

The Houston Commission on Disabilities Meeting Minutes for March 10, 2016

The Houston Commission on Disabilities met on Thursday, March 10, 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: Louis Maher, Brandon Bowie, Benigno Aceves, Cornelius Booker, Tina Williams, Roland Bienvenu, Eddie Jessie, Shelley Townsend, Frankie Sims, Lesa Jackson Lazard, and Karen Cunningham.

Commissioners Absent: Tony Jones, Maria Palacios, Charles LaDay, Monte Osburn, and Elizabeth (Beth) Delledera.

Ex Officio Present: Jay Stiteley, Division Manager, MOPD

Ex Officio Absent: Matt Russell, ADA COORDINATOR

Legal Present: Tiffany Evans

Minutes

The HCOD minutes for February 11, 2016, were approved without alterations.

Presentation

Ms. Katrina Johnson, with Horizon Outreach (www.horizonoutreach.org), spoke on the services that her organization offers.

Horizon Outreach's mission is to give Everyone a New Start. They provide programs that decrease the effects of challenging life situations on the family. Their programs provide key resources that: increase self-sufficiency, employability in career positions, workforce development/certifications, access to permanent affordable housing and overall health and wellness of the family. There is no cost to the families. Their facilities are ADA compliant.

Public Comments

Ms. Lauren Cochran, from the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), gave the following information.

The MTA is pursuing a Google grant and federal grant for a pilot project to aid in developing an accessible bus system. The idea is to place low-energy Bluetooth beacons on bus stops and inside transit centers. The beacons would be read with smart phones, and would give information about each specific bus stop. The beacons will be compatible with Google and iOS standards.

The batteries in Bluetooth beacons last 2 to 4 years.

The beacons have an approximate 70-meter range.

Each beacon has a unique identifier; therefore, each beacon can give precise information about each beacon's position.

The beacon system can distinguish two poles ten feet apart.

The MTA will write the smart-phone beacon-reading Android application first because it is simpler. If they get both grants, then they will also write a beacon-reading iOS application.

The MTA is considering having the beacon-reading application tell you as you approach your destination bus stop.

The MTA has 9500 bus stops. The pilot study would provide about 200 beacons.

Ms. Cochran said that the MTA is also upgrading the wheelchair accessibility of some bus stops.

The MTA is reaching out to disability groups for their input for bus stop accessibility.

Mr. Michael Andrade, Director, Paratransit Services, (MetroLift) (<http://www.ridemetro.org>) spoke on the new MetroLift fare structure.

Based on a study from the Texas A and M Transportation Institute (TTI) Metro designed the "MetroLift Moving Forward" project.

One of the features of this effort is to continue the MetroLift Premium area which is beyond the fixed-route service area. MetroLift rides to, from, and within the Premium area costs two MetroLift tickets. The MetroLift monthly passes do not count for these trips. There is a fare calculator on the Metro website.

The MTA hoped that the two-ticket Premium area fare would provide the MTA with enough funds so that they would not have to shrink the Premium service area.

Passengers may use old MetroLift tickets.

Metro has established the Freedom Pass which enables disabled individuals to ride fixed-route buses and trains for free.

Metro will evaluate this fare structure a year from now.

Commissioner Williams asked for a monthly Premium service area pass.

Mr. Stiteley made the following requests:

1. The reservationist should tell the MetroLift client the cost of the trip.
2. People should get a medical exception for their medical treatment appointments.
3. The MTA should consider that people on fixed-incomes have moved further out from the city so that their funds could go further. He mentioned that many people have to live on \$733 a month.
4. When a person's travel is only in the Premium area, could their travel only cost one ticket?
5. The MTA should reconsider their fare structure soon, at least as it pertains to people who have a medical necessity, such as dialysis, in the premium area, not a year from now.

Mr. Emanuel Eziash echoed Mr. Stiteley's requests for fare reductions.

Committee Updates

Policy Evaluation and Improvement – Louis Maher, Chair

No updates.

Emergency Preparedness – Debra Nowinski, Chair

Commissioner Booker will start scheduling people for the HCOD table for the May 21, 2016 Hurricane workshop.

Employment – Benigno Aceve, Chair

No updates.

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

Commissioner Williams is circulating a questionnaire for this committee to determine the best time for a meeting. She would like the first meeting to be a face-to-face meeting. The remaining meetings can be by phone.

The Houston Parks and Recreation speaker will come to the April HCOD meeting to discuss the city's Parks and Recreation plans.

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

Commissioner Lazard announced a committee meeting for March 26, 2016, at 10:30 AM, at the MMSC. Once it was pointed out that this was Easter Weekend, Commissioner Lazard said she would reschedule the meeting.

Mayor's Disability Advocate of the Year Award (MDAYA) – Tony Jones, Chair

MDAYA forms will be released on March 11, 2016. This year, there will be an emphasis on people who volunteer to help the disabled. People who help the disabled as part of their jobs will not be considered.

Marketing – Frankie Sims, Chair

This committee is waiting to receive the Houston's social media policy before they can post on Facebook. Once the guidelines are in place, the committee need get permission from only one city official for each post.

HARP (Houston Application Review Panel) – Eddie Jessie, Chair

Mr. Stiteley says that five people have contacted him about applying to the HCOD for membership. No one has yet submitted an application.

There will be four vacancies on the HCOD in August 2016 due to term limitations.

Police Response to Persons with Disabilities – Charles LaDay, Chair

No updates.

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

Commissioner Cunningham announced the following special education events.

Mar 23, 2016, ADHD Roundtable
Sam Houston State University Center
The Woodlands
5-7pm

Student supports and resources for parents, students, teachers and community
3380 College Park Dr, 4th Floor Banquet

Apr 2, 2016, Autism Awareness Walk, Pet JH, The Woodlands

Apr 16, 2016, 12-4 pm George Bush Park, Katy TX - weather permitting
Picnic in the Park, The Harris Center

Apr 16, 2016, 9 am - 1pm hosted by Pearland/Alvin ISD....held at Manville HS, Autism Conf

Commissioner Cunningham said that next week was spring break for all the school districts in this area.

Metropolitan MSC Update – Chuck French

MSCC facilities manager Hannah Walker summarized the MMSC repair schedule. It is hoped that all construction will be completed by July 1, 2016.

Ms. Walker summarized the spring tournaments for MMSC related teams.

ADA Update - Matt Russell, COH ADA Coordinator

No updates.

MOPD Update – Jay Stiteley, Division Manager

MR. Stiteley reported on the following items:

1. On March 9, 2016, the MOPD sponsored a workshop, at the MMSC, entitled "From Disability to Productivity" on the Ticket to Work program. 25 people attended this workshop.
2. The South Texas College of Law had 6 people come to their recent event. Their next event will be on March 31, 2016 at the MMSC.

Commissioners' Comments

Commissioner Bowie asked when the rest of the HCOD training material would be provided to the new HCOD members. Mr. Stiteley said the documentation should be available next Wednesday.

Commissioner Aceves motioned that the HCOD partner with the DARS, the MOPD, and the TWC, to sponsor the White Cane Safety Day (WCSD) event which will be held in October 2016. Commissioner Aceves asked that the HCOD help by providing volunteers for the event, and by marketing the event to the HCOD's constituencies. The motion passed.

Commissioner Aceves said that the WCSD event would not be giving the Business of the Year award this year.

Commissioners Booker and Townsend thanked the HCOD commissioners for attending the ReelAbilities film festival.

Mr. Stiteley said that Mrs. Lamb (of the MOPD) would be on maternity leave from March 18, 2016 until June 6, 2016.

The HCOD meeting adjourned at 5:27 PM.

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

Please submit any corrections to Louis Maher.