

## **The Houston Commission on Disabilities Meeting Minutes for March 14, 2019**

The Houston Commission on Disabilities met on Thursday, March 14, 2019, at the Houston Metropolitan Multi-Service Center (MMSC), 1475 West Gray, Houston, Texas 77019.

Chair Petty called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm with there being a quorum present. Chair Petty gave opening remarks by welcoming everyone to the meeting. Next Chair Petty asked Commissioner Edmonds to proceed with roll call.

### **Roll call of the Commissioners:**

Commissioners Present: Eileen Edmonds, Emmanuel Arizona Eziashi, Michael McCulloch, Richard Petty, Mark Potts, Sara Freeman Smith, Shelley Townsend, Tina Williams

Commissioners Absent: Benigno Aceves Jr., Khafilat Adesokan, Asha Dhuka, Maria Palacios, George Powers

MOPD Staff Present: Angel Ponce-Trevizo, Amanda Boyd, 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

Chair Petty asked for a motion for the February minutes approval. Motion by Commissioner McCulloch to correct the spelling of Lex Frieden's name in the February minutes. Commissioner Edmonds motioned to correct the spelling and Commissioner Cole seconded the motion. The HCOD minutes for February 14, 2019 were then approved.

### **Public Comments**

Chair Petty explained the process of public comment. Angel Ponce introduced the following speakers.

Andie Palagi, ReelAbilities Festival Coordinator thanked the Houston Commission on Disabilities and MOPD Director Town for their support of ReelAbilities Film & Arts Festival in February. She also thanked Commissioner McCullough for sharing his comments about ways to improve the festival.

- Chair Petty thanked ReelAbilities Houston for a wonderful festival.
- MOPD Director Town thanked Andie for her work with the festival.

Charmene Barron, introduced herself as the new Executive Director for Houston Center for Independent Living, HCIL.

- She informed constituents that HCIL does have Hurricane Harvey funds available for individuals with disabilities effected by the storm.
- They are conducting a legal aid workshop on March 25 from 1:30 – 3:30 PM.
- Commissioner Cole asked for information about HCIL. Ms. Brown added that they are a community-based non-profit organization that's been around for 40 years. HCIL is the first independent living program in the state of Texas. They provide supports, services, and advocacy for individuals with disabilities.
- HCIL contact information is 713.974.4621. HCIL is located at 6201 Bonhomme Road, Suite 150 South, in Houston 77036. The website is [www.hcil.cc](http://www.hcil.cc).

Roxanne Werner, the Director of Community Relations for Harris County' Clerk's Office introduced herself.

- Ms. Werner informed attendees that all voting locations will be ADA accessible across the county.
- MOPD Director Town asked Ms. Werner what the county clerk's office is responsible for. They are responsible for marriage licenses, death certificates, and elections.

Citizen Kevin Walker shared that the Metropolitan Multiservice Center's therapeutic pool has not been operational since January 22, 2019.

- Chuck French, MMSC Administration Manger for the City of Houston Parks & Recreation Department, provided an update about the pool. The entire filtration system has been replaced but the last hurdle is the inspection that will hopefully happen soon. The initial timeline for the pool repair was 4 – 8 weeks and it's currently the 7<sup>th</sup> week of that timetable.

Angel Ponce stated that there were no more public comments.

Chair Petty thanked everyone for their public comments.

### **Speakers for today**

Chair Petty and Ex officio Town introduced the speakers for the day from MetroNEXT and MetroLift on Demand Pilot Project - Tanya McWashington, Vice President of Public Engagement and Michael Andrade, Director of Paratransit Services for MetroLift.

Ms. McWashington shared that for the past 2 years since 2017 MetroNEXT has been focused on what the future of transit will look like. The focus is on transit investments, managing congestion and planning for the future with the community's input. Listed below are the options MetroNEXT is considering:

- The aim is to create opportunities for more people to move places quickly and efficiently.
- They've drafted a plan for connectivity to provide access to both airports, extending a rail line to Hobby Airport, and a bus rapid transit project in a dedicated corridor to Bush International Airport.
- They are looking at existent light rail infrastructure and extending the current red line light rail to N. Shepherd transit lanes.
- Considering converting the HOV lane networks to two lanes, each dedicated to a way in and a way out for simultaneous use.
- Optimize current bus service.
- Ensuring all facilities and bus stops are fully accessible.
- Additional park and ride locations and transit centers.

Ms. McWashington added that they encourage everyone to be a participants in this process and are looking for public comments. The timeline to finalize and approve a new long term plan is slated for June/July. A comprehensive education plan will be rolled out to inform the public. They are anticipating including a bond referendum at the next election in November 2019.

Citizens can visit [metronext.org](http://metronext.org) to review general information, preview the draft plan information, and provide public comments.

Mr. Andrade shared information about MetroLift –

- They are listening to customer feedback.
- 6 months ago they started a pilot program focused on medical appointments and they are in the process of soliciting feedback and looking at the collected data.

- They put in place a WILL CALL option on return day service with an expectation of a pickup within 59 minutes.
- On March 1<sup>st</sup> they are providing service to about 100 WILL CALLS per day.

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

- Commissioner Eziashi expressed that he's been in contact with one specific deaf-blind individual who's had difficulty with getting picked up. The MetroLift driver will honk for him but he cannot hear. This individual also requires assistance with getting into and out of the vehicle. Mr. Andrade countered that he can receive alert messages and should be seen to the door of the drop off location. MetroLift is working with the Trapeze software provider to include specific client attributes.
- Commissioner Cole asked if any collected data shows how it's working yet. Mr. Andrade said not as of yet.
- Commissioner Freeman Smith asked shared that pick up time and end destination are 90% better with on-time performance.
- Commissioner Williams asked about the Metro and MetroLift areas within and outside of city limits. Ms. McWashington shared that the Metro service area is within city limits, while MetroLift extends those boundaries. Municipalities outside of the city can request those services if they financially contribute to the costs. The Metro system serves 7,500 people per day and over 2 million people last year.

Questions were asked by the public and answered.

AnnMarie Blacketer from The Village in The Woodlands is concerned that their clients with intellectual and developmental disabilities cannot get to and from work with no public transportation options. Ms. McWashington offered that Harris County Rides operates outside of the city zone.

Ricky Harris asked if there is an alternative technology if the app fails. Ms. McWashington shared that there is a subscriber alert system that pushes information to users if the app goes down.

Jane West with the Super Neighborhood Alliance asked how MetroNEXT will determine which bus stops to upgrade for accessibility. Ms. McWashington offered that the Universal Accessibility System will determine priority through a matrix system focused on high system use/high service areas first.

Commissioner McCullough shared that MetroNEXT is a proposal offering plans for the future, a service plan, and a capital plan. He asked if the MetroLift pilot program would include picking up prescriptions along with medical appointments. Mr. Andrade said that service is under consideration.

Commissioner Townsend's adult daughter had a recent experience with MetroLift - the MetroLift pick up was going to be more than 30 minutes late due to inclement weather. She was wondering how the cancellation of the pickup would be categorized. Mr. Andrade stated the cancellation would not be counted against the client as a no show.

Chair Petty thanked everyone for their public comments.

### **MOPD Director's Report**

- Director Town first remarks focused on ReelAbilities Houston and their record numbers in attendance for UpAbilities, ReelMusic, and many of the films sold out thanks to local TV, local

newspapers, and social media. Maria recently gave an Inclusion Talk @ Sabbath at Congregation Beth Yeshurun. They've been working on fostering inclusion for 9 years.

- Mayor Turner recently gave the keynote speech at The Monarch School Luncheon.
- The city has designated a compliance officer for elections to ensure all polling places are accessible in time for the 2019 election cycle.
- Houston was not selected for the 2020 Democratic National Convention. Milwaukee was chosen.
- Director Town reminded the public that there is still time to complete the Harvey Recovery Survey. Low income people with disabilities are prioritized. The survey will close in May. The survey can be taken online, on the phone, or in person.
- The COH has created a cold weather action plan for temperature of 32 degrees or lower to help prevent hypothermia with homeless people, anyone who's lost heat in a home, etc. Warming centers would be setup with accessibility.
- Director Town recently spoke about financial inclusion at The United Way.
- There will be a Financial Inclusion Resource Fair @ the MMSC on Saturday, March 23 from 2 – 4PM.
- Maria asked that we all take a moment of silence for Trenton Turner, a part-time employee at the MMSC who recently passed away unexpectedly.

## **MOPD Staff Report**

MOPD Staff Ms. Jess Faerman gave the monthly report for February: 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 1,485 people this month.

Mr. Angel Ponce noted that ReelAbilities Houston had an estimated 6,500 attendees and that an additional 4,200 students were served through ReelEducation. Angel shared his story pre-injury with many students through ReelEducation.

Chair Petty thanked Director Town and MOPD Staff for their reports.

## **Committee Updates**

### **Community and Transit Access (Tina Williams, Chair)**

The next Community and Transit Meeting is Tuesday, March 26<sup>th</sup> at the MMSC.

### **Disability Unity and Pride Celebration (Maria Palacios, Chair)**

Disability Unity and Pride Celebration met last Tuesday. They are planning the theme, incorporating skits, and would like volunteers. They requested help with costuming from Commissioner Edmonds and Theatre Under The Stars.

### **Education (Eileen Edmonds, Chair)**

The next Education Committee Meeting is scheduled for March 26<sup>th</sup> @ 5PM @ the MMSC.

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

Extreme Weather Ready Expo is scheduled for June 8<sup>th</sup>.

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

Mr. Ponce shared that the Leaping Into Employment Conference is scheduled for April 12. It'll include a hiring event and workshops for students and parents.

**Housing and Tenancy (No Chair)**

No Report

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

There have been less problems with HPD. A recent issue involved a deaf individual arrested without an interpreter.

**Public Awareness (Mark Potts, Chair)**

No Report

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

Four applications look promising. One applicant is awaiting for approval by Mayor Turner.

**Metropolitan Multiservice Center – (Chuck French/Hannah Walker)**

Mr. French reported that thanks to Councilwoman Cohen's office the MMSC was awarded \$36,000 to put toward fitness equipment and computer class upgrades and teacher stipends. Mr. French also noted the passing of part-time employee Trenton Turner and power soccer player Steven Schulze.

**ADA Update - (Marshall Watson Administrative Coordinator – ADA, City of Houston, Human Resources Department, Employee/Labor Relations Division)**

No Update

**Commissioners' Comments**

The HCOD meeting adjourned at 5:56 pm. Motion to adjourn: Commissioner Cole. Seconded: Commissioner Freeman Smith.

Minutes submitted by Eileen Edmonds ([eileen@tuts.com](mailto:eileen@tuts.com), 281.797.3796).

Please submit any corrections to Eileen Edmonds.