

## The Houston Commission on Disabilities Meeting Minutes for May 10, 2018

The Houston Commission on Disabilities met on Thursday, May 10, 2018, at the Houston Metropolitan Multi-Service Center (MMSC), 1475 West Gray, and Houston, Texas 77019. Chair, Richard Petty, called the meeting to order at 4:02 PM with there being a quorum present.

Commissioners Present: Michael McCulloch, Maria Palacios, Toby Cole, Benigno Aceves, Richard Petty, Tina Williams, Emmanuel Eziashi, Sara Freeman Smith, George Powers, Eileen Edmonds, Shelley Townsend, and Mark Potts

Commissioners Absent: Lesa Jackson Lazard, Khafilat Oyindamola Adesokan, Erica Fletcher, Asha Dhuka

Ex Officio Present: Maria Town, Director, Amanda Boyd, Angel Ponce -Trevizo, Jess Faerman

Ex Officio Absent: MOPD, Matt Russell, ADA Coordinator

Legal Present: Tiffany Evans

Chair Petty opened the meeting stating that the agenda for today would be in a different order. He stated that the reason for this change was to accommodate the schedules of the Vice Chair of the National Council on Disability, Mr. Benro Ogunyipe and for the Director of the National Council on Disability, Lisa Grubb who would be presenting for today. He stated that they would be attending our meeting later. He asked for one of the commissioners to do the roll call and Angel stated that he would.

Chair Petty said that we would move forward to public comments but first the minutes needed approval from the April 12 meeting. He asked for a motion on the floor and a motion to adopt the minutes. Commissioner Cole approved the minutes and Commissioner Eziashi seconded. MOPD Director Maria Town stated that one change was made to the minutes from the last meeting. It was moved to approve the changes in the minutes of April 12. Commissioner Cole approved and Commissioner Eziashi seconded it. The motion was carried and the minutes were approved.

MOPD Director Maria Town gave her monthly report. First, she welcomed one of her staff Amanda Boyd back who had been on maternity leave. She stated that MOPD has new technology and can respond to emails without shutting off the computers numerous times. She stated that a 70 million dollar gift was given to the city to expand Memorial Park. In addition, Senator Rodney Ellis's office committed money to expand access for walking and biking trails throughout the city of Houston. They will be working with MOPD's to ensure inclusion. Director Town stated that The Texas Medical Center will be expanding and MOPD is hoping that it will improve the Quality of Health for people with disabilities. Director Town spoke about the accessibility resources that were provided in various venues of communication by the mayor's office for the celebration of the life of former first lady Barbara Bush. She stated that the C.A.R.T. transcript, which was created by Marie Bryant, would be a part of the Bush Presidential Library at Texas A & M.

Director Town stated that Mayor Turner introduced the FY 19 Budget and said that they are not hiring any for any new positions and no current city employees will be laid off. She also spoke about Mayor Turner's state of the city address and what his plans and goals are for the next year.

He also address the Harvey Recovery Housing efforts that are being initiated by the city. Director Town stated that there are three housing and rehousing programs available to the Houston community. First is the mobile home units that can be gotten by individuals and placed on their property. The second is the direct lease, in which FEMA will directly lease an apartment to an individual that has been misplace and third is the direct home loan repair, the dollar program. This program allows repairs to storm damaged homes for \$60,000 or less. The Housing Department is currently working on engaging the community to get them enrolled in these programs.

Jess Faerman gave MOPD Report. She stated that they were presented with issues facing the disability community such as ADA accessibility to home repairs, legal advice, but the top three this past month were sidewalk repairs, employment, and rental assistance. The MOPD office was instrumental in helping the citizens get assistance with these matters.

Angel Ponce added that the Extreme Weather Ready Expo was occurring on June 2 and that we have two tables, MOPD/HCOD. He encouraged other commissioners to sign up for a time slot. He said that there was an anticipation of a large attendance this year.

Chair Petty thanked Director Town and staff of MOPD for their reports. Chair Petty asked the Commissioners for their reports.

#### **Announcements reported from the Commissioners Committees:**

- Community and Transit Access – (Tina Williams, Chair)

Commissioner Williams stated that she had been working on a symposium for service animals in transportation. They had two meetings on educating themselves about what is allowable, and what is not allowable. Moreover, how to prevent accidents in the future based on recent news events of the transport of service animals. Their next meeting is on the 24<sup>th</sup> at 2 o'clock. She stated that she and Commissioner McCullough were working with Space Center Houston on last year about accessibility issues there and that now a position has been created for an ADA assistant.

Commissioner McCullough stated that because of a prior trip made by he and a friend who was also visually impaired at Space Center Houston and with the assistance of Commissioner Williams, changes were made. In the future, they would like to invite the ADA person to come and speak to the commission at a future meeting.

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

Commissioner Palacios stated that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of every month from 5 pm to 6 pm is their meeting. They are moving forward and will be looking at a theme and looking for sponsors. She is inviting other commissioners to attend. The event is on September 29.

- Education– (Eileen Edmonds, Chair)

Commissioner Edmonds stated that their first meeting would be on May 30 at 6pm at the Multipurpose Center. She stated that the committee will be reviewing issues on education and she

wants to work with other disability organizations in Houston who advocate on behalf of children with disabilities.

- Emergency Preparedness (Shelley Townsend, Chair)

Commissioner Townsend reiterated what MOPD staff Angel Ponce stated but also talked about the need of having enough people at each table and if commissioners were intending on attending to please let Angel know so that they could have nametags. She also gave out parking information and a floor map of where the MOPD/HCOD table was so that everyone would know the location of the table when they arrived at George R. Brown. Commissioner Townsend stated that the parking behind GRB was \$10.00.

Chair Petty inquired about the date of the event and Commissioner Townsend stated that it was Saturday, June 2 from 10 am to 3 pm.

MOPD Director Town also talked about another upcoming event occurring at the George R. Brown Convention center, the Hurricane Evacuation HUB on May 31 from 7am to 11 am. She said this exercise was on the evacuation procedures on riding a bus to another city. Director Town stated that the importance of people with disabilities participating in an event like this would give the city a better view on what needs to be done when working with people with disabilities. Director Town stated that it is better for things to go wrong in the front than in the back. She stated that the contact person with the Office of Emergency Management is present and if you had any questions, please talk to her after the meeting.

- Employment and Transition to Employment (Benigno Aceves, Chair)

Commissioner Aceves stated that the Hampton Inn requested a Diversity Training and that one be provided to staff. He stated that HCOD and MOPD teamed up to do this Training. He stated that Commissioner Williams was there, Matt was there and Ricky Harris with CAAG. He also stated that everyone who attended was able to give great insight on the various different types of disabilities that staff may encounter. The staff was pleased with training.

Concerning the committee, Commissioner Aceves stated that their first meeting was today at 2 pm. This focus for this year is what do we keep or bring back. The committee felt that Diversity Training for HR employees was still important. He stated that the committee members would be reaching out to various businesses to offer this service. Commissioner Aceves stated that Leaping into Employment workshop would continue. He thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

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

Commissioner's Eziashi's stated that today there was a police training and 150 officers were there and by the time we finished talking to them the Police officers were so surprised to learn about pulling over the Deaf community at traffic stops.

- Public Awareness (Mark Potts, Chair)

Commissioner Potts stated that their committee is working on defining their goals and objectives. How to get other stakeholders involved from the disability community and disseminating information to the disability community. He invited other commissioners to join this committee.

- Strategic Planning and Commission Membership (Toby Cole, Chair)

Commissioner Cole stated that the main goal is to ensure that all commissioners are utilized as much as possible. Commissioner Cole intends to reach out to all commissioners to discuss their interests in serving on the various committees or chairing a committee. In addition, to make sure that all commissioners are used in an efficient and effective way. He encouraged the commissioners to reach out to Chair Petty or Commissioner Cole if they are being over utilized or underutilized.

Director Town stated that MOPD should be notified about meetings and participants in the meetings, whether it be commissioners or the members of public so that they can ensure that the right resources are at the table.

Chair Petty asked if Chuck French or Hannah Walker were present and they were not present. Chair Petty stated that he will depart from the agenda and asked Legal (Tiffany Evans) if we are keeping in line. Tiffany Evans responded that he was. Chair Petty asked for Public comments.

### **Public Comments:**

Chair Petty stated that Commissioner Cole was asked to officiate during this section. He asked the public to please wait until their name was called from the sign in sheet. MOPD Angel Ponce stated that he had the sheet and would call the names for Public Comment.

Mr. Robin Blend was called for public comment. Mr. Blend expressed his concerns about a new building construction in his neighborhood and the removal of a bus stop that caused some barriers to transportation.

MOPD Angel Ponce stated that he met with Metro to address the issue after meeting with Mr. Blend and assured him that MOPD was working on a solution.

Mr. Garcia with the Living Hope program announced that their organization is helping people who were affected by Harvey or something else. The program is focused on people with disabilities who are undocumented. People with speech problems also can sign up for the program.

Chair Petty announced that we are still waiting for the Vice Chair of the National Council on Disability and the Director of the council. He proposed a ten-minute break. The time is now 4:50. Chair Petty stated that we would reconvene once the guest have arrived.

The meeting reconvened at 5:03. Chair Petty stated that we would move to announcements. Danielle Bartz, Director, Mayor's Office Boards and Commissions stated that commissioner's terms usually end on July 26. She explained about term roll off and reapplying and encouraged commissioners who wanted to serve for another 2-year term to please reapply.

Chair Petty stated that our guests had arrived and he welcomed them. Chair Petty made acknowledgement of their leaving their meeting early to attend the Commissioners meeting today. He stated that because most of our public guests and commissioners ride public transportation that this ends at 6 pm.

MOPD Director Town introduced our guests from the National Council on Disability Acting Executive Director Lisa Grubb and National Council on Disability Vice Chair Benro Ogunyipe.

Our speakers thanked MOPD Director Town and everyone for inviting them there. Vice Chairman Benro was appointed by former President Obama in 2014 and was reappointed in 2016. He is an accessibility specialist of the Department of Human Services in Illinois.

Ms. Grubb introduced herself. She said that she was currently serving as the acting Executive Director for NCD. She stated that she had been there since 2007. Ms. Grubb stated that she served as a long time, as the Director of Operations. Ms. Grubb then turned the floor over to Mr. Benro.

Mr. Benro stated that they had been traveling to several states includes Atlanta, Georgia, Florida Washington and Seattle. Mr. Benro stated that they came here to have panel discussions on Disaster Preparedness. They wanted to hear what kind of improvements could be made for people with disabilities for disability relief, preparedness and recovery.

He stated that their job is to give advice to President and Congress about policy and programs that affect people with disabilities. He stated that NCD gathers information and feedback collected to look at which issues to prioritize for people with disabilities. Once it is voted on by the council, we address the priorities:

The priorities for this fiscal year will be:

- involuntary institutionalization during disasters,
- Guardianship follow-up reports on IDD population.
- 14c – the subminimum wage
- Bio ethics and disabilities report.
- Central accommodations for the federal government and also NCD voted to dedicate staff resources to foreign policy.
- travel, possibly where and why.
- Immigration -- the immigration project.
- Autonomous vehicles.
- The opioid epidemic.

In conclusion, Mr. Benro stated that there are some other tasks on the table that will be looked at in the future.

Chair Petty opened the floor up for questions from the commissioners.

Several Commissioners posed questions to Mr. Benro on several issues that were addressed during his presentation.

Issues such as:

- 14c
- Questions asked about the essence of the NCD and
- ADA
- Autonomous vehicles
- Civil Rights
- Parenting rights
- HR620
- Guardianship for people with IDD
- Training for law enforcement for dealing with deaf citizens
- Distinguishing disabled persons from regular community

**Question accepted from the Public:**

Two questions were asked from the public about immigration and bill of rights. Mr. Benro addressed these questions.

Commissioners were encouraged to join the NCOD list serve. Mr. Benro stated that they were on Facebook and Twitter also.

Chair Petty thanked Mr. Benro and Ms. Grubb for their presentation. Chair Petty asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting,

Commissioner Townsend moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner McCullough seconded. All in favor. Motion carries.

Meeting adjourned at 6 pm.

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

Please submit any corrections to Shelley Townsend.