



Fort Wayne/Allen County Disability Advisory Council's 2018 Annual Report



PURPOSE

Assist the City of Fort Wayne's Mayor's Office and Allen County Board of Commissioners in becoming models of providing equal access for people with disabilities to employment, services, programs and activities offered in the City of Fort Wayne and Allen County.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- Serve as an informational resource for city/county elected officials and administrators.
- Identify barriers to full community participation encountered by people with disabilities.
- Recommend corrective actions to address identified barriers.
- Produce an annual report.

COUNCIL MEMBERS

- Chairman: John Guingrich, President/CEO, The League
- Vice-Chairman: Patti Hays, CEO, AWS Foundation
- Charity Murphy, Allen County ADA Coordinator
- Krista Maxwell, Fort Wayne Title VI Coordinator
- Heather VanWagner Fort Wayne ADA Coordinator
- Cindy Atkinson, Events and Fundraising Coordinator, GiGi's Playhouse
- Rachael Miller, Special Education Teacher, FWCS
- Ronald Duchovic, Purdue Prof. (ret.) of Chemistry
- Becky Weimerskierch, Exec. Director, Community Transportation Network
- Jeff Scherer, Communications Coordinator, Scherer Resources

SUMMARY

2018 has been a year of information-gathering and awareness-building for the Fort Wayne – Allen County Disability Advisory Council. The council surveyed attendees at the 2018 Disabilities Expo and identified recreation and transportation as the areas of greatest concern, need, or interest for people with disabilities in the Fort Wayne area (see attached). These areas as well as emergency preparedness and employment were focus areas for discussions throughout 2018.

ACTIVITIES

Conducted discussions with representatives from city and county departments as well as other organizations to better understand the services provided by each and to provide insight into the needs of individuals with disabilities in order to improve access throughout the community.

Transportation. The council met with representatives from Transportation Engineering, Traffic, the Allen County Highway Department, the City Clerk, Citilink, the Street Department, and the Highway Foreman.

- Discussions centered around ramps and curbs, accessible parking meters, issues with misuse of handicap parking spaces, audible signals, Citilink services beyond the fixed routes as well as their new app, and snow removal in neighborhoods as well as downtown.
- New signs are being tested at Citizen's Square that inform drivers not to park in the handicap access aisles. The council discussed ways to increase education and awareness regarding use of handicap parking spaces. Lana Keesling has been in touch with the BMV regarding an informational brochure on this topic.

Recreation.

- The council met with Steve Schuhmacher and Chuck Redinger to discuss the riverfront development. They have been very deliberate with the details in making this project accessible, using feedback from many people with a variety of disabilities.
- The council also met with a representative from the Allen County Parks Department who provided information regarding the triangular playground there and at various other parks.

Emergency Preparedness. The council met with representatives from the Department of Health and from the Allen County Office of Homeland Security.

- Discussed how major emergency situations such as disease or weather can best be managed with regards to the unique needs of people with disabilities.
- Charity Murphy will include them both in future communications about emergency preparedness for local citizens with disabilities.

Employment. The council met representatives from Rehabilitation Hospitals of Indiana (RHI) and from Greater Fort Wayne, Inc. to discuss services available to people with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining employment.

2019 COUNCIL FOCUS / INITIATIVES

The data and information the council started collecting in 2018 enable us to consider several new initiatives. As the Fort Wayne/Allen County Disability Advisory Council looks forward to 2019, we intend to build on the past year's information gathering activities.

The council will add to the survey results from the 2018 Disabilities Exposition by conducting a similar survey at the Expo again this year. A consistent, annual stream of

data from the local citizens most impacted will help the council to continue to prioritize community concerns.

Already in development is an Inclusiveness Training Program designed to increase sensitivity and understanding of how to work with people with disabilities. It is initially being designed as an informational training program for local government employees. Once refined it may be used as a template for community organizations and local businesses.

Discussions with the Allen County Building Commission, the Fort Wayne Building Authority, City and County Park Bureaus, and the designers of the Riverfront Project focused on state accessibility requirements and awareness of Federal ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) requirements. The Advisory Council will explore opportunities to help them continue to surpass minimum requirements by encouraging best practices by builders, developers, and architects for accessibility.

The Advisory Council's discussions with emergency preparedness agencies and the Public Health Department highlighted the challenges that individuals with disabilities encounter during significant civil, weather, and public health emergencies. The simple process of identifying the location of persons in need of assistance during an emergency is a daunting task. The Council will explore the use of new technologies that may aid in locating persons who need assistance during such emergencies and will recommend the adoption of effective technologies.

A recurring theme is the need to motivate local government, businesses and organizations to go beyond the basic legal requirements in accessibility with regards to construction and accommodations like snow removal through various means of positive recognition and acknowledgement of their dedication to being inclusive and accessible. The council will look for and recommend opportunities to recognize these organizations.

The information gathered and relationships developed by the council in 2018 provide a solid foundation to identify future opportunities to make Allen County and Fort Wayne model communities of accessibility and inclusiveness for people with disabilities.

COUNTY AND CITY ADA COORDINATORS

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