

The Houston Commission on Disabilities Meeting Minutes for January 10, 2019

The Houston Commission on Disabilities met on Thursday, January 10, 2019, at the Houston Metropolitan Multi-Service Center (MMSC), 1475 West Gray, Houston, Texas 77019.

Vice Chair Aceves called the meeting to order at 4:02 pm with there being a quorum present. Vice Chair Aceves gave opening remarks by welcoming everyone to the meeting and then asked Commissioner Townsend to proceed with roll call.

Roll call of the Commissioners:

Commissioners Present: George Powers, Emmanuel Arizona Eziashi, Sara Freeman Smith, Benigno Aceves Jr., Eileen Edmonds, Shelley Townsend, Asha Dhuka and Mark Potts

Commissioners Absent: Michael McCulloch, Toby Cole, Richard Petty and Tina Williams

MOPD Staff Present: Angel Ponce-Trevizo, Amanda Boyd, Annie Bacon, Alex Chou, Jess Faerman

Ex-Officio Present: Maria Town, Director, MOPD

Ex-Officio Present: Marshall Watson, Administrator Coordinator – ADA, City of Houston, Human Resources Department, Employee/Labor Relations Division)

Legal Present: Tiffany Evans

Vice Chair Aceves asked for a motion for the December minutes approval. Motion by Commissioner Sara Freeman-Smith and seconded by Commissioner Emmanuel Eziashi. The HCOD minutes for December 13, 2018 were approved.

Public Comments

Vice Chair Aceves explained the process of public comment. Commissioner Townsend introduced the following speakers. First, Ms. Jane West spoke, who is the Secretary and Chair for the regulation and administration affairs for the Super Neighborhood Alliance, which is a citywide organization of civic organizations that serve as a city code recognized advisor to the mayor and city council. Ms. West brought to the commission information about some new construction that is not being built in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. She stated that she wants the Super Neighborhood Alliance to make this a priority issue this year and about work with the commission to make this a priority issue for the city also. Director Town thanked her for her comments and stated that she will follow-up with the planning departments on what is happening with the hawk crossings.

The next speaker for public comment was Christian Fitsch Mouras. Mr. Mouras was from 101 Mobility Inc. that specializes in mobility and accessibility. He stated that he is aware of some mobility and challenges in the city and wanted to advocate for them but his presence today was more of an introduction to his company to the commission.

The next speaker for public comment was Dr. Jaishree Ellis – Executive Director of the Greater Houston Disability Chamber of Commerce. Dr. Ellis stated that the chamber has grown since its introduction to the commission. They have built their board and have started their programming. Dr. Ellis talked on the focus of the GHGCC. She also announced about their upcoming Sunrise Series program on Thursday, Jan 17 – from 8:30 to 10:00. She thanked the commission for letting her speak.

The next speaker was Rosa Ramirez-Community relations officer for U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services. Ms. Ramirez wanted to educate everyone on the services that their office provides to the deaf community and those consumers needing assistance and accommodations. She gave her phone number, 800-375-5283. Their organization also provides sign language interpreters. The hard of hearing consumers can call TTY 800-767-1833 that will provide an interpreter for an appointment for an interview. Ms. Ramirez also talked about the other accommodations that they provide if people cannot come to their office.

The next speaker was Thumas Lee. Mr. Lee was a representative of the Texas Association of the Deaf with Region 4 in the west side of Texas. Mr. Lee stated that he was present to ask for support of SB281 because there are certain disability terminologies' that are being changed e.g., hearing impaired to deaf and hard of hearing. Mr. Lee wanted everyone to be aware of these changes and that he is the contact person for the TAD.

Finally, the next speaker was Nancy Radecki. Ms. Radecki is with the Houston Women's March. She stated that this is their 3rd year and they are aware that they have not dealt very well with the disabled and want to make sure that they provide accommodations and do it right. She stated that she needed assistance with people with disabilities at this event. The event is on January 19. Ms. Radecki gave us the time of the event and brochures and gave us her email. She also had a time up sheet for people who wanted to participate. nancyradecki@gmail.com Commissioner Townsend stated that there were no more public comments.

Vice Chair Aceves thanked everyone for their public comments. Vice Chair Aceves stated that there was an Action item on the floor, for the Secretary for the Commission. He stated that Commissioner Edmonds as well as Commissioner Potts showed interest in being the commission secretary. There was a motion put forth for both Commissioner Potts as well as Commissioner Edmonds to be Secretary for the Commission. Commissioner Edmonds stated that Commissioner Potts should be the secretary and that she would be the alternate secretary. Commissioner Edwards motioned and Commissioner Freeman Smith seconded it. Vice Chair Aceves thanked Commissioner Townsend for her service.

Speakers for today

Vice Chair Aceves introduced the speakers for today, Ms. Susan Farb Morris, Chair and Ms. Dee Dee Dochen Co Chair for the Reel Abilities Festival. Vice Chair Aceves read the bios for both speakers.

Ms. Farb Morris and Ms. Dee-Dee Dochen both talked about how Reel Abilities has Enlightened the community by breaking down barriers to help the community better understand people with disabilities. They stated that the idea of Reel Abilities is consistent with the five e's, to educate, enlighten, erase stigmas, pave pathways to employment and entertain. The event begins on Feb 12 and ends on the 24th. The films open on Sunday, February 17. They encouraged the audience to go to the Facebook page, also Twitter and Instagram. They also encouraged everyone to go online and register so that they will know how many people to expect.

Questions were asked by commissioners and answered and Commissioners made comments. Questions were asked by the public and answered.

Vice Chair Aceves introduced the next speakers who were from the research on people with disabilities, the medical communication and accessibility, (Anson Tong and Emma Every, Albert Schweitzer Junior Fellow, Rice University), ansonjtong@rice.edu. They were not present yet so Vice Chair asked for the MOPD report.

MOPD Director's Report

- Director Town welcomed everyone to 2019 and talked about celebrations and reasons to celebrate.
- The passing of Planning Director Patrick Walsh and for everyone should keep his family in their thoughts and prayers.
- Operational Note-MOPD has gotten minutes online from 2017 to current.
- Conversations have been initiated with a company called Nuro an autonomy grocery delivery service. Their sole job is to tote groceries. They are mapping out street and sidewalks and have already agreed to share that data on the infrastructure.
- The MOPD crafted a public charge rule letter based on Mayor Turner's letter as a campaign awareness in support of people with disabilities. The public charge rule would deny people with disabilities access to citizenship and services because of their disability.
- At local government level, MOPD assisted with new technology for city hall city chambers, to allow hearing impaired citizens to hear meetings during the council meetings.
- Director Town again reiterated the need for volunteers for the Women's march, January 19 to assist people with disabilities.
- MOPD staff received training on the login systems for 311 so that they can provide better assistance on the Houston call system and allow less frustration on the consumer's side in telling and retelling their stories to 311.
- Last month MOPD collaborated with the West Gray Multipurpose center and with TIRR for the 11th Annual Metal and Muscle Sports.
- December saw the final visit of Democratic National Convention to make decisions whether Houston would host the 2020 DNC
- The MetroNext plan is still in process of expansion and hoping to be on the November election ballot. Metro is still encouraging consumers to make public comments or submit letters to them. Your voice is encouraged to help get bonds passed.
- MOPD is still working with Mr. Residio to help with resolutions for his problems with Metrolift.
- Chair Petty is still working with the Houston Housing and Community Development Department on accessibility issues. If anyone is interested in working with Chair Petty please let him know.
- The nonprofit hippa therapy program that had problems with finding a new place has now been able to be acquire a lease with the aid of MOPD through the city's economic development department on land owned by the Houston Airport System.
- Re: Mr. Lee's comments, Wednesday, the Texas legislature is in session, if you or your team are interested on bills, over 1000 bills have been filed. Many things could affect people with disabilities. Let us know.

MOPD Staff Report

MOPD Staff Angel Ponce gave his monthly report for December: MOPD assisted the disability community with calls about; accessibility, adaptive sports, apartment assistance, ASL interpreters, Child and adult care, durable medical equipment, employment questions, emergency preparedness, financial inclusion, Harvey recovery, home modifications, Immigration questions, legal assistance, outreach, Social Security benefits, legal issues with South Texas College of Law, transportation, utility assistance, visual fire alarms, Waste management or solid waste, Homelessness and shelters. Their office helped 564 people this month. Mr. Ponce also stated that in January he would officially be the chair of the United Way monthly meetings. He gave information about the date and time for that meeting and invited others to attend. In the month of December, the United Way-Harbor Light Choir performed and after a 30-year run-, they have closed the door on the choir because of lack of

funding. Next meeting-Feb 14th-next United Way meeting-West Houston Assistance Ministries and the Houston Food banks.

Mr. Ponce stated that the sidewalk online applications will be online soon and that they have had seven new requests for sidewalk assistance.

Vice Chair Aceves thanked Director Town and MOPD Staff Angel Ponce for their reports.

The final presenters arrived and were introduced. Mr. Anson Tong and Ms. Emma Every are students at Rice University. They are working on a project right now funded through the Albert Schweitzer Fellowship and with Disabilities Rights Texas and they are trying to understand and improve the experience of individuals with disabilities with their health care providers. They have been interviewing people and conducting focus groups. Their goal is take information back to the medical professions to see how they can enact change and provide a better experience and medical care for people with disabilities.

The floor was open for commissioners to ask questions. Questions were asked and answered. The floor was open to the public for questions and they were answered. One question asked was about the period for this study and the funding will end in April. The Albert Schweitzer website will be up by then. Mr. Tong and Ms. Every were thanked for their presentations

Committee Updates

Community and Transit Access (Tina Williams, Chair) Absent

No Report

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

No Report

Education (Eileen Edmonds, Chair)

Commissioner Edmonds stated that a meeting was held on the last Tuesday of the month at 5pm, here in this building, it was an open forum, and contained a lot of pressing issues. We welcome people to attend that. There are also three events occurring in the next couple of weeks. The 14th Annual, FamilytoFamily Network Conference will be held on January 26, On February 2, Mikey's place will have their yearly event at United Methodist Church and on Saturday, February 23 is Rare Disease Day. Education for children and adults.

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

Commissioner Townsend encouraged everyone to prepare an emergency to go bag and how important it is to have one. Commissioner Townsend also stated that Hurricane season is right around the corner. She told everyone that the extreme weather ready website has good information for consumers to access. Commissioner Townsend gave the date for the upcoming Extreme Weather Ready event on Saturday, June 8 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Commissioner Townsend also talked about getting the committee together to work on getting speakers for that day. She will send out dates to anyone who is interested in sitting on the committee.

Employment and Transition to Employment (Benigno Aceves, Chair)

Commissioner Aceves stated that the Hiring Event – Leading to Employment-2019 merger with Texas Workforce-Date is confirmed for Friday April 12, 9am to 1pm, Region 4 ESC- 7145 West Tidwell, Houston, Texas. There will be a Hiring event for youth, and we plan to have 30 to 50 employees.

The second level is breakout sessions where the employers will be simulations about various jobs and allow participants to take part in them. In addition, a Cyber Café will be present. A flyer is still being developed. Registration will happen soon, Thank you Angel for your assistance in connecting us to the BBVA. The Employment committee will do a presentation at the BBVA conference. It will be etiquette training for their staff in how to receive customers with disabilities. Thank you to everyone working on the committee.

Housing and Tenancy (No Chair)

No Report

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

Commissioner Eziashi stated that at this time HPD is working on increasing the budget to hire more people. He stated that there was not much to discuss for this month however on Tuesday, HPD was talking about how to reduce the murders via weapons.

Public Awareness (Mark Potts, Chair)

No Report

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

Commissioners Freeman Smith stated that to date we have approved one application and that particular application has been requested to move forward and additional applications are under review. She stated that if you know of anyone who has a passion for working with people with disabilities please send them their way. We are need of additional applications to fill positions on the commission. Encourage anyone to apply at MOPD website.

Metropolitan Multiservice Center – (Chuck French/Hannah Walker)

The biggest facility update stated Mr. French is the pool. The pool will be closing January 2 for six weeks. We are getting new commercial pumps and heaters. They are adding daytime classes, sit and fit classes and strength classes. Mr. French talked about the 10th Annual Muscle Expo that was held at the George R. Brown Convention Center and how great it was.

ADA Update - (Marshall Watson Administrative Coordinator – ADA, City of Houston, Human Resources Department, Employee/Labor Relations Division) No Update

Commissioners' Comments

Commissioner Townsend talked about the upcoming training for the Volunteer Deputy Voter Registrar training at the end on the month. Director Town stated that they could have the training here again if the commissioners wanted it.

Final Comments-Vice Chair Aceves thanked Commissioner Townsend for the work that she has done with the commission being that it was her last day on the commission.

The HCOD meeting adjourned at 5:38 pm. Motion to adjourn: Commissioner Potts. Seconded: Commissioner Eziashi

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

Please submit any corrections to Shelley Townsend.