



Pinellas County Office of Human Rights

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TO: MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

THROUGH: County Administrator Mark S. Woodard

FROM: Paul Valenti, Director of Human Rights

SUBJECT: County Advisory Board for Persons with Disabilities

DATE: January 18, 2017

Representatives of the community of persons with disability¹ have approached staff to recommend creation of an advisory board to provide advice and counsel to the Board of County Commissioners on issues of importance to them.

Several Florida jurisdictions with such boards include (but is not limited too):

- The City of St. Petersburg;
- The City of Dunedin;
- The City of Jacksonville;
- The City of Tampa;
- The City of Lakeland;
- Hillsborough County;
- Alachua County;
- Palm Beach County;
- Miami-Dade County; and
- Broward County.

Such advisory boards generally provide counsel and advice to their legislative body on issues of importance to persons with disability. In several jurisdictions, they also provide review services for planned public facilities - such as ensuring park and recreation resources have integrated features of accessibility.

For jurisdictions with such advisory boards, membership is typically comprised of appointments by the legislative body, or from a mix of appointments from the legislative body and appointments from designated community stakeholders. Membership is almost universally an odd number, and is usually between seven (7) and fifteen (15) members.

¹ Specifically, Joseph DiDomenico and Jody Armstrong, from the Disability Achievement Center.

Where these advisory boards exist, the frequency of meetings range from quarterly (four (4) meetings per year) to monthly (twelve (12) meetings per year). The proposed ordinance allows for quarterly meetings, should there be business to be conducted.

Staff members who serve as liaisons to such advisory boards in sister jurisdictions throughout Florida suggest these advisory boards provide value to their jurisdictions by:

- Identifying and raising to local government issues of importance to persons with disabilities which might otherwise escape review and/or notice;
- Providing insights and/or expertise in regards to accessibility to government facilities, programs, or services, thereby reducing barriers to persons with disabilities; and
- Serving as a conduit of information on county programs, services, and initiatives to the community of persons with disabilities.

It is noted that the Office of Human Rights, with considerable assistance from other departments under the Board of County Commissioners and volunteers, is working on updating Pinellas County's ADA Transition Plan. A necessary component of this update will be soliciting public input, including targeted outreach to the community of persons with disabilities. Having an advisory committee for persons with disabilities in existence would prove invaluable in providing feedback and input into this review.

This subject has already been presented to the Human Rights Board, and at its meeting on November 11, 2016, the Human Rights Board approved this subject for consideration by the Board of County Commissioners.

The proposed ordinance underscores that the ordinary work of the proposed board would be purely advisory and consultative in nature, and not directly to the Board of County Commissioners, therefore staff contemplates little direct interaction with the Board of County Commissioners (or the Human Rights Board).

Staff also notes the creation of the proposed board was discussed at the February 4, 2016, meeting of the Mayors' Council of Pinellas County, Inc. In response, the Mayors' Council issued a letter supporting the creation of such an advisory board, which is also attached.

Additionally, while not intended to be a direct advisory board to any municipality within Pinellas County (each such municipality being at liberty to create its own advisory board, if it deemed it appropriate, as the City of St. Petersburg and City of Dunedin have already done) it is believed that such an advisory committee would be of benefit to our municipal partners by filtering through the Office of Human Rights issues which may be of concern to a particular jurisdiction, and indeed we have had previous success working with municipal partners on issues raised before our office which properly belonged with one of our municipalities.

County Administrator Woodard counseled being mindful of other entities or persons already performing work relating to issues of interest to the community of persons with disability to ensure unnecessary redundancies are not created - specifically noting work done in conjunction with Community Development Block Grants (CDBGs), as well as the MPO. By having the proposed advisory group work primarily in conjunction with the Office of Human Rights, which then in turn would liaise with these groups and related county staff, we believe we will be able to minimize such redundancies by serving as a centralized repository regarding efforts at accessibility already underway, or where accessibility concerns are already being addressed.

While such an advisory board will necessarily require county resources, particularly that of staff, as the Office of Human Resources would provide primary staffing to the proposed board, we would work as diligently as possible to ensure we remain within the currently budgeted or future proposed funding for the Office of Human Rights.

I have also discussed creation of the proposed board with Clerk of Court Burke, Director of Marketing and Communications Hernandez, the County Attorney's Office, and staff in Community Development (the departments most likely to be tapped to provide additional support for the successful functioning of the proposed advisory board), and they have expressed no concern of an undue burden on their operations or budgets.

I hope this memorandum addresses those questions the Board of County Commissioners may have in regards to the proposed ordinance, and I remain available at (727) 464-4880 to answer any questions you may have.