



CITY OF SALISBURY

DISABILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

September 11, 2025, 3:00 p.m. Virtual ONLY

Zoom: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82553688195>

Committee Members Present

Virginia Bender

Greg Tyler

Shanda Ward

Brandon Theriot

Katherine Jones

Jeremy Wolfer

Jessica Chittams

Brian Bergen-Aurand

Ron Pagano

Members Absent

Jessica Cook

In Attendance

Adith Thummalapalli, Project Engineer City of Salisbury

Call to Order

- The Disability Advisory Committee (DAC) Meeting was called to order at 3:05 pm by Katherine.

Introductions & Welcome

- All active members introduced themselves and our guest, Dr. Michele Schlehofer from the Salisbury University REACH Initiative introduced herself.

- Jessica Chittams and Brian Bergen-Aurand were welcomed as official members of the DAC.

Last Meeting Minutes Review

- Motion by Virginia and seconded by Greg to review and approve the meeting minutes from July 2025. The minutes were reviewed and approved unanimously.

Potential DAC Member Introduction

- Potential DAC member Frank Armstead was unable to join the meeting as originally planned, so this item was tabled for a future meeting.

Guest: Dr. Michele Schlehofer - REACH Initiative at Salisbury University/PACE

- Dr. Michele Schlehofer, a professor of Psychology at Salisbury University and head of the REACH Initiative, introduced herself and provided some background about why she and her associates were undertaking this work regarding ethical treatment of those in disadvantaged communities. She shared her experience working with students and individuals with disabilities and her desire to understand their needs and help address them in a manner that is ethically beneficial to them. She expressed her thanks to those who had attended the recently held listening session and explained the next steps in the process.
- The goal is to hold a forum sometime next April to actually speak with members of the disability community, and Dr. Schlehofer wanted to discuss what format would be best for this purpose and get feedback from the DAC regarding the logistics and layout of such a forum. Discussion occurred amongst the committee members and Dr. Schlehofer about the forum and how to advertise it and spread the word in the disability community and an external meeting was planned for 9/19 to focus the discussion on planning and coordinating the forum. Discussion moved to potential panelists for the event and Katherine encouraged fellow DAC members to consider people to be panelists between now and the meeting on 9/19.
- An update for this item was noted to be added to the agenda for the upcoming DAC meeting on 11/13.

Nominations for DAC Chair

- Mr. Brandon Theriot gave a speech about his intention to run for the position of DAC Chair and then answered questions from fellow DAC members regarding his goals.
- Ms. Dominique Sessa, a former member and Chair of the DAC, gave a speech about her intention to reapply to the DAC and run for the position of DAC Chair, and then answered questions from DAC members regarding her goals.

Housekeeping Items

Process for Using DAC Funding

- Adith explained the process through which the DAC could now fundraise and use money provided to them via a line item on the City's annual budget, moving forward. Use of the funds would require a vote by all committee members, with a majority vote needed to authorize use of the funds. The DAC City Liaison would then be authorized to access the account and add money or pay for expenses from the account.

Plan for Future Meetings

- Adith explained how the usual conference room used for DAC meetings, Room 306 in the GOB, would no longer be large enough to accommodate all members plus guests and members of the public who may choose to attend, once renovations to the room were complete in the coming weeks. This prompted discussion of alternative meeting locations, like what other committees do, and several options were presented and discussed by members of the committee.
- The promise that all DAC meetings would always have a hybrid format, with a virtual meeting option to ensure accessibility for anyone interested in attending meetings, was reiterated and so a meeting location with this type of technology function would be necessary. Council chambers was proposed as a viable meeting location, Adith was tasked with exploring this option further.

Active DAC Projects – Progress Reports

City Provided Ramps for Downtown Businesses

- Of the four downtown businesses that expressed interest in having a ramp, three did not meet the physical doorway requirements for a ramp to be useable, but one business, which has chosen to remain unnamed, has accepted the ramp and signed the liability waiver. Many downtown businesses that were interested no longer are due to the liability waiver, absolving the City of any fault, that needs to be signed to have a ramp on their property. A discussion with the Mayor is needed to determine an appropriate path forward.
- Work to identify businesses outside of the downtown area has commenced and all members of the committee are looking for any businesses within Salisbury City limits that might be interested in receiving a ramp and would not be dissuaded by the waiver needing to be signed.
- Once a few ramps are in the hands of business owners, a press release from the City and news and TV media coverage of the initiative is planned to raise awareness about the project and spread the word to all businesses in Salisbury that may be interested in a ramp.

City of Salisbury ADA Transition Plan

- Adith explained that he has been officially tasked with drafting an ADA Transition Plan for the City and gave a basic overview of the process for how a plan is developed and what it means. He explained that the DAC can help with this process by engaging with the public and helping to prioritize what things need to be updated to bring City infrastructure up to ADA regulation.
- Discussion about how to best engage with the public occurred and DAC members said they would think about it and could discuss further at the next meeting.

REACH Initiative at Salisbury University - PACE

- Katherine provided an overview of a listening session involving stakeholders from the disability community, conducted by the REACH Initiative at Salisbury University, and that the researchers from that program were interested in conducting further listening sessions to understand the needs of the disability community from a context of ethics. More details would be provided soon, and DAC members were encouraged to attend themselves and share the opportunity.

Agency Updates

- No significant agency updates were shared.

Open Discussion/Concerns for DAC to Address

- Katherine provided an overview of the issue with service dogs that was discussed at the previous meeting on 7/10 and explained how the situation did not fall within the purview of the DAC, and so therefore the DAC could not do anything to resolve the matter, beyond directing the individual to other organizations and resources that may be of assistance. This citizen was informed of the available resources by Katherine and was appreciative of this help.

Adjourn

- Next Meeting (11/13/2025 at 3:00 pm)
- A motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Ron and seconded by Greg. The meeting was adjourned at 4:12 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Adith Thummalapalli

Adith Thummalapalli, City Liaison