

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED
PUBLIC MEETING, Saturday, March 23, 2002, 1:00 P.M.
Lincoln, Nebraska

Approved

Call to Order and Introductions: Barbara Walker, Chairmen of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order by welcoming Nichelle Ferreyra to her first in-person meeting. Commissioners present were: Barbara Walker from Lincoln; Bill Orester, Lincoln; Dorothy Westin-Yockey, South Sioux; Bob Burns, Omaha and Nichelle Ferreyra, Scottsbluff. Commission staff in attendance was Executive Director, Pearl Van Zandt, Lincoln; her assistant, Jan Ludwig, Lincoln; Bob Deaton, Deputy Director of Independent Living Services, Lincoln; Carlos Servan, Deputy Director of Vocational Rehabilitation, Lincoln; Lin Miller, North Platte, staff trainee for the Rehabilitation Counselor position in the North Platte office; Fatos Floyd, Director of the Nebraska Center for the Blind, Lincoln; and Connie Daly, Supervisor of the Lincoln District, Lincoln. Others introduced as members of the public were: Fritz Yockey South Sioux; Mary Susan Orester ACBN-Lincoln; Jim Jirak President of the American Council of the Blind, Omaha; Erika Wolf client of the Commission, Lincoln; Michael Floyd and Evelyn Haines both, Lincoln.

Announcement Concerning Public Comments: Walker encouraged attendees to participate in the meeting. If anyone wants to seek the floor during the discussion of an item, she requests he or she address the Chair, identify himself or herself and at the discretion of the Chairmen the opportunity may be granted to make comment.

Minutes of the January 29, 2002 Meeting: Walker requested action on the Minutes of the January 29, 2002 video-conference meeting. Burns moved they be accepted, Orester seconded the motion and the vote was unanimous; the minutes were approved.

Nebraska Center for the Blind Concern: There was a concern raised as to there being quite a few distractions during Center training. Van Zandt spoke to the issue by stating basically there are two main factors: number one, the nature of the center itself; it's an "exceedingly dynamic environment"; clients' needs on any given day or hour; staff issues as well and events that come up. The other major factor is that previously we had a Center Director full time and a contract person who taught the Braille class. Due to budgetary constraints, we are no longer able to employ that contract person. There was a lot of time spent on discussion of different issues and solutions. Burns asked could there be a video rather than so many tours. Fatos Floyd said cost is a big issue. If a video was made of a tour, it may be a valuable tool for the field as well. Floyd gave a very detailed report which included that there are six full-time staff and one part-time person who is a diabetic alternatives counselor, 11 clients which is maximum, 1 staff trainee, one staff intern and each week we have one to two three day stay clients.

Everyone agreed the evaluation surveys conducted after Center training are a valuable tool. Burns suggested a footnote on the evaluation as to what has been dealt with, how and the outcome. Van Zandt and Floyd agreed and a footnote will be included, before survey results are forwarded to the Executive Director and the Board.

Report, the Chairman: Budget has been a concern. The Legislative Session is nearly over and it won't be until then when we know what the outcome actually will be.

Walker stated the Board continues to receive materials that we need to have and this helps them to be informed.

Report, the Executive Director: Statistics figures as of January of this year, were reported as follows: total served in Vocational Rehabilitation was 404 and total served in Independent Living was 365.

A grant proposal is being written to the HHSS Health Care Cash Fund, the Tobacco Settlement money that Nebraska has received. The project is primarily for Diabetic education for individuals across the state. A secondary purpose is to provide contacts with the medical community to help them understand blindness and blindness alternatives. The grant will fund \$225,000 for three years (\$100,000 the first year, \$75,000 the second year and \$50,000 the third year). Materials need to be available in alternative format. When the grant proposal is completed it will be made available to the Board.

Old Business:

Materials Update: Walker expressed appreciation of materials, the Commission and Center. She is requesting a reply to all e-mails received.

Budget Update: The State of Nebraska is in a major budget deficit. The Governors bill LB 1309 does have the Commission slated for a cut of about \$12,000 from the State General Fund. Appropriations amendment to LB 1309, AM 3079 restores the funds cut and includes the request for the additional PSL. Statewide cost allocations plan is \$16,000 that is better than we were estimating. We do now have all of our Federal Grants in full. Social Security of \$180,000 has been approved and the money will come but it is not here yet.

CPQ Update: Our CPQ request was finally approved. Positions were not reclassified but were determined to be at higher pay grade. DAS had the final approval to make it happen and would not let it go through because we do not have adequate PSL yet. In order for the increase in pay grades to happen, Van Zandt would have had to write a plan of reduction in force and layoffs would have been inevitable which would not have served our clients well.

DAS has granted a delay in the implementation of the upgrades and at the end of this session hopefully we will have our budget and the increased PSL. The Business Enterprise Administrator position will be looked at by another desk auditor. Walker expressed appreciation in all work that has been done.

Website Update: Walker experienced a problem on the website with address changes so be sure to get any address change to Kelly Coleman and to the Board members. The subscriber list is available at the end of the home page. "On Meet the Commissioners" page, we need to get Orestor's and Ferreyra's Bios up. We also need to inform people that the hearing drafts are now up (or will be soon after today's meeting).

Friends of the Commission Update: Orestor reported that the application for 501(c)(3) status was sent on September 27, 2001. IRS responded on February 14, 2002, wanting some changes in the Articles of Incorporation as it was lacking some information and then they wanted clarification on whether we were Public or Private. We should have our status before too long. There is a need for people on the Friends Board with connections and the ability to raise funds.

DigitalNews Update: The NEWSLINE ® rollover time has happened making it nationwide. The Lincoln Journal Star and the people in Baltimore are getting closer to working out issues in order to get the Lincoln Journal Star available on NEWSLINE ®.

Van Zandt reported NCBVI received \$800 from DigitalNews for telephone bills that have occurred so far. DigitalNews has a verbal assurance that a \$1,000 Telephone Pioneers donation will be forthcoming.

SRC Update: Senator Schimek introduced LB930 early in the session and it will do away with the section of the Statute that requires the State Rehabilitation Council. On January 31, 2002, LB930 was placed in General file and will be completed toward the end of the general session.

Public Hearing for Rule: If the entire Board is at the Public Hearing it can be approved at the time of the meeting. Otherwise, Walker the Hearing Officer would need to write a report to the Board and another meeting would need to be held to approve.

Orester moved to hold the Public Hearing on Rule at 7:30 P.M. Central Daylight Time on May 6, 2002, in Lincoln, with Board Meeting held immediately following the Hearings to officially approve the rules. Burns seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous. We will meet at the NCBVI Office Building. Board members who cannot be in Lincoln will attend via conference call (speaker phone).

Walker expressed publicly sympathy to Van Zandt in the loss of her father.

Public Comment: Michael Floyd did update the Board that the materials for Friends of the Commission were sent to the IRS "overnight mail" and they should have had it on the 18 th (deadline was the 21 st).

New Business

Audit Report: NCBVI has been audited for the period of fiscal year ending June 30, 2001. The audit exit interview was just this week and when the report is finalized it will be on the State Auditor Web site. The most difficult issue is what they believe are costs of entertainment, amusement, diversion and social activities. Their recommendation is that the Commission expend state and federal funds only where activities will promote rehabilitation. In the Law, maintenance definition is the cost of an individual's participation in enrichment and vocational adjustment activities related to that individual's training program. Van Zandt will make comments and respond to the Audit by Wednesday, March 27, 2002. It may be necessary for a representative of the Board to become involved to get the rehabilitation maintenance issue settled and or request Commissioner Wilson to give an official statement on it.

The minutes of the Blind Vendors Spring meeting, needs to show that there was discussion of the percentage of Set-aside and more documentation is needed in the Vendor Committee minutes. The Commission must approve the percentage of set-aside at the Board of Commissioners meeting following the Blind Vendors Spring (usually May or early June) meeting. There must be documentation on the determination and the basis for the percentage set.

We need to implement procedures to ensure that all moneys due to the set-aside fund are collected and all investigations are conducted as required by Statute.

State Plan: Due April 1, 2002. We requested more time and they did give until July 1 st but since the Board may not meet before that date, Van Zandt went ahead and worked to have it ready for today's meeting to get the approval. Burns moved for approval of the State Plan. Orester second and the vote was unanimous. Van Zandt will submit the completed Plan following formatting.

Executive Director's Evaluation: It was suggested to add an agenda item to the May 6, 2002, public meeting following the Public Hearing to complete this issue. It was determined to get forms out to staff for input by May 21 st and request they be returned to the Board by June 1, 2002. Evaluations will come directly to the Board of Commissioners through the commissioners website e-mail address.

Need to appoint a new Executive Session Secretary. Burns volunteered to be the Executive Session Secretary.

Location, Date and Time of Next Meeting: Meeting was set for North Platte, at 9:00 A.M., July 20, 2002.

Adjourn: Orester moved and Westin-Yockey second to adjourn the meeting at 5:12 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Jan Ludwig

Staff Assistant