

## **Knoxville Mayor's Council on Disability Issues**

June 14, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Zoom

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

### **II. Roll Call:**

**Members:** Alexander, Ajinkya, Barber, Black, Brooks, Carter, Childress, Jenkins, Landfather, Lowe, Maxwell, Mathison, Mull, Robertson, Shimmin-Orr, Simmons, Spangler, Villanueva, Welch

**City of Knoxville Staff:** Cook, Dziubak

**Present:** Alexander, Ajinkya, Barber, Brooks, Jenkins, Landfather, Lowe, Maxwell, Robertson, Simmons, Spangler, Villanueva, Welch

**Absent:** Black\*, Carter, Childress, Mathison\*, Mull\*, Shimmin-Orr\*

**Guests:** Adam Cureton, Regis Borsari

**Interpreters:** Monique Johnson and Greysen Wood

**III. Approval of May Minutes:** Barber made the first motion, Spangler seconded the motion, motion carried.

### **IV. Presentation - Adam Cureton, Philosophy of Disability Professor, UTK**

- I will give you some background on me first: I have been legally blind since birth, my father was in the military, so we moved frequently, and I was faced with the decision when we moved to hide my disability or downplay it, and it was surprising how well I could hide it. This occurred to the point where my father signed me up for little league baseball, and I was in the outfield and prayed that the ball would not come to me, and the one time it did I scrambled around to find it and threw it the wrong way. I ended up “coming out” about my disability in college and claimed it, and then decided to make it my career path. I went to Oxford University on a Rhodes scholarship and studied philosophy and disability, then completed my PHD at UNC at Chapel Hill and came to UT in 2011.
- Disability is a new and growing field in philosophy. In the late 1970's or early 1980's interest grew among sociologists and psychologists for disability as its own area of research. Disability impacts how people identify as disabled, or view

groups related to disability. What it is to live a good, happy life, for intimate relationships and how to relate to those with disabilities, maintaining self-worth for those with a disability. And we see the impact with justice when distributing resources fairly in society.

- So why now? There is now more academic interest I believe. Society has started to change its views on disability, and if we are lucky enough to live long enough, we will all have a disability at some point.
- I am a firm believer of ideas leading to social change, such as ideas of race and gender which led to the Suffrage movement and Civil Rights Movement. Disability Rights in the 1970's led to advancements, as incomplete as they are.
- There is growing technological innovation that raises questions folks with disabilities need to be on the forefront of, such as artificial intelligence or AI. Are people with disabilities involved in the testing of these ideas?
- Reading about ideas can help people understand their own experience. For instance, in the past with sexual harassment, there were women experiencing it, but now knowing how to explain what was happening. Then people started thinking of how to explain things which lead to change in society, and women being able to give a name to what they were experiencing.
- For people with disabilities, their condition is not always the disadvantage. It is the social model, the deviation from "normal" functions in society, that is the problem. This idea turned the view on disabilities on its head, and we want to make sure the arguments for the social model of disabilities are not vague in order to give it more power. We want to give it the firmest basis we can to be able to use it in society, and as philosophers, we prod and poke and debate things. Philosophers are struggling with if this model is relevant to all disabilities; for instance, the idea of chronic pain being a disability is being argued about. In medicine for example, disabilities are things to be avoided, because instead of making things accessible it encourages "curing" the disability. However, philosophers push back that disability is not as much the problem as is the accessibility to lead good lives in society.
- How do we show respect for people with disabilities? At conferences where they know that I am blind, people will come up and grab my arm to help lead me to the next room, and that really rubs me the wrong way. Treating people with disabilities without respect in small subtle ways can undermine someone's self-worth. At the University of Tennessee, I have taught courses on all of these issues, and it will now be a permanent course offering. The response has been great from the students. I have found that with student, some had just not learned about the disabilities rights movement, but also that more than half of the students are disabled students themselves and they felt they were being heard and included in the class in a way that had been lacking in other classes.
- Stephanie Cook asked if there is a degree related to this and Dr. Cureton said that right now there is only a Special Education degree, and there are a few

people whose research is on disability issues, but he is trying to come up with a certificate or concentration.

- Landfather said that he appreciated the fervor and excitement for the topic.
- Simmons shared that he has quadriplegia, 13 ½ years in the chair, and with people opening doors for him, he almost gets more upset with people who do not have common courtesy rather than those that try to be polite and open doors.
- Dr. Cureton shared that there are people who go beyond common courtesy because there is a person with a disability and they believe there must be extra courtesy given, and said to him that is almost offensive. He mentioned that another strategy that would work well is to wait to see if the person needs help.
- Jenkins shared that people reading the situation is important, as a paraplegic getting into and out of the car is something he has practiced, and well-meaning people try to help, but would just make the process take longer. Jenkins inquired if there has been a push in the medical profession, for awareness of disability culture?
  - Dr. Cureton shared that there are Medical Humanities courses being taught about disabilities, but the push back in the medical field is treating people with disabilities as broken. He believes there is blatant discrimination going on where medical professionals will try to avoid treating those with disabilities although they do not say that, but will find other ways to not have to deal with those patients.
- Dziubak asked if Dr. Cureton has considered having this class offered as a non-credit class that is offered over the summer.
  - Dr. Cureton was not aware of those types of classes being offered and will investigate that.
- Dziubak invited Dr. Cureton to have his students to attend future CODI meetings whether unofficially or as part of a class assignment.
  - Dr. Cureton liked the idea and they will follow up with each other via email.
- Cook asked if anyone is interested in going back to school.
  - Landfather said that he would love to visit Dr. Cureton's class or to be a guest lecturer.

## **V. Member Advocacy and Inform Member Advocacy and Information, ADA Anniversary, Stephanie Brewer Cook**

- Cook presented regarding moving the equity needle in regards to the City, and what things beyond the city of Knoxville we are interested in. She is interested in accessible and customer service friendly healthcare. When Cook visits medical offices offering the latest and greatest, they often say they do not offer lifting services, but they could. With the 33<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the ADA coming up on July 26, 2023, how can we be better advocates and more informative? One way to do so is educating people on accessibility and the

importance of advocating for change. For instance, mentioning that a table on a sidewalk is dangerous for people in wheelchairs, or rollators, or strollers, while the table may not get moved immediately, it planted the seed of thought regarding accessibility. I have been a person with a disability since 1987 and have recently been thinking about how we can all be an advocate for change. You do not have to chain your wheelchair to a bus in front of a federal building, but making small changes does add up.

## **VI. Committee Reports:**

### **Bylaws:**

- None, did not meet.

### **Membership:**

- Dziubak presented:
- Resignations from CODI at the end of this fiscal year:
  - Previously reported:
    - Logan Black
    - Hank Jenkins
  - New to report:
    - Dennis Landfather
- Dziubak presented the nominees recommended for CODI membership:
  - Jackson Cain—works at Legal Aide of East TN as a staff attorney at least 3 years of working with disability services, has siblings with disabilities. (Vote:13/13)
  - John Eldredge—recommended by Joel Simmons, 48 years of experience and represents the visual disability population, is retired but worked in technology. (Vote:13/13)
  - Lauren Ziegler—works at Pellissippi State as the Coordinator of Cultural Engagement and Inclusion, represents neurodivergence, simple nervous system and stroke survivors with 8 plus years of experience with a disability herself. (Vote:13/13)
- Vote on first full terms for CODI members filling partial terms:
  - Ashley Wells Ajinkya (Vote:13/13)
  - Hilary Brooks(Vote:13/13)
  - Nancy Carter(Vote:13/13)
  - Christopher “Matty” Mathison(Vote:13/13)
  - Paul Robertson (Vote:11/13)
- Vote on second terms for current CODI members:
  - Joel Simmons (Vote:13/13)
  - Stacy Spangler (Vote:13/13)

- Spangler asked if she can vote on her second term herself, and she can.
- Simmons made a motion to accept all 3 new nominees, Barber seconded it.
  - Dziubak launched a poll to all members to tally votes for new member nominees, all motions passed.
- Landfather made a motion to accept all first full terms, Simmons seconded it.
  - Dziubak launched a poll to all members to tally votes for first full terms of members currently filling partials, all motions passed.
- Landfather made a motion to accept all second terms, Welch seconded it.
  - Dziubak launched a poll to all members to tally votes for member second terms, all motions passed.
- We will have two empty chairs on CODI as of July 1, 2023; Dziubak recommends we wait to fill these as we have recently brought on several new members.

#### **Transportation:**

- None, did not meet.

### **VII. Strategic Plan Reports:**

#### **Livability:**

- Mull asked about the email blast being voted on at the last CODI meeting in May. Dziubak stated that it had unanimously passed with an amendment of the word “number” being removed from the first paragraph.
- Dziubak will be making the checklist accessible now that it has been approved in by CODI.
- Dziubak has contacted Lauren Longmire at the Knoxville Chamber regarding the email blast, and it will be sent out in their June 28, 2023 weekly email newsletter.
- There has not been much forward movement in terms of getting a few more checklists completed.
- Mull emailed the list of when people had signed up to complete checklists to the committee; Dziubak will update it with the current list of members and months that they indicated availability in at the regular CODI meeting in May.
- With many CODI members being on vacation in both June and July, discussion ensued and Livability Committee decided to forego the July Livability meeting for an email exchange on July 6, 2023. Next meeting will occur August 3, 2023 at 3:00 pm.

### **Universal Design:**

- None, only Chair Simmons, Member Villanueva, and Liaison Dziubak attended, and meeting dismissed at 15 after due to lack of attendance.

### **VIII. Vote on New CODI Officers:**

- Chair: nominees were John Barber (vote:10/12) and George Childress (vote: 2/12), Barber was voted in as the new Chairperson
- Vice-Chair: nominees were George Childress (vote: 1/13), Karen Lowe (vote: 9/13), and Conya Mull (vote: 3/13), Lowe was voted in as the new Vice-Chairperson
- Secretary: had no nominees other than Karen Lowe, so we asked for self-nominees for Secretary and members Ashley Wells (vote: 4/12) and Nancy Welch (vote: 8/12) volunteered, Karen Lowe explained about her experience over the past year, the group voted and Nancy Welch is the new Secretary

### **IX. New Business:**

- Dziubak presented about the Forum:
- Mayoral & City Council Candidates Forum
  - As CODI has typically held forums during each City election cycle, we will need to start planning in the coming weeks in order to do so before the primary vote on August 29, 2023. General Election will be on November 7, 2023.
  - Candidates for Mayor are:
    - Indya Kincannon (current)
    - Burak Er
    - Constance Every
    - R.C. Lawhorn
    - Jeff Talman
  - Candidates for At-Large Seat A are:
    - Lynne Fugate (current)
    - Cameron Brooks
    - Darin Worsham
  - Candidates for At-Large Seat B are:
    - Debbie Helsey
    - R. Bentley Marlow
  - Candidates for At-Large Seat C are:
    - Amelia Parker (current)

- Matthew Best
- Tim Hill
- Questions asked in the last forum, held in 2019, included the following nine questions, which were asked of mayoral candidates in person and for City Council candidates, answered via email to be included on the CODI webpage.
  1. Describe your experience with individuals with disabilities in Knoxville. How have you included individuals with disabilities in your campaign efforts? How do you plan to include this population during your tenure as Mayor?
  2. The City of Knoxville has aging and outdated recreational facilities and park spaces that are included in an ADA study to identify what needs to be done to make these areas inclusive, and able to promote healthy lifestyles for people of all ages and abilities. We have received 1.4 million dollars to date to remediate 21 facilities. While this is a good start toward making these facilities ADA compliant, more funding is needed to complete additional improvements. What is your plan to ensure that accessibility and ADA compliance is a necessity when it comes to providing resources and funding?
  3. How will your leadership as Mayor encourage other departments and local businesses to support greater civic participation by residents of all ages and abilities?
  4. For years, the City of Knoxville has supported the meaningful employment of individuals with disabilities by participating in National Disability Employment Awareness Month activities, hosting several job seekers with disabilities throughout the city, as well as regular engagement with the Knoxville Area Employment Consortium. Describe your past participation in these efforts, and how you would improve them.
  5. Knoxville's Disability Services Office serves over 300 residents and visitors with disabilities each year, and is comprised of one full-time, and one part-time employee. This office is responsible for providing information, addressing ADA complaints, guiding the City's ADA compliance efforts, and providing City employee accommodation requests. CODI has long supported the expansion of this office in order to provide additional supports and services to individuals with disabilities who live and visit Knoxville. How are you going to ensure that our City makes more headway

in supporting persons with disabilities through an expansion of disability services?

6. Active leadership by persons with disabilities is necessary to ensure that any decisions made are made with these voices being present to identify how those decisions may impact our community. How will you engage individuals with disabilities to be included in key City leadership posts?
  7. Living with a disability is very expensive, and the lack of accessible housing and aging compounds the problem. This can force individuals to live in institutional settings vs. independent living within their communities. As Mayor, how will you increase the percentage of accessible housing units required to address this systemic issue?
  8. Transportation options are a critical concern for thousands of individuals with disabilities and those aging in the Knoxville area. How will you address the lack of accessible cabs/Uber, lack of and compliance with accessible street parking, accessible sidewalks, bus stops and crosswalks, and the lack of accountability for access in emerging transit technologies?
  9. Homelessness is a term that goes a lot deeper than what is actually seen on the surface and is greater than just mental illness and addiction—veterans, persons with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, individuals with job loss, individuals not qualifying for services, opioid addiction, etc. How do you perceive homelessness in Knoxville and how are going to combat this issue during your term as Mayor?
- Spangler asked how long the forum is, Dziubak responded that it is typically about 2 hours.
  - Cook says that we need to decide fairly quickly about the forum to have to time to plan everything.
  - Barber suggested we have plans situated by the July meeting if possible.
  - Dziubak will send out an email with the questions for the forum so that suggestions can be made regarding changing, adding, and subtracting questions.
  - Barber made a motion to have everything be discussed and finalized at the July meeting, and Spangler seconded the motion, it carried.
  - Dziubak stated that we will want the full CODI body present at the forum if at all possible.
    - CODI full day retreat is August 18, 2023. With the Mayoral Forum in mind, would membership prefer to reschedule the all-day retreat for a later month?

- Spangler made a motion to move the all day retreat to September and have a regular meeting in August, Welch seconded the motion, it carried.
- CODI Grants Committee will be meeting on Wednesday, June 21, 2023 at 1:00 p.m.

#### **X. Announcements & Public Forum:**

- Regis announced that the adaptive mountain biking and kayaking will be a permanent fixture now.
- Disability Resource Center is having their 33<sup>rd</sup> ADA Celebration and luncheon on July 26, 2023 at the Foundry in the World's Fair Park.

#### **XI. Meeting was Adjourned at 4:35 p.m.**