

## CODI Mayoral Forum – Charles F. Lomax, Jr.

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 30<sup>th</sup> 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?

Admittedly, my experience has been extremely limited. While in college, I worked for the Knox County Election Commission and one of my major responsibilities entailed keeping compliance with the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). I evaluated the accessibility of every voting precinct in Knox County according to national standards to ensure that our voting locations were compliant and accessible. When elected to City Council, I will proudly work with the mayor and other parties to promote individuals with disabilities and to address the specific needs that are present.

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 The City of Knoxville has aging and outdated recreational facilities and park spaces that are included in an ADA study to identify what needs to be done to make these areas inclusive, and able to promote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 a city we must ensure that any new development and any rehabbing of existing buildings is ADA compliant. We should look at increasing funding within our own budget, but also look for new grants and funding from the State and Federal Government to increase the number of ADA compliant facilities in the city.

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 want Knoxville to be seen as an inclusive city, and we must promote diversity from every aspect and perspective. Our strength is found in our diversity and our diversity is displayed when all individuals are invited to the table. Increased civic participation allows for more ideas to be debated and a greater cooperation to be had. I believe in leadership by example, so as a City Councilmember, I would encourage the mayor to set the example for Knoxville as to how to increase participation across the board.

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 fortunate enough to participate in any of the aforementioned activities, but I look forward to learning more once elected to City Council.

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?

By listening. Listening to the needs of the staff and listening to the needs of the community that are being served would address the concerns of how to bridge the gap between what is being done versus what needs to be done. If expansion is the answer, then I would support a decision by the mayor to make that happen.

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?

As a member of City Council, my ability would be extremely limited as to the appointment of key leadership posts within the city. I would hope that the next mayor would seek advice and counsel from the City Council at which point I would gladly be inclusive of individuals with disabilities.

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?

Affordable and accessible housing is one of the most important issues that we are discussing during this election cycle. We, as a city, have the moral responsibility to increase the availability of housing that all Knoxvilleians might have a place to call home. Construction is one piece, but we must also prepare individuals to be homeowners and how to manage the responsibilities that come along with homeownership. Homebuyer readiness programs such as the ones offered through the Knoxville Area Urban League and the Knoxville Leadership Foundation are instrumental in equipping new homeowners with the tools they need to be successful.

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?

Every person deserves access to public transportation within the city. We need to increase our infrastructure for bus stops around the city to make sure they are ADA compliant, have seating, and a cover over them. By increasing the access to public transportation we can help individuals with disabilities to get to and from where they need to be.

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 that too many are unfortunately having to deal with day after day. Regardless if the reported numbers are decreasing or not, having one person on the street is one too many. It is a top priority of mine, and when elected to Council, I would love to work with the mayor's Roundtable on Homelessness to get a better understanding of the plight and what our best solutions are.