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Airport staff meets with disability advocates to discuss terminal modernization project

Community members interested in discussing disability accessibility issues met with Tampa International Airport staff on Friday, November 4th, to learn about the upcoming Main Terminal Modernization Project.

The conversation covered everything from flooring surfaces and signage, to furniture selection and parking spaces.

"I was really excited to be involved in this project," said Barbara Page of Disability Rights Florida. "It was more than just a meeting to hear about their plans. It was an opportunity for people with disabilities to be part of the stakeholders."

Page described the pre-construction focus group as a first of its kind that she was involved with, although she often conducts site visits at facilities to consult on accessibility.

"I was most impressed with the broad spectrum of disabilities represented, not just one group with physical challenges," said Page. "There were people there to discuss the challenges of people with hearing, vision, and cognitive disabilities and their input is very different."

Elita McMillon, Director of Ethics, Diversity and Compliance for Tampa International Airport organized the session. She described the meeting as positive and enlightening.

"We have already reached out to the community for input on the aesthetic elements of the airport," said McMillon, referring to the "visioning sessions" for the \$20 million held in September. "This was an opportunity for us to hear directly from advocates and the members of the community who face accessibility challenges every day and allow them to share their ideas."

Members of the airport staff working directly with the design team that includes architects, engineers and construction managers were on hand to present an outline of the project and answer questions about the plans.

“This project is more than updating the appearance of the airport,” said Jeff Siddle, Director of Planning and Development. “This is our opportunity to modernize the airport, and make improvements that matter to our customers and enhance their travel experience.”

Accessibility considerations are an important part of any modification to the facilities.

“Since the beginning of this project, our designers and architects have explored the latest technology and building design trends to make the terminal as accessible as possible,” said Siddle. “There are also elements that go beyond legal guidelines and make a facility more comfortable and inviting, and that’s the feedback we were looking for.”

The discussion with disability advocates often went beyond the scope of the terminal project and the group members appreciated the opportunity to express concerns and make recommendations for improvements to other airport amenities. All suggestions were documented and passed along to the appropriate department for further evaluation.

McMillon said she will continue to consult with the group on future airport projects.

“We have discovered that there is much we can learn from our customers,” said McMillon. “All we have to do is ask.”