

The Houston Commission on Disabilities Meeting Minutes for June 9, 2016

The Houston Commission on Disabilities met on Thursday, June 9, 2016, at the Houston Metropolitan Multi-Service Center (MMSC), 1475 West Gray, Houston, Texas 77019.

Chairman, Cornelius Booker, opened the meeting at 4:01 PM.

Commissioners Present: Tony Jones, Louis Maher, Cornelius Booker, Tina Williams, Roland Bienvenu, Eddie Jessie, Shelley Townsend, Karen Cunningham, and Elizabeth (Beth) Delledera.

Commissioners Absent: Maria Palacios, Brandon Bowie, Benigno Aceves, Charles LaDay, Monte Osburn, Frankie Sims, and Lesa Jackson Lazard.

Ex Officio Present: Jay Stiteley, Division Manager, MOPD

Ex Officio Present: Matt Russell, ADA COORDINATOR

Legal Present: Tiffany Evans

Minutes

The HCOD minutes for May 12, 2016, were approved without alterations.

Public Comments

Mr. Charles French (Administration Manager for the Adaptive Sports and Recreation division of the Houston Parks and Recreation Department) thanked the HCOD for being willing to move its meeting into activity room two so that the MMSC can host a summer basketball camp where both fully-abled and disabled kids could play games together.

Ms. Candi Sexton-Ruiz continued Ms. Angela Trahan (HCOD meeting May 12, 2016) request for HCOD help in developing a business plan to create a Houston center for the deaf. Ms. Sexton-Ruiz's organization wants to apply for 501(c)3 non-profit status.

Commissioner Delledera, suggested that Ms. Sexton-Ruiz should develop a plan that could be completed in phases. Commissioner Delledera said that she would help develop such a plan.

Ms. Sexton-Ruiz wants an apartment complex, specifically for the deaf, so that the deaf will be able to communicate with their neighbors.

Commissioner Jones suggested that Ms. Sexton-Ruiz contact city council person, Brenda Stardig, for help.

Ms. Sexton-Ruiz said that often individuals within the deaf community resist change.

Commissioner Jones asked that the deaf community not use the "Public Comments" of HCOD meetings to discuss this issue due to a lack of time. Commissioner Jones suggested that Ms. Sexton-Ruiz get a spot on the regular HCOD agenda.

Mr. Matthew Dickens, of the "Communication Access Ability Group" (CAAG) (<http://caag4.com/>) suggested that Ms. Sexton-Ruiz Contact CAAG for help. CAAG provides sign language interpreters for the deaf community.

Ms. Sexton-Ruiz said that she did not have fire alarms that had lighted alerts in her home. Commissioner Williams said that she could apply for such alarms through the MOPD.

Ms. Sexton-Ruiz will send Mr. Stiteley the handout that Ms. Sexton-Ruiz Gave at the HCOD meeting.

Presentation

Mr. Joe Bontke, Ombudsman, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) spoke on the Topic of "Implementation of the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA), recently adjudicated cases and the resulting implications for persons with disabilities".

The EEOC enforces laws in five areas: The Equal Pay Act, The Civil Rights Act, The Age Discrimination Act, The Americans with Disabilities Amended Act, and the Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act.

Only about 1% of the complaints are adjudicated. Most people are willing to stop the discrimination once shown how to do this.

Mr. Bontke could not say how many cases were filed because these cases are confidential.

Commissioner Maher asked if this act covers the graphical user interfaces (GUIs) used in the Linux operating system. Linux is used in mathematically-intensive situations. Accessibility to GUIs running on remote Linux computers does not exist. Mr. Bontke said that in reality only some discrimination is covered.

Commissioner Cunningham said that she had participated in several education discrimination situations. She said that Texas ranks fiftieth, among the states, in spending on special education.

Mr. Russell asked: "What constitutes a government entity?". Mr. Bontke said any entity providing services, at tax-payer expense, is a government entity.

Commissioner Jones asked if paying sub-minimum wages was discrimination. Mr. Bontke said that it was legal to pay sub-minimum wages for the disabled. Mr. Bontke thought this would not change soon.

Commissioner Booker asked why only 1% of EEOC issues were litigated. Mr. Bontke said that the EEOC looked for cases that would effect a large number of people.

Mr. Dickens asked how the deaf could make EEOC complaints at EEOC offices. Mr. Bontke said that EEOC offices would arrange for sign language interpreters if given advanced notice.

Committee Updates

Policy Evaluation and Improvement – Louis Maher, Chair

No updates.

Emergency Preparedness – Debra Nowinski, Chair

Commissioner Bienvenu said the hurricane workshop was well attended.

Commissioner Townsend said that they had run out of handouts before noon. She said that the Brailled inserts should not have been in the general handout packet because Braille is expensive to produce, and the sighted recipients would throw away the Braille inserts.

Commissioner Townsend said that new commissioners need to be trained on what to say to introduce the HCOD to non-HCOD people.

Employment – Benigno Aceves, Chair

Commissioner Booker said the Employment Committee meets on the first Friday of each month at noon to 1:30 PM at the MMSC. This is the meeting time picked by the committee members.

Commissioner Booker said that the committee will seek to increase the number of disabled individuals working in the City of Houston's summer jobs program by having an employment workshop, for disabled young people, on January 21, 2017, at the MMSC. The committee will publish a list of job opportunities in this program. The committee will work with the Marketing committee to promote this program. The committee may also have a workshop for parents to get their disabled children into this program. There might be a separate workshop for deaf young people.

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

This committee met on May 24, 2016, at the MMSC. In this meeting, Ms. Rosario Vazquez spoke on her bad experiences with United Airlines concerning her grandson who is a wheelchair user. She asked for HCOD help with these issues. She wishes to start a national campaign to have corridors, elevators, and aircraft aisles increased to fit all models of wheelchairs. She also wishes to have aircraft modified so that wheelchair users can use their own wheelchairs in the aircraft so that disabled individuals do not have to be moved from a wheelchair to an aircraft seat. She said that since using one's own wheelchair is a standard part of ground transportation, that it should be possible to modify aircraft to have this option.

Commissioner Williams said that she is arranging a meeting with Todd Curry, a representative of the City of Houston Airport Authority, on airline accessibility issues. She will send the meeting information to the HCOD.

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

No updates.

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

HARP recommended the following changes for the HCOD:

Choosing board candidates for July 26, 2016 exit of even numbered board members.

Position 2: Lesa Jackson Lazard moved up from Alternate Position 2.

The following are proposed new commissioners.

Position 4: Toby Cole,
Position 6: Michael McCulloch,
Position 8: Emanuel Eziashi,
Position 10: Asha Dhuka, and
Alternate 2: Richard Petty.

Commissioner Jones moved to accept these recommendations. Commissioner Maher seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Police Response to Persons with Disabilities – Brandon Bowie, Chair

No updates.

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

Commissioner Cunningham announced the following events:

July 16, 2016 The Mom Expo at the Woodlands Marriott Waterway 10am-4pm, and
The Abilities Expo Aug 5-7, 2016, free event, at the NRG Stadium.

City of Houston Updates

Metropolitan MSC Update – Chuck French

No updates.

ADA Update - Matt Russell, COH ADA Coordinator

Mr. Russell said that Greyhound had settled a disability discrimination case. People who have suffered damages can file a compensation form on ada.gov.

Commissioner Cunningham said that the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) handles web accessibility and education complaints. The Dallas Texas OCR office number is 214-661-9600. Their web site is ed.gov.

MOPD Update – Jay Stiteley, Division Manager

Mr. Stiteley discussed the Lex Frieden Employment Awards Ceremony to be held on October 27, 2016. These awards acknowledge outstanding employers who have focused on hiring and inclusion practices in the workplace for persons with disabilities.

Mr. Stiteley and Commissioner Cunningham are preparing an HCOD presents at the Ability Expo.

The MOPD is working with FIMA for disabled people who suffered losses in the recent floods.

Mr. Stiteley re-emphasized the need for the disabled to have disaster plans. He says that electricity dependent individuals need to leave the area of a disaster.

Commissioner Jones said that only the disabled in zip-codes in immediate danger will be assisted to evacuate.

Mr. Stiteley said that a cab-based plan, to evacuate the disabled, in case of hurricanes, from zip-codes not in immediate danger, is being developed. This plan would move these individuals to evacuation hubs where they can be transported out of the threatened city.

Commissioners' Comments

Mr. Stiteley made the following announcement.

Subject: Texas Assistive Technology Network (TAN) Statewide Conference

The TATN Conference will be held on June 14th and 15th at Region 4 Education Service Center in Houston. The conference focuses on assistive technology for school-age children. On June 14th, national speakers will present half-day

sessions. On June 15th, vendors, national, statewide and regional presenters will present 60 and 90-minute sessions throughout the day. For more information and registration, please see (https://www.escweb.net/tx_esc_04/catalog/session.aspx?&session_id=972909).

The conference exhibit is open to the public at no cost. The exhibit hours are 8:00 to 4:30 on both June 14th and 15th. Forty-four companies will be showing their products. There is no need to register for the conference exhibit. Parents are welcomed to bring their child or children to the exhibit as long as the youngsters are being supervised. Drinks and snack will be available for everyone.

The conference Web site is at www.texasatconference.net.

For more details, contact:

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Commissioner Booker said that the HCOD will need a new chair when Commissioner Booker's term expires on July 26, 2016. Commissioner Jessie will act as an interim chair until a new individual is appointed.

Commissioner Jones asked if there were any legal restrictions that would keep new commission members from becoming HCOD chair. Ms. Evans said she was unaware of any such restrictions. She would research the issue and send the HCOD the answer to this question.

The HCOD meeting adjourned at 6 PM.

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

Please submit any corrections to Louis Maher.