



MEETING MINUTES

Benton County Accessible Communities Advisory Committee (ACAC)

Benton County Justice Center

Thursday, July 15, 2021

2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

The meeting of the Benton County Accessible Communities Advisory Committee was held in-person at 2:00 p.m. on Thursday, July 15, 2021, at the Benton County Justice Center. Present at the meeting were committee members Matt Nash-Chair, Amanda Hatfield, Vice-Chair (County Elections Manager), Shyanne Palmus (Commissioner's Office), Corp. Dallas Murry (Corrections), Judith Davis, Theresa Payne, and Deidra Beck, Coordinator. Larry Gorton (GCDE and Spokane ACAC) and Elaine Stefanowicz (GCDE) joined the meeting by WebEx. Michael Kosanovich joined by WebEx as Larry Gorton's sign language interpreter.

Matt Nash welcomed guest speaker, Larry Gorton with the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment. Larry shared that he was born deaf and has lived in Spokane all of his life. Since he had previously served as a member of Spokane County's ACAC, he was asked to speak to our committee as their representative. He has worked with the ACAC in Spokane County for many years and has loved his service both with them and now with the GCDE. When asked to share about Spokane's successes, Larry stated that one of their primary emphases is to use a positive approach with businesses so as to avoid creating a feeling of threat or disapproval. They work to encourage the importance of friendly customer service to all and to help promote awareness for all on how best to approach people with disability. Larry shared that some of the experiences and successes he has had with Spokane's ACAC was helping a modular home park to set up accessibility for different groups of people as well as in various parks within their county. They have developed various programs and policies addressing accessibility and have a checklist they use to evaluate businesses and organizations to help identify areas for accessibility improvements. Matt asked whether Spokane's ACAC publicizes their findings or issues any certificates after reviewing a business. Larry explained that they typically go and visit the site in teams and later meet with the director of the site and explain their findings. Larry understood Benton County ACAC's concern about posting our site evaluation findings on

our webpage because of the possible impression given that we were promoting a business, and he felt that our idea of issuing an ADA Accessible Certificate directly to the business or organization for their own media posting was interesting. Deidra asked if Larry could give us some advice about connecting with businesses for projects and how to navigate the grant application. Larry suggested that the first step that he recommends is to try to gather sponsorships from around our community first. Because Larry reported that Spokane's ACAC is reforming, Deidra requested that Larry send new contact information in order to reach out to them in the future.

As our second guest speaker, Matt introduced Elaine Stefanowicz, also with GCDE. Elaine shared that she has been with the GCDE for quite some time and has her own personal experience with accessibility as she is a wheelchair bound person. Elaine shared a power point presentation about the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment and the features of some of their project-focused subcommittees. One that she is involved with, together with Matt Nash, is the Employer Awards committee which recognizes and promotes the achievements of employers and individuals who have improved employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Elaine encouraged our committee members to watch for employers in our area that are great at including and accommodating the disabled. Deidra mentioned that this could work in our favor as we implement our site evaluations as an incentive for local businesses. Another committee project that the GCDE has is their Youth Leadership Forum. Unfortunately, due to continued COVID-19 recommendations their August event has been cancelled. However, they hope to schedule one for next year, possibly in Eastern Washington. This is another opportunity, Deidra encouraged, for our committee to get involved with. Elaine reminded that the overarching goal is to improve accessibility in each of our communities, and the GCDE is striving to improve and grow the ways that they can assist ACACs to succeed. With regard to the funding grants available to ACAC projects, Elaine reminded the committee that because of the slow down of the past year due to the pandemic, the grant funds available are low. She recommends, like Larry, that it is best to try to find community sponsorships and matching funds from other grants. One resource that she recommends is the Recreation and Conservation Office for any outdoor projects. Elaine explained that grant funding given by GCDE is based largely on the expected impact, so it is very important to show how any proposed project will improve the lives of a large percentage of the disabled in our area.

Rewards are approved only twice each year in October and April and are awarded to those that will have the greatest impact. The application includes three forms: A Narrative, Budget Details, and a Milestone Timeline of the Project. Deidra asked Elaine whether grant funds are provided when the project involves ADA improvements that are required by law and are a business/organization's responsibility. Elaine explained that for ADA upgrades to be considered, it must be shown that other funding is limited and that there is no ability to acquire additional grants.

The committee thanked Larry and Elaine for their participation and presentation in our meeting, and appreciation was expressed to Michael Kosanovich for his signing service to Larry.

Because a vote was still needed for the new 2021 Short Term Goals, Shyanne moved that the committee accept them, and Judith Davis seconded the motion. The committee, by attending quorum, voted unanimously by a voiced "Yea" vote to accept the new goals.

In order to move forward with recruiting a new member for our current vacancy, the committee granted approval for Deidra to reach out to the Edith Bishel Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired and possibly an organization that services the hearing impaired for membership suggestions.

The meeting hour had finished, so the committee agreed that discussion on "Drive-By" ADA Lawsuits affecting Tri-Cities businesses would be postponed until our meeting in August.

Matt adjourned the meeting at 3:10 p.m.

The August meeting is scheduled as an in-person meeting on August 19, 2021, at 2:00 p.m. in the Executive Conference Room at the Justice Center in Kennewick, WA.