

STATE OF MINNESOTA
ACCESS REVIEW BOARD

In the Matter of the Application of
Bethany Lutheran Church

FINAL DECISION
Dated: 6/5/2023

Application No. 23-04

This matter came on for hearing before the Access Review Board (“Board”) on May 26, 2023. The record closed at the conclusion of the hearing.

Board Chair Karen Gridley and Board member Bill Reinke were present in person, while Board members Tristy Auger and David Fenley were present via teleconference.

Patti Wiersgalla appeared in person on behalf of Bethany Lutheran Church.

The issue in this application is whether the application for a waiver of the State Building Code for the purpose of installing a stairway chairlift should be granted.

Bethany Lutheran Church requested a waiver of the State Building Code to install a stairway chairlift at its church. The church is a two-story building with split-level entries. There is an elevator serving the upper level of the church but not the lower level. The church seeks to install a straight rail stairway chairlift in the stairway in the lower level.

The Board reviewed the application pursuant to the factors identified in Minn. Stat. § 471.471, subd. 3.

With regard to the first factor, the need for limited accessibility when a higher degree of accessibility is not required by state or federal law or rule, the Board noted that the church’s application notes that it has member with mobility issues who would use the chairlift to get to the lower level.

With regard to the second factor, the architectural feasibility of providing a greater degree of accessibility than would be provided by the proposed device or equipment and the cost of providing a greater degree of accessibility, the Board noted that the church’s application indicates that it was not architectural feasible because there is insufficient space for an elevator to serve the lower level and that the congregation is small with a limited budget.

With regard to the third factor, the total cost of the proposed device or equipment over its projected usable life, including installation, maintenance, and replacement costs, the Board determined that the estimated cost to purchase and install the chairlift of \$10,000 is justified.

With regard to the fourth factor, the reliability of the proposed device or equipment, the Board noted that the proposed chairlift is manufactured by Stannah, which is a reputable company. The chairlift model includes dual call and send remotes, a folding seat, armrests, and footrests.

With regard to the fifth factor, the applicant's ability to comply with all recognized access and safety standards for installation and maintenance, the Board discussed that the chairlift device allowed the user to fold the chair out of the way when not in use for safety and to maintain the device in good condition.

With regard to the sixth factor, whether the proposed device or equipment can be operated and used without reducing or compromising minimum safety standards, the Board noted that the proposed stairway is 44 inches wide and the folded chair protrudes 12.75 inches. The Board determined that 31.25 inches of clear passing space on the proposed stairways is not a compliant clearance as allowed by IBC Chapter 10, Sections 1009.4 and 1012.8 where the occupant load is more than 50; however, there are two other means of egress from the lower level and therefore, the proposed chairlift does not compromise or reduce minimum safety standards. The building has a smoke detector system and an alarm system but does not have a fire sprinkler system. The Board also noted that the City of Onamia's Fire Chief provided a letter in support of the installation of the chairlift.

After considering these factors, Board member Reinke made a motion to approve the application for a waiver from the building code to install a straight rail chairlift in northwest entrance at the back of the Bethany Lutheran Church in Onamia, Minnesota. Board member Auger seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

The Board's approval is subject to the following conditions:

- 1) The stairway chairlifts shall comply with the Minnesota Building Code and Minnesota Elevator Code requirements. Only licensed elevator contractors may install stairway chairlifts. Proper permits, inspections, and certificates for use shall be obtained by the licensed elevator contractor installing the lift. Licensed elevator contractors may be found by searching License Look Up at:

<https://secure.doli.state.mn.us/lookup/licensing.aspx>

- 2) The stairway chairlift shall be maintained in the folded position when not in use.


KAREN GRIDLEY, Chair
Access Review Board