

Accessibility Advisory Commission

Tuesday, January 19, 2021, 4:30 PM Minutes

Virtual meeting with WebEx platform

Live streaming on City's website:

<http://www.worcesterma.gov/video-on-demand>

Call-in conference line and ASL interpreters provided

Attendance:

Members Present: Robert Bureau, John Finn, Jr., Nancy Garr-Colzie, Fitzroy Hall, Dee Karuna, Linda Larrivee, Elizabeth Myska, Joseph Prochilo, Stephen Stolberg

Members Absent: Philip Economou, Paul Keister

Staff: Jayna Turchek, Miriam Nyante, Dawn E. Clark

Guests: LeighAnne Taylor, WalkBoston and Carl Gomes, Indian Lake resident; Jack Peacock, Complements

Call to order, instructions for virtual meeting, introductions

Chairperson Bureau called the meeting to order and requested Director Turchek to provide the technology instructions for access the meeting. Commissioners then introduced themselves. Mr. James Delage was welcomed as the Commission's newest Associate Member.

Approval of December 15, 2020 minutes

Commissioner Larrivee moved to approve the December 15, 2020 minutes as written. Commissioner Prochilo seconded the motion. All approved.

Discussion on proposed focus areas for 2021:

- Raising the voices and addressing the concerns of people of color within the disability community
- Viewing work through a trauma informed lens

The Chairperson opened the conversation by sharing the desire and commitment for this Commission to be a diverse representation of both the disability community as well as the community at large and as such should represent diverse ethnic, cultural and racial backgrounds. Additionally is the intention to engage and involve the same to enrich public conversations and recommendations.

Comments from Commission members included:

- Agreed we need a diverse Commission membership achieved by the Commission going into the neighborhoods and communities letting people know we are here as a disability resource and invite participation or inviting various groups to come in and have a conversation with them around disability and how they are impacted.
- Speak with the City's Chief Diversity Officer about recruiting people of color and other cultures. Chairperson Bureau requested that she speak with both the Chief Diversity Officer and the Citizen Advisory Council to let them know this Commission wants to be more diverse.
- Important to broaden our horizons to include people of color and other representation of cultures.
- Personal outreach inviting people to become a part of the Commission can be a powerful way to achieve the goal of having a diverse membership. There is an official process for applying that goes through the Citizen Advisory Council. Members are encouraged to share that process with others.
- The more outreach we do, the more robust the conversation and achievements can be done for the disabled population.
- One Commission member identified that he applied for this Commission because in a conversation, the City Manager's goal was to have all Board and Commissions as diverse as possible.

Chairperson Bureau encouraged everyone to invite the people they know to apply/join us in our monthly public conversations.

He moved on to the second item which was: Viewing work through a trauma informed lens. During this year living through CoVID just about everyone experienced some type of trauma and has been called collective trauma.

CoVID 19 has affected people with disabilities particularly hard. Health care and accessing resources such as food was difficult before the pandemic and has become more difficult. The Commission is aware of this and wants to let people know we are available. Worcester Together has done a good job of pulling resources together. However, there still is loneliness and isolation being felt which can affect people's health.

A person with disabilities is impacted in many more ways even in Worcester which is economically diverse. Reaching out just saying "hey how you doing" can mean a

lot. 70% of people living with disabilities have hidden disabilities. We don't know who all these people are so being kind can go a long way for all.

Indian Lake walk audit presentation*

This walk audit was brought to the Commission as information to share their collaborative process with neighbors and the things they learned about walkability. Additionally there is interest in collaboration with the Commission to better understand access for persons with disabilities.

Commissioner Myska introduced LeighAnne Taylor and Carl Gomes. Ms. Taylor from WalkBoston has worked with WalkWorcester on several projects here in Worcester and most recently collaborated with Mr. Gomes. WalkBoston considers walkability with five categories: connections, destinations, safety, comfort and activities. She further explained the connection between the Boston and Worcester bike programs as follows. MassDOT is in phase II of the Complete Streets Program which is when a community would come together and identify all the walkability plans for that community to apply for grant funding to make the improvement.

WalkBoston is assisting Worcester with conducting walk audits in the five categories by providing a tutorial so Worcester residents can conduct their own audits. The Commission could get involved in these walk audits by being a voice for ADA compliance. Another way is to be involved in policy development for city walking paths. Ms. Taylor is willing to work with the Commission to develop some goals on walkability. It would be wonderful if each walk audit in Worcester could have a Commission representative. <https://walkboston.org>

Commissioner Myska suggested that walking is a good way to reduce the isolation and loneliness people may have. While her feet do the "seeing", she gave a tutorial of curb cuts by showing slides of apex and parallel curb cuts along West Boylston Street going south explaining how each affect safety. The yellow bumpy rectangles are known as truncated domes developed in Japan for visually impaired people. Apex curb cuts direct sight impaired people into the middle of an intersection while parallel curb cuts go from one side of the street to the other with helps with safer street crossing.

Carl Gomes is a resident of the Indian Hill neighborhood who is interested in establishing a walk trail around Indian Lake and a community garden/park for the neighbors and others who may be interested. Activities: Nutritious food and a

healthy living environment. These problems are both global and local. Food deserts exist here in our own community as well, affecting people of all ages. His exposure to these global issues led directly to his involvement in the creation of a Community Teaching Garden here in Worcester. This Garden, supported by the Regional Environmental Council (REC), will hopefully be used to develop a curriculum in collaboration with the Worcester schools to expose learners to the ways that water and food insecurity impacts land use and is exacerbated by the effects of climate change. The critical outcome of such learning is to create both advocates and global citizens who will effect meaningful change for the future. He will hopefully begin working with Forest Middle School in the Fall.

There are no city plans in place for parcel 149. The City will at some time in the future have to prepare a design plan for such a park which would be include in the City's Open Space Plan.

Director Turchek asked if WalkBoston had a list of sidewalk issues discovered in audits done for recommendations for annual sidewalk reconstruction. There are some items related to the Greenhill Walkway audit on the WalkBoston website.

Commission discussion and vote on recommendations for annual sidewalk reconstruction*

Director Turchek explained that on an annual basis each district City Councilor makes recommendations on the streets needing repair in their district usually in October. There is set aside of \$200,000.00 for sidewalk repair/replacement the addresses accessibility issues which the Commission is invited to make recommendations. After some discussion, the Commission agreed to ask Commissioner Prochilo to review the sidewalk issues that were identified as a result of the wheelchair strolls and forward to Director Turchek for processing.

Director Turchek has spoken with the City Engineer; there is a little grace period so the Commission can make a decision next month.

Review of City Hall Launch Guides*

Mr. Jack Peacock designed and installed these launch guides several years ago. They are instruments intended to assist visually impaired people (VIPs) to find City Hall entrances from the sidewalks surrounding the building. He showed the video when these were originally installed. A smart phone can be placed in the cradle to read the medallion which will open a web page for that location. Instructions can be made audible for VIPs for getting to the door. These launch

guides are faded and are in the process of being replaced. The red heart in the seal will be changed to black for more lasting quality. The red faded no matter what was done to prevent the fading. There were four on Main Street, which were removed when the sidewalks were replaced, and repeated attempts to recover them failed.

A local vendor has been located with a better more lasting product. The launch guides that were removed will be replaced as well as all the medallions. The information on the guides will be updated. Peacock would like a way to connect with the city to have more relevant information on these guides and a way to keep it updated. We would also like to have more people use them, and the city to suggest what information to post, would be helpful.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Peacock for his labor of love.

Update on wheelchair accessible taxis and transportation Initiatives

The two accessible taxi vans are not in use. Red Cab has relinquished both accessible taxi medallions to the Worcester Police Department, Licensing Division. An active search continues to find operators for these medallions. The WRTA has submitted a grant application that if awarded would pay for the purchase of an accessible van that could be contracted for use by Yellow Cab.

Commissioner Garr-Colzie reported that there is a WRTA Advisory Board meeting on Thursday. The Chairperson thanked Commissioner Garr-Colzie for her service on the transportation front.

Review of AAB notices and applications: No City properties*

Notice of Action:

- 1098-1102 Pleasant St. (V20-214) – Commercial Building

Suggestions for upcoming agenda items

None

Announcements:

● **Mayor's Mental Health Taskforce Working Group**
January 20, 2021, 10am-11am. Contact: Kelsey Hopkins
hopkinsk@worcesterma.gov

WRTA Advisory Board Meeting January 21, 2020, 8:30am,
Contact: tsebastian@therta.com

- **Transportation Advocacy Coalition (TAC) Meeting**
January 21, 2020, 4pm, Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83175439556>
- **Next Accessibility Advisory Commission virtual meeting:**
February 16, 2021, 4:30pm

Adjournment:

Commissioner Garr- Colzie moved to adjourn and Commissioner Prochilo seconded. All approved at 6:55pm

*Material can be viewed at the Human Rights & Accessibility Office during normal business hours.