



City of Jacksonville's Mayor's Disability Council 2024 Year End Report

*Dedicated to improving the quality of life for persons with a disability
in the Jacksonville area.*

Our Mission: The Jacksonville Mayor's Disability Council raises awareness of the needs of persons with disabilities by assisting in the formulation of solutions to meet those needs by providing a public forum.

Our History: The Mayor's Disability Council is a diverse group of individuals with over 80% personally having disabling conditions. The 13-member board was created in 1989. These council members volunteer their time and expertise to improve the lives of persons with disabilities. This council works hand in hand with the City of Jacksonville Disabled Services Division.

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COMMUNITY PARTNERS (Ad Hoc Members)

Outside of the agencies that partner through the Council's members, the MDC partners with a multitude of other agencies in the community to receive feedback on community issues and potential resolutions. These are some of the major partners we have worked with this year.

- Brooks Rehabilitation
- SportsAbility Alliance
- City of Jacksonville: Public Library/Special Needs
- City of Jacksonville: Office of Sports & Entertainment
- City of Jacksonville: Jacksonville Small and Emerging Businesses
- CareerSource
- Division of Blind Services (DBS)
- Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)
- Duval County Public Schools (DCPS)
- Jacksonville Sheriff Office (JSO)
- Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA)
- MV Transportation, Inc.

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Mayor's Disability Council (MDC)

Currently the Mayor's Disability Council (MDC) consists of twelve (12) active members appointed by the mayor. Within the MDC there are three (3) Subcommittee's:

- **Employment Subcommittee;**
- **Access to Health and Wellbeing/Adaptive Sports & Recreation Subcommittee; and**
- **Legislative, Education, and Public Safety Subcommittee (LEAPs).**

Each January, the MDC puts together Goals and Objectives to fulfill the duties of the executive order that created the Council. This year, the Council took into consideration initiatives put in place by Mayor Donna Deegan when creating the 2024 Goals and Objectives. This ensures the Council will be better to advise on how the disability community is affected by community issues and come up with solutions.

The Council meets monthly on the first Tuesday of each month from 10am – 5pm with additional meetings as needed throughout the year. These meetings are used to fulfill the Goals and Objectives and to receive community input on a plethora of topics that include but are not limited to: infrastructure barriers, transportation, Health and Public Safety, employment, education, etc.

This year resulted in some astonishing accomplishments and positive outcomes for the disability community through the hard work of the Council, its subcommittees, and the COJ Disabled Services Division.

LEGISLATIVE (LEAPS)

The Adult Changing Tables Ordinance (2023-780):

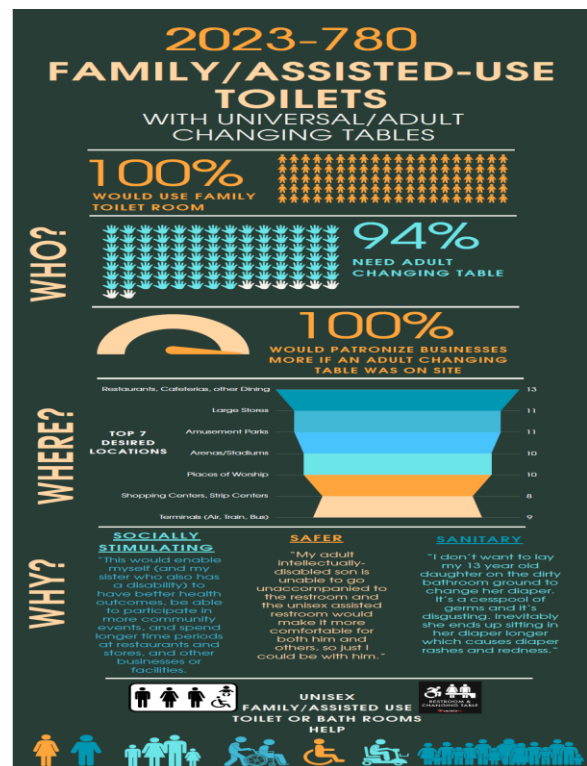
Ordinance 2023-780

AN ORDINANCE REGARDING LOCAL TECHNICAL AMENDMENTS TO THE FLORIDA BUILDING CODE; READOPTING SECTION 321.103 (BABY-CHANGING TABLE REQUIREMENTS), CHAPTER 321 (ADOPTION OF BUILDING CODE), ORDINANCE CODE; REPEALING SECTION 321.103.1 (CHANGING TABLE REQUIREMENTS)

WHEREAS, through Ordinance 2019-392-E, the Council also adopted a second technical amendment to require adult-changing stations in specifically designated locations;

Source: GC-#1617923-v2-2023-780_LUZ_Sub.DOCX

The MDC worked with the DSD and former General Counsel, Trisha Bowles to successfully pass an ordinance to ensure persons with disabilities would have access to proper restrooms throughout the City of Jacksonville while ensuring small businesses would not be negatively impacted in implementation. The MDC's Vice Chair, Natalie Alden wrote a report on behalf of the entire MDC Board on how the lack of adult changing tables impact the health and well-being of persons with disabilities. DSD Staff and Board Members attended City Council Meetings in support of the ordinance and spoke during public comment on the vital need in the community. A survey was put together by General Counsel, the MDC, and DSD. An infographic was created based on the report and survey results through General Counsel to substantiate the need in the community.



PUBLIC SAFETY (LEAPS)

INFRASTRUCTURE/ACCESSIBLE SIDEWALKS: Through continued multiyear advocacy, the MDC's Vice Chair wrote a letter on behalf of the Council requesting that the Art Museum Drive project be moved up the list within the capital improvement projects as this is a very dangerous area for people with disabilities to traverse. There are a multitude of nonprofits, government agencies, and other disability related services programs that are home to this area that people with disabilities need to access. This project was taken up by City Council and supported by the Mayor's office.

JSO DISABILITY SENSITIVITY TRAINING: Through multiyear advocacy from the MDC, JSO partnered with the Council and the Division to conduct a disability sensitivity training for the Corrections Officers of the Sheriff's office. Chief Tucker, José Morales, and Natalie Alden conducted the training session and received great feedback from the officers in attendance.



JAX READY FEST: The MDC gave input through the DSD to the Emergency Preparedness Division to complete an inclusive conference for the Jacksonville community. DSD played an active role in the disability accommodation portion and both the DSD and MDC had vendor tables.

WHITE CANE SAFETY DAY: The MDC collaborated with The Jacksonville Council of the Blind, CIL Jacksonville, and the Division of Blind Services, and the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office to create awareness of pedestrian safety for individuals with disabilities.



PUBLIC AWARENESS (LEAPS)

PARATRANSIT: The MDC requested JTA's assistance in putting together palm cards on how to educate the community on (1) how to use the new AIRA App, and (2) how to navigate paratransit when traveling to a different municipality within the United States and how visitors with disabilities coming to Jacksonville can utilize JTA's paratransit. JTA put together the two (2) requested palm cards and they are now ready to be dispersed to the community.



These resources will not only help the Jacksonville community but will have a positive economic impact in the city by making Jacksonville more accessible to visit by those traveling with disabilities.



TRANSPORTATION: The MDC hosted a town hall meeting on transportation in collaboration with the Jacksonville Transportation Advisory Committee (JTAC) and the Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA). This event marked a significant step in engaging the community directly to identify and prioritize key issues impacting accessibility and transportation in Jacksonville.



The MDC continued to advocate through DSD in for the continuance of Mental Health First Aid Trainings. We were very pleased to see that the mayor took up this initiative through Mental Health Matters Jax!

EDUCATION (LEAPS)

PUBLIC EDUCATION: The MDC has successfully worked on phase 3 of our multiyear education project: DCPS is sharing their on-site resource nights through DSD at the different schools to enable community agencies the ability to bring resources to teachers, parents, and students with disabilities. These

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resources will help remove barriers to needed services to enable children with disabilities to have successful transitions to adulthood.

OUTREACH EVENTS

The MDC through the DSD supports and/or attends different outreach events throughout the city to bring awareness of disability related topics and how individuals can get involved through the Council. Council members to attend these events seek out information on issues that affects different disability populations throughout the city to bring back to the full Council.

- 29th Annual Tools for Success Family Conference: This event supports families of children with special needs ages birth to 22 through interagency collaboration. It helps families obtain information on available resources and topics that affect their child's education and well-being.
- Fair Housing Expo: This event gives resources and education on how to increase one's understanding of the Fair Housing Act and how the law applies to people with disabilities.
- Visit Jax: Visit Jacksonville, <https://www.visitjacksonville.com/> an official Travel Website for Jacksonville, FL invited the Mayor's Disability Council Members to be a part of a photoshoot that highlights diversity and accessibility in our city. **Photos courtesy of the VisitJax Photoshoot.**



Picture 1 MDC Councilmembers, Anida Pollo & Teona Haugabook, & DSD Chief Kara Tucker at Jacksonville Beach fishing pier.



Picture 2 DSD Chief Kara Tucker & MDC Board Member, Ray Pringle: Southbank Riverwalk

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- Community sporting events: These events originated with the intent to normalize people with disabilities in public, create awareness, and to break down barriers that prevent people with disabilities from fully participating in the community.
 - Jacksonville Shrimp baseball, Jacksonville Sharks arena football, and Jacksonville Iceman hockey
 - Jacksonville Jaguars football: This event is specific to veterans with disabilities.
- Gate River Run: The Run for Inclusion: Through Challenge Enterprises and the Ability Experience, Teona Haugabook, Kara Tucker, and Stephanie Young participated as runners in the event to raise awareness for the inclusion of people with disabilities in community events.



Photo of Gate River Run 2024 participants with disabilities

- River City Live: MDC Chair, José Morales and DSD Chief Kara Tucker were invited to talk about the Disability Expo, the MDC, and the DSD.
- With feedback from the LEAPS subcommittee, Stephanie Young put together a new brochure for the MDC with inserts that can be changed for different events to have better outreach on current events and issues through the community.

EMPLOYMENT

City of Jacksonville Career Fair: The City of Jacksonville held career fair on June 18, 2024 whereby the MDC partnered with CareerSource, Center for Independent Living (CIL), Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST), Division of Blind Services (DBS), and Division of Vocational Rehab to ensure all accommodations were readily available for individuals with disabilities to fully participate in the event and obtain additional resources to help with successful employment.

The Employment subcommittee is actively working with the City of Jacksonville's Jacksonville Small and Emerging Businesses (JSEB) to implement a course to help persons with disabilities go through their process to become successful entrepreneurs. This has been a great collaboration and JSEB hopes to have the program implemented in 2025.

We are developing a campaign to educate employers on the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. The campaign would consist of having a voluntary pledge card that businesses can participate in whereby they would voluntarily "pledge" to hire qualified individuals with disabilities in upcoming job positions. Participants may choose to: complete a corporate accessibility assessment and take steps toward creating a more accessible workplace, engage in mentoring/job shadowing opportunities for individuals with disabilities, and/or participate in on-the-job training programs with the option to hire individuals with disabilities who complete this training. With feedback from the employment subcommittee, Stephanie Young created the pledge card, José Morales is working on the assessment, and Natalie Alden created the "Why Hire Someone with a Disability" document.

WEEK OF ADA – JULY 20 – 25, 2024

July 26, 2024 marked the 34th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA was signed into law by President George HW Bush on July 26, 1990. Disabled Services and the Mayor's Disability Council came together with other community partners to plan a week full of ADA Events and activities where all abilities could participate.

- July 20th kicked off the week of events starting with a “Night at the Shark Tank” arena football game where the Jacksonville Sharks beat the Quad City Steamwheelers 43 to 37.
- July 23 held the annual ADA and IT symposiums through the City of Jacksonville's Disabled Services Division. The MDC started implementation of the ADA symposium in 2012 and has been able to continue educating contractors, engineers, government workers, and the public on the Florida accessibility code for building construction as it relates to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other laws. The IT symposium was added to the schedule a few years later to expand public education of the ADA in relation to Information Technology.
- July 24 started the move in for all the exhibitors at the Prime Osborne Convention Center for the 3rd Annual Disability Expo. This year an adaptive recreation portion was added to the event where we partnered with Brooks Adaptive Recreation and SportsAbility Alliance.
- Disability Network Event for Exhibitors (after move-in) to network with one another before the Expo – This was the 1st Annual Networking Event created, planned, organized and coordinated by MDC's very own Vice Chair, Natalie Alden and sponsored by COJ's Disabled Services Division and Disability Rights Florida. This was a very successful event with rave reviews/awesome feedback!

DISABILITY AND ADAPTIVE RECREATION EXPO 2024

July 25, The City of Jacksonville Disabled Services Division presented the 3rd Annual Disability and Adaptive Recreation Expo 2024. The Disability Expo was Founded and Created by Lois Smokes, COJ Disabled Services Division Manager. Since its inception in July 2022, it is the only Expo of its kind in the Northeast Florida area. With over 100 vendors, a hands-on Adaptive Sports & Recreation area and guest appearance by Mayor Donna Deegan. The MDC along with other community partners work with the division on the logistics and details of the event. This event has quickly become extremely popular for both vendors and the community to become educated on different disability topics and learn about a multitude of community resources available.



The graphic features a blue background with circular images of people participating in adaptive sports and recreation. At the top center is the City of Jacksonville logo. Below it, the text reads: "CITY OF JACKSONVILLE DISABILITY AND ADAPTIVE RECREATION EXPO 2024". Underneath are icons for various disabilities: hearing, vision, physical, and cognitive. The event details are: "THURSDAY • JULY 25TH • 9AM-4PM" and "PRIME F. OSBORN CONVENTION CENTER • 1000 WATER STREET • JACKSONVILLE, FL 32204". A red banner states: "LUNCH AVAILABLE TO THE FIRST 500 ATTENDEES TO REGISTER". There is a "FREE PARKING & DOOR PRIZES!" section with a list of benefits: "Variety of Exhibitors with Valuable Resources", "Adaptive Sports Event", and "Presentations by Community Partners". A QR code is labeled "SCAN ME". At the bottom, it says "REGISTER AT JACKSONVILLE.GOV/DISABILITYEXPO" and lists sponsors: AGAPE FAMILY HEALTH, Disability Rights FLORIDA, COMCAST, and JAX CARES. A small note at the bottom states: "Accommodations for persons with disabilities are available upon request. Please contact Disabled Services at VM (904) 255-5466, TTY (904) 255-5475, or email your request to KaraT@coj.net."



Photo of presentation of proclamation at Disability Expo (from left to right): MDC Vice Chair Natalie Alden; Chief Kara Tucker; Mayor Donna Deegan; MDC Chair José Morales, and MDC Council Members Alexis Gonzalez and Teona Haugabook.



WHITE CANE AWARENESS DAY:

A proclamation was put together to include language from last year plus adding content on both statutes for pedestrian safety that was approved and signed by the mayor.

MOBILITY WEEK:

The MDC revised last year's proclamation to include accessibility for people with disabilities in the various transportation choices and multimodal projects that include the Emerald Trail, the U2C Urban Connector, and the VisionZero Initiative.

NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH:

Jacksonville citizens of all abilities deserve equal access to employment opportunities. Inclusive and productive workforces are built on the strengths and abilities of all.

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Picture from 12032024 MDC meeting: (from left to right) Patric Young from the Patric Young Foundation, MDC Council members – Stephanie Young, Natalie Alden, Dan O'Connor, Anida Pollo, Ron McCauley, Ray Pringle, José Morales, and DSD Chief Kara Tucker

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Mayor's Disability Council has relied on staff from the Disabled Services Division throughout the years to implement different programs, services, events, and initiatives. Currently, the office is down on staff (and is currently hiring for current vacant positions). However, the overall number of staff has decreased over the last several years. We recommend an additional FTE be placed in the Disabled Services Division to ensure that both the MDC and the division can continue to provide excellent service and have the capability of moving forward with different initiatives that would positively affect the disability community as a whole in Jacksonville.
- Expand the Jim Brady Scholarship so that high school students have more of an opportunity to apply and obtain the scholarship to successfully transition to employment and adulthood. The Council would also like to change the name of this scholarship or add a new scholarship to honor one of our own Disability Advocates, Mark Roesser. The expansion or new scholarship would enable recipients to receive certification from vocational and technical schools which expands the opportunity and employment choices for people with disabilities.
- An ordinance be enacted to allow the Disabled Services Division to take sponsorships from the public for specific events and initiatives. This would enable the Council and Division to hold different events or create initiatives that the public is very willing to share the cost to implement (i.e. Disability Expo, Financial Freedom Conference, etc.).
- Healthcare Symposium through the Mayor's office (Lynn Sherman, Executive Director of Health Programs): We support having this event to educate healthcare facilities (including smaller medical offices and diagnostic facilities) and persons with disabilities on their rights and responsibilities. Topics should include: accommodations in completing paperwork, physical access for exams and diagnostics, and access to services.
- The establishment of a fully inclusive sports complex for persons with disabilities that includes but is not limited to: a multiuse facility, Olympic size pool, regulation track, a hotel and conference center. The MDC has more itemized specifics on the vision of this sports complex that has a list of features that have been brought forward by the community and community partners.

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Addendums to the 2024 Report to the Mayor

- Adult Changing Tables – write up
- Adult Changing Tables – bullet points
- CIP Letter to Mayor – support for Art Museum Drive project
- Why Hire Someone with a Disability – document
- Report on the Mayor's Disability Council's First Community Town Hall on Transportation

PASS ORDINANCE SEC. 321.103.1. - CHANGING TABLE REQUIREMENTS

Over 40,000 Duval County residents are in need of adult changing tables to take care of their toileting needs, sometimes with the help of a caregiver. These residents encompass seniors, veterans, larger children, and other adults with disabilities. Many of these individuals are forced to lay on the bathroom floor, sit in soiled garments/diapers, or do not go out into the community due to a lack of proper accommodations. Jacksonville has a higher disability population due to our naval base being one of five facilities in the nation that caters to servicemen that have a spouse or children with disabilities.

This population has a great economic impact on our community and small businesses. Social Security pays out almost \$1.5 trillion annually to persons receiving Title II and Title XVI benefits. This figure does not take into account veterans benefits or income from other pensions and retirement income, nor does it account for the nearly \$500 billion in post-tax income for working age individuals with disabilities. It has been shown that people with disabilities, their family members, and caregivers account for more than 50% of the population and decidedly would prefer to spend their dollars at businesses that give equal treatment to people with disabilities. It should also be stated that people with disabilities and their families/caregivers are more likely to travel to locations that are more accessible which greatly impacts tourism dollars.

We not only encourage the Council to renew the ordinance Sec. 321.103.1. - Changing table requirements but, to take away the sunset provisions. There are a multitude of other types of buildings/facilities that should also be included in this ordinance. School buildings used as special needs shelters, courthouses and other public buildings, and public parks with larger facilities. [NOTE: Duval County schools and COJ's Parks and Recreation Department are already actively putting adult changing tables at some facilities without the mandate because it is the right thing to do.]

It should be noted that there is a preference for bathroom facilities that allow either sex to enter as a multitude of caregivers that assist in the toileting process may be of the opposite sex than the person requiring the adult changing table (i.e. parent, spouse, child, sibling, etc.). There is also a preference for adjustable height adult changing tables as these are more accessible for a majority of the population who require these types of facilities.

The ordinance has exemptions that would prevent undue hardship for small businesses as well as the IRS has tax credits to help cover the cost of eligible access expenditures. This ordinance can be seen as a way to give more value to commercial property and for developers that proactively create inclusive bathrooms for their consumers. There are even location websites for individuals that require an adult changing table for their bathroom/toileting needs. This can be seen as a free marketing tool for businesses.

Think about the son that wants to take his elderly mother or grandmother to lunch, shopping, and/or a show but, is not able to ensure that she will be able to use the restroom due to the lack of an adult changing table whereby the son can assist with changing an adult diaper and ensuring clean skin.

Think about the woman, mother, grandmother that requires a catheter to use the restroom that has to lay on the bathroom floor in order to relieve themselves or has to limit their liquid intake to prevent having to go to the bathroom before they get home. This can cause severe medical issues such as urinary tract and/or vaginal infections, and voiding dysfunction. Men can have similar UTIs and voiding dysfunction when having to hold urine for long periods of time.

Think about the person who has to sit in their soiled garments or diapers due to not having access to an adult changing table. Skin damage due to incontinence can happen quickly and have negative long-term health effects. This could turn into a larger community health issue when these individuals leave behind bacteria on seats/chairs due to lack of access.

Disability is the one thing that can affect anyone at any time. It does not discriminate and for some disabling conditions there are no treatments and there are no cures. Let's do the right thing for the entire community.

Adult Changing Tables

- **Population Affected:** 15% of the overall disability population which accounts for over 40,000 Duval County residents are in need of adult changing tables. This includes: veterans, seniors, larger children, and other adults with varying types of disabilities and disabling conditions.
 - Many of these individuals also require a caregivers' assistance. Caregivers are often family members (i.e. mothers, fathers, spouses, siblings, children, etc.), friends or paid workers that may be of the opposite sex. [When caregivers and family members are added to the population affected, this raises the numbers to more than 50% of the entire population.]
- **Justification of Necessity:** current restrooms do not allow for the safe and sanitary access for these individuals with special toileting and/or incontinence needs.
 - Adult changing tables give persons with disabilities a sanitary location for self-catheterization, catheterization by caregiver, diaper changes, incontinence cleanup, etc. This prevents individuals from having to lie on the floor for toileting/changing purposes.
- **Economic Impact:** Social Security pays out almost \$1.5 trillion annually to persons receiving Title II and Title XVI benefits. This figure does not include veterans' benefits, pensions and other retirement income, for the nearly \$500 billion in post-tax income for working age individuals with disabilities.
 - Persons with disabilities, their families, friends, and caregivers are more likely to support businesses with proper access and avoid places of business that are not accessible.
 - This large population gives a great economic impact through tourism dollars.
- **Large and Small Business Access:** The ordinance as exemptions that would prevent undue hardship for small businesses. For those businesses that would need to upgrade their facilities or create accessible facilities during construction, may be able to utilize tax credits through the IRS that help cover the cost of eligible access expenditures. There are different types of these adult changing tables and the cost range depending on the type. Larger facilities may need the adjustable height larger tables whereas a smaller business may just need a lower end model.

Disability is the one group that anyone at any time can join. Fair and reasonable access is what is being requested based on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) so that ALL persons with disabilities may enjoy the community at large.

May 8, 2024

Re: Art Museum Drive project – CIP

Mayor Deegan,

We are writing to request assistance with moving the Art Museum Drive project up on the CIP list for funding to expedite crucial improvements for road and pedestrian safety. The project currently has design funding for FY 26/27 and construction funding is included in the FY 27/28 budget.

Art Museum Drive is a critical service area for people with disabilities as thousands of citizens with disabilities live, work, and receive services each day on this stretch of road between Atlantic and Beach Boulevard. This stretch of road is home to the State Board of Education Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Division of Blind Services, the Center for Independent Living, the Northeast Florida Safety Council, Duval County Public Schools' Exceptional Student Education Office, the Department of Family & Children Services, and the City of Jacksonville's Social Services Division.

Citizens who use the services offered by these organizations represent a vulnerable population that often relies on accessible facilities such as sidewalks, curb ramps, accessible pedestrian signals, and bus stops that may exceed what is required by law. It should be noted that over 50% of the housing units in this area are HUD section 8 that house low-income elderly and disabled individuals, and that several of the businesses and organizations make it a priority to hire people with disabilities which makes for more disability traffic in the area.

We have been collaborating with the Department of Public Works and the Disabled Services Division on this project over the past 6 years on resolutions for better accessibility and pedestrian safety to include: continued sidewalk access, accessible crosswalks (particularly at bus stops) with pedestrian sensor signals, curb ramp cuts, additional bus stops, speed tables at specific locations, etc. for citizens with disabilities and other individuals that utilize the area. We feel it is imperative that this project become reality as quickly as possible as it is not only critical that people with disabilities have a safe way to traverse the sidewalks but have confidence to safely cross the street which means slowing the traffic going around the curve under the Emerson Street overpass.

We are grateful for your support of the disability community and hope you will take this project up as part of your Administration's priorities to remove barriers to create a safer and more accessible area where people with disabilities go to receive essential services, to work, and/or to live.

Respectfully,

Natalie Alden, Vice Chair
Jacksonville's Mayor's Disability Council

Why Hire Someone with a Disability?

Although hiring a person with a disability may seem philanthropic, there are real benefits for companies' bottom lines when they include people with disabilities in their workforce.

1. **Untapped Talent:** There are a multitude of people with disabilities with the skills, talents, and abilities that are just waiting for the opportunity to show an employer how they can be an instrumental part of a company's success. People with disabilities often encounter more barriers in their regular lives where they must come up with creative resolutions to move forward and be successful. This mindset gives more out-of-the-box thinking that benefits companies in finding solutions to complex and unexpected business problems.
2. **Job Retention and Increased Productivity Rates:** Persons with Disabilities on average have lower absentee rates, are highly motivated to prove themselves, and create an atmosphere within staff that increases overall productivity rates. It has also been shown that hiring a person with a disability increases other employees' productivity as they are more motivated to elevate their job performance when seeing their coworkers with disabilities succeed. Maintaining qualified employees increases a company's bottom line by reducing employee replacement costs.
3. **Financial Incentives:** There are federal tax incentives available to employers who hire employees with disabilities: (1) Work Opportunity Tax Credit, (2) Disabled Access Credit, and (3) Barrier Removal Tax Deduction. Furthermore, vocational rehabilitation agencies may offset the cost of some reasonable accommodations and services for maintaining employees with disabilities while also providing opportunities for on-the-job training programs for individuals with disabilities that are also clients of the Division of Vocational rehabilitation (DVR) and the Division of Blind Services (DBS).
4. **Economic Impact:** A study found companies that lead on key disability inclusion criteria realize 28% higher revenue, 2× the net income, and 30% higher profit margins outperforming other businesses.
5. **Investor Interest and Expanding Your Market:** Global investor coalitions are calling on companies to be more disability inclusive for sustainable performance. Hiring and maintaining employees with disabilities demonstrates a more inclusive culture at a company which makes them more appealing for other potential employees, investors, and customers. Recruiting and retaining workers also gives a competitive edge when applying for government contracts.

Report on the Mayor's Disability Council's First Community Town Hall on Transportation

Date: Tuesday, October 15, 2024

Location: Main Library, 303 N Laura Street, Jacksonville, FL

The Mayor's Disability Council (MDC), in collaboration with the Jacksonville Transportation Advisory Committee (JTAC) and the Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA), hosted its first-ever community town hall meeting. This event marked a significant step in engaging the community directly to identify and prioritize key issues impacting accessibility and transportation in Jacksonville.

The town hall brought together community members, local advocates, and representatives from the MDC, JTAC, and JTA. Jose Morales, chair of the Mayor's Disability Council, facilitated the meeting, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and inclusivity in addressing the needs of the disability community.

Key Topics and Discussions

1. Top Priorities Identification:

Attendees actively participated in identifying the most pressing transportation and accessibility concerns. The priorities were narrowed down through a transparent voting process to ensure a collective community consensus. The final results were:

- Accessible Sidewalk Routes (10 votes): Acknowledged as the most critical issue, with participants stressing the importance of safe, accessible pedestrian pathways.
- Special Events Pickup/Drop-Off Zones (7 votes): Highlighted the need for dedicated, accessible transportation options during large-scale events.
- Community Outreach & Awareness (6 votes): Recognized the importance of educating the public and stakeholders about accessibility challenges and solutions.
- Medical Transportation (Two-Way Trips) (5 votes): Identified as a priority to enhance access to medical services for individuals with disabilities.
- Fee Restructuring (5 votes): Suggested as a measure to improve affordability and equity in transportation services.
- Other Priorities: Suggestions included maintaining awnings (2 votes), vehicle identification improvements (1 vote), and continuing sensitivity training for transportation staff.

2. Community Input:

The town hall provided a platform for voices outside of the MDC to share their perspectives. Participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to directly contribute to shaping the council's agenda for the upcoming year.

3. Goals, Objectives, and Activities:

The council committed to integrating the town hall's feedback into its strategic plan, ensuring that the identified priorities drive tangible actions and measurable outcomes in 2025.

Next Steps

The MDC, JTAC, and JTA will collaborate on implementing the prioritized goals. Key activities include:

- Partnering with city agencies to improve sidewalk accessibility.
- Developing transportation strategies for special events.
- Launching outreach initiatives to raise awareness of transportation services and accessibility needs.
- Advocating for sustainable medical transportation solutions and evaluating fee structures for equity.
- Continuing sensitivity training to foster a culture of understanding and inclusion.

Conclusion

This first community town hall demonstrated the power of collaboration and the value of listening to the community. By creating a forum for open dialogue, the Mayor's Disability Council has taken a vital step in ensuring that Jacksonville becomes a more accessible and inclusive city for all its residents.

Jose Morales
Chair, Mayor's Disability Council
Jacksonville, Florida