

Suffolk County Disabilities Advisory Board

June 29, 2011 Meeting Minutes

Approved

A meeting of the Suffolk County Disabilities Advisory Board was held on June 29, 2011 in the Conference Room of Building 158, North County Complex, Hauppauge at 2:10 pm, Chairperson Beverly Cody presided.

PRESENT:

GROUP A

Frank Krotschinsky, Esq.	Representing County Executive Steve Levy
Jack Caffey	Representing Presiding Officer William Lindsay
Terry Maccarrone	S.C. Department of Parks
Barbara Falkman	S.C. Dept. of Health Services/Div. of Services Children with Special Needs
Linda O'Donohoe	S. C. Department of Social Services
James Kokindo	Representing S. C. Human Rights Commission
Garry Lenberger	SCDPW Transportation Division, Interim Director
Carolyn Bossert/Donna Passin	S.C. Department of Labor

GROUP B

Beverly Cody	Member Secretary & Acting Chair
Debbie Epple	Member, S.C. Department of Civil Service/Public Info.
Valerie Lewis	Member

GROUP C

GROUP D

Roy Probeyahn	Member
Clifford Hymowitz	Member

GUESTS: Bob Shinnick, DPW-Transportation Division, Garrett Hulett/SILO, Mike Stoltz/Clubhouse of Suffolk, Sharon Garcia, Doug & Erin King, Robin Mayr

STAFF: Gina Grassi, Neighborhood Aide, Suffolk County Office of Handicapped Services

EXCUSED: Kleo King, Esq., Leg. Kate Browning/Timothy Rothang, Tedd Godek/Lew Johnson, Teresa Strum, Glenn Campbell, Esq., Jodi Nicastro/Rep. Ingo Gloeckner, Mitch Shapiro

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF May 18 2011: Beverly asked if there were any changes to be made to the minutes as distributed. Roy said he wasn't able to review minutes and asked if the minutes could be approved at the next scheduled meeting in August and Beverly said that would be fine.

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Beverly asked that we go straight to Transportation on the Agenda because we are pressed for time.

Garry SCDPW Transportation from SCDOT/Division & Bob Shinnick said they are here today to discuss a plan of action for denials on SCAT paratransit. Presently the denial rate is unacceptable to their department and to the FTA which have been conducting a triennial review in their office for the last few months. They are looking to implement a plan of action to get the denial rates down and they would like to get suggestions from the board. This plan of action needs to be submitted to the Feds sometime in August of this year. They would like to put a penalty policy or penalty clause in place for the habitual no shows within the system and they would like to modify the reservation period by cutting down from a 7 day ahead reservation to a 3 day ahead reservation. Bob said the main focus is to eliminate the situation where people call into SCAT and are denied a trip. If they aren't able to offer the person a ride within a certain time frame the person is denied the trip. Numbers have been creeping up year after year due to ridership demand. Last year they had 567,000 SCAT trip requests 547,000 were granted and 125,000 of those trips were cancelled by the riders. They want to do an education campaign as well by writing letters asking riders to use the trips they are booking because 1 in 4 trips are being cancelled and it's blocking out access to others. Out of those 125,000 trip cancellations there are people who are not telling them they no longer need the trips or they tell them too late. ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) regulations allows SCDOT to talk to those people and tell them they are not allowed to do this and put in place a policy to penalize individuals that abuse this situation.

Cliff said he is on the National Steering Committee, Project Action, a federal organization that works with the FTA regarding paratransit and accessible transportation. Cliff is also a member of an organization called Community Transportation Association of America, which meets annually with all providers and which makes Cliff very familiar with plenty of different bus systems. Cliff also works for the Town of Brookhaven and he gets calls all the time from people who just don't know how to use SCAT and he tries to educate them on how to use it.

Cliff said he tried to address the problem of the no-shows and cancellations many times in the past with the Director of SCDOT/Transportation and the Director of OHS and feels people shouldn't be penalized. Cliff feels transportation should be looking into the reason why this is happening first and feels that penalizing a passenger should be the last step.

Cliff gave an example of a no-show; a SCAT driver drops off a passenger in the back of a building for an appointment but the driver who comes to pick them later looks for them in the front of the building. No person is there, so the bus driver leaves and the person is marked as a no-show. Cliff also feels if the reservation period is moved to a 3 day period, reservationist wouldn't be able to handle the capacity.

Cliff said we are one of the only systems which basis reservations on pick-up time instead of destination time. By scheduling the appointments by destination time will eliminate multiple buses coming from the same general area going to the same destination.

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Valerie said in the 14 years she has been using the SCAT bus service every time she comes to one of these meetings or other transportation committee meeting there is always talk of how to penalize the passenger and would like to know when the county and the bus company will be held responsible. Valerie feels the trapeze bus system is clearly misused. She doesn't think SCAT should be providing priority trips to people who clearly should be using specific medical transportation systems. Valerie said there is something wrong with the foundation of how the SCAT system works and it needs to be looked into before people are marked as no-shows and penalized.

Cliff also said when analysis is being done a minority of the people are being held responsible for the majority of the no-shows and cancellations. Many other transit systems call people in the morning before their scheduled pick-up to check if they still want the appointment. They found by doing this it was very cost affective. Cliff said he would forward the link to transportation regarding the above info.

Bob said they are in the process of buying a technical system which will track the location of the SCAT buses as well as the transit buses. Another thing they will be pursuing with SCAT transportation will be the ability to call out to people as the vehicle arrives near their home to give them a heads up that the vehicle is on the way. The IVR system they will be using will give them the opportunity of calling the night before to remind them of their reservation for the next day and it also gives them the opportunity to cancel it if they no longer need the appointment.

Cliff hopes that more evaluation is done by analyzing how many people are responsible for the no-shows and cancellations and identify the root causes before implementing a penalty policy. Cliff would like to make a motion for SCDOT to explore the root causes and educate the public on how the bus systems work. Valerie seconded the motion. It was discussed that a motion should not be made until everyone had a chance to speak.

Bob said if this policy was to be implemented letters would go out explaining the process and that there might be a penalty. They would track most of the late cancellations and no-shows and would contact them directly to advise them of the impact they are having on the system.

Frank said before there is a major change made there has to be a lot more public input such as a public hearing.

Garrett/SILO said cancelling at the door is a big problem as well and this number runs between 700-1,000 per month and late cancellations are when the person only gives only about 2 hours' notice. Garrett/SILO said he held a Transportation Education class on May 14, 2011 to explain how to use SCAT and the fixed route bus system. It was held at SILO Headquarters and they sent out over 10,000 letters announcing it. Garrett feels the reservation system would be able to handle the change from a 7 day reservation period down to a 3 day and said it would cut down on the number of cancellations. Garrett handed everyone a draft of their *No-Show/Late Cancellation Policies for (SCT) and (SCAT)*.

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Jack feels we need to start by educating our district legislators by letting them know what the problem is and Frank would take the responsibility through the legislature and make the contacts. Thereafter, regular hearings should be held on the local level by educating people with what the system is and where it needs to be fixed. Then they would report back to this committee and the committee would then have to recommend to the full legislature what needs to be changed.

Cliff said he worked closely with Terry Pearsall and about 3 years ago Presiding Officer William Lindsay paid for them to have public hearings, court stenographers and at that time the county had a transportation advisory board. A whole plan was developed and presented to every legislator identifying the issues but nothing was ever resolved.

Mike Stolz who is not yet a formal member said he is mostly involved in behavioral healthcare. Most people that are on SSI and SSD who have Medicaid are being moved into mandatory managed care over the next 3 years. The reason for that is the exact same issue we are looking at right now because there are a small percentage of people who cost a lot more. 15% of people who have Medicaid account for 60% of the cost. The solution that the Governor and the Medicaid Restructuring Task Force imposed on the Managed Care Company was to look at those 15% of people and find out what's going. When they did some research they found it was people problems, people having problems with access, proper information or resources. We need to understand the problem before we design the intervention and we need to find out why these people are struggling. Mike feels that Cliff's recommendation is going in the right direction but Mike supports a motion which focuses just on understanding the problem first and doesn't prescribe an intervention yet and certainly not discipline.

Beverly asked if the percentage of no-shows could be looked at and identified and then maybe those people could be given trip reminders.

Bob said yes they agree with all those things, they didn't intend to come the meeting today with solutions and that's why nothing was put in writing yet but what they wanted was discussion on the topic. They are looking for guidance, they have federal regulations and timelines that they need to adhere to. Bob said there are people at the meeting today that have criticized them for not having a no-show penalty in place and there are also people here today that are opposed to it; this is why we need to work through it.

Roy wanted to know if when someone calls to cancel a trip does the reservationist asks the person why? Bob said no because those are privacy issues.

Roy made a motion to table the discussion for now and have the Suffolk County Dept. of Transportation do some research from what they heard from us today and come back to our next meeting with some recommendations. Beverly seconded the motion all were in favor and the motion carried.

Bob asked for the motion to be put in writing.

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Valerie asked that if any information that can be sent in accessible format to please e-mail it because she can't read it.

The subject of needing to have exact change on the SCAT bus was brought up and some possible solutions on how to make it easier for people was discussed.

CORRESPONDENCE: None

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT: Beverly had nothing new to report.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Architectural Barriers - Tedd/Lew was excused.

Community Partnership - Frank had nothing new to report.

Education - Teresa was excused.

Housing - Vacant

Legislation - Vacant

Transportation - Vacant

Employment - Donna had nothing new to report.

COUNTY DEPARTMENTS:

Suffolk County Office of Handicapped Services - Frank reported he attended two EXPOS where they showcase services and products for people with disabilities. United Spinal EXPO was one of them and was held in N.J.

Suffolk County Parks - Terry had nothing new to report.

S.C. Department of Social Services - Linda had nothing new to report.

S.C. Office of Public Information - Debbie had nothing new to report.

Old Business - None

New Business - None

S.C. Department of Health/Division of Children with Special Health Care Needs - Barbara reported that she attended a public hearing on *Safety and Quality of Care in Residential Facilities and Programs Licensed by the Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD)* on June 9, 2011 at Farmingdale State College. The public hearing was sponsored by the Assembly Standing Committee Mental Health, Mental Retardation, Developmental Disabilities; Assembly Standing Committee on Codes; and Assembly Standing Committee on Oversight, investigation and Analysis. Assemblyman Felix W. Ortiz is the Chairman of the Committee. The purpose of the hearing was to examine state and regulatory oversight of residential programs licensed by OPWDD, review current investigative policies and procedures as they relate to incident reporting, and to explore additional safety and quality measures to protect the State's most vulnerable residents.

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Assembly speaker, Sheldon Silver announced a series of public hearings aimed at “carefully examining the quality of care and safety measures in homes for individuals with developmental disabilities” in response to an investigative report that the New York Times published on March 12, 2011 on the care and treatment of individuals served in facilities and programs licensed by OPWDD. The report described incidents of severe abuse and mistreatment of residents with developmental disabilities receiving services in these facilities and programs. At the hearing, several persons spoke and described their experiences and the experiences of family members. There was a thoughtful interactive discussion between the audience and committee members with a sincere to wish to improve the current system of oversight. The committee members were very sensitive to the concerns of the families and many committee members have family members with disabilities themselves. Discussion and the sharing of ideas included the possibilities of developing a prior-abuse notification system for employers to prevent potential employees who have a history of abuse from working with vulnerable individuals at other agencies, mandatory immediate reporting of violent crimes to the police, and standardized training for service providers. The hearings will be conducted throughout NY State.

S.C. Department of Public Works/Transportation Division – Garry and Bob had nothing more to report.

S.C. Human Rights Commission - James brought some copies of the Commission’s 2010 Annual Report for those who are interested. They’re still waiting for their offices to be moved up to the 2nd floor in the Riverhead County Center.

S.C. Community Development – Vacant

S.C. Library System – Valerie mentioned that Talking Books Library will be having their biennial Assistive Technology Fair next May 11, 2012.

Valerie wanted to let everyone know that decisions have been made to close the Talking Book Library which has been serving over 3,000 patrons in Nassau/Suffolk counties for the last 40 years. People will now have to go to New York City to receive services.

SILO - Glenn was excused.

ADJOURNMENT: Jack made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Terry seconded the motion. The motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 3:45 p.m. The next meeting will be held on August 10, 2011 at 2:00 p.m. in the Conference room, Building 158, Veterans Memorial Highway, Hauppauge.

Respectfully submitted,
Heidi Zeitler