

March 30, 2017

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Accessible Communities Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

The Accessible Communities Advisory Committee (ACAC) met on Thursday, March 30, 2017, 1:30 – 2:30pm, at the Cowlitz County Administration Building, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor meeting room. The meeting agenda is attached.

Attendees were:

Regina Beer, Cowlitz County Elections  
Ardell Burns, Department of Services for the Blind  
Judy Chamberlain, Disability Resources  
Kathleen Chilson, Goodwill  
Linda DeCost, DSHS, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation  
Carolyn Fundingsland, Cowlitz County Elections Manager  
Marc Gilchrist, Cowlitz County Sheriff's Office  
Breoni Harkleroad, DSHS, Developmental Disability Administration  
Debbie Himes, Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment  
Suzann Isaacson, Catholic Community Services – Volunteer Services  
Tim Krueger, Cowlitz County Ombudsman, Mental Health  
Joanne Laurent, Department of Services for the Blind  
Mary Kate Marthaller, Director Disability Support Services, Lower Columbia College  
Arne Mortenson, Cowlitz County Commissioner  
Susan O'Connor, Wahkiakum County Elections  
Marjorie Pitcher, Community  
Susan Schwartz, Community  
Jennifer Shaffer, DSHS, Developmental Disability Administration  
Sybil Sides, Cowlitz Community Network  
Sunnie Smith, Parents Child Assistance Program  
Breanne Swanson, Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities of Southwest Washington  
Kristina Swanson, Cowlitz County Auditor  
Shannon Underhill, Sign Language Interpreter  
Sharon Weinhold, Disability Outreach Coordinator  
Carla-Jo Whitson, Brain Injury Alliance of Washington

**Welcome and Introductions.** Attendees were welcomed and thanked for their interest and participation. This was the second meeting of the ACAC, which resulted from the transition of the Cowlitz County Disability Advisory Committee to an ACAC. Members introduced themselves. Special recognition and thanks was given to Debbie Himes, visiting from the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment.

**Update on ACAC Grant Request.** Carolyn gave an update on the request for funding to improve access to three offices in the County Administration Building – the Assessor’s Office, Treasurer’s Office and Auditor’s Office. The entrance to those offices, all of which are frequented by seniors and persons with disabilities, are not easily accessible due to the awkward and heavy doors. The Governor’s Committee has indicated this is a great proposal and has asked for additional details. The Cowlitz County Maintenance Director has been asked for the details so we can respond.

**Incentives for Businesses to Improve Accessibility.**

Sharon provided information on two tax incentives available to businesses for projects that improve access to their business and accessibility within their business. The tax incentives – tax credit and tax deduction – are derived from the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and authorized by the Internal Revenue Service. The tax credit, up to \$5,000 each year, is available for small businesses (\$1M of revenues or less or 30 or fewer employees) for expenditures such as readers, sign language interpreters, adaptive equipment, accessible formats of printed materials, removal of barriers and consulting fees. The tax deduction, up to \$15,000 each year, is available for all businesses regardless of size for removal of facility and transportation barriers. Examples include: parking lots, walkways, ramps, entrances, stairs, floors, bathrooms, signage, alarms, protruding objects and symbols of accessibility. Small businesses can combine these incentives and receive up to \$20,000 each year.

Businesses improving accessibility for seniors and persons with disabilities is a win-win situation. It provides seniors and persons with disabilities better access to needed services in the community and possible employment opportunities. People with disabilities have a lot of abilities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. Disability Statistics, about 1 in 5 people have a disability. By 2018, almost 25% of the population will be over 55. With aging comes accessibility related issues – vision, hearing, mobility. This population has a tremendous buying power. Improving business accessibility for people with disabilities and seniors not only increases the customer base and makes good business sense, but benefits everyone and helps to create a more inclusive society.

**Discussion / Idea Gathering.**

ACAC members were asked if they had interest in partnering to pursue a project to help businesses improve accessibility. And, if so, how would the ACAC go about it. Members expressed interest in pursuing the project and began to brainstorm how the ACAC should proceed:

- The ACAC should begin with an information/education campaign for businesses with flyers, handouts and presentations. It also was suggested we consider online accessibility information, e.g., Business Accessibility 101.
- Targets for the campaign should be information and/or presentations for local small business networking groups, the Rental Property Owners Association of Cowlitz County (President is Sheila Soto), restaurants, Senior Fair attendees (May 10), and small businesses working out of their homes.
- It was stated that landlords may not be willing to make minor home modifications, or will require the renter to pay for the accessibility improvement

- and later to return the rental property to its original condition, e.g., grab bars in bathroom.
- Transportation is a major problem for people with disabilities. Is there any way to incorporate this issue into our plan? Possibly help taxi companies fit vehicles into using tax relief?
  - The conversation moved to barriers in our community for persons with disabilities and seniors. They included:
    - o New street/sidewalks on Commerce that are not accessible because there are not enough curb ramps from parking to the sidewalk.
    - o Fire alarms in apartments not safe for hearing impaired. Should have flashing lights in addition to the alarm.
    - o With new phones, TTY is outdated. ASL does not use the same structure as writing, technology is moving towards video chat.
    - o Commissioner meetings or other public meetings are not accessible to those with hearing or vision impairments and do not allow them to fully participate.
  - There was discussion about business websites. Most businesses have websites, but they may not be useful to all. Certain colors are not visible to people with some vision impairments. Certain fonts are easier to read. Lower Columbia College currently is in the early stages to make all documents fully accessible to all.

Debbie said Spokane and Jefferson Counties have ACAC's and shared some of the work they are doing. Spokane County ACAC conducted an accessibility survey of businesses and plans to include the survey results on their website. Businesses received certificates to post to the public for being accessible. Jefferson County ACAC improved beach access for persons with disabilities by purchasing a special beach wheelchair and beach walker. Debbie said she will share the Spokane survey information with our ACAC.

The Elections Department agreed to develop a plan for moving forward on this opportunity for businesses to improve accessibility and will present it to members at the next meeting. The plan will consider the very useful input received from the members at this meeting. Smaller discussion sessions may be scheduled to develop certain areas of the plan. The goal will be to partner with those who are interested. Several members indicated strong interest in participating and stated the type of support they could provide.

### **Opportunities and Happenings A-Round the Room.**

- Sheriff's office is interested in more accessible entrances at the Hall of Justice, and would like to pursue a grant opportunity in the future.
- Highlands is hosting an Easter Egg Hunt on Saturday, April 8, for people of all ages with disabilities. They are still looking for volunteers and donations.
- Senior Connections Fair is May 10.
- Traumatic Brain Injury Support Group, 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of every month, at AAADSW.
- Identify a problem and then potential solutions. This has been a successful approach.
- Washington State Youth Leadership Forum for high school students with disabilities. The Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment is seeking youth to participate in this forum to be held in late July or early August at a State University. They

ask members for help in getting the word out. High school juniors and seniors with disabilities apply to serve as delegates from their communities at this six-day, five-night event. Young people with disabilities cultivate their potential leadership, citizenship and social skills.

The meeting adjourned at 2:38pm.

Sharon Weinhold  
Cowlitz County Elections

**Accessible Communities Advisory Committee – Meeting Agenda**  
**County Administration Building, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Meeting Room**  
**Thursday, March 30, 2017, 1:30 – 2:30PM**

Welcome

Introductions

Update on ACAC Grant Request

Incentives for Businesses to Improve Accessibility  
Eligibility  
Incentives  
Examples of Improvements

Discussion / Idea Gathering

Opportunities and Happenings A-Round the Room