

Disabilities Commission
1685 Main Street
PO Box 2200
Santa Monica, California 90407-2200

City of
Santa MonicaSM

January 6, 2009

Honorable Ken Genser, Mayor
Members of the City Council
P. Lamont Ewell, City Manager
City of Santa Monica
1685 Main Street
Santa Monica CA 90401

Dear Mayor Genser, City Council Members and Mr. Ewell:

Thank you for seeking the Disabilities Commission's input on the City's FY09-10 Budget Priorities. After hearing from the public and analyzing the Commission's priorities over the last several months, the Commission respectfully requests that the following recommendations be given priority in the development of the budget:

1. Provide funding for live captioning of City Council Meetings

While we are pleased that City Council meetings are captioned over CityTV, we would like to see that the captioning is broadcast in the City Council Chambers. Live captioning allows people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have auditory processing or other disabilities to have full access to meetings and encourages participation in those meetings. It is not inclusionary to force attendees to watch proceedings on a television in a different room unless the Council Chambers are full. Accordingly, we would like to see live captioning of every City Council meeting in the Council Chambers made a priority for funding.

2. As plans continue for developing new playgrounds throughout the City, including Memorial Park and the new Civic Center plan, please consider funding universally accessible playgrounds that are fully accessible to children with mobility and other impairments

As plans are considered for building or expanding playgrounds around the City, the Commission requests construction of at least one "universally accessible" playground and incorporation of universally accessible elements in all future playground projects. The design of universally accessible playgrounds and play equipment allow children with various disabilities to participate and play with their peers who do not have disabilities in a manner traditionally not available in typical playgrounds. The cost of universally accessible playgrounds varies widely, and elements can be incorporated to fit virtually any space or budget.

Universally accessible playgrounds have been developed with the assistance of such programs as Shane's Inspiration throughout the cities of Los Angeles, Calabasas, Chino, and Corona, as well as numerous other cities across California and the nation.

At our presentation of this concept to the Recreation & Parks Commission (which Councilmember Katz attended), unanimous support of the concept was expressed. As a result, we would now like to see what it is long overdue for Santa Monica, as a major tourist destination (and a wonderful place to play) -- to be among the list of cities that offers at least one universally accessible playground to its residents and visitors with disabilities.

3. Continue the installation of talking traffic signals and consider replacing all chirping signals with the talking signals

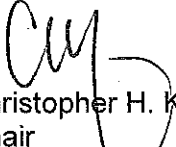
The Commission is pleased to see the talking traffic controls at the corners of Broadway and Ocean, Colorado and Ocean, and 23rd and Wilshire. After observing the improvement in the quality of life for those using the talking traffic signals, we recommend that the City fund a program to replace the signals that emit chirping sounds with the new talking traffic control units. The cost per intersection to update the units is approximately \$6,000 plus ongoing costs of approximately \$500 per intersection per year for maintenance, according to the Transportation Management Division. Updating the units will benefit residents and visitors with visual, cognitive, and mobility impairments, and will be a tremendous safety improvement for all. For each year until the project is complete, we ask for 10 units per year, for a cost of \$60,000 per year until all of the major intersections in Santa Monica are fitted with the devices.

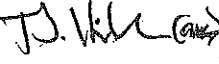
4. As a non-budget related priority, please consider passing an incentive-based visitability ordinance to apply to private home construction and housing development projects

The Commission recommends passing a visitability ordinance based on the Model Universal Design Local Ordinance adopted by the California Department of Housing and Community Development. This would provide a consistent, practical, and proven building and design requirement to incorporate universal design and visitability standards into new construction that will make specified dwelling units visitable by people with mobility impairments and other disabilities. Visitability will enhance full life-cycle use of housing without regard to physical abilities of the home's occupants and visitors. This will accommodate a wide range of individual preferences and functional abilities and to facilitate aging in place. A visitability ordinance will enhance the ability of homeowners or renters to remain in their homes during periods of temporary, developing, or permanent disabilities. Santa Monica should join various other California cities in enacting a visitability ordinance which will significantly improve the quality of life for residents.

These recommendations reflect the ongoing and urgent priorities voiced by the community and our commissioners over the past several years. The Commission appreciates your serious consideration of these recommendations, and we look forward to the City's continuing commitment to accessibility, inclusion and civic participation. If you need any additional information, please feel free to contact the Commission or its staff liaison, Janet Hand.

Respectfully submitted,


Christopher H. Knauf
Chair


Thomas J. Hill
Vice Chair