

## The Houston Commission on Disabilities Meeting Minutes for April 14, 2016

The Houston Commission on Disabilities met on Thursday, April 14, 2016, at the Houston Metropolitan Multi-Service Center (MMSC), 1475 West Gray, Houston, Texas 77019.

Chairman, Cornelius Booker, opened the meeting at 4:03 PM.

Commissioners Present: Tony Jones, Louis Maher, Maria Palacios, Cornelius Booker, Tina Williams, Charles LaDay, Roland Bienvenu, Eddie Jessie, Shelley Townsend, Frankie Sims, Lesa Jackson Lazard, Karen Cunningham, and Elizabeth (Beth) Delledera.

Commissioners Absent: Brandon Bowie, Benigno Aceves, and Monte Osburn.

Ex Officio Present: Jay Stiteley, Division Manager, MOPD

Ex Officio Absent: Matt Russell, ADA COORDINATOR

Legal Present: Nneka Kanu

### Minutes

The HCOD minutes for March 10, 2016, were approved without alterations.

### Public Comments

Ms. Angela Trahan and Mr. Emanuel Eziashi asked that the deaf have their own permanent community center.

Commissioner Jones asked "What was the best way for Yellow Cab employees to interact with the deaf community?".

Mr. Eziashi said that writing was the best way for Yellow Cab employees and deaf people to communicate.

Commissioner Palacios asked Ms. Trahan if Ms. Trahan had worked with the Houston Center for Independent Living. Ms. Trahan said yes.

Ms. Trahan said that the deaf consider themselves to be a separate community. Ms. Trahan said the deaf do not consider themselves disabled.

Commissioner Jones suggested Ms. Trahan contact Houston city council member Brenda Stardig for help on deafness issues.

Mr. French said that the MMSC would be pleased to host any deafness related activity.

Ms. Dawn Eubanks said that the radio station, KTRH 740 AM, had a radio show by Mr. Michael Berry. Ms. Eubanks said that Mr. Berry had criticized the Americans with Disabilities Act. Ms. Eubanks said that Mr. Berry said that the ADA had driven many small businesses out of business due to the costs of applying with the ADA. She wanted the HCOD to invite Mr. Berry to a HCOD meeting where his views could be publically discussed. Ms. Eubanks said that many European countries did not have ADA-like legal protections, and the disabled were excluded from many public accommodations.

Mr. Stiteley said that Mr. Berry's shows were available as podcasts if people wished to review them.

Commissioner Delledera said that we should write letters to KTRH to express our views on the ADA and Mr. Berry's opinions.

Mr. Michael

## Presentation

Mr. Kenneth Allen, Assistant Director, Houston Parks and Recreation, gave a presentation on plans for existing and future accessible parks. Houston has accessible park facilities through the city. There are no budget cuts in the Parks department budget this year. There are two major projects due to be finished by the end of the year. The first project is to renovate the Parks department headquarters. New accessible sports facilities are being added there. The second major project is to renovate emancipation Park.

Commissioner Jones had several accessibility complaints. The first was that he was told that he would need a doctor's note to use the pool wheelchair lift at Schwartz park. At another time, he was told that there was no one available to operate the pool wheelchair lift. At another time, when he was traveling over the grass to a picnic table, an HPD officer told him it was illegal to leave the sidewalk.

Mr. Allen said that a doctor's note was not required to use the pool wheelchair lift. Mr. Allen also said that the Parks department suffered from frequent staff turnover, and that keeping individuals trained on all the aspects of their jobs was difficult. Lastly, Mr. Allen said it was not illegal for a wheelchair user to go over grass.

Mr. Allen asked to be contacted if Mr. Jones had further issues.

Mr. Stiteley summarized the HCOD request for an ADA accessible park entry to Buffalo Bayou Park, and for maintenance and accessibility upgrades for Autry Park. The ADA accessible park entry to Buffalo Bayou Park would require a pedestrian bridge over Allen Parkway.

Mr. Allen said that Houston Parks are on a 21-day maintenance cycle. Maintenance means lawn mowing and minor repairs. He also said Each park has a trash pickup once a week.

Mr. Allen said that the pedestrian bridge would have to come from Capital Improvement Project (CIP) funds, or from a community development grant. He said that city council members are interested in talking to their constituents about CIP projects.

Commissioner Palacios asked that P-gravel be removed from city parks. She said that P-gravel was unstable for wheelchairs, and was hard for children when they fall. She wanted a softer surface.

## Committee Updates

Policy Evaluation and Improvement – Louis Maher, Chair

Commissioner Maher asked that anyone having difficulty with a city procedure for accessibility reasons should contact him. His contact information is: Phone 713-444-7838, E-mail [ljmaher@swbell.net](mailto:ljmaher@swbell.net).

#### Emergency Preparedness – Debra Nowinski, Chair

Commissioner Booker has sent out a message requesting people sign up for the HCOD table at the May 21, 2016 Hurricane workshop to be held in Hall A-3 at the GRB convention center from 9 AM to 3 PM.

Ms. Nowinski has all the handouts for the HCOD emergency part of the workshop.

Ms. Nowinski said it was important for the disabled to attend the workshop. She said that many individuals do not have an emergency plan, and this makes them helpless when a crisis occurs. She said the HCOD members should urge their various disabled communities to prepare for emergencies because it is up to the individual to have a practical emergency plan, and be able to execute it.

Ms. Nowinski also said it was important for the city to see that the disabled are interested in their own survival during emergencies so that sufficient resources can be allocated to help the disabled.

Ms. Nowinski asked that she be put on the standard HCOD members e-mail list, and that she be given the names of those on her committee.

Ms. Nowinski will give a speech at the April 30 Houston Area Visually Impaired Network (HAVIN) Insight Expo to be held on Saturday, April 30, 2016, 9:00 am to 2:00 pm, at the University of Houston - Main Campus, Health and Biomedical Sciences Building, 4811 Calhoun St., Houston, TX 77004. There is a \$10 attendance fee.

#### Employment – Benigno Aceve, Chair

Commissioner Booker said that the committee had its first meeting. The committee decided they would focus on employment opportunities, for the disabled, with the city.

#### Metro/Transportation/Parking/Recreation – Tina Williams, Chair

Commissioner Williams said that she would have her first meeting at 5 PM, on Tuesday, April 19, 2016, at the MMSC. She wanted her first meeting to be face-to-face. After that the committee would meet by phone.

#### Housing & Tenancy Issues Involving Individuals with Disabilities – Lesa Jackson Lazard, Chair

Commissioner Lazard said that the first Meeting with the Housing & Tenancy Committee did the following:

1. Reviewed and discussed the committee's Mission Statement and goals. (She will email all the Commissioners a copy of the Mission statement).
2. Talked with Brian Gage, of the Houston Housing Authority, about scheduling a speaker to do a presentation, and also talked with Royce Sells, with the Housing & Tenancy Community Development Department.
3. Worked on a handbook for the Disable Housing Community.

Commissioner Lazard is planning to attend a training workshop on Tenant and Landlord Issues and Rights.

Commissioner Lazard was able to help Mr. Alvin Washington move from a second floor townhome to a first floor townhome. Mr. Washington has had a stroke, and uses a cane.

Commissioner Lazard wishes to be included on the proposed disability pride event planning committee. This event might be combined with other disability awareness events.

#### Mayor's Disability Advocate of the Year Award (MDAYA) – Tony Jones, Chair

No updates.

Marketing – Frankie Sims, Chair

No updates.

HARP (Houston Application Review Panel) – Eddie Jessie, Chair

Commissioner Jessie says that he has 5 complete HCOD membership applications, and several partially completed applications.

There will be four vacancies on the HCOD in August 2016 due to term limitations.

Police Response to Persons with Disabilities – Charles LaDay, Chair

Commissioner LaDay is rolling off the HCOD. Commissioner Bowie will take over this committee.

K-12 Disability Related Issues in Public Schools – Karen Cunningham, Chair

Commissioner Cunningham said that the Texas Education Agency (TEA) has divided Texas into 20 regions. We are region 4. Their phone number is (713-462-7708). They have many disability-related resources for children.

Commissioner Cunningham announced the following special education events.

April 23, 2016 8am - 1pm Reach for Kids, Collecting the Pieces Autism Conference at Long Point Baptist Church, Houston Texas

Aug 5-7 Abilities Expo, NRG Stadium

Metropolitan MSC Update – Chuck French

Mr. French summarized the MMSC repair schedule. It is hoped that the outside construction will be finished by June 1, 2016.

Mr. French summarized the results for the spring tournaments for MMSC related teams.

ADA Update - Matt Russell, COH ADA Coordinator

No updates.

MOPD Update – Jay Stiteley, Division Manager

MR. Stiteley sent the following written report:

----

Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD)  
3 Weeks of tracking ending Friday April 8, 2016, as of 4:00 pm

Total number of events provided by MOPD: 1

Pedestrian Accessibility Review (PAR) requested: 7

PAR approved: 0

PAR in process (this addresses any request phone, email or in person constituent checking on the status of their PAR, INSPECTING SITE AS PART OF A REQUEST, ETC.):

10

## Resource referrals

Tenant/housing questions: 10  
Homeless: 3  
Disabled veterans: 4  
Renter Utility payment requests: 3  
Durable Medical Equipment (DME): 2  
Transportation: 7  
Home repairs: 12

Visual Fire Alarms Requested: 0

## Legal Assistance

South Texas College of Law (STCL) referrals: 4  
Houston volunteer lawyer's program requests: 5 requests and 36 individuals attended the quarterly session on March 23<sup>rd</sup>

## Other:

Disabled Parking Enforcement: 3  
Employment: 2  
Child/Adult Care: 2  
Social Security: 4  
Autism: 4  
Visual/Blind Services: 6  
Public Information: 6  
Treatment Centers: 4  
Education: 1  
ADA questions: 6  
Adaptive sports: 1

Total constituents assisted: 143

----

## Commissioners' Comments

Commissioner Lazard, speaking for commissioner Palacios, discussed the Women with Disabilities Empowerment Fair 2016 which will be held on April 23<sup>rd</sup> 12:00PM to 6:30PM, at the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center. The contact Phone Number is 713-974-4621 or 832-342-8752, and the contact Email is empowermentfair@gmail.com.

Commissioner Townsend discussed "The 4th Annual LoneStar LEND Conference: Building the Best Interdisciplinary Team for the Child with Special Needs" ([www.childrenslearninginstitute.org/programs/lonestar-lend/](http://www.childrenslearninginstitute.org/programs/lonestar-lend/)). The conference is on Friday, April 29, 2016, from 8 am – 4:30 pm.

Commissioner Sims discussed "the STOMP OUT STROKE FESTIVAL" (<http://www.strokefestival.org>) on April 30, 2016, from 10 AM to 5 PM in Buffalo Bayou Park.

Commissioner Jones said that the new MetroLift-Yellow Cab contract came into force on April 1, 2016. He said that the number of MetroLift Subsidy Program (MSP) drivers would be raised from around 234 to approximately 600. Commissioner Jones was involved in giving the training classes, on disabled passenger etiquette, to the new drivers. Commissioner Jones would appreciate hearing comments on how the new extended service is working.

Mr. Stiteley said that the HCOD training material, for the new members, was now available in the meeting room.

Mr. Stiteley said that Mrs. Lamb's baby was born on April 5, 2016.

Commissioner Booker requested that commissioners, who cannot be present at HCOD meetings, should e-mail this information to him at (Cornelius.booker@ymail.com) as well as the MOPD office at (mopdmail@houstontx.gov).

Commissioner Booker requested that HCOD sub-committees send him their meeting agendas and minutes.

The HCOD meeting adjourned at 6:12 PM.

Minutes submitted by Louis Maher (ljmaher@swbell.net, 713-444-7838).

Please submit any corrections to Louis Maher.