

Commission on Disabilities
Regular Monthly Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, October 4, 2023

Commissioners: *indicate present (P) or absent (A)*

Laurie Berner - P
Ashlie Castaldo - A
Chris Johnson - P
Amanda Crosby - P
Allison Fochs - P
Dianne Naus - P
Samantha Smingler – P
Brooke Marinan - P

Also present:

Emma Chhock, Intern with Human Rights Office
Leah Whalen, Intern with Arc Northland
Police Officer Mark Bauer, Parking
Human Rights Officer Carl Crawford
Jon Otis, Fire Department, Deputy Chief of Life Safety
Fire Chief Shawn Krijaz (oversees private, city and state sidewalk clearing)

Chair Crosby called the **10/4/23** Commission on Disabilities meeting to order at 3:35pm, there was a quorum.

Approval of current agenda: 1st motion, Commissioner Fochs, 2nd Commissioner Berner

Approval of the September 2023 minutes: 1st motion, Commissioner Naus, 2nd motion, Commissioner Johnson

Guest speakers or presentations:

Snow Removal - Fire Chief Krijaz and Life Safety Officer Otis

Otis and Krijaz shared answers to Commissioner questions that came up in the September meeting around snow removal and temporary closure of sidewalks to redirect clearing efforts to areas more easily cleared.

How will the city communicate with the public when sidewalks are closed?
City Public Communications Officer, and Duluth Police Department Communication Officer - just like other changes, press releases will go out on all our platforms, including most social media platforms.

Seasonal closure - Jeff Ucliage from Streets, would do interviews for news, radio, and video for social media, and live on the city's website.

Woodland Ave Example - city engineers will work with (traffic control) public works and streets to identify seasonal closures.

Who makes the decision on what sidewalks to close?

Director of Public works - Director Jim Benning. Has control over sidewalks. Parks Maintenance staff does help clear sidewalks, but do not have the authority over them.

What is the process for closing a sidewalk?

Over the last few years we have already identified some problem areas. Woodland ex. 6-9 ft sidewalk, rather wide - but no where to put the snow. So this could be a place where we do a seasonal closing. Weather dependent. Or we pick a date - Sept - March. But if we still have 6ft of snow in June then we would need flexibility to the timeline.

Must also be a safe route to still access things. In this example, there are controlled intersections above or below it. UMD owns sections around that too that are cleared well. Elizabeth St. also has a crosswalk. So lots of factors come into play.

Need for an Emergency declaration, to close a sidewalk for a week. In a declared snow emergency, plowing is already a priority on the streets.

Commissioner Berner: I like that you can look at temporary closure. Nice first line, so that it can be reopened. Can that be the first line?

Chief Krijaz - we want COD to advise. But it takes about 3 weeks to get snow removed after everything is cleared, if no other snow falls.

Officer Bauer: Can there be a snow train?

Chief Krijaz - that has a huge cost, and neg PR, because cars have to be towed.

Commissioner Johnson: my fear, in the Woodland Ave example - the path to walk around is lengthy. So then it will encourage folks to walk in the street. Can there be a tiered priority system, so we can get back to clearing snow in a high traffic area? Wide road with lots of cars going fast is a dangerous situation.

Commissioner Fochs: as someone who lives there, the snow does just continue to fall. The Dermatology clinic near there has not regularly shoveled in the past.

Chief Krijaz - want to keep shifting the culture where folks take responsibility to shovel. But also need walkers to use safe routes.

Otis - we need heavier messaging to folks who have gotten notices in the past. The option to clear the street is to put it on the sidewalk. Private owners just don't have the equipment to remove the snow. Let's keep the private owners aware of the situation.

Commissioner Berner- how many areas are we thinking are in the city?

Otis - 21st ave, woodland ave, arrowhead rd, blackman ave in Piedmont, out west on Grand. Lots of walkable areas to cover.

Chief Krijaz- talking to engineering to do studies to see what other areas snow can be stored(ie. bike lane) so not on the sidewalk.

Commissioner Fochs: my concern, someone else sees the city closing sidewalks, then others think they can choose to close their own sidewalk.

Chief Krijaz - we have a 48 hour city ordinance - private residents have 2 days to clear their snow. We close sidewalks temporarily all the time, for construction, etc. for weeks to months.

Otis- city is plowing snow back onto the sidewalks, then it's a burden to the private owner. Considering piloting areas in downtown to store snow in a few parking stalls.

Chief Krijaz -not asking COD to say what sidewalks to close, but your input. We spend a lot of time shoveling so we can get an ambulance and

stretcher to someone's door. St. Louis County and MN Dot to help with tax forfeited property in the middle of the term. AKA...not the city's responsible. The County has not responded to requests to help with those sidewalks. Say they can't divert plow efforts.

Public works should be able to share who has jurisdiction over the road - if the road is redone, St Louis County updates the road, then maintenance transfers over to the city. Like Woodland market, - county project to upgrade, then city for maintenance.

Commissioner Fochs: can we make sure other sidewalks are DEFINITELY passible? To avoid folks in the street.

Chief Krijaz - Did Jeff say they could budget for signs to mark closures? Need more folks from Public works that can make the higher decision making to help with this effort.

Commissioner Berner: Let's experiment with temporary closures this year. Want to make sure the Commission on Disabilities can continue to advise and collaborate.

Officer Bauer - one timely issue, need for emergency sidewalk closure. Similar to flood needs, close sidewalks for greater safety needs. Chief Krijaz agrees. - Snow removal is easier than flood repairs. Cars are still king, over pedestrians and bikes. With emergency closures, COD can put pressure on the right folks to get sidewalks reopened. Give a voice to those who don't have one. Want to balance billing private citizens for snow removal.

HR Officer Crawford- key goal, clarity on what does a closure mean (timeline) language to message to the community. "For public safety, closed from date to date"

Officer Johnson - don't want a policy on sidewalk closures to go public yet, now it looks like we've(COD) gone backwards on access to sidewalks. Trying really hard to grow access.

Chair - the snow removal task force does see this as a positive move. Just need maps. Task force can help write this support statement up. Still need to work on the social health around snow removal.

HR Officer Crawford - let's see what works. We need to tell the story of how much it pulled from clearing other areas.

Chair - pilot a process this year. The City Council did just put \$150K for Jeff and James to do a study this year on what routes need to be focused on for accessibility. Look at sidewalks as part of the infrastructure. Then we would have miles, areas, street names!

HR Officer Crawford will get notice of sidewalks closures. He can let the snow removal tasks force know. All the work has to be measurable. All the things we try this year need start and end time. And what worked and what didn't.

Chief Krijaz - what does getting better look like to the commission? What does that mean to us? Haven't really talked about bus stops, and clearing bus stops. Or seeing that as another gap.

Commissioner Smingler - can we make a check-list of what to focus on to include disabilities from when a sidewalk needs to be closed?

MinnaSNOWda Nice campaign - coming from the snow removal task force and the Duluth Aging Support group. How much does the COD want to get involved in the marketing?

Commissioner Berner - Helping neighbors get to know the importance of helping one another with snow removal. Lesterriver Rondevou folks want to help get that message out too. WDIO does talk about the snow removal - so they can help.

Chief Krijaz - caution against a formal resolution. We are currently unwinding resolutions from 30 years ago.

Chair will write up a letter of support to share with the city. Chief Krijaz, also encourages us to meet with public works.

Public Comment/Information:

- Equity Action Team in Duluth - would like to get ahold of a wheelchair, and go through the city hall building to experience access issues first hand.
- Human Rights Officer Crawford - has received a number of calls concerning street crossing areas - speakers don't have sound to indicate when it's safe to cross. We know the crossing from Bluestone to UMD was hit by a car. Also issues in West Duluth, near tower buildings.
 - Officer Bauer - his staff makes note of broken stop lights, and sends them on to Joe in engineering. He will ask his team to also be checking for audio at the crosswalks.
 - HR Officer Crawford - is it possible to have the Commission audit those crosswalks. To give those feedback to what needs to be fixed? Would prioritize crosswalks over skywalk audits - since skywalk use seems to be decreasing.
- There is a reason that some doors in the skywalk don't close the same way - suggestion to consult Fire Marshal Consie, Lisa - to understand the code on why.

Accessible Parking Update:

As discussed in our September COD meeting - there were 2 off street parking requests for accessible stalls. Both were approved.

- 502 North 22nd Ave W. in Lincoln Park.

- 3 diagonal spaces at a church on MN Ave. Formalizing what has been used informally for years.

3 new requests to go to the Parking Commission on Friday.

1. 1714 East 7th St - garage off the alley, but steps and grade are unusable
2. 206 East House St (Guary) - no off street parking, will be recommended
3. 222 East Superior St. (Arc Northland) - recently moved into Zeitgeist building, and want credentialed visitors to have accessible parking. Will be near a loading zone, and near the entrance.
4. 3061 Chestnut - has not been visited yet. Will go to the next meeting.

Officer Bauer notes that accessible parking stalls are not only for the applicant, not for any one party - so it serves the wider community attending evening events to have an accessible parking spot near Zeitgeist.

Parks and Rec Report:

Tuesday Oct 17th 3pm - opening event for new Lincoln Park.

Old Business:

Snow Removal Task Force

- See notes above.

Annual Commission on Disability Goals Will return to next month.

New Business/Current Disability Issues:

- Hold for November meeting.

Announcements:

N/A

Adjourn: 1st Motion, Commissioner Naus, 2nd Motion, Commissioner Fochs. 5pm Adjourned at 5pm. Chair notes we will table the rest on the agenda for now, due to time.

Next meeting *Wednesday, November 1st, 3:30 PM*
City Hall Room 430