COMMUNITY ID IN THE WORKS

Identification cards could be available next spring

By Josh O'Leary
Iowa City Press-Citizen

A new community identification card could be in people's pockets as soon as next spring, and hundreds have already expressed an interest in receiving one, officials say.

Johnson County officials are working to implement a new card system that would be the first of its kind in Iowa, allowing access to local services for immigrants and others who may not have the documentation needed to obtain a state-issued ID.

Leaders of the initiative say more than 700 people have already signed up through the Iowa City-based Center for Worker Justice, stating that they would like a card if and when they become available. Officials are aiming to have a system in place six months from now, though how the card will be issued, what must be provided to receive one, and what it can be used for, are things that have yet to be hamb-

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County Auditor
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mered out.

"It really does emphasize what a welcoming committee we are for all people," said Johnson County Attorney Janet Lyness, a member of the committee working to implement the card program. "That's one of the intangible things, but it's a benefit."

Earlier this year, Iowa City's Human Rights Commission and Ad Hoc Diversity Committee recommended that the city of Iowa City offer municipal IDs to assist immigrants — both documented and undocumented — when interacting with police and help them access municipal or private services.

Since then it has become more of a regional idea, and Johnson County leaders have taken the reins with the hopes of making a card available to people throughout the county, touting its benefits not just to immigrants, but to others who can't obtain a state-issued ID.

That includes seniors who no longer drive and don't have a birth certificate, homeless people who may have lost their ID or other documentation, spouses and dependents of international students, and people who have been displaced suddenly from their homes such as disaster victims or domestic violence victims.

Community ID programs have been established either directly by the city or through partnerships with nonprofit or for-profit organizations in places like New Haven, Conn.; Mercer County, N.J.; San Francisco; Oakland, Calif.; and Richmond, Calif. No city in Iowa currently offers community IDs, local leaders say.

"There's a huge need," said County Auditor Travis Weipert, who is working on the ID committee. "A lot of this is so people aren't afraid to go up and talk to law enforcement about issues they're facing without fear of repercussion. I know the committee also has talked about using these as bus passes where you can put money on them, and those kinds of things."

Committee members still are working with municipalities to determine what those specific services tied to the card will be. In addition to busing, officials are looking at things like library services, paying parking meters and accessing recreation center programs.

Lyness said the committee also is looking into private partnerships that could allow the card to be used at local businesses.

"Whether that's a discount at different businesses, or it being used to help open a bank account — there could be some additional perks to having it," Lyness said.

Officials must finalize which office will be responsible for issuing the cards and determine what equipment must be purchased to do so. The Johnson County recorder, auditor, treasurer and social services offices have all been floated as possibilities, as well as public libraries or city halls.

Johnson County Supervisor Janelle Rettig, in a joint government meeting last week where she updated local officials on the efforts, said the cards are expected to cost about $10. Rettig anticipates many more residents to sign up for the card than the 700 who have already expressed interest.

"We think that's the tip of the iceberg," Rettig said.

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