



Agenda For A Better Community

The **Agenda for a Better Community (ABC)** is an attempt by a small and growing group of residents of Valparaiso, Indiana to put down on paper the elements that we believe are necessary in a healthy, thriving, just and sustainable community. The ABC is not meant to be a static document that sits on the shelf but one that spurs dialogue and debate, educates about both historic and present conditions that must be addressed, inspires the addition of other components that will enhance our community and, most of all, initiates the organizing and advocacy necessary to make the Agenda the reality of our lives in Valparaiso.



Assuring a Welcoming Community for All People

Cities the size, location, history, and demographics of Valparaiso have not always excelled at integrating new members into their community, especially when those new members are of different racial or ethnic composition. Our goal is to make Valparaiso a truly welcoming city for all and serve as a model for other communities on how to accommodate to the inevitable changing demographics that all cities will experience. To accomplish this we fully support the efforts of the City's ValpoNext Vision Plan to "embrace diversity." We want Valparaiso to become a community that welcomes all people no matter their race, ethnicity, religion, color, sexual orientation, gender preference or economic situation. We seek a community that works to prevent all actions, whether by individuals or institutions, that do not promote the full acceptance of all persons. We seek a city that recognizes, encourages and values the changing demographics of our community and takes action to prepare for and welcome our new neighbors. Actions include:

- 1 Committing to assure that disparate voices are actively solicited to be heard in public meetings;
- 2 Supporting measures like the Welcoming Cities Ordinance (not using city resources to enforce anti-immigrant efforts);
- 3 Assuring that our schools teach the value of all people and cultures as a priority;
- 4 Promoting gender equality through hiring/appointment practices, education and addressing complaints of sexual harassment/abuse;
- 5 Collecting, regularly updating and widely disseminating employment and appointment data so that the public can monitor progress in diversifying City government;
- 6 Assuring the City website and publications contain welcoming messages relevant to all populations;
- 7 Directing Valpo's schools, police, fire and other public departments to take measurable steps to hire people of color and otherwise assure that the personnel of our public institutions reflect the complexity of our society, so that all of our children have many role models and our community gains the benefit of different perspectives and learning opportunities;
- 8 Engaging the broader community in discussions about the changing nature of our community and preparing for the change as a positive asset
- 9 Supporting the efforts of the Human Relations Council and other organizations committed to making Valparaiso a welcoming community; and
- 10 Establishing a mechanism/procedure to enable the City to quickly and effectively respond to bias and hate related incidents.



Assuring the Availability of Quality Housing for Persons at All Income Levels

Numerous reports over the years, including ValpoNext, have documented or recognized the need for quality housing for people in all income categories in our community. We support the concept of Quality Housing for All -- which includes quality housing for those persons at the lowest income levels. Actions include:

1

Assuring that city leadership apply the same vision, energy, skills, and tactics they did to development of the downtown to provide quality housing for persons at all income levels;

2

Hiring an individual at the City whose job description includes researching, advocating for, and representing the need for quality housing for all;

3

Establish a Quality Housing for All Advisory Committee, similar to the Human Relations Committee, with a majority of its members comprised of representatives of non-profit organizations, community groups, and builders with a demonstrated record of providing quality housing for all;

4

Create a Quality Housing for All Fund from filing fees, increased user fees for high end housing, or other sources, to be used for fee reduction for projects that include housing for persons at all income levels requiring developers of high-end housing to set aside a percentage of lots for affordable housing or to compensate the affordable housing fund in lieu of the set-aside;

5

Create a city land bank for Quality Housing for All which would provide down payment assistance and grants to encourage restoration of existing housing or the building of new housing for persons at lower income levels;

6

Require developers of high-end housing to set aside a percentage of lots for housing for persons at lower economic levels or to contribute funds to the Quality Housing for All Fund in lieu of providing the set-aside;

7

Use redevelopment funds to reduce the cost of infrastructure for projects that include housing for all income levels.

8

Annex land to be used for housing for people at all income levels coupled with extended bus service to these units.

9

Use tax abatements to help lower income persons own their own homes and encourage developments with housing for all income levels.

10

Provide zoning variances for projects that include housing for persons at all income levels and review zoning ordinances -- and amend where necessary -- to avoid zoning that reduces the ability of the disadvantaged and the elderly access to housing appropriate to their income levels.

11

Incentivize building smaller, high quality housing units.

12

Create government/not-for-profit partnerships to create quality housing for all.



Assuring a Healthy Community

While much of health care policy is being debated at the federal level, there are actions that can and should be taken locally to assure that our residents have access to high quality and affordable care services and that Valparaiso is a healthy community in which to live and work. Actions include:

1

Widely disseminating information to government agencies, health providers, schools, churches and not-for-profits about the enrollment process for Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Healthy Indiana Plan (HIP) and the federal health exchange to assure that all eligible are covered;

2

Building partnerships between health care providers to address the continuing issues of access to services, including detox and addiction services, and;

3

Requesting that Porter County develop a strategy for the use of the conversion fund that resulted from the sale of the former Porter Memorial Hospital and, with public and health care expert input, assure that a significant portion is targeted to the improvement of the health of the broader community.



Assuring a Strong and Equitable Economy

The most essential element of a strong community is an economic base that offers all residents the ability to make a living to support themselves and their families. Creating this environment requires a comprehensive approach that builds opportunities for many different skills sets and experiences. Actions include:

1

Enacting a “Buy Valpo” ordinance mandating that City and Redevelopment Commission (RDC) contracts be awarded to qualified local businesses first, if they are within 10% of the lowest outside bidder;

2

Working with local industry, schools and non-profits to create job training initiatives, including a youth job corps providing opportunities and mentoring, especially those under-served and economically at-risk;

3

Creating a Tax Increment Finance/Tax Abatement reform which prioritizes taxpayer subsidies directed first towards local businesses, requires recipient businesses to show genuine need, provides for robust reporting and accountability through annual jobs/salaries reports, requires a loss to local government analysis be submitted with each new TIF/Abatement request, and encourages redevelopment and economic development goals include serving under-served and economically disadvantaged constituencies, especially the inclusion of affordable housing and taxpayer subsidized private development via the RDC

4

Assuring the inclusion of under-represented constituencies in economic policy making by adding positions to local economic development entities to be filled by members of those constituencies; and

5

Guaranteeing a “living wage,” achieved through cooperative efforts of government and the private sector so that all can share in the prosperity of the community.



Assuring that All Residents have Access to Comprehensive Educational Opportunities

The right to education is fundamental to our nation and should be to our community as well. Education is only valuable if it meets the disparate needs of and is accessible to all seeking it. Actions include:

1

Developing and adopting a selection process for potential candidates for open positions on the Valparaiso Community Schools (VCS) School Board that assures both the participation of key stakeholders who have been traditionally excluded in making decisions about education in our community and assures that qualified candidates are put forth to the city council for selection;

2

Recognizing the increasing diversity and the dramatic rise in the percentage of minority students and those on Free and Reduced Lunch, by giving priority to the development of a Strategic Diversity and Inclusion plan for VCS which will result in: **(2a)** a more diverse workforce, reflective of the diversity of VCS student through the strategic recruitment and retention of minority administrators, teachers and support staff in the Valparaiso Schools; **(2b)** equal access to participation in VCS extra-curricular and vocational programs by adopting policies that eliminate economic barriers to these programs; **(2c)** the adoption of curriculum and instructional materials that have been overhauled to remove existing cultural biases and give value to the history and contributions of African Americans, Native Americans, immigrants and other marginalized people in the development of this country; **(2d)** all school personnel trained in recognizing, confronting, and repairing harm caused by cultural and implicit biases in curriculum content, pedagogical, organizational, and personal practices; **(2e)** initiatives and programs that provide safety, support, empowerment, and justice to students who are bullied or disenfranchised.

3

Implementing a system within VCS by which community members and stakeholders can become better informed about legislative actions that would be harmful to VCS and assures that VCS administration and school board advocate locally and downstate on behalf of VCS students, teachers, facilities and finances;

4

Creating a citizen advisory group to improve the VCS through regular dialogue and sharing of key information about the opportunities and challenges of providing education in the community;

5

Encouraging partnerships, sharing of resources and open communication with alternative and adult education programs as a means to ensure educational equity and opportunity to members of the greater Valparaiso Community whose educational needs are not met in the traditional K-12 system.



Assuring a Sustainable Environment

Few issues are more important or of greater urgency than caring for our environment. Regardless of politics, income or age, we all depend on a healthy, clean and beautiful environment. While local actions are not sufficient to fully address the need, they are essential and can be a model for other communities. Actions include:

1

Instituting property tax credits for Renewable Energy Systems (geothermal, solar, wind and hydro);

2

Making upgrades to and establishing additional EV (electric vehicle) charging stations;

3

Instituting net metering, compensating owners of solar panels for energy produced by those panels;

4

Enacting ordinances that require solar shingles be used on all new city buildings, zoning for solar fields and community gardens; and

5

Creating additional bike lanes and bike parking areas and resourcing increased visibility and education on recycling.



Assuring a Safe Community for All Residents

Being truly safe on the streets, in stores, in schools and in one's own home is a basic expectation for all residents of Valparaiso. To that end, the community must be committed to assuring that safety for all of the people who live or work or visit here. Actions include:

1

Advocating for, creating and enforcing a zero-tolerance policy of bullying in our schools;

2

Beginning a community wide conversation exploring the concept of family, school, racial, gender and micro-aggression violence and provide a mechanism to publicly report and show responses to those incidents;

3

Assuring that all law enforcement personnel have extensive training in the prevention of the negative impacts of racial profiling;

4

Encourage, throughout venues in the community (schools, churches, book clubs, etc), the reading of literature which exposes and dramatizes real historical and cultural violence;

5

Committing to a community wide effort to moving toward a rational gun control environment by:

- knowing state and national legislators and their positions on gun control,
- electing local leaders that support common sense gun control, and
- advocating for common sense regulation of guns and ammunition, like the proposals put forth by the Parkland students, including: banning assault weapons, universal background checks, plugging the gun show loophole, raising the age to purchase weapons to 21.