

Knoxville Mayor's Council on Disability Issues

January 10, 2024, Meeting Minutes - via Zoom

I. Meeting was called to order at 3:05 pm.

II. Roll Call:

Members: Alexander, Barber, Brooks, Cain, Carter, Childress, Eldredge, Lowe, Mathison, Maxwell, Mull, Robertson, Shimmin-Orr, Simmons, Spangler, Villanueva, Welch, Ziegler

City of Knoxville Staff: Cook, Dziubak

Present: Alexander, Brooks, Childress, Eldredge, Lowe, Mathison, Maxwell, Mull, Shimmin-Orr, Simmons, Welch, Ziegler

Absent: Barber*, Cain, Carter, Robertson, Spangler*, Villanueva*

Guests: Craig Kennedy (Open Doors Organization), Lynna N. (Oak Ridge Advocacy Group)

Interpreter: Antonio Banner

III. Approval of December Minutes: Simmons made first motion, Mull seconded motion, all in favor with none opposed, motion carried.

IV. Presentation (Craig Kennedy, Program Coordinator, Open Doors Organization)

- Had a skiing accident at age 22 and broke 9 vertebrae (T3 -T11).
 - T-12 paraplegic - longtime wheelchair user going on 29 years.
 - Still active with skiing. Lives in Tennessee and loves to travel.
- Started a business "Access Anything."
 - Published a couple of adventure travel guides for people with disabilities with his wife.
- Met Eric Lip with Open Doors Organization (who also is a T-4 Paraplegic). Lip helped start Continental Airlines, as is now on the United Airlines Disability Advisory Board.
- Kennedy has been involved in the industry for a very long time and advocates for increased accessibility because he loves to travel. Since most people can get anywhere in the world now in 24 hours, he believes everybody should have that opportunity.
- Open Doors Organization (ODO) was founded by Eric Lip in 2001 – Mission: to make goods and services more accessible to people with disabilities, including travel and tourism.
 - They provide Customer Service and ADA Disability training.
 - They work with Amtrak, cruise ships, motor coaches, hotel chains, as well as provide training with both Uber and Lyft.
- Kennedy speaks for ODO at aviation and transportation conferences.
 - Since 2018, about 40% of their business is in aviation, and they work with 60 air carriers worldwide, 30-40 airports worldwide, and train disability experts (CRO) for the airports
 - Some of this training is on how to handle mobility devices such as power wheelchairs- "be careful with it, this is not equipment, it is someone's arms or legs."

- Open Doors is also currently training front-line workers to know the rights of travelers and what those rights are. (such as removing parts from wheelchairs, etc.)
 - They also work with airports on design and accessibility. (Memphis and Chicago terminals)
- Kennedy mentioned the Harris Bowl 2002 market studies which showed that 58 million Americans with disabilities took 21 million trips a year and spent 16.7 dollars a year on travel.
 - Recognized in the New York Times and Wall Street Journal
 - Attitudes are shifting to “If you become more accessible, its not just because it’s the law or the right thing to do, you can actually make more money.”
 - Hopefully in the future, airlines will be able to start tying down powerchairs and secure luggage around it to keep from damaging it in transport.
- Open Doors Organization can help calm the anxiety of first-time travelers who may have a disability and feel uneasy about travelling. They recommend:
 - Travelling with your manual wheelchair if you can (Powerchairs were not made to be in airplanes)
 - When travelling, call the airline to give them all the information they need about you.
 - Know Your Rights so you will know if your rights are ever violated during travel
 - At the airport, check in at the counter and ask for an escort to assist you in getting through the airport and airport security.
 - Look for an expedited line – most of the time a separate line for people with disabilities, they can get you through a little quicker.
 - You can choose to do a TSA pre-check as well, to avoid the full check-in on the day of your trip.
- Once you arrive at your gate, check with the gate agent, and let them know you need an aisle chair to board the plane. You will transfer into the “aisle chair”. The aisle chair is a transfer chair to take you to your seat. You will be strapped in for your safety. They will also help you to transfer if you need assistance. Kennedy suggests arriving two hours early for pre-boarding.
 - You will get on the plane first, however that means you will be getting off last at your destination.
 - Getting on first can be nice because you can bring extra medical equipment or wheelchair wheels and store them in the overhead. Legally you can take parts, seat cushions, etc. into the with no extra charge.
- If you have any problems or complaints, ask for a CRO (Complaints Resolution Official) – they are an expert on the Air Carrier Access Act.
 - When headed to board the airplane you are no longer covered by the ADA anymore, you are covered under DOT regulations (better regulations)
 - The difference is under the ADA you can take individual action against somebody.
 - Under the Air Carrier Access Act, that is under Department of transportation (DOT) complaints must be submitted to the DOT, and one cannot bring individual action against an airline.
- Craig Kennedy shared his cell number - (970) 846-9859

V. Member Advocacy and Information – (Aquayla Maxwell)

- Winter Safety Tips for People with Disabilities: (*from the Easter Seals website*) these are some tried-and-true tips to from people with disabilities.

1. Consider your wardrobe: Add these pieces to your daily wardrobe.
 - Outerwear: Hoods vs Hats (If you cannot see well, then you need to be able to listen at intersections. Hoods are easier to flip on and off than hats) - Make sure your coat is suitable for the winter conditions specific to your location.
 - Footwear: invest in snow boots with good tread and insulation to keep your feet warm and to prevent slipping. Also recommended is buying a good pair of cleats that can attach to your boots.
 - Gloves: Protect your hands with a good pair of gloves, those that have thinner materials for texting are helpful for individuals who can't see well and use sense of touch.
2. Think of your wheelchair like your car: Make sure everything is tuned up, charged, and ready for possible rough terrain ahead.
 - Have an emergency kit in case you become stuck in hazardous conditions: include a protein bar, bottled water, hand warmers, and kitty litter for traction.
 - Wheelchair users should consider buying an all-weather poncho that is spacious enough to fit over both them and their wheelchair.
 - Wheelchair users may want to consider snow tires for icy conditions.
3. Check smoke alarms and CO2 detectors:
 - Make sure they have fresh batteries and are in working order.
 - Make sure fireplaces and candles are extinguished before going to bed to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.
4. Winter storms can be strong in different parts of the country and cause possible power outages. In case of emergency, have these plans in place:
 - Have emergency contacts in place.
 - Connect with others on social media to check in, or broadcast you need help.
 - Stock up on non-perishable food items.
 - Make an emergency plan with your primary physician to discuss refills, treatments, oxygen orders, etc. – anything that the storm could impact.
 - Have a backup power source.
 - Reach out to your utility company to inquire about becoming listed as a life-sustaining equipment customer.
5. Make staying warm a priority: Make sure you are warm indoors and outdoors.
 - If you have circulation problems or no feeling in your limbs you may want to consider hand warmers to keep hands and toes warm
6. Make sure your dog is ready: Service dogs need to be prepared for winter weather conditions to ensure their safety and comfort.
 - Avoid driveways, roads, and sidewalks where salt has been used to melt ice (This can damage the paw pads).

- i. Can use a protective barrier such as “Musher’s Secret” cream to protect the paws before going on walks – it will need to be reapplied before every walk.
 - ii. Another option would be weather boots to protect the paws.
- If you cannot avoid the salt, be sure to always wipe the dog’s paws once back indoors.

Maxwell also mentioned a Medical Priority Program through KUB (Knoxville Utility Board) that those relying on life-sustaining medical equipment at their residence can sign up for which provides prioritization when there is an outage.

VI. Committee Reports:

Bylaws:

- None, did not meet.

Membership:

- None, did not meet.

Transportation:

- None, did not meet.

VII. Strategic Plan Reports:

Livability:

- Met on January 3, 2024
- Ziegler will continue working on making the Livability Checklist accessible.
- Cain completed a checklist at Stock and Barrel, and although they got a score of 23/24, they were not eligible to receive a “disability friendly” cling as all bolded items were not met, specifically regarding restroom access and emergency exits.
- Ziegler will complete a Babalu’s checklist in January and will invite Mull to attend with her.
- Mull shared that while wearing her CODI shirt, she was approached and asked about the council.

Universal Design:

- Met on January 8, 2024
- Information on Affordable Housing:
 - Dziubak shared Harvard study article on housing, the elderly and aging: <https://www.npr.org/2023/11/30/1215460460/housing-seniors-affordable-harvard-report-baby-boomers?ft=nprml&f=1133>
 - Discussed current rates for renting and buying a home in Knoxville as well as income-based rentals.
 - Discussed how affordable housing is based on HUD poverty rates, and how affordable is based on low to moderate income.

- Missing Middle Housing Project:
 - Discussed what is currently happening in Knoxville with Missing Middle Housing. Dziubak encouraged Simmons to gather questions and ask them at a City Council meeting.
 - Dziubak shared link: <https://www.knoxvilletn.gov/cms/One.aspx?portalId=109562&pageId=19766310>
 - Dziubak shared link: <https://knoxplanning.org/cases/10-b-23-0a>
- Assisted Living Communities:
 - Shimmin-Orr brought up the high rates of assisted living communities and would like to discuss ways to reduce the rental rates in these communities.
 - Shimmin-Orr also briefly discussed experiences of residents with rents and accountability and perceived untrustworthiness of staff.
 - Dziubak requested that Shimmin-Orr do initial research on these communities as well as Section 202, and report back to the group at the next meeting and mentioned that this would not be regulated by City of Knoxville or within our jurisdiction to do so.
- Smart Devices:
 - Robertson mentioned lack of affordability of smart devices for the home, which tend to be needed by people with disabilities, and wanted to know if there was something CODI could do to help make these more affordable and accessible for people.
 - Dziubak reported that it was outside of City of Knoxville and CODI's purview, but if this is a topic Robertson is passionate about, he could write his own advocacy letters to send to companies.
- City of Knoxville Five-Year Plan:
 - Cook mentioned that the City is working on the next five-year consolidated plan right now and that CODI and Universal Design will hear more about this soon and have an opportunity to weigh in on it.

VIII. New Business:

- CODI 40th Anniversary: Last time we held a celebration event, we raised funds – which we may do again through sponsorship, however we will need to discuss when to hold the event, a venue, the program, budgetary needs, and marketing of the event.
- This event will be discussed in more detail at the February 14, 2024 CODI half-day retreat.
- Cook mentioned the possibility of highlighting the top 10 impacts on the City of Knoxville or highlighting the “Impact of 40 years.”
- Dziubak is researching materials from the 30th year celebration and will provide suggestions for this event. She also suggested inviting past members and guests that CODI has had present along with local student groups and elected officials.

IX. Announcements & Public Forum:

- CODI's half day retreat will be held from noon until 4:00 p.m. at the Cansler YMCA, across from O'Connor Senior Center, in the Community Room, located at 616 Jessamine Street, 37917. Light refreshments will be provided.
- Ziegler brought attention to 2 state bills that are in legislature (HB 1660 and HB 1634). Please reach out to your representatives let them know your thoughts.

- Cook brought to attention another state bill (SB 1595) that is going to prohibit Emotional Support Animals in businesses and restaurants. This may cause some confusion relating to Service Animals and the right to have them in public spaces.
- Cook mentioned that the Age Friendly Networks (AFN) Steering Committee met today. Cook shared with them the good work that CODI and the special committees are doing. Cook will share any upcoming information regarding Livable Communities and the Age Friendly Networks as it becomes available.

X. Meeting was Adjourned at 4:00 p.m.