

CODI Mayoral Forum – David Hayes

Most people aren't born with disabilities, but as we age, we tend to develop disabilities which can be temporary or permanent and can change over time. In fact, people with disabilities and seniors make up almost half of the population in the United States. The Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law in 1990 and is about to reach its 30th anniversary; yet there is still a long way to go to ensure accessibility for and inclusion of people with disabilities.

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?

I am inspired by the resilience of people with disabilities. I am advocate for disability justice and the rights of all marginalized people.

Our campaign aims to have accessible events, and believes our city should be a leader in accessibility and support for individuals with disabilities.

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 The City of Knoxville has aging and outdated recreational facilities and park spaces that are included in an ADA study to identify what needs to be done to make these areas inclusive, and able to promote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?

All public spaces should be accessible and inclusive. I will familiarize myself with our shortcomings, work with city departments and communities and people with disabilities to prioritize improvements, and advocate for the necessary 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?

I believe in a Knoxville for All, and that must include people with disabilities. I will use my platform to push back against ableism and use my influence to push for more inclusion of the elderly and residents with disabilities.

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.

I have not been involved in National Disability Employment Awareness Month activities, but I am excited to change that and promote the activities among communities who need it most. I believe the city must step up in its promotion of these resources and activities, and I will work to make that happen.

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?

The Knoxville's Disability Services Office needs the appropriate resources and staff to ensure we are a leader in accessibility and inclusion. I will work with that office to identify its needs and advocate for appropriate funding from the city's budget.

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?

I will bring communities and people with disabilities into the budgeting process, advocate for individuals with disabilities to serve on posts that affect disabled communities, and I will be an ally in the struggle for disability justice.

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?

The city must take a more active role in pushing developers and builders to create affordable and accessible housing. Every housing development supported by the city must include copious accessible units.

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?

We must work with KAT and private transportation companies to increase accessibility and decrease barriers.

The entirety of the city's infrastructure needs to be made more accessible. I will advocate for prioritizing the most needed improvements to increase accessibility for people with disabilities and all residents who have yet to receive the necessary infrastructure in their communities. Furthermore, once people with disabilities are included in the budget process, we can more easily identify opportunities for improving the accessibility of the city's infrastructure.

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?

People find themselves homeless or houseless for a variety of reasons, but most come down to poverty and a lack of resources. It's clear that many Knoxvilleans are being marginalized and thrust deeper into cycles of poverty and instability, while underfunded organizations and departments work to ensure people have the resources they need. The city must expand resources and capacity toward the homeless community and work to connect people with good jobs.