

**City of Worcester Accessibility Advisory Commission
Tuesday February 15, 2022, 4:30 PM Meeting Minutes**

Virtual meeting with WebEx platform
<http://www.worcesterma.gov/video-on-demand>
ASL interpreters provided

Attendance:

Members Present: Robert Bureau, James Delage, Philip Economou, John Finn, Jr., Darya Karuna, Linda Larrivee, Elizabeth Myska, Christina Parissi Joseph Prochilo, Stephen Stolberg

Member not yet sworn in: Jully Khattar

Staff: Jayna Turчек, Dawn E. Clark

Guests: Evelyn Darling, Worcester Business Improvement District
Joseph Bellil, Easter Seals of Massachusetts
David Gasser & Maritza Crossen, Citizens Housing & Planning Association (CHAPA)

Call to order, instructions for virtual meeting, introductions

Chairperson Bureau called the meeting to order at 4:30pm and requested Director Turчек to provide the technology instructions for public access to the meeting. Commissioners then introduced themselves on roll call. Commissioner Khattar was introduced and will be sworn in soon.

Approval of January 18, 2022 minutes*

Commissioner Larrivee moved to approve the January 18, 2022 minutes as written. Commissioner Stolberg seconded the motion. Unanimously approved by roll call.

Conversation with Evelyn Darling, Worcester Business Improvement District <https://www.downtownworchester.org>

Ms. Darling, Executive Director, hired in May 2019, provided the Commission with a power point presentation which she described. The following information was included:

The logo is interlocking chains, one strand is red persimmon/blue and the other chain is yellow and green forming a heart and is used widely on ambassador uniforms, receptacles and written/digital material.

She had her “eyes opened” to challenges faced by VIPs when she recently participated in a blindfolded white cane walk of the district with Commissioner Myska. She is eager to learn from the Commission and looks forward to establishing a strong relationship moving forward.

The Downtown Worcester Business Improvement District (DWBID) is a non-profit organization started at the end 2018 that represents the owners of 140 properties within approximately 78 acres of Downtown Worcester, Massachusetts, The district is centered around City Hall and Common and goes from the corner of Foster Street and Main Street (both sides) and all the way to Austin and Myrtle to McGrath over up McGrath up Foster Street. DCU Center is not included. By state statute a BID has to be approved by the City Council and have signatures of 60% of the property owner’s which represents 51% of the assessed property value. Municipal and non-profits do not have to pay the fees. The City bills the commercial property owners. The fees then go back to the BID to provide services over and above the city.

The BID now exists for five years. The result of a comprehensive community-based effort, the DWBID seeks to create a “unique sense of place” through enhanced investment and development, establishing and sustaining a vibrant, welcoming, and economically viable district for all stakeholders.

Nurturing a Neighborhood & Building a Community for All

A Business Improvement District is a legally established, contiguous geographic area within which property owners initiate, manage, and finance supplemental services for the benefit of everyone who lives, works, or visits the District.

The Downtown Worcester Business Improvement District seeks to build upon the existing investments within the area, allowing for property owners to invest and coordinate improvements and supplemental services in the downtown to enhance property values, generate more business activity and enhance the overall experience for those coming to the Downtown.

CULTURAL PLACEMAKING

The DWBID will develop partnerships with the City and cultural organizations to implement a multifaceted approach to create a downtown where people want to live, work and visit. It will create a destination, provide active programming, improve connections through quality design and spotlight development opportunities.

BEAUTIFICATION

The DWBID will create a "fresh look" for the downtown to foster a positive user experience. The Clean Team supplements city services to elevate the level of maintenance and attention to detail throughout the District, projecting a destination that is ready and open for businesses, walkable for pedestrians and welcoming for visitors, employees and residents to call home.

HOSPITALITY & SAFETY

As the birthplace of the Smiley Face, Worcester is always ready to greet its residents, employees, students and visitors with a smile. Hospitality

Ambassadors will be a visible presence in the District to provide information, troubleshoot problems, and assist visitors and others in need.

MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

The DWBID will promote Worcester as a destination to a broad audience of entrepreneurs, businesses, residents, students and visitors to increase foot traffic, bolster retail sales, promote opportunity, and enhance perceptions of downtown. Received grants from Worcester Arts and a state travel grant.

ADVOCACY/POLICY/ADMINISTRATION

The DWBID will provide advocacy and lean management to support the development goals of the District. Surveys of businesses have been done and disseminates information. Meet second week of every month on second Friday from 9 – 10am and are making effort to be accessible for everyone. All are welcome.

The BID is on Instagram and Facebook. There is a newsletter. One can subscribe on the website. A new website is being rolled out in March. There are dog waste containers and bags with signs to ask cleaning up after dog

CONTACT INFORMATION

44 Portland Street, Suite 508, Worcester, MA 01608

info@downtownworcester.org

CALL IF YOU SEE AN ISSUE THAT NEEDS ADDRESSING
508-414-1953

Commission members would like to see this take place in other city neighborhoods. Main South is doing something like this (TBI on Pleasant Street.) They also worked with the Worcester Chamber of

Commerce and their Green Team. There are other models to fulfill these goals in neighborhood that are not so stringent.

In 2023 the BID will have to review if it is to continue. Owners are happy with the program.

The Commission is interested in keeping informed and to work with the BID when opportunities arise.

Legislative update H.2419, H.2420, and S.1629, “An Act building a more accessible Massachusetts,” filed by Representatives Barber and Moran, and Senator Moore. These bills will significantly expand housing options for people with disabilities and seniors, as well as ensure workplace accessibility and reduce workplace discrimination against people with disabilities

Mr. Bellil reported the versions of these bills have been filled over fifteen years and have not gotten out of Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee. (Clerk determines what Committee gets a bill.) Hopefully they will this year. There are many disability groups that support these bill. The next step would be to go to Ways and Means Committee.

He explained that many times trade organizations who think many buildings accessible will be expensive go to legislators with this in mind and they do not vote in favor of the bills.

The commission voted unanimously to support these bills by roll call vote with commissioner Prochilo making the motion and a second by Assistant Commissioner Parissi.

Conversation with David Gasser & Maritza Crossen, Citizens Housing & Planning Association (CHAPA)

<https://www.chapa.org>

<https://www.massaccesshousingregistry.org>

<https://search.housingnavigatorma.org>

Mr. Gasser is Director of CHAPA and Ms. Crossen is Program Director. CHAPA is a statewide advocacy program for affordable housing and housing programs. The discussion tonight will be around a couple of websites the agency manages. One of which has been the most important websites for affordable, accessible listings and searches.

Ms. Crosse explained the www.massaccesshousingregistry.org as follows: In 1995 a law was passed that all accessible and now affordable units in Massachusetts be posted in one place. CHAPA has managed this website since its inception and Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) is the owner. Property owners or managers create an account and post the available unit(s). Customers can search or create an account saying what is being searched for.

A new website was launched in 2021 called the <https://search.housingnavigatorma.org>. A determination has been made to combine the two sites with a vendor company and robust staff and funding. This is being planned for June 2022. All housing owners coming into the state are required to post accessible affordable rental units on the navigator and the new website when started.

Mr. Gasser indicated that right now there is a discussion about what to do about home ownership. The MassAccess website is nearing the end technologically and needs to be updated. CHAPA also manages a website that lists mortgagee resources. Since September, they are trying to put these websites together so there is one place to go for all of these housing resources whether looking for rental or homeownership.

They welcome input into the needs to be addressed in this single website. They are meeting with agencies such as the Independent Living Centers for input. They are also meeting with people on how to use the new website as well.

CHAPA will keep the Commission informed through Director Turchek.

Review of requested data on accessible units from Worcester Housing Authority (WHA) *

The WHA data for both Federal and State housing units showed that of 2,891 rental units there are 8 wheelchair units and 127 '504' units. Being liberal 5% are accessible. There is an eight year waiting time for an accessible WHA housing unit.

After listening to the last agenda item as well as this data, the Commission noted there was work to be done for those needing accessible housing in the city verifying what was known all along. We suspect the demand is a lot more.

Vaccine clinics and vaccine information:

<https://www.mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine>

Need an ASL Interpreter? To request interpreter/ accommodation call Michelle at 774-303-6976 or email

mortizocasio.socialwork@gmail.com

Review of AAB notices and applications: *

(No City owned properties)

Decision:

- The Learning First Charter School, 50 Richland St. (V21-155)

No action taken

Suggestions for upcoming agenda items: None at this time

Announcements:

- Next Accessibility Advisory Commission virtual meeting:
March 15, 2022 - 4:30pm
- WRTA Transportation Advisory Planning Group – February 16,
2022 – 1:00 – 3:30pm

Adjournment:

Commissioner Karuna moved to adjourn and Commissioner Prochilo seconded. All approved by roll call at 6:36 pm.

*Material can be viewed at the Human Rights & Accessibility Office upon request.