

The Houston Commission on Disabilities Meeting Minutes for June 13, 2019

The Houston Commission on Disabilities met on Thursday, July 11, 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 Potts to proceed with roll call.

Roll call of the Commissioners:

Present:

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Absent:

- Benigno Aceves Jr.
- Khafilat Adesokan
- Toby Cole
- Asha Dhuka
- Eileen Edmonds
- Emmanuel Arizona Eziashi
- Michael McCulloch
- Maria Palacios
- Richard Petty
- Mark Potts
- George Powers
- Sara Freeman Smith
- Shelley Townsend
- Tina Williams

MOPD Staff:

Present:

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Absent:

- Annie Bacon
- Amanda Boyd
- Alex Chou
- Evan Hagan
- Jess Faerman
- Angel Ponce-Treviz
- Jackie Hoyos Ponce

Ex-Officio

Present:

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Absent:

- Maria Town, Director, MOPD
- Marshall Watson, Administrator Coordinator – ADA, City of Houston, Human Resources Department, Employee/Labor Relations Division

Legal

Present:

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Absent:

- Angelie Thomas

Chair Petty asked for a motion for the June minutes approval. Motion by Commissioner Shelley Townsend and seconded by Commissioner Eileen Edmonds. The HCOD minutes for June 13, 2019 were approved.

Public Comments (General)

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

Jose Anita inquired about autonomous vehicles, Metro and the use of GPS systems. Each identifies disparate locations to pick up and drop off passengers. Mr. Anita asked if the Commission would force standardization of the various systems. Commissioner Williams recommended that Mr. Anita share the issues with customer service.

Michelle Glasper with Dispatch Health shared that Dispatch Health provides urgent care services in the home. The service is considered an urgent care visit and is covered by Medicaid and Medicare. Request care at (713) 422-2920.

Susan West shared concerns about the closing of the Metro Service Center pool and the current pool hours. City of Houston outdoor pools have maintained their hours but many do not have working lifts. Susan feels the City of Houston and Parks Department has not done right by the users.

Gail Poland echoed concerns the pool hours in the evening and the demands on the understaffed life guards.

Jean Ross echoed concerns about the lack of communication regarding the pool hours.

Linda Murray echoed concerns about the pool hours. Suggested that the city apply for grants in advance of the changes to hours. Also, suggested that the lifeguards be granted raises.

James Walker echoed concerns about the pool hours and asked the commission for action.

Director Town stated that the city is aware of the issues related to the pool and Mayor Turner's chief of staff indicated that solutions are forthcoming.

Bailey Lords echoed concerns about maintenance and hours at the pool.

George Polk echoed concerns about pool hours.

Eric Reyes is a physical therapist who works for the Harris County Health Department and shared that the Department needs and appreciates having access to the pool.

Linda Copenhaver echoes concerns about the pool and stated that there are no alternatives in the city to the Multi Service Center pool. She asked who checks to see that area pools are ADA compliant.

Angel Ponce stated that there were no more public comments.

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

Questions were asked by the public and answered.

Chair Petty thanked everyone for their public comments.

Public Comments (Sidewalk and Intersection Safety)

Chair Petty explained the purpose of the task force and expectations for the commission, Mayor Turner, City Council and other key officials. Chair Petty stated that public commentary is of the utmost importance. Director Town explained the process of public comment. Angel Ponce introduced the following speakers.

James Walker stated that there is a power pole in the middle of the sidewalk between Julius Lane and Charleston Street and it is difficult to navigate. In addition, Mr. Walker share that at Charleston Street and Scott Street a new house was built and the sidewalk that was installed is not on the same level as the existing sidewalks.

Shirley Chaison with the Houston Center for Independent Living shared that at Hiram Clark and Almeda Genoa the sidewalks are in poor shape. In addition, because of the crime in the area, handicapped feel like targets. Many times, Shirley uses the bike lane rather than sidewalks. Lastly, the bricks used for beautification are bumpy and uncomfortable.

Ann Marie Blackletter from the Village in Kingwood encouraged a PSA announcement about the sidewalks for those that cannot attend the meetings to ensure better feedback. The announcement could be similar to the Mayor Turner's "See one, Fill one" campaign.

Alex Chou, MOPD intern, volunteered to have a meeting of his age group peers to discuss the sidewalk.

Jose Anita stated that restaurants have been built without sidewalks in the Heights.

Gary Lynn stated that laws related to sidewalks and intersections are already in place and need to be enforced. Drivers, cyclist and pedestrians do not respect these laws.

Bailey Lords has issues with new buildings that do not have sidewalks and install large boulders in their place.

Chair Petty thanked everyone for their public comments.

MOPD Director's Report

Chair Petty thanked Director Town for her service the past two years.

Director Town thanked Hilda Montamayor who recently passed away. She was very supportive of MOPD and worked on ADA compliance at Metro for over 28 years. A moment of silence was observed.

In June:

- MOPD and HCOD participated in the Extreme Weather Expo and Evacuation hub exercise
- An additional emergency exercise was created to vet ADA compliant purchasing and service protocols
- Led a presentation with Pacific Preparation committee
- A Hurricane Harvey homeowner assistance survey was dispersed. The program assist or reimburse homeowners has started to ramp up. To check status call (832) 393-0550 or www.recoveryportal.houston.tx.gov

- MOPD is part of the city's resiliency strategy
- Intersection task force has been in effect.
- Shepard street intersection has a new public right of way
- Houston Health Department received training related to accessibility.
- 45 participants came to the guide dog symposium.
- Wheel chair accessibility for cabs was addressed to ensure accessible vehicles are available.
- TAMU is conducting a survey about autonomous vehicles
- Aira started at Houston First
- National Federation of the Blind will be hosting their annual meeting in Houston next year.
- Jacki Hoyos Ponce has been hired as a summer intern
- The MOPD director position has been posted on the City of Houston website. A transition plan is in place and Mayor Turner would like to fill the position as soon as possible.

Director Town gave a heartfelt speech thanking the people of the commission and MOPD staff for making her term so special.

MOPD Staff Report

Alex Chou updated the committee that Disability Unity and Pride Celebration Day will be held on September 28th.

Angel Ponce updated the committee that there were 747 total service requests completed in June.

MOPD participated in a Suicide Prevention meeting at the United Way.

On August 8 an interagency showcase will be held at the United Way on Waugh.

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

Committee Updates

Community and Transit Access (Tina Williams, Chair)

Service Animal Symposium was held. Panel discussions about 5 areas: transportation, business areas, jobs and the rights and responsibilities for the handler and various businesses.

Disability Unity and Pride Celebration (Maria Palacios, Chair)

No update.

Education (Eileen Edmonds, Chair)

Committee is recruiting new members. Next meeting to take place in early August.

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

Committee provided documentation to attendees about tropical storm and hurricane preparedness. Stated OEM website has a preparedness guide that is easily downloaded.

Employment and Transition to Employment (Benigno Aceves, Chair)

No update.

Housing and Tenancy (No Chair)

No update.

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

No update.

Public Awareness (Mark Potts, Chair)

No update.

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

Four potential commissioners awaiting approval from the Mayor's office. Actively encouraging people to apply.

Metropolitan Multiservice Center – (Chuck French/Hannah Walker)

- Summer league has been very successful with new participants included.
- MMC will participate in the Abilities Expo.
- The pool hours were cut down by seven hours because the life guards are understaffed.
- There is a hold on safety pool orientation.
- Water aerobics are on hold.
- Director Town explained the hiring freeze is the result of City of Houston budget shortfalls

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

Recently completed an ADA presentation to hiring managers at the City of Houston. Key points:

- The hiring process must be accessible
- Accommodations must be made for all
- The decision to share a disability during a hiring event is up to the person being interviewed

Commissioners' Comments

The HCOD meeting adjourned at 5:58 pm.

Motion to adjourn: Commissioner Toby Cole.

Seconded: Commissioner Tina Williams.

Minutes submitted by Mark Potts (potts60@hotmail.com, (713) 444-1222).

Please submit any corrections to Mark Potts.