



Commission on Disabilities
Regular Monthly Meeting Minutes
December 7, 2022

Commissioners:

Laurie Berner - P
Ashlie Castaldo - P
Roberta Cich – P
Amanda Crosby - P
Allison Fochs - P
Tom Furman - A
Dianne Naus - A
Samantha Smingler – P
Brooke Marinan - P

Also present: Carl Crawford, Mark Bauer

Chair Berner called the December 2022 Commission on Disabilities meeting to order at 3:05 PM, there was a quorum.

Approval of current agenda: Correct date, add snow removal letter discussion under Snow Removal task force update, Add Chamber discussion under Other Business. **MS/C (Smingler/Crosby)**

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

Public Comment/Information: No public comment.

Accessible Parking Update:

Mr. Bauer reported that two new ADA parking spots were approved at the November Parking Commission meeting, one was approved at the December meeting and one request will be reviewed at the January meeting.

Parks and Rec Report:

Commissioner Crosby reminded the Commission that the Parks Referendum did not pass. It was very close - within 100 votes.

Parks and Rec will be submitting a grant proposal to purchase an Action Track Wheelchair at a reduced price. If funded, this would be available to borrow and would be housed at Hartley. The Action Track can be used at Hartley or moved to different locations within the City.

Old Business:**Snow Removal Task Force**

Commissioner Cich reported on the DTA Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) meeting last month. The AAC has also had many conversations about the challenges getting to transportation due to inaccessible sidewalks in the winter. The group decided to draft a letter asking for City and community leaders to come up with some ideas to do better. The AAC would like the Commission on Disabilities to take the lead in this effort. Commissioner Cich brought this draft to the Executive Committee. After quite a bit of editing, the Executive Committee brought it forward to the whole Commission.

Commissioner Crosby read the letter to the Commission (see below). Commissioners had some additions and edits. Many community organizations have already expressed interest in signing on to this letter. The Commission would like to have a fairly quick timeline. They would like to set a meeting in January with City leaders to develop steps to address sidewalk snow removal concerns.

Motion to accept the Snow Removal Call to Action letter, get supporters to sign on and send the Call to Action to the City leaders named in the letter.
MS/C (Cich/Foches)

Commissioner Cich also reported that she and Commissioner Crosby had met with Age Well Arrowhead in an effort to identify options now that the Snow Removal Assistance Program has ended. Age Well does offer this service, but there is a fee. Commissioners Crosby and Cich will continue to identify possible funding sources to make this program available to those who don't have the resources to pay the fee.

Commissioner Cich informed the Commission that STRIDE will begin a pilot project to use the Aquarium parking lot as a drop off point to see if it works better for passengers and for STRIDE.

New Business:

Chair Berner presented the slate of Officers for next year:

Chair, Amanda Crosby

Vice Chair, Ashlie Castaldo

Secretary, Samantha Smingler

Motion to accept slate of Officers: **MS/C (Foches/Smingler)**

The 'annual meeting' must be announced and will be in February, as the commission does not often meet in January.

Commission meeting time change: After discussion, Commissioner Cich made a motion to change the Commission on Disabilities meeting time from 3:00 pm to 3:30 pm beginning at the February 2023 meeting.

MS/C: (Cich/Crosby)

The Commission also decided to cancel the January 2023 meeting since it is so close to the holidays.

Current Disability Issues

No other current disability issues shared.

General Business

None

Correspondence

No Correspondence shared

Announcements:

Commissioner Smingler shared an announcement: at a recent Duluth Chamber Event, she spoke with employee Chris Johnson, the Chamber's Director of Marketing and Communications about the opportunity to bring accessibility training and topics to the Chamber. Chris Johnson shared they have started half-day trainings on change-makers, one recent one was around being more LGBTQ friendly. Johnson felt accessibility would make a great next topic, and would reach out to Commissioner Smingler and the Commission on Disabilities to discuss more options.

Adjourn:

Motion for adjournment made by Commissioner Smingler, seconded by Commissioner Castaldo. MS/C

**Next meeting is Wednesday, February 1, 2022, 3:30 PM
City Hall Room 430**

~Please note time change~

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.