

STATE OF MINNESOTA
ACCESS REVIEW BOARD

In the Matter of the Application of
Grace Christian Church

FINAL DECISION
Dated: May 1, 2025

Application No. 25-07

This matter came on for hearing before the Access Review Board (“Board”) on April 11, 2025. The record closed at the conclusion of the hearing.

Board Chair Karen Gridley, Elise Wehrman, and Jim Weaver were present in person, while Board members David Fenley and Marvin Forbragd were present via teleconference.

George and Jill Marin appeared on behalf of the Forest Hill United Methodist Church via teleconference

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.

Grace Christian Church requested a waiver of the State Building Code to install a stairway chairlift at its church in Albert Lea, Minnesota. The church is a three-story building with a sanctuary on the main floor and a fellowship hall in the basement. The church seeks to install two straight rail chairlifts in the stairway leading to the basement.

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 states that it has two members who have difficulty walking stairs.

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 would be difficult to find space for a vertical platform lift or elevator without significantly reconfiguring the space. The application provides that the reconfiguration would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

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 total estimated cost for the installation of the chairlifts of \$26,940 is justified.

With regard to the fourth factor, the reliability of the proposed device or equipment, the Board noted that the proposed chairlifts are manufactured by Stannah, which is a reputable company.

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. The chairlift model includes dual call and send remotes, folding seat, arms and footrest.

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 split-landing stairways are 41 and 55 inches wide, and the folded chair protrudes 16 inches. The Board determined that 25 inches of clear passing space on the lower-level stairway is not a compliant clearance as allowed by IBC Chapter 10, Sections 1012.8 and 1009.4 where the occupant load is more than 50. However, there are four exits from the basement, so the proposed stairway is not needed to meet the required egress safety requirement. The church has a smoke detector system and an alarm system but does not have a fire sprinkler system. The City of Albert Lea Building Inspector provided a letter supporting the installation of the chairlift.


After considering these factors, Board member Forbragd made a motion to approve the application for a waiver from the building code to install a straight rail stairway chairlift in the requested stairway at Grace Christian Church in Albert Lea, Minnesota. Board member Weaver seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

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

- 1) The stairway chairlifts shall comply with all applicable building and 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 the list of licensed stairway chairlift installers on the Board's website at:

<https://www.dli.mn.gov/about-department/boards-and-councils/access-review-board>

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


KAREN GRIDLEY, Chair
Access Review Board