

Knoxville Mayor's Council on Disability Issues

Dec 13, 2023 Meeting Minutes – via Zoom

I. Meeting was called to order at 3:04pm

II. Roll Call:

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

City of Knoxville Staff: Cook, Dziubak

Present: Alexander, Barber, Brooks, Eldredge, Lowe, Maxwell, Mull, Robertson, Simmons, Spangler, Villanueva, Welch

Absent: Cain, Carter, Childress, Mathison, Shimmin-Orr, Ziegler

Guests: Carter Hall, (City of Knoxville)

Interpreter(s): Antonio Banner, Vernice Williams

III. Approval of October Minutes: Motion by Eldredge, seconded by Welch— motion carried with amended correction to names in listing of members. Mathison (listed twice) should be listed as Mathison and Mull.

IV. Presentation – Carter Hall, City of Knoxville, Personal Delivery Device Moratorium

- Last time he spoke to the group he presented to CODI about micro-ability in regards to the electric scooters/bike share in downtown Knoxville. He took CODI's feedback and concerns CODI members had voiced.
- Mr. Hall spoke today regarding a "new technology" now being considered on the UT Campus, autonomous delivery robots.
- There is a partnership with UT Volunteer Dining and some of the food vendors – the robots use an app-based delivery system that transports food orders from an "on campus" restaurant to students using this autonomous robot.
- The routes are mapped out in real time and in-time with the lighting systems on the streets, etc., which has been successful.
- There was a discussion in early 2022 of possibly expanding to adjacent roads near and around the UT campus area (Ft. Sanders, Lake Drive areas).
- There would need to be an agreement with the City of Knoxville on the need to potentially use certain city streets and it would be on a case-by-case basis if this happened.
- Several months ago there was another delivery robot company wanting to pursue the same business model.
- Mr. Hall states there has to be regulations put in place or it would be the "Wild West" so to speak. There is a regulation that prevents any company coming in and just setting up their robots, however it expires in April 2024.

- Mr. Hall wants CODI's input whether there should be a pilot on expanding the service or prohibit such. Mr. Hall is leading the research on this possibility.
- Mr. Hall has spoken to UT and the company on campus has no interest in expanding.
- If this was to happen, there would need to be discussions with CoK Engineering Dept. to make improvements to sidewalks, such as widen them, fix the ones that are uneven, and there would need to be a HUB to charge the robots.
- Mr. Hall states that there are no expectations of moving forward with a pilot. There is discussion of possibly letting the autonomous delivery robots use a City right-of-way street to cross in order to use an adjacent road.
- In some cities like Toronto and San Francisco, those cities have banned the robots specifically because of disability concerns.
- Several CODI members expressed their concerns to Mr. Hall regarding delivery robots and the disability community.
- Mr. Hall states there should be a report available by mid-February and he can report back to CODI in May about the progress of this project.
- Carter Hall's contact is chall@knoxvilletn.gov.

V. Member Advocacy and Information:

a. Joel Simmons, Advocacy for Spinal Cord Injury Patients:

- Simmons was injured at age 48.
- Simmons spoke about hearing a lady speak about Autism when he was in his undergraduate classes and what she commented that also relates to Spinal Cord patients too – *"If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism."*
- He compared it to paint chips at a hardware store; the lightest paint chips would be Asperger's and darken the higher the impact on a person's ability to function and the problems they may have.
- We have 33 vertebrae in the spinal cord. You start at the bottom by your tailbone, then the lumbar, the thoracic and then the cervical.
- Spinal Cord injury is very similar in relation to those paint chips mentioned before. Down near the tailbone would be light colored and each section you go up you are going to lose something. And each vertebra the paint chips get darker.
- Spinal Cord Paralysis can be in 2 groups – incomplete and complete.
- Incomplete = you might be able to move your leg or other limbs / Complete = no movement
- Simmons injury is C5, C6, C7 – with the bulk being C6 and C7.
- There are several advocacy groups that help with Spinal Cord support – such as Christopher Reeves, the National Spinal Cord Association, and Spinal Cord Injury Association of America.
- Christopher Reeves group will tell you they are looking to cure spinal cord injuries.
- Support groups like Vocational Rehab help advocate for folks with employment and depends on how much of the injury has affected them.
- Cook shared she had a spinal injury in 1987 at age 14 and is a T10 (Thoracic) – incomplete.
- Simmons volunteers at Patricia Neal and encourages the newly injured spinal cord patients and their families. Injuries such as this affect the entire family when it happens to someone.
- An advocate needs to be someone that reaches out during OT/PT and other times as well.

- The transfer of information to someone is the best way to encourage or advocate for others. Share your story and how you were injured and if the medical professionals said you couldn't do something, and you overcame that.
- Simmons shares that when he was injured, the doctors told him and his family he was just another case like Christopher Reeves, and that's the best it's going to get. But he also tells the individuals he talks to that he drives himself to everywhere he goes today. Simmons has a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling.
- Encourage individuals that this is not the best it gets – you can improve!
- Simmons shared that there are also support groups on Facebook.
- It comes down to the individual deciding and wanting to advocate for themselves and others too.
- Even though there are nationwide organizations doing good work, grassroots efforts locally really make an impact such as Knoxville Area Employment Consortium (KAEC) that helps individuals with disabilities get into the workforce despite their disabilities.
- Simmons closed by encouraging "people working with people" instead of waiting for the national organizations to do so.
- Help those that are struggling to find their "New Normal."

b. Stacy Spangler, TN Disability Coalition Services: website: www.tndisability.org.

- TN Disability Coalition is very involved with Disability Day on the Hill which is February 28, 2024.
- Text TEAMWORK to 72690 – to get Tennessee disability policy updates and alerts.
- Disability Advocacy Day is March 11th – ALL DAY – disability advocacy across the state of Tennessee.
- TN Disability Score Card: scorecard rating the state of TN on how they are disability friendly.
- Part of the Tennessee ADA Network.
- Workable TN: Spangler works with this department. She helps individuals understand how working affects their Social Security benefits. Individual counseling is also available regarding benefits.
- Family Voices of Tennessee: supports families with children with special health care needs like chronic illnesses or disability. Support group so families can learn from each other, learn different resources.
- Small Grants program: biannual, and they award small grants up to \$10,000.
- Brain Links: brings together professionals to recognize the unique nature of brain injury and improved services for survivors of traumatic brain injury.
- Tennessee Business for the Better – recognizes businesses for their efforts to promote inclusivity.
- Any person with or without a disability who is interested in learning more and advocating for individuals with disabilities can become a member for \$25.

VI. Committee Reports:

Bylaws:

- Did not meet. Dziubak has reached out to City of Knoxville Law department, and is waiting on a reply from George Shields about separating the Bylaws into two documents - an overarching document which will not change often, and another that CODI may change with approval from the mayor.

Membership: (Met on December 6, 2023)

- Spangler agreed to be Secretary.

- The vote for meetings to be every other month passed unanimously.
- Briefly discussed current absences of members, but no action is needed as of yet.
- There are (3) spots open on CODI and members were asked to provide nominations by no later than the February meeting - send to Dziubak by the CODI meeting in February (Feb 14, 2024).
- Currently, Dr. Kelly Martin of YMCA and Sheryl McCormick, who has retired from Peninsula, may be submitting nominations for membership.

Transportation: (Met December 11, 2023)

- KAT updates- no updates on KAT Reimagined. KAT has launched mobile tickets where you can buy your tickets online. They are still taking both cash and mobile tickets. So far it is going well. Their Bus Stop improvement is on delay until KAT reimaged gets launched this summer.
- Vehicle free Gay Street – this is the last weekend of the pilot, be sure to visit if you haven't and provide feedback. Misha will be sending the comments to Mayor Kincannon.
- Downtown Parking Study – Dziubak contacted Cheryl Ball with City of Knoxville regarding the parking study and to get some clarity on the survey since it looks to be already closed. They do not have the results of the study yet, though there was a great response to the survey. Dziubak has invited them to give updates at our February Transportation meeting.
- Mobility Plan 2050 – shared survey link with the group <https://knoxtpo.org/mobility-plan-2050-update/>.
- Question asked about how often does the CoK perform the sidewalk study? How can a sidewalk get repaired? Call 311 with any concerns or urgent matters so they can be addressed promptly, or download the My Knoxville App to do so. Engineering or appropriate department can address the issue and determine if the matter is a high priority.

Grants: (Met October, 18, 2023)

- Grants committee was dissolved at the Oct. 18th meeting.
- Progress had ceased being made and deadlines were fast approaching.
- Thank you for considering the opportunity, this was a great collaboration with other community partners, including the Urban League. We will try again another time.

VII. Strategic Plan Reports:

Livability: (Met on November 1, 2023)

- Spangler and Carter went to South Coast pizza and completed a survey. Dziubak had a few clarifying questions, so members went through the questions with clarification from Spangler. They received a passing score overall and will get a letter and window cling.
- Discussion regarding October CODI Accessible Surveys that were completed – Ziegler and Cain said they will sign up to do future surveys, and we are waiting on Childress to complete his.

Universal Design: (Met on November 6, 2023)

- Discussed how to collect housing information to inform on what the market is asking for in 2024.
- Inskip Housing Complex – What's the dollar amount for "affordable" and the minimum they consider to be "accessible?"

- Vehicle Free Gay Street – need to gather feedback to share with Mayor Kincannon

VIII. New Business:

CODI social was held on November 3rd at Aubry's on Papermill Drive:

- Out of 23 total CODI members and their families, 17 members and 6 families did RSVP they would be attending. 10 were absent, which included 8 members and 2 family members.
- This social gathering took place instead of the regular CODI meeting, however due to absences, if a social is held in the future, there will also be a CODI meeting held that month.

Vehicle Free Gay Street Pilot: Mayor Kincannon requested feedback from CODI.

- The last weekend to visit will be Friday, Dec 15, and Saturday, Dec 16.
- All comments are due to Dziubak by December 18, 2023.
- The mayor has gathered feedback from several other organizations and groups as well. She did say she appreciated all the comments and the time spent by members going down there to look at this and also believes that some of the comments will be mitigated if this does continue in the future.

CODI Tee Shirts: Dziubak still has several tee-shirts that members ordered, if you have not picked yours up, please make arrangements do so.

IX. Announcements & Public Forum:

- If you are interested and able to speak and share your story with media regarding the Tennessee Disability Scorecard please contact Tom Jedlowski, tom_j@tndisability.org, the more compelling story the better.

X. Meeting was Adjourned at 4:27 p.m.