

Mayor's Council on Disability Issues (CODI) 2023 Mayoral Forum

Wednesday, August 2, 2023 5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Large Assembly Room, City County Building

**** City Council Candidates ****

Please return answers to MDziubak@KnoxvilleTN.gov by August 3, 2023 at 8:00 a.m.

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 has just reached its 33rd anniversary; yet there is still a long way to go to ensure accessibility for and inclusion of people with disabilities.

1. There are various types of disabilities including developmental, hearing, intellectual, invisible, mental health, mobility, physical, and visual disabilities amongst others. 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. Please describe your experience with individuals with disabilities. How will you engage with and help to increase the engagement of individuals with disabilities?

My best friend survived a traumatic brain injury as a young man. I met him in college when his note taker failed to provide him notes. I took over sharing notes from the courses we took together. He was able to not only graduate college, earn a masters degree, but he has dedicated his successful career to advocating for others with disabilities as a Director at the Arc of Tennessee.

Several of my close friends, including my father, are disabled Veterans. Some experiencing physical disabilities while others suffer from PTSD. I have personally witnessed their struggles operating within the VA system for many years.

2. Knoxville's Disability Services Office (DSO) 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 implementation of the ADA Transition Plan, providing City employee and constituent accommodation requests as well as reviewing procedures, programs and policies for compliance. CODI has long

supported the expansion of this office in order to provide additional support and services to individuals with disabilities who live and visit Knoxville. With specific examples, how would you ensure that our City makes more headway in supporting persons with disabilities?

I look forward to meeting with Stephanie Brewer Cook and Misha Dziubak to learn more about DSO and how city council can best support their office and mission.

3. The City of Knoxville has aging and outdated recreational facilities and park spaces that are included in a 2015 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. While the City has renovated a number of facilities, more funding is needed to complete the renovations to the remaining facilities from the study and ADA Transition Plan. What is your plan to help ensure that accessibility and ADA compliance is a known requirement when it comes to providing internal and external resources and funding for these projects?

All city structures and parks should be ADA compliant. As a council member I will support actions that make our city more inclusive to all, including those with disabilities.

4. Part of a robust age-friendly plan is having adequate and affordable housing where older adults can age in place. To quote AARP, “affordability is only affordable if it is also accessible.” For many older adults, the cost of living in Knoxville is an extreme burden, with senior homelessness on the rise and support networks diminishing because of the costs to live in the City. Knoxville's lack of accessible and affordable housing and a rapidly aging population compounds the problem. This can force individuals to live in institutional settings vs. independent living within their communities. How will you help to increase the percentage of accessible and affordable housing units in proximity to community gathering spaces and health services that is necessary to address this systemic issue?

I believe housing is the number one crisis facing all neighborhoods in the city. Based on my experience hosting friends with mobility issues I have made many of properties accessible—including two new homes built through the city’s Homemakers Program. I have advanced proposed zoning amendments aiming to increase missing middle housing options – such as mother-in-law suites, aka accessory dwelling units – which historically have been used to house aging parents in a multi-generational household.

5. Transportation is more than simply vehicles or busses and includes infrastructure such as sidewalks, curb ramps, and pedestrian signals. Accessible options are a critical

concern for thousands of individuals with disabilities and those aging in the Knoxville area. These options should be safe, affordable, dependable, and user-friendly. What is your vision for the future of accessible transportation in Knoxville?

Having hosted many of my mobility challenged friends over the years and noticing their struggles with the city sidewalks within Mechanicsville I have voluntarily undertaken to replace approximately 500 feet of city sidewalks to ensure ADA compliance. We need to continue to bring our sidewalks, curbs, and crossings into ADA compliance throughout the city.

I fully support the aims and objectives of the KAT Lift service; however, I believe more can be done to improve the rider experience for everyone. The future of public transportation is micotransit – a collection of vans that are dispatched directly to riders via an app much the same way as Uber or Lyft.