**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)
  + Citizens Police Academy in Houston
    - Start next Thursday at Baker Ripley (Navigation)
    - Welcome more people to join (we have 30 seats).
  + First agency in the US to do this program
    - Feedback from the Deaf/Hard of Hearing community encouraged
* Elizabeth Keel (Stages Houston)
  + Invitation to ASL program
  + Brought flyers for sensory friendly and ASL dates
* Tanya Mahesh (Youth in Policy Fellow)
  + Addressing healthcare disparities for disabled individuals
  + Completed a year-long fellowship program
* George Pusey, PhD, OT (Baylor Graduate)
  + Barriers people with disabilities face in the Metro area
  + Main barriers for people with disabilities survey- Sidewalks, ramps, no accessible parking
  + Overall mixed results
* Mary Beth Lamb, LMSW (Texas Department of State Health Services)
* 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)
* Information and Referral Services
  + Assisted 89 constituents
  + 7 presentations on disability etiquette and training including the Jung Center
* Accessible Communications
  + MOPD newsletter will go out every two weeks
  + Hilary and Rey toured Skyfarm at Post Houston
* 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.