



Commission on Disabilities
Regular Monthly Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, August 6, 2025
City Hall Room 430

Commissioners Present: Ashlie Castaldo, Chair; Brooke Marinar, Vice Chair; Christina Johnson, Secretary; Marie Anderson; Allison Fochs; Michelle McDonald; Michaela Mullin; Amanda Paszak

Commissioners Absent: Jill Isola Johnson

Guests Present: Azrin Awal, Duluth City Councilor; Marsha Lue, City of Duluth; Laura Laaksonen, City of Duluth; BethAnn Johnson, Arrowhead Regional Quality Council; Andy Paszak; Mark Bauer, City of Duluth; Jon Rix

Chair Castaldo called the **8/6/25** Commission on Disabilities meeting to order at 3:37pm.

Approval of the August 2025 agenda (Fochs, Marinar)

Approval of June 2025 minutes (McDonald, Anderson) - with update to Marsha's last name spelling and Commissioner Mullin absent.

Current Disability Issues and Announcements

- Access North and Arc Northland event Aug. 7 at UWS; another event at Depot Aug 7.
- RSI summer picnic August 19

Accessible Parking Update

- July 7 Parking Commission - 2731 W. 3rd Street - approved unanimously
- August 1 Parking Commission - 110 S 67th Ave W - approved unanimously; 112 W 5th St - approved unanimously
- New Essentia ramp between 3rd/4th Ave E and 1st/2nd Street. Beyond minimum accessible parking stalls included. Stalls will be painted and identified by sign.
- Commission question - How do you get an application for an accessible permit? Through State of MN.

Guest Speaker - Duluth City Councilor At Large - Azrin Awal

What is happening with commissions and boards? Mayor Reinert notes Duluth has a lot of boards and commissions, some struggle to meet quorums, are they effective and supportive?

Q to COD: What has worked for COD? What has not? What are challenges?

- Worked: Opportunity to speak to City Council.
 - COD has always had full commission, dynamic group and diverse group. Benefits everyone in community. Lots of community engagement.
- Challenges: What doesn't work is if Council doesn't show interest or doesn't attend or doesn't invite COD to attend.
 - COD not approached for discussions - particularly the public safety ordinance.
 - Executive board keeping full commission in the loop.

Q to COD: Do we have power and tools and resources to make a difference provided by City Staff and Council?

- No, afraid to ruffle administration feathers. COD does a lot without help from administration. When we have had to reach out to City officials, issues are blown off. IE crosswalk safety. Councilor Awal invited Commissioners to coffee to discuss these issues. Councilor Awal feels hopeful that the transportation commission can help address the crosswalk safety issue.
- Lack of mobilization on requests or tasks. Getting projects to the finish line.
- Skywalk is another concern. We've been told COD will have a voice, but that has not been the experience.

Q to COD: What are things you'd need to see to confidently say COD is being effective, heard, productive? What resources, authority do we need to be successful?

- Have someone from Council at our meetings
- Cross-reporting between commissions

Q to COD: How aware are you on other commissions?

- Parking update and Parks and Rec updates at every COD. Updates with Human Rights Commission.

Proposal: City looking at consolidating commissions. Other 'identity' commissions struggle to meet quorum, feel lack of power/authority, commission cross-pollination, feeling of tokenization. Councilor Awal is considering having voices of identities represented in Human Rights Commission.

Q to Councilor Awal: What is the difference between commission and committee? More flexibility on how to meet and how to conduct business; would fit under Human Rights leadership. Voices are heard at the Human Rights level. Benefit: having more collective power to approach City Council and administration.

COD concerns: Pushing us out feels like a bad message. Afraid it'll water down the work; need it open to the public. No reason to remove where there's passion and commitment.

Timeline: all move together or don't move at all.

Parks and Rec Report

Duluth Superior Sailing Club - different accessible sailing options. Lighthouse had week long sailing camp.

Crosswalk Discussion

New Business

- Update on upcoming events

Old Business

- Skywalk Update

Public Comment

Adjourn

Next Meeting:
Wednesday, September 3, 2025
3:30PM-4:30PM
City Hall room 430

The public is invited to submit written comment prior to the meeting by humanrights@duluthmn.gov or mailing comments to 411 W 1st St, City Hall, Duluth, MN 55802.

Please note that all public comments are considered public data.