described the goals of the project, as well as the process that it had taken to create the document, and asked the members of the Task Force for additions or corrections. Mr. Meritzer added that the document was not only meant for hospitals, but for the disabled to realize what their rights are in the healthcare system. Mr. O'Hanlon, Dr. Seelman, and Ms. Goldstein voiced their approval of the guidelines. Mr. Meritzer responded to a questioner in the audience asking about the implementation of the guidelines, stressing communication with the hospitals.

Vox Pop

Mr. O'Hanlon requested the Task Force members begin to consider agenda items for the meeting with the county executive and the mayor.

Dr. Seelman made a motion to end the meeting, Ms. Evans seconded.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 P.M. The next meeting will be held on Monday, October 19, at 1:00 P.M.