

**CITY OF MONROE
COMMITTEE ON DISABILITIES
300 WEST CROWELL STREET
MONROE, NORTH CAROLINA 28112
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2025 – 3:00 P.M.
AGENDA
www.monroenc.org**

- Item 1.** Public Input
- Item 2.** Approval of Minutes – October 14, 2025
- Item 3.** Sensory Friendly Event Template
- Item 4.** Organizational List
- Item 5.** Mission Statement
- Item 6.** Priorities / Goals

ATTENTION COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Please contact Angie Sustar at asustar@monroenc.org or 704-290-1838 to confirm your attendance. Thank you.

**CITY OF MONROE
COMMITTEE ON DISABILITIES
OCTOBER 14, 2025
MINUTES**

The Committee on Disabilities of the City of Monroe, North Carolina met in the City Hall Conference Room located at 300 West Crowell Street in Monroe, North Carolina at 3:00 p.m. on October 14, 2025 with Chair Melinda Plue presiding.

Members Present: Melinda Plue (Chair), Committee Members Kelly Stegall, Karen Heath (arr. 3:07 p.m.), Jonathan Belk (ex officio), Property Management Director Ryan Jones (ex officio), and Clerk Angie Sustar

Visitor: Linda Belk

Chair Plue called the Committee on Disabilities Meeting of October 14, 2025 to order at 3:00 p.m. and welcomed everyone in attendance. A quorum was present.

At this time, Chair Plue introduced Jonathan Belk (ex officio) new member to the committee and asked everyone to introduce himself or herself. Chair Plue provided a brief overview of the Committee on Disabilities, its purpose, committee structure, she shared committee accomplishments and how each benefited the community.

Item No. 1 Public Comment. None

Item No. 2 Approval of Minutes – September 2, 2025. Ms. Hall made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 2, 2025 meeting. Ms. Stegall seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with the following votes:

AYES: Heath, Stegall, and Plue
NAYS: None

Item No. 3 Review Mission Statement Ms. Plue opened a discussion concerning the committee’s mission. She noted that after discussion with other committee members, a clearly defined and updated mission statement was needed. Initially the committee was named the Special Needs and Disabilities Committee and has been renamed Committee on Disabilities.

As the committee reviewed the current mission statement, Mr. Jones explained that the first sentence more closely resembles a mission statement and the remaining paragraph the purpose.

Ms. Stegall noted the committee’s prior challenges regarding overcommitting to promises. She suggested that a broad mission statement, such as “to promote inclusion, accessibility, and equal opportunity for all Monroe citizens,” would be a starting point. She emphasized the need for the

committee to wordsmith the mission statement and ensure that its language reflects a realistically attainable scope of the committee's actual duties and capabilities.

Ms. Heath raised a question regarding the promotion of inclusion and accessibility. She stated that specific examples detailing how the committee will accomplish these goals should be added to the document. Mr. Belk confirmed that a clear, written plan would be best for understanding the intent.

Mr. Belk noted he had compiled and emailed a document to Chair Plue detailing examples of mission statements and practices of other cities.

Chair Plue referenced Greensboro's mission statement as a model for a broader, more inclusive definition of disability. She suggested revising the current mission statement to encompass all disabilities, not just intellectual and developmental disabilities so that it will be more inclusive to all disabilities.

Ms. Stegall noted that this topic was discussed previously.

In response to Ms. Hall's question about specifics, Ms. Plue stated that the specific details for the committee's work would be developed as goals, clarifying that the mission should define the advisory committee's realistic purpose.

Mr. Jones noted that things that come from Council would come back to this committee. The committee's role is to make suggestions in an advisory capacity and mentioned that whenever that staff determine as opportunities or barriers, this committee can assist with appropriate approaches. An example is the sensory shows at the Dowd Center Theatre provides, while those are provided, the City and staff need to ensure that is being done in the most appropriate way. Ms. Plue appreciated the additional showings but advised there were better practices that exist to promote those showings more effectively.

Mr. Jones referred back to Mr. Belk's comment regarding best practice. This is an opportunity for the committee to take on more of an advisory role and we can say we are doing this but are we doing it the most appropriate way and that's what staff in general needs. Accessibility touches multiple departments. Parks and Recreation does. Prioritization should exist based on the areas that needs focus and how those areas fit within the committees established goals. Mr. Jones stated that that is his role. His role is to take it all in and provide information and feedback based on feasibility.

A brief discussion ensued regarding what the committee is realistically capable of accomplishing. Chair Plue highlighted the accessibility of City Council meetings as a key priority. The committee agreed that a set of recommendations for Council meeting accessibility would be developed for submission.

Ms. Stegall noted that she read something recently that on tonight's Council agenda is maybe to cut off the public comments for streaming which is also an issue in terms of individuals with disabilities who cannot physically be in attendance and not being able to see those comments.

She noted that if this topic was on the agenda that someone might need to be there tonight to speak that from a disabilities point this is problematic. Chair Plue expressed total agreement and stated that if you had a barrier and physically could not get to a meeting and you wanted to, that would be a violation of your civil rights.

Chair Plue stated that if there were not opportunity to present about this tonight, she would write a letter that all the committee could sign and get to Mr. Jones to be forwarded to Council. Committee members unanimously concurred. Ms. Hall stated that she was willing to be present. Ms. Stegall noted that they are not taking public comments tonight since this is not a public comment meeting.

Mr. Jones noted that an item of “Rules Governing Public Comment Period and Rules of Decorum During City Council Regular Meeting Amendments” for the Consent Agenda. When asked by the Chair, Mr. Jones confirmed it was included on the Consent Agenda.

Chair Plue highlighted the accessibility of City Council meetings as a key priority. It was agreed that a set of recommendations for Council meeting accessibility would be developed for submission to the Council.

Chair Plue stated another priority to make sure physical accessibility needs are being addressed in the City. She stated that they look different than having designated accessible spaces, curb cuts and things like that. She raised the topic of an updated accessibility study and mentioned that this would have a financial obligation from the City.

Ms. Stegall cited a study touting the importance of accessibility for city properties and expressed concern about specific events including the Downtown Halloween event and Parade.

Mr. Jones advised that there is a planning committee through the Alliance for Children and that is something that could be brought to the committee’s attention. Mr. Jones noted that including a representative from the Parks and Recreation Department would be appropriate because of the department’s scope relative to public events and facilities.

Chair Plue asked if the City would be willing to allow people to watch the parade from inside the Dowd Theatre and stream it so that there was not so much noise.

Mr. Jones advised that he has spoken with the Director of Parks and Recreation and noted the importance of having a City representative from Parks and Recreation attend meetings. This would provide direct input on the significant number of Parks and Recreation related matters discussed and would be a great benefit.

Chair Plue would like to invite a representative from Parks and Recreation to the November meeting.

Chair Plue offered another priority to increase sensory friendly activities in a thoughtful way.

Mr. Jones noted a good function of this committee is to assemble a type of checklist of what a sensory event at the Dowd should look like. He asserted that an event planner is very list focused to ensure all basis are covered and to avoid any missteps. If staff has something that we are prepared with that we have a prep list almost of these are the things that is the standard through Parks and Recreation on their site/maintenance list that we have those things already in place that are a part of our event map. The role of the advisory committee is to provide these types of suggestions so that staff can approach these items appropriately.

Discussion ensued about the committee compiling a comprehensive checklist to serve as a template for planning successful future sensory events. Chair Plue asked Mr. Belk to compile a list to act as a guide for making an event or movie screening sensory friendly at the Dowd Theatre.

Mr. Belk quickly noted that low lighting, low noise, for those sensitive to any loud sound, providing noise cancelling headphones, and sunglasses with UV protection.

Chair Plue proposed seeking community members with disabilities or family members to speak at future committee meetings. Hearing their lived experiences and insights would be of great benefit to the committee.

Ms. Hall shared a concern expressed by someone new to the area that just moved from Florida. She shared that it seems that you are very isolated here in Union County and Monroe related to activities when it comes to disabilities as compared to Florida. She would like to share some of those ideas and resources. Ms. Hall proposed that the committee meet within the community in an effort to find more efficient ways to involve the community in providing more accessible facilities and programs. She suggested that a community center might be the most appropriate venue.

Ms. Hall conveyed a concern from a new resident regarding the lack of accessible activities and resources for those with disabilities in Union County and Monroe compared to her experience in Florida. She would like to share some ideas and resources. Ms. Hall proposed that the committee meet within the community, such as at a community center, inviting the community to share their ideas.

Mr. Belk suggested that the men and women from the Action Club come to a meeting. Chair Plue stated that it would be wonderful to have a parent or self-advocate at every meeting for the public comment period.

Chair Plue stated that the public comment period at each meeting is to allow individuals to come, address the committee, and share ideas.

Ms. Stegall reminded the committee of the ongoing discussion regarding an event to increase awareness and change the community's culture to better support people with disabilities on a larger scale than a typical committee meeting. She mentioned about the Dowd Theatre hosting the movie/documentary "The Ride Ahead".

Discussion followed relating to the cost of the showing, the promotion package and conversation starters following the showing, and a brief description of the documentary about Daniel Habib and his transition from childhood into adulthood as someone with disabilities and navigating what that looks like. Ms. Stegall will forward the contact information to Mr. Jones.

Item No. 4 Develop Goals Ms. Stegall suggested that potentially creating a Vision Statement as opposed to the Purpose. Having a Mission Statement, a Vision Statement, and then each year potentially updating the goals. Having some primary goals that we are focusing on so that we are clear about what our charge is right now and that we have a Vision that we are working towards.

Chair Plue asked Ms. Stegall to take the lead and draft something for the committee to review between meetings. Chair Plue asked everyone if Googledocs and if the City allowed use of GoogleDocs. Mr. Jones will confirm with the City about the use of GoogleDocs.

Item No. 5 Announcements Following an inquiry relating to the number of vacancies on the committee and the requirements, Mr. Jones explained the application and approval process. Chair Plue will provide the wording for recruiting for the committee.

Chair Plue advised that she would like to have a representative from the Wolfe School be an ex officio member on the committee since we have a separate public school in the City of Monroe and she thinks that voice is just as important. She asked if a slot for a representative from an entity if it is an ex officio? Ms. Stegall interjected we recommend that we be allowed to provide an ex officio to have an ex officio slot for a member of a local Monroe agency that serves individuals with disabilities. Committee members discussed the challenges with finding candidates that live in the city limits.

Following a brief discussion, Chair Plue the Committee on Disabilities established the time and place of its Regular Meeting as the first Tuesday of every month at 3:00 p.m. in the City Hall Council Chambers located at 300 W. Crowell Street in Monroe, North Carolina.

There being no further business, Ms. Hall made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Stegall seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with the following votes:

AYES: Chair Plue, Members Stegall and Hall
NAYS: None

The meeting adjourned at 3:58 p.m.

Attachment "A" Letter to the Mayor and City Council

Attachment "A"

October 14, 2025

Dear Mayor Burns and Monroe City Council Members:

The Committee on Disabilities met this afternoon to begin our work making Monroe a more inclusive place for people with disabilities. I write today to express our strong concern regarding something we learned today, that the City will discontinue live-streaming the public comment portion of Council meetings. This decision poses significant accessibility barriers for residents with disabilities and could place the City in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Title II, which requires state and local governments to ensure that individuals with disabilities have equal access to participate in civic life.

Many residents with physical disabilities, chronic illnesses, sensory impairments, or compromised immune systems are unable to attend in-person meetings due to mobility, transportation, or health-related limitations. The live-streaming of public comments has been critical to them being able to virtually attend these meetings, allowing them to hear, understand, and engage in the same public processes available to their non-disabled peers.

By removing this access point, the City effectively excludes a segment of the population from participating in government decision-making — something the ADA explicitly prohibits. Title II of the ADA requires that all public entities provide individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to benefit from programs, services, and activities, including civic engagement. Accessibility is not limited to physical ramps or parking spaces; it extends to digital and communication access as well.

We urge the Council to reinstate the live-streaming of the public comment section of meetings. Doing so demonstrates the City's commitment to transparency, inclusion, and compliance with federal law. The Committee on Disabilities stands ready to assist in identifying solutions that balance accessibility with any technical or logistical concerns the Council may have. **You will hear from us soon with other ways we feel these meetings should become more accessible, but for now we want to simply keep the systems in place that are there now.**

Thank you for everything you do to make Monroe an inclusive place for people with disabilities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melinda Plue". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Melinda Plue
Chairperson, Committee on Disabilities