

The Houston Commission on Disabilities Meeting Minutes for November 8, 2018

The Houston Commission on Disabilities met on Thursday, November 8, 2018, at the Houston Metropolitan Multi-Service Center (MMSC), 1475 West Gray, Houston, Texas 77019.

Chair, Richard Petty, called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM with there being a quorum present. Chair Petty gave opening remarks. Chair Petty stated that the Strategic Planning Chair Commissioner Cole would speak first because he has to leave to attend the Houston Trial Lawyers Association Installation Ceremonies and he will be one of the honorees. Commissioner Potts is at a funeral in Chicago. Keep his family in your thoughts and prayers.

Roll call of the Commissioners:

Commissioners Present: Toby Cole, George Powers, Richard Petty, Tina Williams, Emmanuel Arizona Eziashi, Benigno Aceves Jr., Shelley Townsend, Asha Dhuka, Sara Freeman Smith

Commissioners Absent: Mark Potts, Maria Palacios, Eileen Edmonds, Michael McCulloch, Khafilat Adesokan

Ex Officio Present: Angel Ponce-Trevizo, Amanda Boyd, Annie Bacon, Alex Chou (absent)

Ex Officio Present: Maria Town, Director, MOPD (absent)

Legal Present: Tiffany Evans

Chair Petty asked for a motion for the October minutes to be approved. Motion by Commissioner Cole and it was second by Commissioner Williams. The HCOD minutes for October 11, 2018, were approved.

Public Comments

Chair Petty explained the process of public comment and asked if there were any public comments.

Angel Ponce, MOPD staff called speakers for public comment. Ms. Gloria Cones, a consumer talked about access to the Metro bus in the South Park area. Ms. Cones stated that at Bellfort Street and Telephone Road there is no ramp and the sidewalks at Bellfort and Belneath are terrible and prevents access to catching and riding the bus. Ms. Cones stated that she and a group of consumers been trying to get the MLK ramps fixed for the past ten years. The ramps are needed and Ms. Cones wanted to know whom she could talk to concerning this problem. Commissioner Williams in response to Ms. Cones stated that Bellfort and Telephone Rd. streets are being worked on. Mr. Ponce asked that Ms. Cone speak with him before she leaves the meeting.

Mr. Ponce asked anyone else wanted to make public comment and no one responded.

Chair Petty stated that we would now have reports from the MOPD Director.

MOPD Director's Report

In Director Town's absence, the MOPD report was given by Angel Ponce, Sr, Customer Service Representative and he included his regular monthly report. Mr. Ponce stated that his report includes a report from MOPD pertaining to the support of the southwest mobility improvement project. This past month MOPD hosted a financial summit along with the insurance company and the National Disability Institute. The MOPD will host

a resource fair with banks and other financial institute along with the launch of the MOPDs and Baker Ripleys free accessible tax preparation.

MOPD participated in the inaugural National Disability employment event for their new disability employment employee relations. In addition, October 18 was proclaimed as White Cane Safety Day. Commissioner Aceves was thanked for his leadership for this event. Concerning pedestrian safety, the Houston Blind and Low Vision Community is putting signals across the city to outreach to the community. MOPD has actively supported the Festival of Abilities and its goals to getting a fully accessible park in Oak Forest and they attended this event. MOPD staff attended other events throughout the city for the month of October. MOPD Angel Ponce stated that his office assisted the disability community in giving out assistance, supports, information and referrals.

Chair Petty thanked Mr. Ponce for his report. Chair Petty introduced the two presenters who will speak about the outline of the structure of the parks in Houston. He welcomed City of Houston Parks and Recreation Facilities Accessibility, Michael Isermann, Deputy Director, Facilities Management and Development Houston Parks and Recreation, Chip Perry, Sr. Project Manager, Parks General Services Department, Design and Construction.

Mr. Isermann talked about the capital improvements and how they are handled by the General Services Department (GSD). His particular role is to review and ask questions. He makes recommendations and his staff have recommendations. They have the ability to make comments and make suggestions to improve the design. They spoke about 11th Street Park and addressed the concerns and issues of that particular park.

Mr. Isermann and Mr. Petty gave explicit detail on the process of making the parks accessible and the challenges that they face. They talked about the time that it takes them to get projects corrected and how they must be at 95% to pass inspection. Each improvement has to align with the Texas accessibility standards, which is our minimum requirements.

They spoke about their current projects and funding issues that presents many challenges with their staying within the budget and trying to remain within the ADA standards. They talked about what they are working on here at MMSC, which included the heating system, ventilating the pool area, barricades on the front door.

Chair Petty thanked them for their presentation and stated that he knows that they are working earnestly towards access in our park system and facilities. The floor was opened for the commissioners to ask questions.

Commissioner Williams asked the presenters if they ever interacted with the disability community. Responses were given to her question and they talked about the relationships that they have with Verne Cox in Pasadena. Another question that was posed was how the commission can interact with them so that all parks are accessible and there was much discussion on this question.

Mr. Isermann stated that we could help by checking the parks to see how accessible they are and getting back to them.

One question of concern was whether there is an ADA person that is hired to work with them to ensure that everything falls within the guidelines of accessibility. Mr. Petty stated that no ADA person is working with his

or her team. The designer does hire the initial plan review and the inspection to walk through to make sure that everything is okay.

Chair Petty stated that the commission is a group of our best advocates if they needed assistance with accessibility.

Commissioner Freeman Smith asked about the priority level of which parks are upgraded and what is their system for doing so. Responses were given as to how parks are prioritized.

The floor was opened for questions from the public. Mr. Jose Avila, a consumer suggested that a volunteer focus group to help them with ADA concerns would be good. Mr. Isermann talked about liability issues with having the public assist with these issues but still welcomed their support.

Another question from the audience, Ms. Orisa Welcott asked about funding for parks that are on the bottom of the list which are not getting upgrades. Mr. Isermann suggested that if consumers go and talk to their council member about improvements to the park things may change.

Chair Petty made comments that it would be a great concern if any park that was built were not accessible. He thanked the speakers and moved on to the next agenda item. Chair Petty asked for Commissioner's Coles' report because he needed to leave. Commissioner Cole stated that the committee has two responsibilities: Strategic Planning and Membership of the commission.

Commissioner Cole and Freeman-Smith met with MOPD and the Chair. He stated that membership wise, we have busy members. Commissioner Cole stated that we need to represent all of the areas of disability community and that the membership should reflect the different disabilities in the community. In the meeting, it was also discussed whether open recruitment should be for three months or two and it was decided that we would leave it for a two-month period. The committee is looking at many arenas for recruitment such as Facebook access and direct recruitment. We currently have a strong candidate to present to the mayor. Our application is more stringent, we are looking to extend the application period and allow those applicants that have applied previously to supplement their application. We are requesting a motion from the commission to do that shortly. We are asking for a motion to suspend the expiration date and that they allow applicants to supplement with resumes as opposed to a whole new application. Chair Petty asked for a First call, if there were and discussions, with none, Chair Petty asked that all in favor of Commissioner's Cole motion say aye, motion carries. Any new applications we have that are in front of the committee will go to the Mayor Turner's office. Commissioner Cole concluded his report.

Committee Updates

Community and Transit Access (Tina Williams, Chair)

Commissioner Williams stated that due to the Disability Awareness Month, the committee members were busy with helping this committee. A conference call will be held on Tuesday, at 2 pm, concerning the symposium.

Disability Unity and Pride Celebration (Maria Palacios, Chair) (absent)

Commissioner Petty asked if anyone from the Disability Unity and Pride Committee that could present a report. No one was present. Commissioner Pettty moved forward to the next committee.

Education (Eileen Edmonds, Chair) (absent)

No report

Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery (Shelley Townsend, Chair)

No report

Employment and Transition to Employment (Benigno Aceves, Chair)

Commissioner Aceves stated the following; first, he thanked Angel Ponce, MOPD for collaborating with them On White Cane Safety Day. He talked about the local organizations that supported the event. He stated that they had a good turnout and the event consisted of the following: Councilman Mike Knox, TV personality Melanie Lawson, youth with disabilities, Inspirational speakers and entertainers, which made this event very successful.

Second, the Third Annual Youth Employment will be held in April 2019. The committee is collaborating with Texas Workforce Commission. This will be a hiring event and a job readiness workshop. We plan to have thirty to forty employers that will be ready to hire the youth. Parents will also attend a workshop.

Third, Commissioner Aceves gave success stories that the employment committee accomplished over the year. He and Angel Ponce did a presentation with Community Health Choice, and that company has very specific job requirements. TWC currently is interviewing one person for a System Analysis position. I appreciate them for the work that they are doing for hiring people with disabilities.

Finally, Commissioner Aceves presented a diversity training to staff of the Museum of Natural Science, which stemmed from a meeting that he and Commissioner Townsend had with staff members earlier that year.

Chair Petty thanked him for his work. Chair Petty continued with calling for Commissioners reports.

Housing and Tenancy- (no chair)

No report

Law Enforcement and First Responder Response to the Disability Community (Emmanuel Arizona Eziashi, Chair)

Commissioner Eziashi had two reports related to voting and the elections. He stated that there were some voting barriers in the west area. Second, the law enforcement at Wood Haven Baptist church were given a presentation on how to protect the area of the deaf community. Commissioner Eziashi stated the he hoped that they would have better understanding on how to work with the police department. He met with the program this month, which has a statewide meeting once a year.

Chair Petty thanked Commissioner Eziashi for his report. Chair Petty stated that that there are two chair openings. Housing and Tenancy and Emergency Response. He urged Commissioners to become involved and speak to Commissioner Cole or Commissioner Freeman Smith.

Public Awareness (Mark Potts, Chair)

No Report

Strategic Planning and Commission Membership (Toby Cole, Chair and Sara Freeman-Smith, Co-Chair)

Report previously given at the beginning of the meeting

Metropolitan Multipurpose Service Center – (Chuck French/Hannah Walker)

No Report

ADA Update - (absent position)

Chair Petty asked Legal Evans if she had anything that the commission needed to know. Legal Evans said no remarks.

Chair Petty stated that we are near to concluding this evening and he had one remark about the position for the city's ADA. This person will make reports to the commission and the position is still open. Chair Petty asked if there were any more remarks from the commissioners.

Commissioners' Comments

Commissioner Aceves asked that you go to another commissioner and ask them about their expertise. Suggests that they try to keep in mind all disabilities when they are considering the chair positions. No other commissioners' comments.

The HCOD meeting adjourned at 5:45 PM.

Motion to adjourn: Commissioner Eziashi.

Second: Commissioner Williams.

Minutes submitted by Shelley Townsend (satownse@central.uh.edu 713-743-5491).

Please submit any corrections to Shelley Townsend.