



August 8, 2024

Report to council re: National ADA Symposium Experience

To the Mayor and Council Persons of the City of Columbia, MO:

This year two (2) members of the Disabilities Commission were able to attend the National ADA Symposium which took place in Minneapolis, MN from June 9 to June 12, 2024.

The National ADA Symposium is the most comprehensive in-person training conference available on the ADA. It is organized by the Great Plains ADA Center, our regional resource for the ADA and located here in Columbia, MO. The symposium provides the latest information and best practices on accessibility ideas around the country with input from US DOJ, US DOT, US Access Board, EEOC and thousands of professionals and advocates.

Included below are experiences and reflections from Commission members:

Rene Powell, Disabilities Commission Member:

My first session was Beyond ADA getting to "Nothing About Us Without Us" explained a process for including all people with disabilities and recognizing lived experience as a kind of expertise. I met an ADA coordinator who had Braille printed on her business card and she seemed to be very proud of it and was delighted to hand me one. Later, I saw one of the presenters, who told me that I was encouraging and that it was helpful to all of them. It was a great session. The session regarding how accessible charging stations are going to be dealt with introduced a lot of questions which will likely be answered in the future as policies surrounding them evolve. I was happy to see that an old friend presented about a readily adaptable format for evaluating businesses and rewarding them for being accessible. I also attended a session about the Harkin Center in Iowa. The building, basically built around a ramp, and they very deliberately built it so that disabled people could work on it if there is a need for repairs. I was disappointed to have to leave before my last session ended, but it is a topic that I will have more opportunities to learn about. Disability and aging is going to be an ongoing topic given that it affects us all.

Vera Elwood, Disabilities Commission Member:

Vera Elwood discusses her experience and some of the ideas from the symposium including the following: (1) Springfield, Missouri has a program in which it audits local restaurants for accessibility, not with ADA standards but more general accessibility standards, and restaurants that pass get a sticker from Empower Ability; (2) Vera attended a session which discussed the issues surrounding gender dysphoria and the



ADA, that there are several pending lawsuits on this topic right now; (3) the state of Minnesota has the Minnesota Council on Disability; this organization is not tied to elected officials and it has incredible outreach programs, has a centralized accommodation fund which small businesses are eligible to assist people with disabilities, and the Council provided several handouts at the Symposium as resources for accessible businesses, accessible parking violation warnings, and more.

Included below are experiences and reflections from City staff:

Adam Kruse, ADA Coordinator

This was the 6<sup>th</sup> National ADA Symposium that I have attended, it is an outstanding conference. There were a total of 93 breakout sessions available and attendees can pick a path unique to their professional field or interests. This year, I attended several sessions related to sidewalks and the public right-of-way. I heard directly from US Department of Transportation Staff on the current legal status of Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (which will one day be federal regulations) as well as the most common complaints federal agencies receive for sidewalks: temporary sidewalk closures, outdoor dining encroachments, and e-scooters/ e-bikes obstructing sidewalks. I also attended multiple sessions on how to make special or temporary events more accessible. This will hopefully help me to provide feedback for what the City may want to consider in reviewing applications for special events. I also attended a session on the accessibility of parks and some of the ways the US National Park Service provides notice to travelers with realistic expectations of the accessibility experience at each park. The intent behind their blunt assessments is to assist travelers in planning their trips as well providing internal feedback on areas to improve. I believe the information Commissioners and staff learn at this ADA symposium improves City services and the accessibility of the community.

The Disabilities Commission is thankful for the support from Council, City Staff, and the Great Plains ADA Center. This is the second year this travel training has been available to the Commission. The information learned is valuable as it is incorporated in the Commission's COMO Accessibility Plan for long-term accessibility goals as well as feedback to various Departments through our monthly meetings. We look forward to continued work with the Council and City Staff as we progress towards accessibility for all persons.