



MEETING MINUTES  
Benton County Accessible Communities Advisory Committee (ACAC)  
October 15, 2020

The meeting of the Benton County Accessible Communities Advisory Committee was held by WebEx at 2:00 p.m. on Thursday, October 15, 2020. Present at the meeting were committee members Brenda Chilton, Chair, Matt Nash, Vice-Chair, Amanda Hatfield (County Elections Manager), Luz Rupp (Chaplain for Benton County Corrections), Judith Davis, Teresa Payne, Matt West, and Deidra Beck (Committee Coordinator). Rene Rojas, (Benton County Elections System Supervisor) and Paul Singer, Executive Director of Tri-Cities Residential Services joined our meeting as guests. Also present and assisting us with our WebEx virtual and public access was Cody Shelton from Benton County Information Technologies.

Brenda Chilton opened the meeting at 2:01 p.m.

Due to issues with WebEx connections, the order of the agenda was adjusted until the difficulties could be resolved.

Amanda Hatfield, Benton County Elections Manager, shared that the General Election ballots were mailed out October 14, 2020, and that the temporary Voting Center in Richland was currently open and serving Benton County voters needing to register, update their registrations, or get replacement ballots from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, and will be open from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Saturdays beginning on October 24th as well as October 31<sup>st</sup> prior to the General Election on November 03, 2020.

Rene Rojas, Benton County Elections System Supervisor, intended to share a video demonstrating the AVU (Accessible Voting Units) available at the Benton County Voting Centers in the Auditor's office in Prosser, the Voting Center in Richland, and WSU Tri-Cities. Unfortunately, due to technical issues with the virtual meeting, the videos would not display successfully. Rene, instead, explained how the AVU's work and how they service those voters who need assistance voting due to a disability or simply because they prefer to vote their ballot electronically. A ballot on the AVU is marked electronically and then

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printed for the voter to enclose in their envelope packet to either mail or deposit in any of the County ballot drop boxes. Because the video was not able to be shared in this virtual meeting, it was agreed that Deidra Beck will send the link to all committee members, and Rene would be invited back to our next meeting to answer any questions members may have regarding the AVU video after viewing it.

Brenda shared about the new Washington State University Tri-Cities Hub that has been established in accordance with the new Washington law that requires state and regional universities to open a nonpartisan student engagement Hub on its campus for in-person voter services. This WSU Hub will be open starting October 29th and run through Election Day on November 03, 2020. These hubs allow students to either download their ballot from online portals or Benton County Election personnel will assist them with the opportunity to register, update their registration and receive a ballot or replacement ballot in the same way as all other regular voter services provided at voting centers.

The committee discussed the opportunity to provide a regularly scheduled time during our meetings to be open for “Public Comment” now that our meetings can be publicly accessed both virtually and audibly. Brenda explained that although we do not fall under the Public Meetings Act and are ultimately subject to the Board of Commissioner’s approval on any decisions made, it would be good to be transparent and allow this public access opportunity. Brenda voiced no objection, and Judith Davis supported the idea. Luz Rudd felt that we should wait because she felt that we are not ready for this since we have not progressed enough in community projects at this point. Brenda agreed that it is a bit frustrating that we’ve been hindered in our progress due to COVID19 restrictions and shutdown. Although we have accomplished some of our goals for the year (i.e. establishing a website, scheduling speakers, and developing a site-evaluation checklist) Brenda agreed that it would be better to wait on this option.

Deidra Beck introduced the guest speaker, Paul Singer, the Executive Director of Tri-Cities Residential Services. Paul had just moved into this position earlier this year having previously served as the Operations Director. Just as it has been for all others, it has been a very interesting and challenging year for them. Tri-Cities Residential Services has been in operation since 1978 and does just as their name implies; they provide residential services

and supporting education on living skills for people with intellectual disabilities. They assist them in paying their bills, doing chores around the home, taking them to their appointments, and any other needed assistance including up to 24-hour care. Currently they are supporting about fifty-two in their homes, and they have approximately a dozen people in their protection program. Tri-Cities Residential spends time with their case members and families to help them learn to be more independent. Their In-Home services provide counseling and coping techniques. "Their ultimate goal is to not be needed," Paul said. They work to be an indivisible agency supporting them in the background. Currently, they have around 170 employees. They also have a Mental Health Division with beds where they can take in and serve individuals transitioning from hospital or crisis care until they are stabilized and are ready to transition back into society. Some of their clients come from the local area, and some are from throughout the state. This division recently progressed to full time assistance with a full staff and program director. After Paul's presentation to the committee, Brenda asked whether he knew of any projects or programs that they were looking for assistance with that perhaps this committee could partner with them in. Paul pointed out that their biggest challenge is staff retention. Because they are on limited funding, they are only able to pay just above minimum wage. Theirs is very difficult work and doesn't tend to be employment that is attractive to young people. For those that do this line of work, it must be a calling; they really have to care for and appreciate the people they serve. There is a high turnover rate among their staff. Through the COVID19 relief package that the State provided some extra funding that enabled them to temporarily bump their wages by two dollars which is some help. Deidra asked if there were any public events that they hold to increase awareness of their services and stimulate interest in the work. Paul mentioned that they usually have a Family Services Day with booths, but that promoting their services is not really a problem. They receive many referrals and accept clients from all over the state. Paul stated that he was not sure how we could help in that area, but that he would think on it while he tries to get to know us a little more. On behalf of the committee, Brenda stated that we look forward to partnering with them in some capacity while we recognize that right now we are all restricted with the challenges surrounded with COVID19 mitigation. We asked that Paul stay in contact with us and keep us in mind as a resource in the future.

The next item on the agenda was regarding the members whose terms would be expiring in December of this 2020 year. These members are as follows: Gretchen Hormel, Judith Davis, Kyle Bosley, Teresa Payne, Shyanne Palmus, and Brenda Chilton. Somewhere the committee alternating terms got unbalanced with more expiring this year than next and we will work to remedy that when applying for member approval with the Board of Commissioners. Brenda expressed her need to step down as a member and the Chair, and offered that perhaps Matt Nash, currently Vice-Chair would be interested in stepping into her role. He stated that he would. This would be voted on and decided in December prior to beginning our new year for 2021. Deidra will reach out to each of the members whose terms are expiring individually to inquire about their interest in continuing. This time, those that are wishing to continue will serve a two-year term through the end of 2022.

After no committee members presented any other items for the Good of the Order, Deidra promised that she would work with Benton County's IT to learn better ways of how to avoid the connection and video sharing difficulties we experienced during this meeting with WebEx so that we might not experience the same technical interruptions.

Brenda adjourned the meeting at 2:53 p.m.