

Houston Commission on Disabilities
April 11, 2024 4:00 - 6:00 PM

Housekeeping items:

- Closed captioning is enabled, please use the chat function if you have any technical difficulties with accessing captioning.
- There are ASL interpreters available in-person at TranStar.
- To support our ASL interpreters, please introduce yourself before speaking and be considerate of your speaking pace. Also, for presenters, please describe any images or visual content.
- For those joining us in person, please refrain from side conversations, as there are sensitive microphones throughout the room, and we will hear you speaking.
- Reminders about turning on/off microphones.

Chair Silcox asked Stephanie Haechten to proceed with the roll call.

Roll Call of the Commissioners:

Position 1: Michael Cottingham	Absent
Position 2: Ricky Don Harris	Present
Position 3: Ann M. Bacon	Absent
Position 4: Daquan Minor	Absent
Position 5: Sashikala Nisankarao	Present
Position 6: Monique Mason	Present
Position 7: AJ Morton	Absent
Position 8: Amie Jean	Present (late/virtual)
Position 9: Mary Sias	Present
Position 10: Meridith Silcox – Chair	Present
Position 11: Lydia Nunez Landry	Present
Position 12: Vacant	
Position 13: Osvaldo Capmany	Present
Position 14: Vacant	
Ex-Officio: Angel Ponce	Present
Ex-Officio: Marshall Watson	
Legal: Rebekah Wendt	Absent

Chair Silcox called the meeting to order at 4:08 PM with a quorum present and welcomed attendees to the meeting.

MOPD Staff:

Angel Ponce, Stephanie Haechten, Kayla Cochrane, Rey Herrera, Hilary Pircher, Sissel Carlsen, Amanda Boyd

Metropolitan Multiservice Center Staff:

Nolan Griffin, Charles French

Review and Approval of February Meeting Minutes

- Motion: Commissioner Nisankarao
- Second: Commissioner Sias

Public Comments

- Elizabeth Longoria, Deputy Mordecai, Sergeant Williams (Harris County Sheriff's Office – Community Engagement)
 - o Citizens Police Academy in Houston
 - Start next Thursday at Baker Ripley (Navigation)
 - Welcome more people to join (we have 30 seats).
 - o First agency in the US to do this program
 - Feedback from the Deaf/Hard of Hearing community encouraged
- Elizabeth Keel (Stages Houston)
 - o Invitation to ASL program
 - o Brought flyers for sensory friendly and ASL dates
- Tanya Mahesh (Youth in Policy Fellow)
 - o Addressing healthcare disparities for disabled individuals
 - o Completed a year-long fellowship program
- George Pusey, PhD, OT (Baylor Graduate)
 - o Barriers people with disabilities face in the Metro area
 - o Main barriers for people with disabilities survey- Sidewalks, ramps, no accessible parking
 - o Overall mixed results
- Mary Beth Lamb, LMSW (Texas Department of State Health Services)
 - o People with disabilities in functions and disasters
 - ASL Communication aid
 - Seeking feedback from community; link provided

MOPD Report to the HCOD

- Angel Ponce (Director, Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities)
 - o Information and Referral Services
 - o Assisted 89 constituents
 - o 7 presentations on disability etiquette and training including the Jung Center
 - o Accessible Communications
 - o MOPD newsletter will go out every two weeks
 - o Hilary and Rey toured Skyfarm at Post Houston
 - o Events

- Homeland Security Workshop will have workshop at the MMSC - May 4th
- Provided Tax Prep Services offered at MMSC in February and March specifically for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Community in collaboration with Baker Ripley and Nightingale
- ReelAbilities event kicked off in February and MOPD attended
- March MOPD joined TIRR to discussion and tour facility

MMSC Report to the HCOD

- Charles French (Facilities Manager, MMSC)
 - 13,000 visits in March at MMSC including voters
 - Having middle of spring activities
 - Hannah is coaching basketball team this weekend
 - Actively seeking full time lifeguards for MMSC pool – requested support with outreach for this position
 - Encouraging people to use fitness center at MMSC

Occupational Therapy Capstone Presentation

- Courtney Yarborough (Intern, MMSC)
 - Discussing the benefits of scuba diving for people with disabilities
 - Freedom from impairment, enhancements of social experience/self-concept, and optimal experience
 - Form of enjoyable psychical activity, pain relief from
 - Created needs assessment and gauged interest through survey
 - Presented at local dive shop and West Gray to recruit participants for survey
 - Adaptive Discover Scuba Pilot Program
 - Two 3-hour sessions, gear rental, five adaptive divers and eight certified Adaptive Dive Buddies
 - Diveheart and MMSC will continue partnership, seeking funding

Accessible Voting Discussion Community access and Housing-Disability voting rights and access

- Commission discusses their experience when voting
 - The fastest way to get an issue resolved is reaching out to Harris County elections
 - It is a good idea to call voters line ahead of time and schedule an interpreter
 - Q: How long does a complaint take?
A: Complaint policy has 20 days to have a response
You can file a complaint online on Harris County website.

- Recommendation to invite County clerk and/or accessibility team, multiple people from the office to hear feedback from disability community regarding barriers and accessible voting

ADA Update

- Marshall Watson, Administrative Coordinator – ADA, City of Houston, Human Resources Department, Civil Service & EEO Division
 - No updates to report

Meeting Schedule

- May 9th, 2024
- June 13th, 2024
- July – NO PUBLIC MEETING
- August 8th
- September 12th

Chair Silcox motions to adjourn meeting. Vice Chair Harris second. Meeting closes at 5:56 PM.

Meeting Minutes recorded by Amanda Boyd amanda.boyd@houstontx.gov. Please email any corrections.