

The Houston Commission on Disabilities Meeting Minutes for April 11, 2019

The Houston Commission on Disabilities met on Thursday, April 11, 2019, at the Houston Metropolitan Multi-Service Center (MMSC), 1475 West Gray, Houston, Texas 77019.

Acting Chair Eileen Edmonds called the meeting to order at 4:05 pm with there being a quorum present. Acting Chair Edmonds gave opening remarks by welcoming everyone to the meeting. Next Acting Chair Edmonds asked Commissioner Townsend to proceed with roll call.

Roll call of the Commissioners:

Commissioners Present: Toby Cole, Eileen Edmonds, Emmanuel Arizona Eziashi, Michael McCulloch, George Powers, Shelley Townsend, Tina Williams

Commissioners Absent: Benigno Aceves Jr., Khafilat Adesokan, Asha Dhuka, Maria Palacios, Richard Petty, Mark Potts, Sara Freeman Smith

Ex-Officio-Maria Town, Director, MOPD, Angel Ponce, Amanda Boyd, Annie Bacon, Alex Chou and Jess Faerman, MOPD Staff

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

Legal Present: Tiffany Evans

Acting Chair Edmonds asked for a motion for the March 14 minutes approval. Motion by Commissioner Cole to approve the minutes and seconded by Commissioner McCullouch. The HCOD minutes for March 14, 2019 were then approved.

Public Comments

Acting Chair Edmonds explained the process of public comment. Angel Ponce, MOPD staff introduced the following speakers.

Ms. Andrea Lynn gave public comment about a Metro Lift driver that left her multiply impaired son on the bus while leaving to go and get something to eat. Ms. Lynn complained to the Metro office with ho results. She is afraid that their negligence will one day harm an innocent citizen. She brought her frustrations to the commission for them to hear.

The next public comment was from Judy Blake. Ms. Blake commented about the recent deaths of two citizens killed on Shepherd and 10th street. Ms. Alicia Adams and Mr. Jesse Perez. Ms. Adams was in the car with her two kids and saw Mr. Perez who was in a wheelchair trying to get across the street and she stopped and got out of her car to help him. The driver killed them both.

The next public comment was from Johnny Vo. Mr. Vo was representing the US Census Bureau. He stated that the census would begin on April 1, 2020. Mr. Vo encouraged everyone to participate so that Texas can receive federal funding. They will be hiring 30,000 people to be census takers. Interested parties can apply at census.gov. A new change in registering for the census is now people can use the internet also to answer questions as opposed to a post card. Questions were asked by the commissioners about access to the census and were answered.

Angel Ponce stated that there were no more public comments.

Acting Chair Edmonds thanked everyone for his or her public comments.

Speakers for today

Acting Chair Edmonds introduced the speaker for the day from Metro Mr. Robert Trevino, Metro Executive Vice President, Planning, Engineering and Construction. Mr. Trevino said that his presentation was about some of the corrective things that the agency was doing to improve the customer experience. Mr. Trevino stated that Metro has taken some proactive steps toward universal accessibility. Mr. Trevino spoke about Metro's definition of Universal Accessibility. He stated that their key principles are Equitability, Mobility, Flexibility, Hazards, Simplicity, Suitability, Perceptibility and Usability. He stated that anyone who contracts with Metro has to know the key principles and to know about Universal Accessibility. Mr. Trevino talked about the vision of the board, which will focus on Equity, Accessibility, Safety and Stewardship. The Partners in this process is Metro City of Houston and Harris County.

Many questions were asked by commissioners to Mr. Trevino and they were answered and some Commissioners made additional comments. Questions were also asked by the public and were answered.

Acting Chair Edmonds thanked Mr. Trevino for his presentation and thanked everyone for his or her public comments. She stated that it was a good dialogue for everyone to contribute to and that's how we will have a better outcome for everybody. Next Acting Chair Edmonds asked Director Town for her report.

MOPD Director's Report

Director Maria Town began her report about the Mayor's City's Safer Streets campaign in response to the death of Jesse Perez and Alicia Adams previously mentioned in the public comments. Two people hit and killed attempting to cross the street at an accessible intersection. She talked about working with MOPD Disability Advocates and Transit Advocates to identify what changes need to occur to increase pedestrian safety. Mayor Turner charged Director Town to develop a full strategy for the city of Houston by Tuesday and then have it ready for a press conference this afternoon. A new Service Request for 311 has been requested to report safety and accessibility concerns at sidewalks and intersections. The City will get a better view of what the needs are for the city with this new app. The 311 App response person will have a script that they will use for callers who call 311. This position will be a safe street coordinator whose responsibility is to address the broader safety within the city. The sidewalk can often be the either responsibility of the city, Metro or County. Sometimes the information gets lost in the data as to whose responsibility it is to get the sidewalks fixed. The other part of the campaign is Public Awareness and Engagement. Changing driving culture and behavior is a focus. There is a high need to reduce distraction driving. The mayor wants city council member to walk with members of the disability community who walk and roll to get a better sense of what it takes to navigate through the city sidewalks. They are also working on a Sidewalk ordinance to remove obstacles in the sidewalk and make access improvement. Finally, the mayor has directed the Houston Police department to devote greater resources to enforce existing laws. Director Town stated that we have a wonderful pedestrian ordinance and drivers need to know that they are breaking the law and the cost of it.

MOPD Staff Report

MOPD Staff Mr. Angel Ponce gave the monthly report for March: MOPD assisted the disability community with calls about; ADA, adaptive sports, apartment assistance, ASL interpreters, job, city and public information for other departments, drain, disability education, employment, emergency,

home modifications, immigration, home repairs, sidewalks request for parking enforcement, outreach, rental assistance, social security, southwest college of law, systems senate and housing issues, transportation questions, utility exits, official, official and other blind services. There were 757 people assisted this month.

Mr. Angel Ponce spoke about the community outreaches that they participated in this month. Mr. Ponce also announced about the Leaping into employment event on tomorrow at Region 4 and thanked those commissioners who will be attending to sit at the tables and represent MOPD and HCOD.

Acting Chair Edmonds thanked Director Town and MOPD Staff Ponce for their reports.

Committee Updates

Community and Transit Access (Tina Williams, Chair)

The Community and Transit Access Symposium will be on Monday, May 20 from 1pm to 4pm at the MMSC. Registration for this event will be up in a few days. Commissioner Williams asked that any commissioners who could help would be great.

Disability Unity and Pride Celebration (Maria Palacios, Chair)

Commissioner McCulloch – no report

Education (Eileen Edmonds, Chair)

Commissioner Edmonds - no report.

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

Commissioner Townsend - no report.

Employment and Transition to Employment (Benigno Aceves, Chair-absent)

Mr. Ponce previously shared that the Leaping into Employment Conference will be on tomorrow.

Housing and Tenancy (No Chair)

No Report

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

Commissioner Eziashi reported about a VIP meeting and they were talking about how to stop people from stealing and how to get cars from being stolen. He will report more next time.

Public Awareness (Mark Potts, Chair-absent)

No Report

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

Chair Cole stated that they had one recommendation outstanding nor for an additional commissioner. Four applications are in the process. One applicant is awaiting for approval. We encourage people to continue to apply for the commission.

Metropolitan Multiservice Center – (Chuck French/Hannah Walker)

Ms. Walker announced about all of the wins that the sports teams representing the MMSC had accomplished. They have been travelling a lot and participating in tournaments with great success. She talked about a fishing camp coming up in Galveston and anyone was interested in participating that she would be at the desk for registration. She also shared with us about events happening at MMSC. She also stated that the pool was open again.

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

No Report

Commissioners' Comments

Commissioner Townsend stated that she had some Abilities Expo flyers for anyone who wanted them.

Director Town congratulated MOPD staff Angel Ponce for becoming a US citizen.

The HCOD meeting adjourned at 5:50 pm. Motion to adjourn: Commissioner Cole. Seconded: Commissioner Eziashi.

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

Please submit any corrections to Shelley Townsend.