

The Houston Commission on Disabilities Meeting Minutes for September 13, 2018

The Houston Commission on Disabilities met on Thursday, September 13, 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.

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

Commissioners Absent: Toby Cole

Ex Officio Present: Maria Town, Director- MOPD, Angel Ponce -Trevizo, Amanda Boyd, Annie Bacon

Ex Officio: Vacant

Legal Absent: Tiffany Evans

Opening comments made by Chair Petty.

Chair Petty stated that everyone should have received a copy of the minutes from August. He then asked for a motion to approve the minutes.

Commissioner Tina Williams approved the minutes and it was seconded by Commissioner Asha Dhuka.

Chair Petty stated that public comments would be next on the agenda and asked that Commissioner Townsend officiate this section of the meeting.

Public Comment

Mr. Jose Avila stated his concerns to the commission about Metro Services. He said that when there is a change on the bus route and on the bus stop it affects his ability to travel. He requested that Metro be more transparent. He stated that people have lost jobs because of these changes and that they have had to change their whole life because of what Metro has done. This change also affects those who are visually impaired.

Chair Petty asked Mr. Avila for examples of those times where his travel was affected by Metro. Mr. Avila provided an example of the bus route that he uses to go to the Lighthouse for the Blind. He stated that even though Metro talked about the improvements that they made, he could not see them and attended the Metro Board meeting to complain. Mr. Avila stated that he is receiving no cooperation from the Metro staff about his concerns.

Commissioner Williams responded that she will speak with Mr. Avila after the meeting.

Chair Petty stated that Director Town would be introducing the presenter for this meeting.

Director Town introduced Ms. Clementina Nunez with the Harris County Tax Office. She stated that

Ms. Nunez once worked at the Houston Public Library. She talked about what programs she worked for and how she was focused on helping the communities. Ms. Nunez will be training us on how to become a Volunteer Deputy Voter Registrar (VDVR).

Ms. Nunez began talking about the statistics of people with disabilities who voted in Texas and about the barriers that Texans with disabilities face. Ms. Nunez stated that the training was an hour and if there were any questions that came to mind during the presentation she was sure that the answer would be in the next slide. The Tax Assessor for Harris County is Ms. Ann Harris Bennett, and Ms. Nunez read her mission statement.

Commissioners and the public audience were trained and each person that agreed to be trained is now a VDVR.

She gave attendees and the commissioners information on the qualifications to be a Volunteer Deputy Voter Registrar. The qualifications include the following

- 18 years, US citizen, not have been determined, total mentally incapacitated or partially mentally incapacitated with the right to vote, not being convicted of identity theft, be a Texas resident.

Ms. Nunez stated that the length of time for the VDVR is December 31, 2018. Everyone will have to take the training again on January 1st and that term expires December 31, 2020.

Chair Petty thanked Ms. Nunez for coming to present to the commission and the public and for giving us the Volunteer Deputy Voter Registrar Training.

Questions were asked by members of the commission and answered by Ms. Nunez.

MOPD Director's Report

Director Maria Town thanked Ms. Nunez for the training also. Director Town stated that she had travelled to Puerto Rico to assist them in their recovery efforts. Director Town stated that 40 pallets were shipped after Hurricane Maria made landfall. She took this trip to see the results of the MOPD's distribution efforts. The survivors had organized the Puerto Rico Recovery Network and are doing amazing things and hold people accountable.

Director Town also talked about trainings in the Toyota Center where the DNC site would possibly be to determine how accessible it is for this big event.

Director Town talked about Beep Baseball and MMSC team placing 2nd. She also talked about voting and one of the ballot issues; Rebuild Houston and the Firefighter pay. She talked about the upcoming events at MMSC. On October 2nd, National Night Out, on October 9th, Financial Inclusion Summit and on October 18th, White Cane Safety Day. She stated that Matt Russell will be honored at the Disability and Unity Celebration (DUPC) on the September 29th. Director Town said that Mr. Russell's position is posted internally and that they have only received one applicant for this position.

Director Town also spoke about MOPD's new intern, Alex Chou who joined them in August. Mr. Chou spoke, and Chair Petty thanked him for being there and for serving.

MOPD Staff Report

Angel Ponce gave the commission updates on what activities and services were accomplished and completed for the month of September to assist the Houston community for people with disabilities. He stated that Alex has been assisting them with updating MOPD handouts and with the website. Mr. Ponce stated that MOPD and HCOD will have a table at the DUPC and asked Commissioners to participate in this event. He stated that he had only received thirteen vendor responses but felt that he would receive more as the event got closer.

Mr. Ponce stated that they are working on a one stop application process for the sidewalk review. He stated that Engineering and MOPD will receive the same information and the process can be expedited. Mr. Ponce completed his report to the commission.

Commissioners Updates

- Community and Transit Access – (Tina Williams, Chair) Chair Williams stated that they had a meeting on the 13th and they are working on a symposium which is tentatively scheduled for January 14th. They plan to have 3 breakout sessions. Chair Williams stated that they want people with disabilities to experience H Town. They are working on transportation experiences for people with disabilities such as riding Uber, Yellow Cab and a Sailing Experience.
- Disability Unity and Pride Celebration - (Maria Palacios, Chair) Chair Palacios talked about the theme for the Upcoming DUPC is “Connecting the Dots”. She stated that they will be transforming Jay’s Room with offerings of love, enlarged posters of deceased advocates, a time capsule and music playing. They will be booths where people can come and speak to other disability advocates. Chair Palacios asked that the commission and the public come and participate and make this event a History making Moment. She also stated that we need volunteers to assist with this great event.
- Education– (Eileen Edmonds, Chair) Chair Edmonds stated that her committee met last Thursday and that family members shared concerns about unrealistic IEP goals, (either too simplistic or unattainable); inconsistent communication with the IEP team; resources (connecting to people who do advocacy); HISD Houston Parents with Inclusion (HPI) and some other issues. Chair Edmonds stated that their next meeting is on the 1st Thursday in October at 5pm.
- Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery (No Chair) Commissioner Townsend stated that everyone should stay prepared with the recent Hurricanes that have been happening around the city. Director Town stated that STEAR is working to educate the public on Rebuild Houston. There will be an Emergency Expo Team that is meeting but she does not know the exact date.
- Employment and Transition to Employment (Beningo Aceves, Chair) Chair Aceves added to Director Town’s comments about a Diversity Training that he did. Chair Aceves stated that they are working on their Leaping into Employment event for April. Chair Aceves also talked about the upcoming White Cane Safety which will be in downtown Houston. He stated that they will have a downtown march. They are in the process of reaching out to schools for this event. White Cane Safety Day is on Thursday, October 18th from 9 am to 1pm.

- Law Enforcement and First Responder Response to the Disability Community (Emmanuel Arizona Eziashi, Chair) Chair Eziashi stated that there was one incident where a deaf person was almost deported to Africa. Chair Eziashi stated that he could not get him help. The person had no family here with him. Chair Eziashi stated he was able to file an extension for him. He talked to police to try and train the offers to interact with individuals when they have been involved in a violent crime. He will bring updates next month.
- Public Awareness (Mark Potts, Chair) No updates
- Strategic Planning and Commission Membership (Toby Cole, Chair) Absent

MMSC Report

Chuck French reported on the Inclusive Sports League and how they are funded not by city dollars but by the funds that they raise. He stated that they have a great partnership with the River. There were no facility updates. There are some needed repairs and it is on the City Council docket for October 3rd.

Commissioner Eziashi mentioned that there are no visual fire alarms. Mr. French addressed the statement made by Commissioner Eziashi and stated they are in the public areas, common areas.

Commissioner Edmonds asked if there was anything that the commission could do to support the October 3rd meeting.

Director Town stated that when an item is tabled it only is tabled for two weeks.

Mr. French updated the commission on the status of the Circle Drive Repair. He stated that there are still some issues with leveling the grade and that the original engineering plan was incorrect, and it appears to be sinking more.

ADA Update-no report

Commissioners Comments were made. Commissioner Townsend thanked everyone for the celebration that she missed at the last meeting and the kind words on the card.

Chair Petty thanked everyone for attending.

Commissioner Williams moved to adjourn. Commissioner McCulloch-seconded. The meeting ended at 6:00 pm.

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

Please submit any corrections to Shelley Townsend.