

Making A Difference In Your Community

Developing Relationships that Matter

Presenter: Patti Dailey-Shives, JD
Legislative Subcommittee Chair



Image: Variety of Community members, including people in wheelchairs and walkers.

Your community is where you live, work and play. The people who make decisions there affect you every day. Getting involved and developing relationships with the decision-makers and your neighbors is a great way to make a difference and be a part of solving issues and concerns that potentially affect everyone.

Who are the players?

- ❖ You
- ❖ Civic and Community Groups
- ❖ Mayor & City Council Members
- ❖ School Board Members
- ❖ County Council Members
- ❖ Legislative District Reps and Senators
- ❖ Statewide Elected Officials

Civic and Community Groups Examples

- ❖ Neighborhood Councils
- ❖ League of Women Voters
- ❖ Legislative District Groups
- ❖ Parent-Teacher Associations
- ❖ United Way
- ❖ Lions Club
- ❖ Kiwanis Club
- ❖ Chamber of Commerce
- ❖ Veterans Service Organizations (VFW, American Legion, AMVETS, etc.)

Why Get Involved?

Leaders in your community have a big impact on your day-to-day lives. They are the decision-makers. They make the rules, decide who enforces them, and determine what does or does not get built, funded or maintained.

Who do they listen to? Truth is, the people they have developed relationships with, whose stories they can relate to.

How Do I Get Involved

The first step is to get to know others in your community. This can be through a neighborhood council. Start attending city or county council meetings – most have online options to join and watch their meetings.

Same with your local school board. If you are politically inclined, you can join a legislative district group for one of the parties represented in your area. Both major parties have precinct committee officers who are elected to represent their precincts – and they are usually active in the Legislative District.

How Do I Get Involved (cont.)

This is a great way to find out what is going on in your community, what the major issues are and develop those relationships that are so important when it comes to getting things done.

Most have websites with a list of their meeting dates and times, and options for joining virtual meetings.

Why are relationships Important?

It is basic human nature to be more motivated to help those with whom we have relationships. The same goes for politics and our elected officials. Here are some hints to develop those relationships:

- Research candidates and incumbents. Contact their campaigns and see how you can help them get elected. This does not have to involve money – time is just as important. I've driven candidates around so they can doorbell. They appreciate the help and you have their ear for a few hours.

Why are relationships Important? (cont.)

- Make an appointment to stop in and see your elected officials. Call their scheduler and see if you can meet for coffee (you buy). Tell them how long you have been in their district, and what is important to you. They will appreciate the time you have taken.
- Email or write letters. Thank them for things they have done that you appreciate or weigh in on an issue they will be considering.
- **Bottom line...** get to where they know your name and can associate your 'story' with that name.

What if I have a 'cause?'

If you have an issue that is important to you, first determine who has administrative authority over that issue. For example: You want to make sure there are accessible sidewalks with cutouts in your community.

- Determine who has decision-making authority over your community - Do you live in the city limits, or unincorporated county area?
- Do a google search to see if the issue has been addressed recently by the appropriate council. If so, what was the result and issues?.

What if I have a 'cause?' (cont.)

- Contact your elected officials. Sharing your personal story about why it is needed, who will benefit and how it will help the community at large. A great example is risk management. If sidewalks are not accessible, it creates a public safety hazard and could open the community to potential liability.
- Find a 'champion' to take your issue forward. Support them, tell your story and testify when the time comes. Help them identify fellow community members who can help and also tell their stories.

Framing the Conversation

When talking to elected officials:

- Keep communication simple, concise and to the point
- Do your homework
- Focus on impact
- Identify stakeholders' values and key issues
- Be prepared to tell your own story
- Thank them for their time

What about statewide issues?

Sometimes, an issue extends beyond a community and is important to people throughout the State. This is where your elected representatives and senators come in.

Let's attack a statewide issue: Accessible walkways and bikeways adjacent to State Highways.

Problem: Shoulders next to state highways are often narrow and don't allow space for walkers, riders or people in assistive devices to use these spaces. And this may be the only way to get from point A to B – the mailbox, the corner store, the post office, etc., for those who either choose not to drive or can't drive.

Solution:

Contact your local legislators, whom you now have a relationship with, and get them involved. Help them identify people to get other voices involved and help with drumming up the support they need to draft and sponsor a bill.

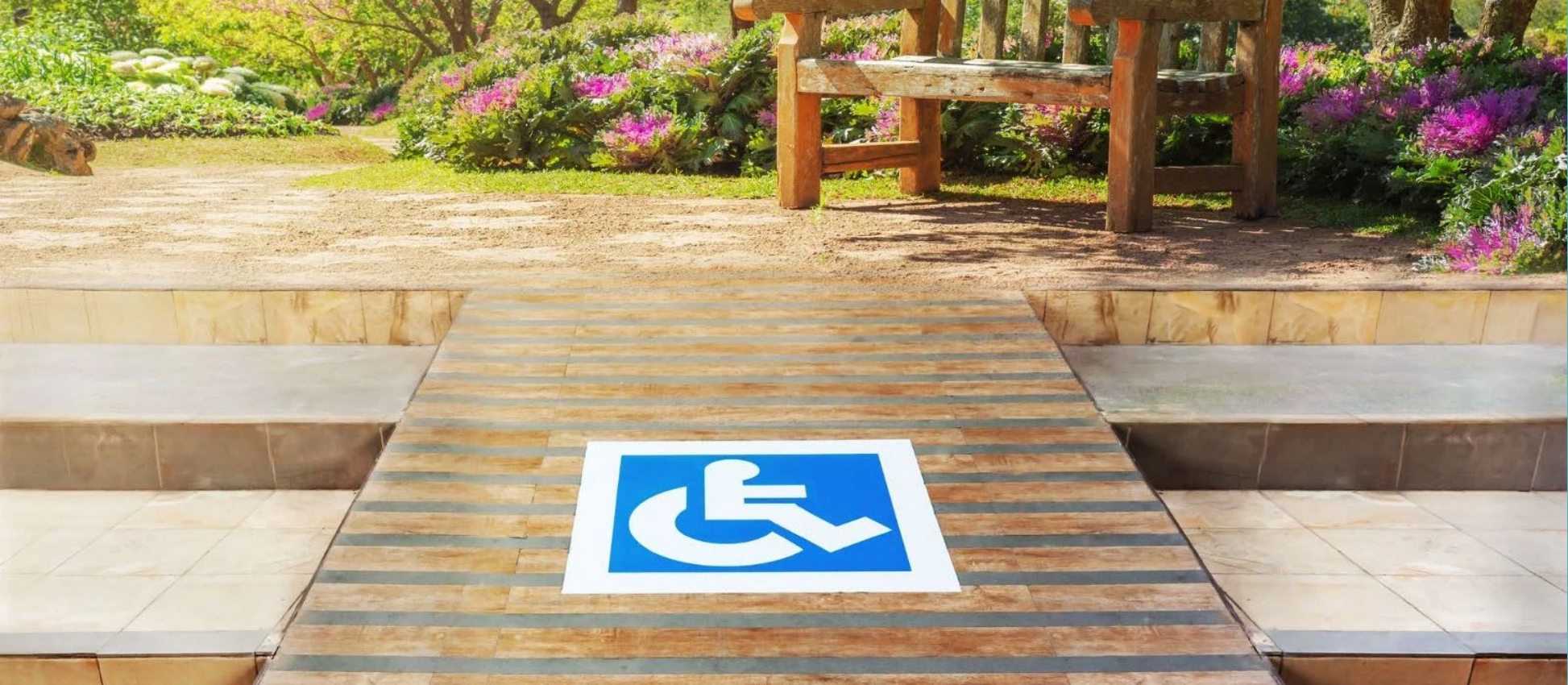


Image: Wheelchair accessible path ramp

Tell us about your community success stories!