

CODI Mayoral Forum – Marshall Stair

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?

Our campaign employs a variety of outreach methods such as radio, television, and mail to ensure that people who may be hearing or vision impaired are able to receive our message in a medium that works for them. As mayor, I will meet with seniors at the O'Connor Center and have outreach from my office to the officials at the homeless shelter (KARM), the Salvation Army, and Family Promise.

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 The City of Knoxville has aging and outdated recreational facilities and park spaces that are included in an ADA study to identify what needs to be done to make these areas inclusive, and able to promote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

As Mayor, I would coordinate with the Council on Disability Issues to set a priority list of the facilities with the greatest resource and facility upgrade needs. ADA compliance is not an option; it is a priority. In addition, I would make sure that any planned upgrades to existing facilities also includes funding to ensure ADA compliance, if needed. For every new planned facility or park, I would ensure that funding to bring an existing facility or park up to ADA compliance is included and that ADA compliance would be a top priority for any new city project.

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 hope to set an example that by making Knoxville a more inclusive city, we all benefit. I would repurpose the office of Community Development into the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to focus on making sure city employees are as diverse

as the city of Knoxville as a whole. I believe this example will show that diversity and inclusion, including citizens of all abilities, is not only the morally right thing to do, it is also vital for Knoxville's success. I would make hiring people with disabilities a part of this process.

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 supported mayor Rogero's disability initiatives and participated in events throughout my 8 years on council. I would work to make disability employment a year-round endeavor with outreach done by the Mayor's Council on Disability Issues, and a continued effort to help community members with disabilities find employment with the help of Knoxville's Disability Services Office. I would consider holding hiring fairs for the disabled community that incorporated both city and non-city employers.

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?

I would work with the Mayor's Council on Disability Issues to help determine the best way to expand disability services and better serve that segment of the population. I believe that community involvement is key to any issue, and this one is no different. To do so, I would convene a working group of business leaders to provide input and resources. In addition, I would create a working group of existing staff to meet to work on providing services, help with planning, and coordination as needed.

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 would ensure the Mayor's Council on Disability Issues included members of the community who have disabilities to make sure they have a voice and input in the

process. The current bylaws require at least 50% of the council to be made up of individuals with disabilities, and I would continue that.

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?

We can and should do more to provide affordable, accessible housing for Knoxville's with disabilities. I would work to find a dedicated funding source for the city's existing affordable housing rental development fund and expand it, then set a minimum percentage of units that must be ADA accessible to provide more affordable and accessible housing options for citizens with disabilities. We can also work with the state to increase the number of apartment complexes that accept Section 8 vouchers.

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?

This is a real concern of mine as well. As mayor, I would work to push cab companies and ride sharing companies like Uber and Lyft to offer more accessible vehicle options. I would renew focus on compliance with accessible street parking requirements. I would also make the Knoxville's public transit system a priority of my administration. We need to build more sidewalks in neighborhoods, and especially along transit corridors where individuals with disabilities need them to safely get to a bus stop. Additionally, I would increase the number of shelters at bus stops to ensure that transit riders can take the bus without having to wait out in the elements and risk their safety. Any new sidewalks would have to be accessible, with an emphasis on sidewalks along transit routes. In this same vein, we need to improve our crosswalks to compliment new sidewalks to make them safe and accessible. I believe we can also do more outreach to disabled individuals to connect them with existing programs and transportation. I would also ensure that any new buses brought into the KAT system are accessible and comfortable to riders with disabilities. As part of our citywide infrastructure plan, we can also examine existing bus routes to make sure they are in the best locations for ADA accessibility.

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?

Homelessness is a serious issue in Knoxville and I certainly think we can do more to combat it. As mayor, I would work to expand the city's existing affordable rental development fund by finding a dedicated funding source, and establishing a community oversight board to identify the areas with most need, and to determine the best locations for new affordable housing units. By expanding this fund, we can get more units in the pipeline, and get people off the streets and into housing. Secondly, we can do more outreach into the homeless community to connect them with existing resources. The city is currently partnering with the Volunteer Ministry Center, which does this outreach and has been successful in getting people the help they need. Finally, we need to work to get the state more involved to provide the funding and resources needed to address this issue. While many in the homeless community may come from within city limits, there are many that come from outside Knoxville so this issue should not be left to just city governments to deal with.