



Commission on Disabilities
Annual Meeting Minutes
February 1, 2023

Commissioners:

Laurie Berner - P
Ashlie Castaldo - P
Roberta Cich – P
Amanda Crosby - P

Allison Fochs - P
Tom Furman - A
Dianne Naus - P
Samantha Smingler – P
Brooke Marinan - P

Also present: Carl Crawford, Mark Bauer

Chair Berner called the February 2023 Commission on Disabilities Annual meeting to order at 3:30 PM, there was a quorum.

Approval of current agenda: MS/C (Fochs/Castaldo)

Approval of the November minutes: Correct date. **MS/C – (Crosby/Fochs)**

2023 Annual meeting:

Vote for 2023 Officers:

Hearing no additional nominations from the floor, the following slate of officers were votes on and elected to serve for 2023 **MS/C (Fochs/Marinan)**

Chair - Amanda Crosby
Vice Chair - Ashlie Castaldo
Secretary - Samantha Smingler

Review of Bylaws and goals

The Commission would like to review goals, Bylaws and the City Ordinance. Chair Berner requested that the Human Rights Office send these items out to all Commissioners.

- It was decided that having a special meeting or retreat to review these items and establish action items for 2023-2024 was best. This will be set up later this month.

Accessible Parking Update:

Mr. Bauer reported that two new ADA parking spots were approved at the January Parking Commission meeting. There are 2 new requests to be reviewed at the February meeting. One will likely be approved. Mr. Bauer requested the Commission's recommendation on the second request.

- The individual making the request has a verified disability and is requesting an ADA spot in front of her house. However, she has 5 parking spots in the alley which is also accessible to her home. One spot is used by a family member and the additional 4 spots are used by what appears to be inoperable vehicles.
- After discussion and explanation, a motion was made to recommend denial of the request.
- The Commission recommends not approving the ADA signage request at 3813 W. 2nd Street because there are several accessible off-street parking options available on the property. **MS/C (Cich/Berner)**

Public Comment/Information: Commissioner Crosby informed the Commission about Transportation Equity Day which will happen on February 3rd and 4th.

- On Friday, there will be a media event from 10:00 - 11:00 and would like someone from the Commission to speak briefly. Commissioners Cich and Crosby agreed that one of them would speak.
- Commissioner Fochs shared about her negative experiences with the bus recently. She reported that she was attempting to board a bus but the step up was too high. This was a new electric bus and she was told it could not kneel. She was also told it could not deploy the ramp because of the snow. Commissioner Fochs reported that she 'literally had to crawl onto the bus.' Commissioner Crosby agreed (at Commissioner Fochs' request) to share this story at the event on Friday.
- Commissioners were encouraged to attend the event which will be from 10:00-11:00 at the Downtown Transit Center.

Parks and Rec Report:

- Commissioner Crosby reported that Dave Schaffer from Chester Bowl has been doing some fundraising for a new building. They plan to add an elevator and accessible bathrooms.

- The Parks and Rec Commission is talking about re-energizing the Parks Referendum for 2024.
- Commissioner Crosby reminded everyone that this is her last year on the Commission on Disabilities and on the Parks Commission. She encouraged anyone interested to fill this role.

New Business: Commissioners talked about the number of Commissioners who will end their terms on the Commission in the next year and the need to recruit new members.

Old Business:

Snow Removal Task Force

Commissioner Smingler gave a review of the Special Meeting held on January 25th. This meeting was well attended and well received. See Special Meeting Minutes for details.

- The new Snow Removal Task Force will begin meeting next week and will meet with City staff on March 1st.

Current Disability Issues: Mr. Crawford asked that we put housing on the agenda in the near future. People are still having difficulties finding housing - even with vouchers. There are also a lot of evictions happening.

Correspondence: None

Announcements:None

Adjourn: Meeting adjourned at 4:50

**Next meeting is Wednesday, March 1, 3:30 PM
City Hall Room 330**

Call to Action Letter

TO: Mayor Larson, Jim Benning, Noah Schuchman, Phil Jents, James Gittemeier, Carl Crawford, Jon Otis

FROM: The Duluth Commission on Disabilities

RE: Call to Action; Winter Accessibility/Snow Removal

DATE: December 07, 2022

It is imperative that accessibility in Duluth is made a priority throughout the year. Safe, accessible sidewalks are a life safety issue, an equitable access issue, a human rights issue and are required by Title II of the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act).

For years, Duluth residents, community groups, nonprofits and several city departments have come together collaboratively through various task forces and work groups to try to tackle the problem of keeping sidewalks free of snow and ice through Duluth's long winters. Each of these groups has its own goals related to accessibility. Examples include access to services and supports for people with disabilities and older community members, general walkability of city sidewalks and access to public transportation including bus stops. The common theme is that accessible sidewalks, free of snow and ice, are essential and are a lifeline for equal access to the community for Duluth residents.

The City of Duluth has recently updated the Snow Removal Ordinance, Chapter 45 Article VI. However, the policies and requirements have not improved accessibility in the winter. This policy does not address support needed for those who are unable to clear snow and ice from their sidewalks due to aging and disabilities. This policy also does not address what happens when snow is plowed onto residential sidewalks.

Four years ago, the city implemented the Snow Removal Assistance Program to assist residents who are unable to clear snow. Although short-lived, the program not only helped individuals have access to the community, but also avoid costly fines that could be a detriment for those living on a limited or fixed budget.

To help address issues of winter access, a group of organizations have come together to support the Duluth Commission on Disabilities and our ongoing efforts to find solutions. As a collective whole, we are bringing a call to action to the Duluth City government with the following priorities:

- Make community access surrounding sidewalk snow removal a priority by the Duluth City government and the community as a whole.
- The City, County and State must collaborate to maintain sidewalks along the property they own.
- Provide assistance for individuals who are unable to shovel due to age or disability.

- Provide help for businesses and residents when snow and ice are left behind from the plow and can be insurmountable to remove by shoveling manually or using residential snow removal equipment.
- Ensure financial resources are committed to and allocated towards snow removal and accessibility.
- Establish a plan to remove plowed snow from sidewalks and curb cuts in a timely manner ensuring accessible sidewalks, bus stops, corners and curb cuts throughout the city.
- Lead marketing and messaging efforts that focus on the importance of snow removal and access.
- Provide education to business owners on their responsibilities for snow removal.
- Assurances that snow removal is addressed in the City of Duluth's ADA Transition Plan for Public Rights of Way.
- Assurance of the implementation of the City of Duluth's ADA Transition Plan for Public Rights of Way.

We respectfully understand this is a complex systems issue with several moving parts, but the system is not working. We are asking that our community, with the City as the lead, do better. The ability to move safely and freely throughout the city is a fundamental human right. As it stands a certain subset of individuals do not have the same access for a considerable portion of the year.

The Duluth Commission on Disabilities and those in support are asking for concrete steps and commitment for moving forward. We are requesting a meeting with the City of Duluth government officials with the goal to help find solutions, meet snow removal priorities, provide accessibility, and make meaningful changes for our community. We are requesting that this meeting be scheduled in January prior to our February Commission on Disabilities meeting.

Respectfully, the Duluth Commission on Disabilities.

Our mission is to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access and can participate fully in the community.