

Inspire

Neighborhoods Conference | Fort Wayne

2025



Register today!



The 2025 Inspire Neighborhoods Conference is being brought to you by the City of Fort Wayne's Department of Neighborhoods with generous support from our sponsors:



**PREVIEW OF 2025 CONFERENCE
WORKGROUPS & BREAKOUT SESSIONS**



Fort Wayne Neighborhoods can!

Electric Works Campus | Fort Wayne, IN
September 12, 2025 | 7:30 am—7:00 pm



PROGRAM FLOW

2025 INSPIRE CONFERENCE

ARRIVAL & BREAKFAST

7:30- 8:15 am

In the Forum at Electric Works

OPENING REMARKS

8:15 am - Director Jonathan Leist
Dept. of Neighborhood Staff &
Program Participants

MORNING BREAKOUT SESSIONS

9:10 am, 10:10 am, 11:10 am

*See website and
registration form for details*

LUNCH & PLENARY ADDRESS

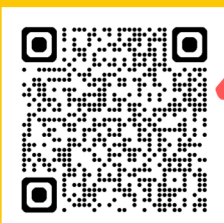
12:30 pm - Mayor Sharon Tucker
Lunch Keynote by JR Jamison
***“Facing Our Neighbors: Using
Narrative to Build Unity”***

AFTERNOON WORKSHOPS

3 pm, *See website and
registration form for details*

AWARDS DINNER, KEYNOTE & LIVE MUSIC

5 pm - Dinner Keynote by Sharon Tubbs
***“Healthy Me, Healthy Community-
Why self-care and social support
matter in local neighborhoods”***



FOR MORE INFORMATION

VISIT: WWW.INSPIREFORTWAYNE.COM

EMAIL: INSPIRECONFERENCE@CITYOFFORTWAYNE.ORG

CALL: 311 (260-427-8311)



BREAKOUT SESSIONS | 9:10

PLANNING SESSION ZONING 101

Speakers: Dave Schaab (City of Fort Wayne, Department of Planning Services)
Chris Beebe (City of Fort Wayne, Department of Planning Services)
Michelle Wood (City of Fort Wayne, Department of Planning Services)
Jacob Rose (City of Fort Wayne, Department of Planning Services)

Learning Objectives: Project Implementation Assistance
Zoning Ordinance Education & Advocacy
Department of Planning Services Organization Basics

Description: Lengthy processes and paperwork can often help or hinder neighborhood projects. This session will equip and empower conference attendees and neighborhoods with the practical knowledge of how to carry out their property and neighborhood's action plans with ease. The presentation will be followed by an open forum panel discussion encouraging questions from attendees, illuminating Board of Zoning Appeals and permitting processes for the general public.

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ACTIVATION SESSION WALK THE TALK: WHY ORGANIZED OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES CAN BUILD SAFER, FRIENDLIER, HEALTHIER NEIGHBORHOODS

Speakers: Tim Hallman and Susan Konopacki (YMCA of Greater Fort Wayne)

Learning Objectives: Learn how to collaborate with wellness oriented organizations for neighborhood activities
Explore various activities available to neighborhoods to mobilize people of all ages
Experiment ways group-based activities can foster healthy social connections

Description: Explore how neighborhood leaders and families can partner with the YMCA to organize simple yet helpful activities which foster meaningful connections, promote a healthier lifestyle, and increase sense of safety and security through kids' games for block parties, adult stretching and yoga classes at the park, pickleball tournaments in local church gyms, group walks in mornings and evenings, and countless other activities. Attendees will have the opportunity to draft an action plan of how they could partner with the YMCA to experiment with neighborhood-based activities that engage diverse groups of neighbors for a healthier, more connected community.

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COLLABORATION SESSION: BRIDGING THE GAP: BUILDING A CONTINUUM OF CARE FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Speaker: Deanna Dwenger (Elevatus Architecture) Brandon Harker (Real Time Furniture)
Emily Roscoe (Mooresville Schools) Rachel Johnson-Yates (Health Management Associates)

Learning Objectives: Understand the Impact of Social Determinants of Health
Examine the Intersection of Mental Health and the Justice System
Identify Strategies for Strengthening the Behavioral Health Continuum

Description: This presentation will examine the continuum of care in behavioral health, emphasizing social determinants like housing, education, and economic stability, and cover mental health support across the lifespan through different resource options. It will address the importance of mental health treatment within the justice system and explore funding opportunities and the role of infrastructure in enhancing services and support. The goal is to identify actionable steps for improving behavioral health care your community through interactive discussions, real-world case studies, and collaborative problem-solving.

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BREAKOUT SESSIONS | 10:10

PLANNING SESSION

MORE THAN A BUS: WHAT TRANSIT DATA TELLS US & HOW YOU CAN SHAPE THE FUTURE

Speakers: Casey Claypool (Citilink)

Learning Objectives: See what data says
Compare perspectives in real time
Take Action for better transit

Description: Learn how Citilink serves as “More Than a Bus” for our community through access, opportunity, and equity, presented through real community survey data of what people across Fort Wayne are asking for and Citilink’s response to the needs of Fort Wayne residents, including efforts to strengthen South Fort Wayne connections and potential links to the airport and major employers.

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ACTIVATION SESSION

FUNDING SHOWCASE- GRANTS AND GRANT RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS AND RESIDENTS

Speakers: Beth Boatright (Allen County Public Library)
Holly Muñoz (Department of Neighborhoods)
Nathan Law (Department of Planning & Policy)
Tracy Hanlin (Star Financial Bank)

Learning Objectives: Learn about local and national funding opportunities available to FW neighborhoods
Learn about local funding opportunities available for home improvements
Learn about local resources available to research foundations and apply for applications

Description: Learn about funding opportunities for neighborhood associations and residents in this session. Speakers will showcase different grants and resources, explaining how to find and apply for them. Join this session for practical advice on securing money for community projects.

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COLLABORATION SESSION

HOW LANGUAGE ACCESS CAN GENERATE A POSITIVE IMPACT IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Speakers: Raquel Kline (Language Services Network Fort Wayne)

Learning Objectives: Learn how to develop a language access plan (LAP)
Practical solutions to language access tools

Description: Language connects. Being able to communicate and understand what the people around us are expressing is a crucial way of feeling included and experiencing a true sense of belonging. This session is a call to action for organizations to commit to providing language services for individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP). These individuals come from diverse backgrounds and speak a wide variety of languages. Learn how having a language access plan in place shows that you care about your community.

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BREAKOUT SESSIONS | 11:10

PLANNING SESSION THE REAL HOUSING TYPES OF FORT WAYNE

Speaker: Nathan Law (Department of Planning & Policy)
Sherese Fortriede (Department of Planning & Policy)

Learning Objectives: Learn how demographic and market trends are impacting housing diversity and affordability in Fort Wayne
See how alternative housing types can fill the gap of missing middle housing
Discover real examples of various built or potential housing types and how they can compatibly exist alongside existing neighborhood fabrics within Fort Wayne

Description: Every year, hundreds of traditional single-family homes are built in the Fort Wayne area. Yet developers and buyers alike are increasingly showing a desire for other types of housing. This variety can come in construction methods, like modular or container homes, or in building form, like accessory dwelling units or zero lot line development (like townhomes). But new development always comes with uncertainty and fear of the unknown. Join us as we cover alternative housing types, including real examples from within our community. We'll explore how housing other than traditional single-family homes can be built – or already exists – compatibly within our existing neighborhood fabrics.

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ACTIVATION SESSION “FUN”-DING CREATIVE NEIGHBORHOOD IDEAS THROUGH COLLABORATION

Speakers: Chris Walker (Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association & Community Garden)
Cameron Ruhl (Phyllie Farms)

Learning Objectives: How to create the wow—planning and engagement driven funding
Easy Cheesy programming
Why listening and stories are so important

Description: In this session, attendees will learn about reverse engineering their funding flow and how creative ideas may be even more impactful with other features included. Explore ideas for low-cost engagement ideas and the factors that may improve successful meet—ups, as well as how storytelling can create understanding and awareness about our neighborhoods.

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COLLABORATION SESSION HEALING COMMUNITIES: ADDRESSING TRAUMA

Speaker: Esther Wilcox (Bowen Health)

Learning Objectives: What is Trauma & Taking a Trauma-Informed Approach to Neighborhood Collaboration
Importance of Connection & Activities
The Value of Social Drivers of Health

Description: Join us for a training session focused on understanding the impact of trauma on neighborhoods and exploring effective strategies for recovery. Learn about trauma-informed approaches, the importance of community connections, and the role of social drivers for health in healing. Discover practical ways to create safe spaces, support one another, and foster healthier, more resilient communities.

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SPEAKER BIOS | MORNING SESSIONS

BETH BOATRIGHT

ALLEN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

Beth Boatright is the Director of Community Partnerships and Programs at Allen County Public Library. She's passionate about connecting people and organizations to each other and to resources that can help them thrive.

BRANDON HARKER

REAL TIME FURNITURE

Brandon Harker - With over a decade at Real Time Furniture, Brandon Harker has been dedicated to providing top-tier solutions in the behavioral health industry. Initially coming from a background in corporate sales, Brandon was drawn to this field by the people and meaningful impact of the work. As Vice President, he leads Sales and Account Management, ensuring clients receive trusted guidance and the best solutions for their needs. Brandon finds motivation in helping clients navigate complex projects and seeing the lasting benefits of their work.

CAMERON RUHL

PHYLLIE FARMS

Born and raised in Fort Wayne, Cameron Ruhl has a background of 12 years in the turf industry. After graduating from Ivy Tech with a degree in agriculture, he gained the position of farm manager at Johnnie Mae Farm. Cameron owns a small business helping individuals and organizations start urban farms and development focusing on food insecurities called Phyllie Farms.

CASEY CLAYPOOL

CITILINK

Casey Claypool joined Citilink in October 2022 as its Marketing & Development Director after years in the nonprofit sector. She has spent her career learning about systemic challenges in Fort Wayne—where public transportation often plays a defining role in access to food, housing, jobs, and healthcare. Driven by a passion for root cause change, Casey believes transit is both one of Fort Wayne's greatest challenges and opportunities. She is committed to linking people to life through data-driven decision-making and community engagement.

CHRISTIAN BEEBE

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING SERVICES

Christian Beebe has been with the Department of Planning Services for 19 years in a variety of roles. Currently, he is the Senior Land Use Planner with the Permits and Enforcement division; the division of DPS that focuses on critical items such as review and issuance of permits and compliance with the Zoning Ordinance.

CHRIS WALKER

BLOOMINGDALE NEIGHBORHOOD

ASSOCIATION & COMMUNITY GARDEN

Chris Walker is a neighborhood advocate and Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association President. He enjoys working with their amazing association

board and neighborhood residents to create engagement opportunities and community growth where there were once challenges. He and his wife, along with other volunteers, help maintain the Bloomingdale Community Garden in cooperation with Bloomingdale Elementary School. Chris has been able to obtain over \$60,000 in grant funding since becoming a member of their neighborhood association board in 2020.

DAVE SCHAAB

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING SERVICES

David Schaab is the Senior Planner of the Special Projects Division for the Department of Planning Services, and he resides in Allen County close to family and longtime friends. He believes it is a fantastic place to live and work. Dave has been with the City of Fort Wayne since 2021, and as the Senior Planner of the Special Projects Division, he manages Comprehensive Plan Updates, Design & Administrative Manual Revisions, Zoning Ordinance Amendments, Overlay District Administration, and Technology Projects in GIS and Accela.

DEANNA DWENGER

ELEVATUS ARCHITECTURE

Dr. Deanna Dwenger graduated from Indiana University before earning her doctorate in clinical psychology. After interning with the Federal Bureau of Prisons, she joined the Indiana Department of Correction in 2013. She most recently served as the Executive Director of Behavioral Health, overseeing all mental health and addiction treatment, policies and grants. In January 2025, Dr. Dwenger became Chief Behavioral Health Advisor at Elevatus Architecture, applying her expertise to the design of education, health, and justice spaces, fostering environments that are both functional and supportive for the user. She is committed to improving both systems and lives.

EMILY ROSCOE

MOORESVILLE SCHOOLS

Emily Roscoe is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor with 15 years clinical experience specializing in trauma-informed care modalities. Emily is currently the Mental Health Coordinator for Mooresville Schools, leading district-wide mental health initiatives and crisis response. With experience in school-based therapy, inpatient admissions, clinical supervision, and program management, Emily is passionate about supporting youth and families through holistic, evidence-based care.

ESTHER WILCOX

BOWEN HEALTH

Esther Wilcox is a licensed marriage and family therapist (LMFT) with a master's degree in education. Esther has called Fort Wayne 'home' since 2015 and has found great joy in learning about the various communities who make up the city's culture. Esther started at Bowen Health in 2015 and currently serves as the Director of Clinical Services. She continues to provide counseling, with a focus on trauma, helping individuals and families navigate their healing journeys. Esther enjoys

SPEAKER BIOS | MORNING SESSIONS CONT'D

spending quality time with her family. She has a passion for the outdoors, loves experimenting with new recipes in the kitchen, and is an avid reader.

HOLLY MUÑOZ

DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOODS

Holly Muñoz is the Neighborhood Resource and Engagement Coordinator with the City of Fort Wayne's Department of Neighborhoods. With years of hands-on experience in neighborhood volunteerism and grassroots initiatives, Holly has built strong relationships and meaningful connections among residents, local organizations, and civic leaders. Before joining the department, Holly worked as the Program Manager for the City of Fort Wayne's Emergency Rental Assistance Program, former Director of Housing Services at Inasmuch Ministry, and the former Director of Partner Engagement at Just Neighbors. She is also a local business owner and former neighborhood president, invested in Fort Wayne and its future.

KAREN BARTROM

AARP INDIANA

Karen Bartrom brings over 30 years of nursing experience and a lifelong commitment to community care to her new role with the AARP Fort Wayne team. A resident of Fort Wayne for 45 years, she has dedicated her career to helping individuals and families navigate healthcare with compassion and clarity. Through AARP's local outreach, Karen advocates for seniors, promotes healthy aging, and supports stronger connections across generations. Her deep roots in the community and firsthand understanding of the challenges facing older adults make her a trusted advocate, a thoughtful listener, and a passionate partner in building a more age-friendly Fort Wayne.

MICHELLE WOOD

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING SERVICES

Michelle Wood is the Senior Planner of the Plan Commission Division for the Department of Planning Services, working with Plan Commission for over 23 years. Michelle is a registered landscape architect, with previous experience in traditional urban & landscape design and wetland restoration in the private sector. She enjoys the collaborative aspects of our planning agencies and loves to help property owners find solutions. Michelle has many years of board experience in a National Register neighborhood, and is currently enjoying her 'new' historic neighborhood by the same designer.

NATHAN LAW

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & POLICY

Nathan has been with the City of Fort Wayne's Community Development Division in the Planning & Policy since 2019. A Ball State University graduate, he earned a Bachelors in Urban Planning and Development in 2015 and a Master's in Public Administration in 2017. Nathan supports the department with data analysis and mapping and contributes to projects like the All in Allen Comprehensive Plan. As an Allen County native, he is enthusiastic about Fort Wayne's growth, driven by the collaborative efforts of residents, advocates, community leaders, and reinvestment.

RACHEL JOHNSON-YATES

HEALTH MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES

Rachel Johnson-Yates is a licensed mental health and addiction counselor, public speaker, and educator with a proven record of developing innovative, equity-focused, and trauma-informed behavioral health programs. She is currently a national behavioral health consultant with Health Management Associates and previously served as deputy director and chief of staff for Indiana's Division of Mental Health and Addiction. Her leadership spans outpatient care, criminal justice, inpatient psychiatry, veteran services, higher education, and residential treatment—consistently championing holistic, integrated approaches to care.

RAQUEL KLINE

LANGUAGE SERVICES NETWORK FORT WAYNE

Raquel A. Kline was born and raised in Nicaragua and moved to the United States in 2002. She holds bachelor's degrees in English as a Second Language Education and translation from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, and BA with a major in Spanish from Indiana University. Presently, she works as the executive director for the Language Services Network (LSN). As the director, she oversees assessing and developing language access guidelines focusing on education, advocacy, collaboration, and training to deliver quality interpretation and translation services to Limited English Proficient (LEP) immigrant and refugee populations living in our community.

JACOB ROSE

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING SERVICES

Jacob Rose has been with the Department of Planning Services for 10 years in a variety of roles. Currently, he is the Senior Land Use Planner with the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) Division; this DPS Division focuses on providing flexibility to the Zoning Ordinance regulations by allowing exceptions to the regulations under certain circumstances.

SPEAKER BIOS | MORNING SESSIONS CONT'D

SHERESE FORTTRIEDE

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & POLICY

Sherese Fortriede is a dedicated urban planner (AICP) with nearly three decades of experience shaping communities across Fort Wayne. Currently, Sherese serves as a Community Development Administrator and Senior Planner for the City of Fort Wayne and plays a pivotal role in the leadership in the Public Art and Historic Preservation Commissions. Sherese earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Public Law and Government from Eastern Michigan University and has experience in placemaking, land use planning, and collaborative community projects, reinforcing her dedication to excellence and ethics in the field. She uses her expertise to manage award winning comprehensive plans and revitalization projects and contribute to local and professional organizations.

SUSAN KONOPACKI

YMCA OF GREATER FORT WAYNE

Susan Konopacki is the Executive Director of Jorgensen Family YMCA, an 18,000-member branch of the YMCA of Greater Fort Wayne in southwest Allen County. Susan has extensive professional experience as a fitness expert and personal trainer in both Indianapolis and Fort Wayne. As a seasoned YMCA leader, she has overseen innovative membership engagement programs, started employee resource groups, as well as supported creative community partnerships with organizations like Easter Seals and Coventry Meadows. Susan is Dare to Lead Trained, an Ironman, and committed to bringing the best out of leaders while nurturing meaningful connections.

TIM HALLMAN

YMCA OF GREATER FORT WAYNE

Tim Hallman is the Christian Emphasis Director with the YMCA of Greater Fort Wayne, and a local pastor with almost 30 years of experience. Prior to the Y, Tim restarted a neighborhood church northwest of downtown Fort Wayne. While there he brought together over a dozen churches to bridge social divides, including partnering with the Y to form a fatherhood coalition. He also collaborated with neighborhood associations to create a new park. With the YMCA, he leads a chaplains program, supports community collaborations, and is building up their top 100 leaders in a healthy spirit-mind for personal and leadership growth.

TRACY HANLIN

STAR FINANCIAL

Tracy Hanlin is the Director of Compliance and Community Reinvestment at STAR Financial Bank, a \$3 billion community bank headquartered in Fort Wayne, IN, with branches extending from Angola to Indianapolis. A lifelong Fort Wayne resident, Tracy has been with STAR for over 15 years. She is committed to advancing financial literacy, promoting affordable housing, and ensuring equitable access to financial products and services for all residents.





WORKSHOPS | 3:00

CONNECTION WORKSHOP

TELL THE STORY: WRITING IMPACTFUL TRUE STORIES ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Speakers: Sharon Tubbs (HealthVisions Midwest Inc.)

Learning Objectives: Learn to gather information through research and oral histories
Be able to pinpoint a compelling theme for ideas
Understand self-publishing vs. supporting publishing vs. traditional publishing
Learn to write to inspire or impact others

*Description: Fort Wayne native and author Sharon Tubbs offers tips to aspiring writers and storytellers who want to write compelling personal, family, or neighborhood stories. Sharon shares lessons learned while creating the award-winning book **THEY GOT DADDY: One Family's Reckoning with Racism and Faith**. That book—about her grandfather's kidnapping by white supremacists, family trauma, and religion—leans heavily on research, much of it conducted using resources at the Allen County Public Library. Aspiring writers will learn how to shape their message for targeted audiences and to avoid publishing pitfalls and have their questions and concerns as newcomers into the industry be answered before investing time and money into writing a book.*

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ACTIVATION WORKSHOP

BUILDING HOPE BY WAY OF BUS SHELTER

Speakers: Gret Machlan

Learning Objectives: Benefit from the example of the Harvester NA Bus Shelter
Explore reasons for pursuing a project as a neighborhood association
Recognize the character qualities of leaders

Description: This presentation will take attendees through the history of the Harvester Bus Shelter, and recognize the challenges that the process presented. In this interactive session, attendees will be able to engage and map out a process for pursuing a complex proposal and the importance of a clear mission, as well as begin a strategic plan for a project that they propose. Join us to encourage the character qualities of leaders and build hope for growth of leadership qualities in individuals and communities.

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COLLABORATION WORKSHOP

RESILIENCE IN MOTION

Speakers: Alice Muhammad

Learning Objectives: Identify what is important
Being mindful and setting intention despite opposition

Description: This session will engage attendees in how to develop tools and mindsets to improve goal setting and performance. This interactive session will provide opportunities for attendees to learn, share, and collaborate, while building a community with a community.

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SPEAKER BIOS | AFTERNOON SESSIONS

ALICE MUHAMMAD **PEACE OF YOU HEALING**

Originally from Illinois, Alice Muhammad has made Fort Wayne her home for over 10 years. She believes that working in and with the local community has been a blessing for her four daughters and son. Alice holds a Master's degree in healthcare, which she uses to connect people to resources and support. Currently, she is on the pathway to complete her doctorate degree in adult and continuing education to continue providing community education.

GRET MACHLAN **HARVESTER NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION**

Margaret (Gret) Machlan is retired and now volunteers with community development as the President of Harvester Neighborhood, Inc. After earning her master's degree in social work, she worked in mental health; directly with clients, developing programs, writing grants, and expanding her supervisory and administrative skills. Transitioning to Christian counseling, she built a private practice "Renewing Your Story." During each chapter, she worked alongside many talented people and she's grateful to all who helped her grow. She was raised in Fort Wayne, one of 10 children; she and her husband George have a grown daughter Andrea.

SHARON TUBBS **HEATHVISIONS MIDWEST INC.**

Sharon Tubbs began her professional journey as a newspaper reporter and editor for 17 years. Today, she is a nonprofit leader, the author of five books, and a speaker. Sharon thrives in emboldening others and has conducted writers' workshops, faith and life empowerment seminars, and other speaking engagements for various groups. Sharon's independent work is under her umbrella company Move Forward Communications and since 2020, she has been the executive director of HealthVisions Midwest Inc., where she leads Community Health Workers across two locations in northern Indiana.



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