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Disability Rights News

Honolulu Advertiser

Agreement to Speed up Wheelchair Ramp Rprojects

By David Waite Advertiser Staff Writer

HONOLULU - A Honolulu lawyer who filed a lawsuit in 1996 in hopes of getting the city to make sidewalks more accessible to disabled residents believes an agreement filed in federal court yesterday will result in the city moving from slow motion to warp speed in building more than 7,600 wheelchair ramps.

The ramps are required under the American with Disabilities Act of 1991. Among other things, the law essentially says that people with disabilities have the same right of access to public facilities as people who are not disabled.

By 1996, when it was clear that Honolulu was not meeting the requirements of the law, the city needed to comply with the federal disability law. The city's plan called for building 7,600 wheelchair ramps for disabled Oahu residents.

The lawsuit resulted in the city's promising to build 7,600 wheelchair ramps. The City Council in January 1999. The plan called for building 7,600 wheelchair ramps by January 2002. But as of this past June, only 99 of the ramps had been built.



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and "curb cuts" for wheelchair ramps. The city's plan called for building 7,600 wheelchair ramps by January 2002. But as of this past June, only 99 of the ramps had been built.

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Levin worked with city officials for the past seven months to come up with a revised and accelerated construction schedule.

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"We believe our recent efforts have changed the way the city does business, and in the process educated city officials to the frustrations and dangers faced on a daily basis by members of the disabled community," Levin said.

The new agreement requires the city to hire a construction manager whose sole responsibility will be to ensure that the wheelchair ramp and curb cut schedule stays on track.

Jim Martin, a law clerk and paralegal with Levin's firm who worked closely with Levin on the new agreements, said one of the reasons the city fell behind under the terms of the former agreements is that there were too few city construction managers trying to oversee too many projects.

The new agreement also calls for a court-appointed 'special monitor' whose job will be to make sure the city meets the terms of the new agreement.

Paul Sheriff, a local ADA consultant and son of the late Stan Sheriff, former University of Hawaii athletic director, was named by federal Magistrate Kevin Chang to the monitor's post.

Levin and Martin said there was a dramatic turnaround this past summer in the city's position on the wheelchair ramp issue, and they credit city Managing Director Ben Lee.

Lee yesterday said he was stunned to learn that only 99 ramps had been built in the 30 months between January 1999 and this past summer.

Under the new approach, contractors will construct those "top priority" ramps that also are relatively simple because they don't require moving of posts and utility boxes or wiring, Lee said.

In additions, the city will be allowed to waive certain state procurement procedures so contractors who worked with the city to build ramps can be given contracts for new jobs without undergoing the lengthy bidding process, Lee said.

Many of the simple ramps will be built without extensive engineering or design plans, he said.

The new agreement calls for more than 1,500 of the ramps to be built by the end of next year and an average of 1,300 or 1,400 per year after that. All of the ramps are scheduled to be completed by December 2007 at a cost of \$94.3 million.

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