

PURPOSE

This report describes the activities of the Pueblo Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Advisory Committee from June 2013 to December 2014.

BACKGROUND

The Committee was established in 2004 under Ordinance #10097 as part of the Settlement Agreement between the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the City of Pueblo to monitor compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Voting members are all citizens with disabilities who live within the city limits. Members are appointed by the City Manager for renewable terms of four years, or more if there are not enough candidates to fill the quota, and can include subject matter experts or advocates for those with disabilities (Bylaws are posted on the city website and are available on request). The Committee can have up to 15 voting members and there is a continuing outreach plan to reach this goal. We invite all of our City Council members to encourage constituents to apply. Disability does not discriminate and we need members with a range of experiences to represent this population effectively.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Goal #1 is to continue monitoring access to city facilities and services.

We get regular updates from city departments about their efforts to comply with the latest ADA regulations. Public Works sends us lists of curb ramp request projects to review and approve and most recently shared with us new curb ramp designs under development by the Department of Justice for input. We have asked to be included in the design phase of new construction and to participate in a walk through before occupancy because there are always unforeseen problems. The only city building we have not toured in City Hall and in fact, this presentation is the first time most of us have seen City Council Chambers. Since construction isn't finished, we expect to be notified when the rest of the offices are ready for occupancy. Incidentally, we learned belatedly that live captioning options had to be added to the broadcast of City Council meetings. One of our members has considerable experience in access for people who are hard of hearing and we would have preferred to have been alerted that this important capacity was overlooked.

We are pleased to inform you that the last item on the DOJ's list from 2003 is about to be completed. The City Park bathhouse was inadvertently left off the list, but we had always understood it needed to be remodeled. We were holding out for a replacement of the pool and other improvements, but alas, this is not to be-- for now. We are not giving up entirely on the idea of a covered pool accessible year round, especially with the fiasco of the pools at the YMCA. There is a very strong argument in favor of an accessible public pool in the downtown area: new regulations require handicapped access to all pools open to the public, and many area hotels have filled in their pools rather than comply. For now, the bathhouse itself is scheduled for remodeling and there are finally accessible restrooms with an accessible pathway near the front of the park.

We would also like to keep alive the prospect of mapping out all of our sidewalks according to the need of repair. Some time ago, graduate students from the Healy Center at CSU Pueblo developed a sidewalk assessment tool using GPS devices to rate the condition of our sidewalks. The idea is that with a few tweaks, citizens could be trained to map out their neighborhoods and this information could be entered into the City's asset management program so that when funding became available it would go to the worst areas first. Then the IT person working on this project moved to Colorado Springs and there is no staff time available to follow up on this project. More on this later.

We pride ourselves on keeping the Handicapped Parking Patrol alive. This patrol began in 1998 with about 10 original volunteers, most of them handicapped themselves, and has been through many changes since then. In recent years, the Patrol has moved out from under Traffic to the Volunteer program and does not use people with disabilities because of safety concerns. Available volunteers continue to be in short supply because they must be available during the week to appear in municipal court when citizens challenge citations. The patrol is, however, alive and well and the judge is issuing tickets when people park in spaces that are clearly marked.

The one thing we have not been able to do is review the online training all new city staff must complete to understand their obligations for working with people with disabilities. This is a scheduling problem. We have been working with Human Resources for a date when everyone has about two hours free. We suspect the emphasis will be on effective communication and service animals.

Goal #2: Advise the county about access to facilities, programs and services.

We have had more success this year than ever before with attendance by county officials. The County Commission went through a legal review of how best to assign responsibility for ADA compliance. We would like to report that Patsy Cresswell is now the ADA Coordinator and Weston Burrer is the Compliance Officer. There was a great deal of participation at first and then it dropped off as schedules filled up. Nonetheless, there have been some important successes and since the City of Pueblo lies within county boundaries, this impacts you.

We initially had a great deal of input into the design of the new Judicial Building. Staff turnover in the Public Works Department left us uncertain about what was included and what was not. We are happy to report that accessible parking is in, although placing it on the north end of the building will create problems with ice and snow melt in the winter.

We have had a very brief walk through by some of our members and have discovered that the bathrooms are accessible--if you can get into them. Each one has a set of double doors. This is always a challenge for people with mobility impairments and in this case the outside door opens in and the inside door opens out so that people who use wheelchairs get stuck between them. We think the solution is to have both doors open in the same direction, or to remove one of them, either way we would like to be consulted about the solution. Then there is the access ramp in the front. Coming from the parking lot, there is a curb cut up to the sidewalk on the north end of the building, which slopes gently before turning to proceed along the front of the building. Coming out of the building, it is not so easy to see the 90% turn down the last few inches to the parking lot...most

wheelchairs can absorb a four inch drop, but it's not recommended! We are assured it has now been well marked. Most striking to our members is the lack of clear signage about where to find anything. Most of us can't get anywhere fast and we really appreciate having our path of travel well marked. We'd like to be consulted about where the signs need to go since there is a lot more going on here than meets the eye.

The other big achievement has been the relocation of the Department of Social Services. We have repeatedly pointed out to any official who would listen that there wasn't an accessible bathroom in that building. The Wells Fargo Bank formerly housed the Social Security Administration. The bathrooms have what we call 504 stalls. That means they have bars, but are long and narrow. This design preceded the ADA. We hope we can prevail on the bank to update them.

Libraries are another concern. The new East Side library uses an existing floor plan, we are nearly certain that they meet minimum access standards. Nearly. We haven't been invited for a walk through. We have always requested, where feasible, more than the required number of parking spaces because these buildings are heavily used by seniors and others with disabilities. No one has responded to this request. We will conduct a walk through next year.

Let's not forget the County Commission itself. The County Courthouse was designed at time when access for people with disabilities was not a consideration. The County has put in an automatic door and a ground floor office where citizens can ideally request any service available in the building. But County Commission Chambers has narrow doors and fixed seating. During the recent public hearings by the Public Utilities Commission, we

argued that the Secretary of State had forced the Elections office to move because of access issues even with all the above modifications. Oh, and the bathrooms do not meet current standards for turnaround space.

In setting up the site at the Convention Center for the second PUC hearing, it was discovered that the listening systems at the Rawlings Library were out dated and unusable. So are the assistive technology stations we helped set up five years ago. Updating this important equipment is a goal for next year. We understand that the County Commission is planning on televising its meetings in the near future and is thinking about piggy backing on the city's system. We would encourage this kind of cooperation.

Goal #3: Strengthen Public Transit Options

Through the years, Pueblo Transit has used the ADA Committee as its ear to the disabled community. We are informed every time Transit contemplates a major change in route or fare structure. We have also intervened when there are specific complaints from riders. We have been able to clarify that a cement pad is required at new bus stops, not simply level ground. We have also made it clear that when all the tie down spaces for wheelchairs are in use, the next rider has the option of transferring to a regular seat when possible—or waiting for the next bus along with everyone else. CitiLift is only an option if the lift is not working.

We've kept our eye on the Greyhound shelter. This is really problematic for us. There are many, many places in this country where the Greyhound stop is a tree or a shop that may be closed at 2:00 am. Yet we persistently get complaints from people who expect more from a city the size of Pueblo, and it is true that there are no small restaurants or convenience stores nearby.

We are assured that there are now plans to build an unheated shelter for people who arrive at night. Transit has a policy of extending hours at the Transit Center during the winter months.

The very best news we have ever had is that Commissioner Sal Pace has asked the county lawyer to look into a Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) to support the Southwest Chief. We must find a way to distinguish this from the Regional Tourism District, also (RTA). Our kind of RTA is funded by an increase in either property taxes or sales taxes, or both for the purpose of funding road and bridge repairs, sidewalk repair and maintenance, and public transportation. Our focus has always been transit, but we have also recognized that this is not everyone's priority. The Pikes Peak RTA has been successful because it identified specific projects and prioritized them so that the smaller towns in the county got their rewards first. The problem is that transit got such a small percentage that it did not weather the recession well. In the coming years, we hope to work with you to develop dedicated funding for both transit and public works.

We have already taken a few steps in that direction. This last semester, a team of graduate students, again from the Healy Center, undertook a feasibility study to see if a route to Pueblo West would support itself. Although some of the premises were not accurate (no bus service runs at capacity every hour), and it assumed there would be no federal funding, the outcome still demonstrated the strength of such a route. Pueblo West must be included in almost any such venture because of the tax base, and that means Pueblo West needs to see some immediate benefit. The next step will be to develop a survey about what people want. This is an enormous task for a committee of volunteers, but we will keep chipping away at it because we are the ones who most need it.

Goal #5: Emergency Preparedness

We have been challenged to find an approach to emergency preparation that fit within the purview of the city and our Committee. The Justice Department website identifies emergency preparedness for people with disabilities as a responsibility cities must undertake. Just how has been difficult to identify as almost any event involves participation by multiple levels of government the city has no control over. Our new Emergency Operations Center is accessible and that is a good start. The Sheriff has updated the necessary communication and that is a huge step forward. Last month, Earl Wilkinson informed us that he went to a training on this subject and found that Pueblo is woefully unprepared. We expect to set manageable goals next year.

In the meantime, we have stretched our resources to reach out to both hospitals. One of our newest members is deaf and has persistently faced difficulty getting interpreters when he needs to go to the hospital. Please bear in mind that American Sign Language is as complex as any foreign language and that a certified interpreter has invested at least five years of education in that certificate. There is only one certified interpreter in Pueblo not dedicated to the school system. Both hospitals have now adopted Video Remote Interpretation systems. Our colleague has tested both satisfactorily and still finds that when he arrives at the ER, no one knows what they are, where to find them, and how to operate them. We think VRI is the wave of the future and will continue to work with public entities, perhaps including the libraries, that need to reach out to this population.

Goal #5: Promote awareness of updates to the Americans with Disabilities Act.

We are pleased to report that both the city and county ADA Coordinators are seeking continuing training opportunities. This is important because a certification as an ADA Coordinator brings grant opportunities. We have been planning a workshop on Effective Communication and have come to the conclusion that almost any target audience needs a tailor made presentation, so we are promoting a series of small workshops throughout the year with one of our members who has completed training with the Rocky Mountain ADA Center to be a Network Partner. We are also pleased to have established cordial relations with the Greater Pueblo Chamber of Commerce. It appears that as the years go by, some of the people most suspicious of the ADA come to develop their own disabilities. We have been too busy to make use of this development and can only hope to capitalize on it in the coming year.

One small service we were able to perform for the community at large was a review of the Song of Pueblo for accessibility. The suggestions we made will also make it more accessible to people who speak Spanish.

Goal #6: Update Publicity and Outreach

We have accepted two new members who bring different perspectives to our Committee. One is deaf and the other has some autism. We are open for more. We have occasionally listed our meeting in the Pueblo Chieftain and have been much more consistent.

CHALLENGES

As with any committee, our greatest challenges are time and energy. In past years, much of our time was indirectly subsidized by the Colorado Cross Disability Coalition, which recognized several city staff members with awards. CCDC no longer has dedicated funding for community involvement, so all of our efforts are on our own time. We not only need new members, we need members who will carry out our work between meetings. City staff is likewise challenged as the city balances its budget by asking for more work from fewer people. In years past, we have had pictures of improvements to facilities, maps with curb ramps plotted on them, supportive documentation from Pueblo Transit and other material. This year everyone is busy with end of the year reports. We will request that such information be forwarded to you belatedly, perhaps through your representative on our Council.

Again, we appreciate the support you have given to our causes and we look forward to more improvements next year.