

**Miami-Dade County
Commission on Disability Issues (CODI)
Stephen P. Clark Center
111 N.W. 1st Street, Miami, Florida, 33128
18th Floor, Conference Room 18-4
Monthly Meeting Minutes**

Date: 12-16-25

Time: 10:30 AM to 12:00 PM

Meeting video: <https://youtu.be/7BoqE7rx-ic>

Call to Order: 10:56 AM

Meeting Adjourned: 12:20 PM

Miami-Dade County Staff in Attendance:

- Daniel Borges, Assistant Director, PIOD
- Heidi A. Johnson, ADA Coordinator, PIOD
- Marie-Chantal Darius, ADA Coordination Specialist, PIOD
- Jody Cox, ADA Project Administrator

Members of the Public in Attendance:

- Debbie Dietz, Disability Independence Group, Inc.
- Renita Holmes
- Theophilus Williams
- Anthony Walters
- Juan Carlos Gil
- Joel Ilanes

A. Opening and Attendance

- Call to order, attendance recorded, copies of documents distributed.

B. Roll Call

- District 1, Commissioner Oliver Gilbert: **Damian Gregory** (absent)
- District 2, Commissioner Marliene Bastien: **Vacant**
- District 3, Commissioner Kean Hardemon: **Marilyn Orozco** (present)
- District 4, Commissioner Micky Steinberg: **Vacant**
- District 5, Commissioner Eileen Higgins: **Eddie Sierra** (present)
- District 6, Commissioner Kevin M. Cabrera: **Marisabel Rey** (absent)
- District 7, Commissioner Raquel Regaldo: **Rabbi Yossi Harlig** (absent)
- District 8, Commissioner Danielle Cohen Higgins: **Howard Kane** (present)
- District 9, Commissioner Kionne L. McGhee: **Vacant**
- District 10, Commissioner Anthony Rodriguez: **Natalia Wong** (absent)
- District 11, Commissioner Roberto J. Gonzalez: **Vacant**
- District 12, Commissioner Juan Carlos Bermudez: **Maria Mercedes Villar** (present)
- District 13, Commissioner Rene Garcia: **Theo Karantsalis**, Acting Chair (present)

Five members present; quorum met.

C. Approval of the Agenda and Minutes

- Motion made by Howard Kane to approve agenda; motion seconded by Eddie Sierra.
 - Vote: unanimous.
 - Result: agenda was approved.
- A motion was made by Ms. Orozco to insert an additional paragraph into the previous meeting minutes to reflect amended edits and to document, for the record, certain events that occurred at the prior meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Villar. The vote was unanimous, and the motion passed.

D. Public Comments

- Juan Carlos Gil expressed concerns regarding County Metrorail accessibility. He stated that some station elevators have been inoperable for over a year. He also referenced the discussion at a previous CODI meeting on public parking accessibility. Mr. Gil also commented on former Chairwoman Katherine Magnoli, noting her significant contributions and national recognition. He asked why she had not been provided with additional guidance or support.
 - Chair Karantsalis stated that he previously met with two County representatives to discuss several of the issues raised, including accessibility challenges at the Coconut Grove Metrorail Station, specifically inoperable elevators. He emphasized that concerns should be raised and discussed openly during CODI meetings rather than in private settings. Although he was not present at the prior STS meeting, he shared that, based on his personal experience using STS, service reliability and the computer system appear to have improved. Chair Karantsalis further offered to draft a formal letter for Board review, identify the appropriate recipients, and elevate the elevator accessibility concerns to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC).
- Joel Ilanes stated that STS service is often off schedule. He expressed concern about funding priorities, stating that people with disabilities should receive priority regardless of wealth.
 - Chair Karantsalis stated he would visit STS and invite a senior representative to address CODI.
 - Howard Kane stated that accessibility at Marlins Park is better than at Dolphins Stadium, and that that these issues are venue-specific, rather than STS-related. Concerns were raised that disability access is often deprioritized and that quality-of-life issues for people with disabilities at major venues remain unaddressed. Decisions are often driven by financial interests, resulting in people with disabilities being the last considered.
- Mr. Sierra stated that individuals with disabilities should be able to utilize public roadways in the same manner as all residents. He emphasized that the primary issue is not Special Transportation Services (STS), but rather overall traffic movement and management. He suggested strengthening coordination with local law enforcement and recommended inviting the City of Miami Police Department to a future CODI meeting to address accessibility and traffic-related concerns. Additionally, he recommended drafting a formal letter to the City of Miami Law Enforcement

leadership regarding traffic movement and accessibility issues.

- Anthony Walters stated that our disability should be a priority, and we should not be put behind. We should have a specific car built for people with disabilities with all the funding being provided.
- Ms. Villar said that identifying a problem is the foundation of solving it. How can CODI and the public help resolve these issues? Ms. Villar recommended outlining specific issues before meeting with STS leadership and suggested holding a workshop to consolidate concerns and proposed solutions. Chair Karantsalis directed that this item be placed on future agenda.

E. Unfinished Business Discussion

- **(Beach Access and Wellness Center): Letter to Commissioners regarding beach access and wellness center**
 - A motion was made by Mr. Sierra to approve and transmit the draft letter previously prepared by former Chairwoman Katherine Magnoli, Sabrina Cohen, and David McMillan for the CODI board to provide to their respective commissioners. The motion was seconded by Ms. Orozco. The vote was unanimous, and the motion passed.
- **(Parking Issues): Disability Placards**
 - Chair Karantsalis addressed parking citations issued to individuals with disability placards and invited someone from Miami Parking Authority to come speak to CODI.
 - Mr. Sierra described difficulties contacting the private parking corporation and noted the website is not operable.
 - Motion to table the parking issue for future discussion made by Marilyn Orozco, seconded by Mercedes Villar. Vote was unanimous to table the issue.
- **Percentage of accessible and affordable housing units that should be available in Miami-Dade County.**
 - Ms. Orozco requested this topic be placed on the next agenda as Item C.
- Motion to table agenda item D. Motion made by Mr. Sierra to table **Celebrating Pedro F Rodrigues-Melendez's life and achievements for the disability community**, seconded by Ms. Villar, Vote: unanimous, Result: tabled

F. New Business Discussion

- **(Advocacy Award): Proposed for CODI to adopt three advocates of the year awards.**
 - Chair Karantsalis expressed personal recognition of Debbie Dietz, noting recognition was not presented as an official CODI award.
 - Mr. Kane objected to CODI adopting an Advocate of the Year Award at this time due to the absence of clearly defined criteria and standards. He stated that the Board must first discuss, establish, and formally adopt objective criteria and standards before CODI may bestow any official awards.
 - A motion was made to bestow to Debbie Dietz CODI's First Advocate of the Year Award. The motion was made by Ms. Villar and seconded by Mr. Sierra. The vote was unanimous, and the motion was passed.
- Ms. Renita Holmes thanked the board and stated that access to organized information has improved. She emphasized the importance of storytelling, reports, and data

collection. She referenced training opportunities, communication strategies and understanding reasonable accommodation rights. She suggested revisiting CODI's goals and mission.

- **Transit Discussion:**

- Theophilus Williams raised concerns regarding transit funding allocation, stating that approximately \$389 million is directed south while northern areas are ignored. He cited lack of communication, community meetings and public engagement. He raised concerns about rising property taxes and questioned how taxpayer funds are being allocated.
- Chair Karantsalis referenced the 601-602 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project estimated at \$300-\$400 million. He believes the Mayor is transit oriented.
- Mr. Sierra agreed the Mayor is receptive to disability concerns but stated that many people do not attend meetings where decisions are made.

- **Additional Transit Discussion:**

- Ms. Holmes raised concerns regarding trolley service shutdowns on weekends, lack of disability ridership data and absence of surveys. She suggested disability fairs in the northern district, veteran involvement, and housing authority participation. She expressed long-standing frustration with transit and housing access. She would like someone from DTPW to come to a CODI meeting and provide data and reports of individuals that use transit.
- Ms. Orozco said that District 3 representatives have attended previously and that invitations will continue.
- Howard Kane stated that CODI operates with limited authority and budget. While CODI can write letters to the BCC, CODI lacks funding.
- Mr. Sierra said CODI has opportunities to improve funding. A commissioner offered a \$2,000 donation, but CODI lacks a bank account. We need structural improvements, discretionary funding requests and officer elections in January.
- Chairman Karantsalis suggested inviting CITT Municipal Program Manager Marian Price. She oversees trolley services.

G. Other Updates/Announcements

- Mr. Kane requested changing the February meeting date from February 24 to March 3, 2026, because he will be traveling. Chair Karantsalis stated this would be discussed further at the January 27, 2026, meeting.

H. Next Meeting: January 27, 2026

I. Adjournment