

BOARD OF COMMISSIONER MEETING TO THE NE COMMISSION FOR
THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED
SEPTEMBER 22, 2000
Lincoln, Nebraska

Approved

Call to Order and Introductions: Barbara Walker, chairman called the meeting to order. Walker welcomed everyone and “introduced the Commissioners: William Orester; Robert Burns; Dorothy Westin-Yockey; and Maya Samms; as well as Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director; Jan Ludwig, her Staff Assistant; and Cheryl Livingston, our taping person.”

Greetings from Governor Johanns: The Governor emphasized that one of the roles in state government is to make sure we create the climate for individuals to achieve their maximum potential in business to grow and achieve to do all of the things that we'd like to see it do to create jobs, etc. One of the things that I realize as I work across the state, there are individual needs and that we need to do whatever we can to make sure we create the climate that allows people to achieve their maximum potential. I learned a lot today. I probably learned a great deal about “that notion”. I applaud you for being willing to educate me but to also educate state senators. My hope is that we'll create a kind of new generation of relationships between the blind community and of the state of Nebraska, but also create a new generation of people who are achieving their maximum potential. Because after all, that is what this is all about. I have enjoyed working with you and I cannot guarantee you'll always get what you want but I do believe we can continue working together in the years that remain to me as Governor of the State of Nebraska. I wish you the very, very, best. Thank you for the wonderful tour, for the pamphlet of information and thank you for the brownie.

Walker asked those in attendance to introduce themselves to let the body know who you are, where you are from and thanked each one for making the effort to come out to the meeting today.

Minutes of August 5 Meeting: The minutes of the August 5th meeting were read by Walker as they weren't made available to the public earlier. Corrections were: focus of the September 22, 2000 Nebraska Center for the Blind; focus of the November meeting Business Enterprises; Bob Burns will be the liaison between the two groups for the State Plan; Walker wanted to clear up why she allows herself to be called a chairman rather than a chair person. She continued by, stating that 'the man part' of chairman is derived from the same word that the word mankind is and that's the word human and so that is not a male term it is a human term. Bill Orester moved to accept the minutes as amended and Bob Burns seconded with no discussion and the motion passed unanimously. Time keeper for today's meeting is Connie Daly and it was determined by the Commission Board to allow discussion on the Nebraska Center for the Blind item until 3:08 P.M. or earlier if finished before that time and then proceed with the time frames as listed on the agenda.

Further Discussion on Nebraska Center for the Blind: Fatos Floyd gave the Commissioners an opportunity to interact with her and her staff. Floyd introduced Jane Lansaw, recent graduate of Louisiana Tech. University, who is taking Jeff Altman's place while he is away getting his Master's degree. Folders of information on the Center were given to each Commissioner as well as Governor Johanns. Samms asked what determines when a student is ready for Center completion. Floyd replied the course of study is very individualized and when the individual is comfortable in his/her day-to-day activities and has attained the confidence and goals they set out to achieve he/she is ready for graduation. Burns asked if all the training is still done under sleepshade? Floyd replied, "Yes, sleep shades are worn from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and again from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m." Burns asked, "Do kids still in school pretty much work with people in the field or do they have access to the Center?" Yes, during the summer, we have teenagers who are school age attending with different schedules and formats.

What kind of mechanism do you have to make sure you're giving people what they want. Floyd prepares a questionnaire used as a survey instrument. A telephone interview is conducted by our Deputy Director of Vocational Rehabilitation about six to seven months after completion of training. Survey results have shown some clients want more training in one course over another so a plan has been developed to provide extra time in the area they request. Walker stated, "It seems there are fewer and fewer activities." Floyd replied, "Activities are what we do outside the building and today might be called an activity by some but I don't." "The surveys have also informed us there are too many interruptions and today may be considered an interruption to some." Walker would like to know if it might be possible for Commissioners to get the information from the surveys to be better informed in giving clarification or information upon request. Walker requested Floyd to start from the beginning of this year and e-mail the Center activities information to each Commissioner. If the Center staff has any concerns, the Commissioners would like to know these concerns as well. Walker express her appreciation that the "Tour was a joy, it was very well done, the timing was great and I think that based on what the Governor said to us, that we made an impression on him and I want to thank the students, the staff, and everyone. @ Van Zandt also added appreciation to the Lincoln District Staff in helping with today's event.

Correspondence: When Walker sends something to you via e-mail, she would like a reply to know you did get the e-mail. The Commission correspondence is being kept in Ludwig's office. Van Zandt agreed to keep the board posted via email.

Location of Meetings: Denise Johnston Rauterkus' correspondence was discussed regarding a concern that the Commission may have seemed short sighted and insensitive in terms of what we were talking about at the last meeting regarding having our meetings in various parts of the state. Discussion did follow. Burns moved to have the Commission meeting first and the SRC be coordinated to follow on the same weekend in November and evaluate it at the end of that. @ Orestor seconded and the vote was unanimous.

Walker still wants to address Rauterkus' question of "that at least one time a year going to the western part of the state to hold a Commission meeting." Westin-Yockey so moved and Orester seconded the motion and the vote was unanimous.

Employee Recognition: Walker read the employee recognition e-mail message sent by Van Zandt earlier today. Walker read and presented a letter of reappointment to our Director. "The five qualities spell the word BLIND and they are what we are all about and those are the kinds of things that we on this Commission Board are looking for and we want to thank you Pearl."

Old Business:

Electronic Communications Update: Burns and Orester agreed it is a must for the Commissioners to be a part of the web page. The Commission's technology personnel are working to complete this project. Kelly is 80% done but the board was reminded she is support staff for the Omaha office so it will depend on her workload. It was agreeable to look at using the Commission address rather than giving out the Commission Board's personal e-mail addresses. Walker and Van Zandt will communicate with Kelly and Jonathan via telephone. Burns encouraged discussion on subscribing to the Commission web page, etc. Van Zandt offered an update at the next meeting and promised to keep the board apprised of the progress. Servan will also express what we've been talking about to Kelly and Jonathan.

Materials Update: The VR and IL Manuals will be sent to the Commission Board on disk.

Commissioners' Bios: Van Zandt has received Walker's Bio and the rest of the board is encouraged to get theirs in so that information can be made available for people wanting to know who the Commissioners are.

Questions on State Plan: Van Zandt is working on the questions of the state plan and when she finishes she will e-mail the answers to each Commissioner to review. If it is a big enough issue for us to discuss, we can make it an agenda item.

Report from the Chairman: Walker related to the body the experience over the last 24 hours on our reaction to the Governor's office in letting us know he was not coming. It points out how far "we still have to go". Walker publicly apologized for that and she continued saying, "I want to say why. One of the things that happens as blind people we get with that (society's notions about blindness) it's contagious, and I want to say as to never let that happen again." "We are important, client's of the agency are important. Everybody is important "We are important and what we are doing matters. Each of us is worth something and can make a difference."

Report from the Director:

Van Zandt reported she did not send draft minutes to her staff, but rather continues to send her Moving Forward e-mails and it was agreed to continue in this manner.

In regards to orientation and mobility nationally, there continues to be the debate of blind people being licensed as travel instructors. Ron Ferguson a researcher from Louisiana will be here September 27 th visiting the Center and going through some of our documents. He will be interviewing Dr. Nyman the next day. Nebraska holds an important role in this area and it is very exciting for a researcher to want to gather information from Nebraska.

Lincoln District staff has put together a “Making it Work” workbook to use in selling employers on hiring blind people. Servan and Van Zandt attended a meeting with the HHSS’ Policy Cabinet and Nancy Coffman assisted in presenting the workbook via a power point presentation. HHSS employs 6,000 people. They were receptive, interested, and expressed an interest in setting up some internships to help make sure the blind candidate has the chance to get the job.

Jim Portillo comes to us from Texas and he is now in the Training Center and will be finished November 17 th and then he’ll be working as an orientation counselor out of the Omaha office. Cheryl Poff was recently promoted to be the Deaf Blind Project Coordinator. That position will be funded by a five-year Helen Keller Grant. So, this means the Omaha office again has an opening for an Orientation Counselor. Karen Mosier was just promoted to head up the Transition program so we have an opening within the Lincoln District. The Transition position itself is not a five-year position. The Helen Keller Grant which funds the Deaf Blind position is and it has decreasing funding which will force us to build the infrastructure to continue with that person which I think is really crucial. Van Zandt continued by saying, Both of these positions I see as continuing.

Public Comment: Walker had had a request for the Public Comment to be on the agenda before 4:00 p.m.; therefore, as chairman she requested comment from the public at this time:

Comments and questions centered around the following topics: Van Zandt was questioned on a letter sent to Commissioner Schroeder with regard to Rule 26 and who she had in mind when referring to the Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired? Van Zandt replied she had in mind the agency, the service system that she directs. She expressed openness to the Board if they wanted to discuss this and direct her in some way. Orestes replied, “This is really a ‘hot’ point” and Van Zandt agreed.

Clarification was requested regarding the minutes, in the area of gathering own facts as far as staff being underpaid and the process of beginning to move forward to upgrade titles and achieve increased pay.

The question was raised as to holding meetings around the state.

What is the importance of having both SRC and Commission? Has there been thought of combining so that there is only one body incurring expenditures in bringing the groups together? Explanation and discussion followed and in order to make a change we would need to go back to the Legislature to amend the Bill.

A question was asked in regard to how the Commission posts employment vacancies. Vacancies are listed through State Personnel, the Lincoln and Omaha newspapers and then also a variety of resources that blind people and consumer groups access to find jobs. Jobline is available for the State postings. RehabNet is set up for Directors of Rehabilitation agencies which includes the general as well as blind agencies and this will be utilized in the future.

Biennium Budget: Part of the budget is the Organizational chart and a text description was sent to the Commission Board and the response from the Board was favorable. A two year/biennium budget that starts in the year 2002 for the state was put together. The state fiscal year is from 7/1/00 to 6/30/01. Policy makers decide whether we get what we request. The Governor's visit was good timing. If the state would decide to cut across the board we would come to a screeching halt. Burns and Walker requested print copies and a narrative overview in braille.

The accessibility issue to the budget was discussed on how the Commission needs to reach the finance people who are writing the new NIS program. The board encouraged Van Zandt to meet with the section doing the NIS programming right away. Samms requested a report on the budget accessibility issues and future technology from the Director at the November meeting. Burns suggested a letter from the chairman, on behalf of the Commission, be drafted concerning the necessity to make the NIS system, as well as the budget, be accessible for the board to do its job effectively.

Discussion followed on the different funds and how the In-Kind and soft match is acquired. Van Zandt explained how the budget does not give us the In-Kind and it should be an agenda item for the next meeting. We're working at getting the In-Kind to replace the state dollars HHSS provided for us. Be thinking about how you might affect the legislature on how we can supply that need. If we do not fully match, we don't get federal dollars. Let's prepare for the next meeting and come up with some answers. Samms requested a written explanation from the business manager to help the Commissioners know what and where the needs are to talk to people in helping pull down the federal dollars. Brown and Van Zandt will provide each Commissioner information on disk and then a print copy of the budget. This will be an agenda item at the next meeting.

Fund Raising Entity: The State Game and Parks has a friends of entity and it is set up as a 501C3 so the main costs are getting the legal work done to get established as a 501C3. Bob Deaton has been working on this and Van Zandt will ask him to get a copy of their 501C, check on who is on the Game & Parks Board, and Article of Incorporation. Burns and Orester requested a copy of their 501C and between the two of them they can provide that before the next meeting.

Approval Procedures for Director's Leave, Out-of-State Travel, etc:
Approval needs to be signed for Van Zandt to get reimbursement, leaves and out-of-state travel.

Burns moved that Van Zandt notify all Commissioners and if Walker is not available Orester will send approval via e-mail and that can be printed and attached to be within her file. Orester seconded. The motion passed and included an amendment made by Burns requesting Dave monitor her leave and report to the board quarterly.

Personnel Salaries: Servan spoke on progress of working on CPQ's as requested by State Personnel. We have completed most of the paperwork. General Vocational Rehab's starting salary is \$4,000 over ours. Van Zandt asked for direction in next steps. Burns suggested a general letter from the Commissioners to add some weight to the process when the CPQ's are ready to go to Personnel. Walker will do a draft to the other Commissioners and come up with a letter of support.

Workforce Investment Act: Van Zandt presented some information on what the WIA was established to do in streamlining services by replacing the 120 Federal Programs about employment and making it a better system. Van Zandt is on the Board. There are three local boards in each area and a youth council. Servan sits on the Lincoln youth council and we do not have any representation on the other boards or youth councils. The blind have given the message we want to be heard and cooperate. This might be another area where we can develop some third party to get a match or funding. We will ask Brown to request other states for a model on what other agencies do in their state.

Public Forums/JAM: Meetings are held three to five times a year. Next meeting will be in Grand Island on October 16, 2000. State Plans process that we do for the Feds requires Public Forums. The board asked to continue as it's being handled now and leave it to Van Zandt's discretion.

September 19, 2000 Meeting: No one from this board attended this meeting.

New Business

Time and Location of Next Meeting: Friday, November 3 rd, 8:00 p.m. in Lincoln until we are done.

Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

*Addendum:

Following adjournment it was determined the November 3, 2000 meeting time will be 6:30 p.m.

Janice A. Ludwig, Secretary Barbara Walker, Chairman