

**City of Worcester Human Rights Commission Minutes**  
**VIRTUAL MEETING – Monday, October 3, 2022, 6:00pm**

**Members Present:** Guillermo Creamer Jr., Elizabeth O’Callahan, Edward G. Robinson, Charles Hopkins, Ellen Shemitz, LaToya Lewis

**Members Absent:** Jacqueline Yang, Jorge Lopez-Alvarez, Jamaine Ortiz

**Staff:** Jayna Turchek

**Guests:**

Sgt. Leto, Worcester Police Department  
Officer McQueen, Worcester Police Department  
Paul Matthews, Worcester Research Bureau

**1. Call to order and Introductions**

At 6:00pm a quorum was established, and Chairperson Yang called to order. The Chairperson welcomes members of the commission and those present and introductions of those in attendance as well as roll call were taken.

Chairperson began with an acknowledgement of the traditional, ancestral, territory of the Nipmuc, the first people of Massachusetts and those whose land we are convening on tonight. While the Nipmuc history predates written history, records from the 1600s inform us that the original inhabitants of Worcester dwelled principally in three locations: Pakachoag, Tatesset (Tatnuck), and Wigwam Hill (N. Lake Ave). It is important to make this acknowledgment and to honor the ancestors that have come before us. It is all too easy to live in a land without ever hearing the traditional names and the history of the people who first resided and prospered in these lands and continue to reside and prosper.

The Human Rights Commission was established to promote the city’s human rights policies. It is the policy of the City to assure equal access, for every individual, to and benefit from all public services, to protect every individual in the enjoyment and exercise of civil rights and to encourage and bring about mutual understanding and respect among all individuals in the city. Our work requires us to address institutional racism so that as a community we can achieve racial equity. Our work also requires us to make visible the unheard, unearned, and unquestioned privilege enjoyed by some members of our community to the detriment of others. We take time to make this acknowledgement, to educate, so a path can be cleared for healing.

The term “**institutional racism**” refers specifically to the ways in which institutional policies create difference outcomes for different racial groups. The institutional policies may never mention any racial group, but their effect is to create advantages for whites and the oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as people of color.

The term “**racial equity**” is the active state in which race does not determine one’s livelihood or success. It is achieved through proactive work to address root causes of inequalities to improve outcomes for all individuals. That is, through the elimination or shifting of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or fail to eliminate them.

The term “**privilege**” describes the unearned social power and informal institutions of society to all members of a dominant group. For example: “white privilege” and “male privilege.” Privilege is usually invisible to those who have it because we are trained to not see it but nevertheless it puts them at an advantage against those who do not have it.

## **2. Approval of the meeting minutes from August 1, 2022.**

The Chairperson motioned to approve the meeting minutes for August 1, 2022 and September 12, 2022. Commissioner Hopkins seconded. Unanimously approved 6-0-0.

## **3. Worcester Police Department Diversity Officers Updates**

**Sargent Leto:** The first question asked us to provide an annual list of outreach activities. I have been the WPD Diversity Officer since October 1, 2020. I have been doing a lot of work, due to COVID, over the phone, by email and by zoom. When school went back in person, I have gone to a lot of the Worcester public schools, working on the Cadet program which started in June. We also started an Explore Program at Forrest Grove Middle School. It is a pilot program at this time and I am hoping that it will be a success like the Cadet Program and we are looking to get into other Worcester Public Middle Schools and High Schools to groom our residents into being future Worcester Police Officers.

I have also been partnering with Worcester Human Resources Department. They have been assisting us by putting out notifications for when the upcoming civil service test is for the police department. They also helped with advertisement for both the civil service test and the open enrollment period for the WPD Cadet Program.

I have also been working with WFD since I began the Diversity Officer. We started with the RITE Training which first came to WFD and me and three other officers attended that training. Then, we brought that training to the WPD. I continuously work with Captain Mosley of the WFD bouncing Diversity issues off one another.

The police body camera program is going to be rolling out, along with the tasers we got. Several officers and officials will be wearing both the tasers and the body cameras.

**Chairperson Creamer:** Is this a two for one where if you have a body camera you also have a taser? Could you elaborate a little more on how police body cameras will impact work?

**Sargent Leto:** Correct: The body cameras are a great tool. They will improve police accountability and hold both the public and the WPD accountable. Tension is lowered when everybody knows that they are on camera. There are more respectful interactions with the public. It seems to go a lot smoother when everybody is held accountable.

**Commissioner Shemitz:** When you say it is a two for one, if you have a taser you MUST wear a camera?

**Sargent Leto:** That will depend on the unit or division you are working. Our operations division is starting the program and also the academy that started last Monday will be the first WPD graduating class that will have both tasers and body cameras.

**Commissioner Shemitz:** So, there are existing officers who currently have tasers but do not have body cameras:

**Sargent Leto:** Correct. It depends on where they are assigned in WPD.

**Chairperson Creamer:** For clarity's sake, going forward, any officer who receives a taser will also receive a body camera? That is what the future will look like?

**Sargent Leto:** Yes. That is what the future will look like.

**Commissioner Hopkins:** At some point 100% of the uniformed police officers would ...

**Sargent Leto:** That I do not know. I cannot answer that question at this time. But, we are doing everything we can to make our department better for the city.

**Commissioner Hopkins:** What percentage of police officers will have body cameras?

**Sargent Leto:** I believe we have 300 available to outfit our operation division and all other units and divisions that deal with, strictly, answering calls.

**Chairperson Creamer:** With respect to the BIPOC and LGBTQ communities, transparency is important. It really softens the blow during an incident. How is WPD planning on presenting that to the community? How are they presenting that body cameras will be worn and it is better for the community?

**Sargent Leto:** We did have a pilot program years ago. Before these cameras came to us, there were several meetings throughout the community talking about the body camera program for WPD, to make sure that there is full transparency when it comes to any interaction, motor vehicle stops and calls for service. Although, some people do interact with the police department, perhaps in a hospital setting, or other location where there is sensitive information at hand, and they may request not to be recorded.

**Chairperson Creamer:** As a member of the LGBTQ community myself, I am going to preface the fact that you do not speak for the entire LGBTQ community, but I am curious of you could add a bit about your thoughts on the LGBTQ community and body cameras?

**Officer McQueen:** I am not a fan. This is my scenario, if you walk into a bar that caters to the LGBTQ community, in a recent survey I have 46% of the LGBTQ community do not serve openly in their jobs. The body camera footage people will be petrified that they will be outed if we walk into a bar with our cameras on.

You can have people who live transgendered parttime. These people live dual lives. And suddenly you have a subject, who lives closeted, their employer doesn't know, maybe their family doesn't know, and they get stopped by the police. How are they going to feel with the body camera on them. I cannot imagine, getting into the fight or flight mode, what could happen? We could have someone all the sudden fleeing from us, not because of something they did, but because of who they are and that scares me.

As you see, I wear my phone on my wrist because it is easier, but I have had some people uncomfortable with just that. I am not a fan of them. I know that, yes, in some instances, accountability, but my fear is that I have always taken calls in a one-on-one person. I have had some great life experiences being part of the LGBTQ world that if I run into a family, I can share with them, but with a body camera, I cannot share my personal life with them. I have had people that I have helped to put at ease. I actually had a gentleman, one time, come up to me in law enforcement, to talk to me about his child being a part of the community. He had guilt and fear and he thought he had contributed to it. Just me being able to say that is how his child was born gave him great relief. When I get one-on-one with people, I cannot have those conversations because it will not be conformable for me to have them where I am being recorded. My personal life is my personal life but sometimes I use that to humanize myself at WPD with the population, even non-LGBTQ people.

That is my reason I am not a fan of body cameras.

**Chairperson Creamer:** Will all police officers also receive a cell phone?

**Sargent Leto:** When we had the body camera pilot program, we had a cell phone that did come with the body camera. I do not know if they are going to get cell phones with the body cameras they are getting now, but I can look into it.

**Commissioner Shemitz:** You said there would be 300 body cameras but what is the current size of the police force?

**Sargent Leto:** We usually have between 450-472 police officers and officials.

**Commissioner Shemitz:** but are the cameras given, or identified with, a particular police officer or just while you are on duty? Are there enough for all on-duty officers at a particular time to be wearing a camera?

**Sargent Leto:** If you are working in a unit, or division, that requires you to wear a body camera, then you will be wearing that camera when you are on the tour of duty, answering calls.

**Commissioner Shemitz:** and there is sufficient amount to be covering everybody?

**Sargent Leto:** Yes.

**Commissioner Shemitz:** there are no school resource officers and instead are school liaison officers. Will they also be wearing body cameras?

**Sargent Leto:** I believe so because, at this moment, they are out of the operations division, on the day shift.

**Commissioner Hopkins:** Which divisions will not be required to have cameras?

**Sargent Leto:** I believe the units, such as the undercover unit, vice and those that wear plain clothing and have to work with criminal informants and/or highly sensitive materials such as our sexual assault unit. I do not have the list of who is wearing them and who is not wearing them.

*Official request to receive that list as Chairperson's Order.*

**Commissioner Lewis:** You would think with what the work entails that the gang task force would have cameras.

**Sargent Leto:** I believe when I did see the email, they may be one of the units that will be wearing body cameras.

**Commissioner Robinson:** What notice do you give when you are approaching a person? Do you tell them that they are being recorded?

**Sargent Leto:** I am assuming we will, yes. The body cameras we had in the past, during the pilot program, sat right on the chest. When we would approach a citizen in the community, there was a rectangle camera pointed right at them. If there is a problem, we will let them know that they are being recorded, especially in the past, it has happened to me on several occasions, where I would pull over a motor vehicle and when I walk up to ask for license and registration, they are pointing a cellphone at me. They record us and we are going to let them know that we are recording them.

**Commissioner Robinson:** I know that the cameras record 30 seconds before you turn them on. Can they be turned on automatically if you get into trouble?

**Sargent Leto:** Yes, when an officer pulls out his taser or firearm, the body camera will turn on. However, when an officer goes to an incident, they are double tapping that camera as they head there so the camera should already be on before they go to retrieve their taser or firearm.

**Commissioner Lewis:** Regarding the individuals who will wear body cameras while called for service calls, are the cameras turned on for every call being answered?

**Sargent Leto:** Yes. We want full transparency so unless it is a sensitive call and the person does not want to be recorded, in which case the officer will abide by the citizen's wishes.

**Chairperson Creamer:** There are a couple of questions we would like you to answer.

**Sargent Leto:**

RE Demographics of new WPD Cadet Program Class. There are currently 6 cadets. 3 males and 3 females. One white male, white female, two Hispanic males, one Hispanic female, and one middle eastern female.

RE Passing rate for 2022 Police Civil Service Exam. When it comes to candidates of color passing the exam, I reached out to the Human Resources Division in Boston, but I did not get an answer. This year on September 17<sup>th</sup>, was the Civil Service Police Promotional Exam, like everyone, they are short staffed and have a lot on their plate.

RE Officers who speak fluent languages other than English. I did reach out to the Boston Human Resources and our Human Resources here and we do have officers and officials in our department that are Spanish and Asian but they may not speak that language. I would have to ask officers directly.

RE Most Recent Sargent and Lieutenant Exam for WPD. That information was emailed out to all officers and officials when the application period was opened. That would be six months prior to the examination date and all the information is also on Mass.gov.

RE Department Climate Survey. We are working with the Racial Equity Audit Agency, CNA, who did a site visit on September 19<sup>th</sup>, and were here for three days. They did several interviews and ride-alongs. Their audit is still ongoing. They should, hopefully, be done by the end of next Spring, early summer. They were notified and I did ask them if they would be doing a survey and they told me to stand by.

RE Additional Training for CIT and Implicit Bias Training. We work with OpenSky. We are trying to get as many officers and officials as possible through the 40 hours, weeklong, CIT training. We have Implicit Bias, Racial Intelligence Training and Engagement (RITE) and this training is provided in every academy with follow up training during in-service twice a year.

**Commissioner Robinson:** When will you find out the results of the Sargent and Lieutenant Promotion Exam and if someone were to pass, when would the promotion happen?

**Sargent Leto:** That is all left up to the Human Resources Division in Boston. There is a promotional exam every two years. The 2020 exam was also in September and the results came out about two months later. I am expecting it to be around the same timeframe this round.

**Commissioner O'Callahan:** How frequently does the whole department receive a refresher course in RITE?

**Sargent Leto:** Not every officer has gone through the 40-hour training. We do mental health training in our academy and in service. I have been on the job almost 19 years and I have received numerous trainings annually. I would have to ask and get those numbers for the whole department though. In our July meeting, to-date, unless it has changed, we have 1 Captain, Three

Lieutenants, 9 Sargents, and 67 patrol officers that have gone through the 40-hour training. We do have a Crisis Intervention Team, led by a Sargent and several patrol officers.

**Commissioner O'Callahan:** There is a gap in coverage where, I believe, 5 CIT officers are 9-5 Monday through Friday. Have you been able to cover every shift?

**Sargent Leto:** I believe so. Every officer and officially goes through the training on de-escalation and recognizing mental illness. It is the officers in the field in the operation division that are responding to the call. The crisis intervention team is the follow up. But on every call, if there is a mental health crisis, our officers are trained for those situations.

**Commissioner O'Callahan:** If they need additional support, is there a CIT officer on call for every shift?

**Sargent Leto:** Yes. We have negotiators and we can call in officers if need be.

**Commissioner Hopkins:** Has the department thought about doing a language skills survey of some type?

**Chairperson Creamer:** This question is in reference to the various languages spoken throughout the department. For example, has the department considered a language audit of sorts?

**Sargent Leto:** I did ask. I sent out an e-mail. This question was asked over the summer. I got very few responses. There are officers and officials in our departments that speak multiple languages. But I do not have the exact data as to which languages and whom. I will look more into that.

**Chairperson Creamer:** We are going to switch gears to officer McQueen who has a couple of questions they have answered.

**Officer McQueen:** This year, I decided to do the stickers. Ordered 750 stickers and gave out basically one to each person. I used this as an icebreaker. I have been a part of the LGBTQ community for well over 40 years and I am in my 36th year of being a police officer. For most of my career I was not openly serving. In the LGBTQ world, there is not a lot of trust for law enforcement. I try to break that barrier down. The other thing I am working on is recruitment. I have about five more years that I can serve as an officer, and it is very important to me to bring in more of the LGBTQ community as officers. It would be ideal to have more serve openly within our ranks. A lot of LGBTQ officers do not serve openly. It must be trying to come in and have to lie about your family life every day. But it is not surprising, because you always have to worry about how it will impact your career. Sometimes people will act differently once they know that you are part of the community.

Regarding how things have been working within the community, as you know, policing has been, kinda, under attack for the last few years, and rightfully so in some instances. I want for people to see me as an individual not a stereotype. I am not your typical police officer, trust

me. I try to meet with people one-on-one period I always believe that having coffee with a cop is the way to go. I want for the community to see me as a human being, not a uniform, not as a badge. The city of Worcester has made me proud. I grew up in the city. I never thought that being an LGBTQ person within the city that you could be out. I am a child of the 60s and 70s. We have changed so much in this community. The first time i saw the pride flag waving outside of the building here, I had tears in my eyes.

A lot of LGBTQ people in the last few years have felt as though they can become police officers. I worked with a person from upstate New York, who got on a job, and I was just invited to her wedding this week. I helped her to be able to become a police officer and to serve openly as a trans woman. I am very happy for her, and very proud of her.

**Chairperson Creamer:** Representation matters. I think having you sit here and elaborate on the work that you do is extremely important. I remember growing up and driving by 290 and seeing the pride flag and consistently feeling like Worcester was an accepting place because of that flag. I think what you do is not only really important for officers who want to serve openly but also for the community.

**Officer McQueen:** I would like to acknowledge chief Sergeant. Anytime we go to an event, he always walks up and shakes my hand. He does this very deliberately to make sure that everybody knows that he recognizes me as a very valuable asset. i thought about retiring last year. The work has been tough. He asked me to stay. And that meant a lot to me. this work is valuable period I've had parents tell me that I have saved their kids because of my openly serving. The LGBTQ plus community it's a very tight community and we talk. We know who is in the community. Most of them know my story. I was at pride one year, waving a flag, and a parent wrote me a beautiful letter telling me how much it changed their lives. Every time you think about leaving, somebody tells you, that you saved their kids life. That is huge. I am very proud of what I have done.

**Commissioner Lewis:** before you go on, I would just like to tell you, Officer McQueen, I commend you. As I sit here and watch you become choked up, I cannot help but emotionally connect with you and your transparency. I want to commend you for the work that you do and the service that you provide to our community. When I sit here and I think, and I listen to you, this is what it should be. This is how officers should be when they interact with individuals in our community because what you do is making a difference. People who wear those badges are able to make a difference when they actually just take the time to connect and you are doing that.

**Commissioner Shemitz:** I am troubled by how big the gap is on how things should be versus how they are. you said that you are not the typical police officer and I wonder if you could paint a picture of the typical police officer in Worcester for us.

**Officer McQueen:** I think that I have life experiences that most officers will never have. To lie about who you are for over 50 years, gives you a different insight. I have had personal issues come up with in my lifetime involving family members, with addiction, which makes me probably more knowledgeable on what families are going through. Unfortunately in the LGBTQ



world we have a lot of people who suffer from addiction, because it becomes a coping mechanism. It's really my life experiences that make me believe that I am different, just that other officers have not lived through what I have lived through.

**Commissioner Robinson:** if we take nothing else from this, “treat me as a person not a stereotype” what should be the main point of this meeting.

**Chairperson Creamer:** last question. What has changed, for better or for worse, since you have started as a liaison?

**Officer McQueen:** I think that there is an anti-policing sentiment throughout the country. I really find that to be challenging. It garners so much negative energy. I work on positive energy. Anyone from the community who would like to sit and talk I will just sit down and have a cup of coffee with them and chitchat and sometimes, I want them to see me as me. I try to make everybody feel comfortable and welcomed. I am working on CIT training with a couple of the officers for LGBTQ factors. We are doing it next Tuesday. I am working with the DAS office or doing another training for those folks because they have asked me to come back and do it again. I tried to make sure I'm available to help anybody as often as I can.

**Commissioner O’Callahan:** you have spoken on, and we have had a conversation about, all of the good things your work has brought to the city. I think the work it's so valuable and commendable to echo my fellow commissioners. Someone had reached out to me, to try to help someone else in the community. it was a trans person in their lives that they cared very much about. There was an assault involved, and obviously there are some issues around reporting something that has happened to you, but on top of that, there is a stigma associated with having to maybe out yourself. They were really looking for someone they could speak to and confidence to get some advice on how to proceed. I was having so much trouble finding a place on the Worcester police department's website to go to be able to direct them to these resources. Is there any way to make that information more visible somehow?

**Officer McQueen:** we are actually in the process of working on that. Writing is something that I struggle with as a person, but we do have something approved and we are just fine tuning it before putting it up on the website under diversity.

**Sargent Leto:** Officer McQueen will have a tab on the Worcester Police Department city website.

#### **4. Municipal Broadband Conversation with Worcester Research Bureau**

- **Boosting Broadband: Access, Performance, Improvements and Funding (April 2022) report.** <https://www.wrrb.org/reports/2022/04/boosting-broadband-access-performance-improvements-and-funding/>
- **Broadening Broadband (July 2020)** <https://www.wrrb.org/reports/2020/07/broadening-broadband/>

- **Affordable Connectivity Program** <https://www.fcc.gov/acp>

**Paul Matthews:** This report is called boosting broadband, it is our second report on broadband. the research bureau is an independent 501 C3 nonprofit. We are in no way affiliated with the city. We are not funded by the city nor are we a city agency. We were first established 37 years ago to provide objective, data based research on the issues faced by greater Worcester. Our role, and our mission, is to inform the public and decision makers.

I have a 7 member executive committee along with our officers and 86 member board of directors. It is a very diverse group representing a broad swatch of the Worcester community. We issued a report in 2020, during the pandemic, called broadening broadband, which helped to call attention to the situation here in Worcester. The task force was requested to look into fees and responses. The school committee also had a standing committee which heard power briefing and ask the city to move forward with developing a cost estimate and finding financial support outside, on the state and federal levels. The Worcester City manager created a broadband task force and set aside ARPA funding. there has been a growing legislative response from the baker administration that parallel the federal funding.

In April we released a new report, Boosting Broadband, which comes in two phases. The first is the actual report. Secondly, we do have an online dashboard that is fully interactive, for the public to utilize. It allows you to look, by visualization, that comparing Worcester speed to other parts of the Commonwealth.

In 2017, 24% of Worcester households did not have a broadband connection. It fell from 24% to 19% in 2020. it is moving in the right direction period it is still a problem but there has been positive movement. The interesting news is that that growth was almost completely driven by cell phone access. If you remove cell phone users only, broadband access is actually shrunk. There is a large divide among age, income, and education. If you have less than a high school education, there is a very marked difference in whether or not you have broadband access. There are still differences to be had by race and ethnicity as well. The broader differences are really between age income, and education. There have been some improvements overall, but there are still 17% or 19,000 households that lack broadband access. Additionally, 5.3% of households lack Internet at all. That translates to 9000 households. Satellite is often offered as a solution, but only 2.7% of households have satellite service for access.

**Chairperson Creamer:** we all know that the broadband attainable at this moment is through one provider. Could some of this data be a result of the high prices?

**Paul Matthews:** I certainly think economic issues and pricing have contributed to this. During the pandemic, there was a dire need for people to make very extreme decisions about food, medicine, housing, and whether or not broadband was at the top of the list for their income bracket and use of their funds was an open question. Yes, I think pricing, and the economics of this situation, can be seen in the income level. In Worcester, charter central has a contract and Worcester to provide cable services. The broadband that they offer is not subject to the municipal contract. They are using the infrastructure they have to offer an additional product to Worcester. But the car draped with the city is over cable. Verizon has a multiyear phased investment to provide services to the city and open it up for public use. If you look at communities that are

served by more than one provider, not only are there benefits in pricing, where the competition drives that, but also it leads to quality improvements and service improvements for speed and in terms of services.

**Chairperson Creamer:** a member of the public has stated that they borrow a hotspot from the Worcester Public Library for 14 days at a time. Well, this is not a solution, it is helpful for the public to know that this is available.

**Paul Matthews:**

Regarding the Worcester public school data: As a cautionary note this is dated, being from March 2021, the Worcester public school system partnered with Education Superhighway which is a national non-profit, and they were able to cross reference student addresses with subscriber addresses. It showed that it was spread out across the city in terms of students without a broadband subscription. It also showed that 34% of Worcester public school students (8500) did not have broadband internet service at home. I would point out that Worcester public schools in the city working together provided 7700 Wi-Fi hotspots to students. They spent \$7 million to purchase 23,000 Chromebooks. The interesting part about this, in terms of reasons why some households were not able to be serviced by a service provider for Internet access, is that the data does not give a reason why they could not be serviced. Some of the potential explanations are financial, a lack of actual cable to the building or unit, and complications for multiunit buildings.

Regarding ACP: the Worcester public school system during a lot of outreach work to families that qualified for a program called ACP which provided a credit to help with the costs of Internet access for their students. Because this is a federal program, the information has already been translated into 14 different languages. In the city of Worcester, we are up to 19,939 households enrolled in the program with nearly 40% living within zip codes 01605 and 01610. Enrollment in this program can be done online, or it could be done with the help of community-based organizations. Additionally, the providers, have an ongoing interest in enrolling subscribers as they come in. I'm told that the service providers are actually steering consumers towards this direction when they enroll.

*Commissioner Shemtiz motioned to send a recommendation to the City Council, through the City Manager, to negotiate in the next cable/broadband contract a provision for households eligible for ACP have their bill capped at the total cost of the allotted federal fundings available to that household. Chairperson Creamer seconded. Passed on roll call vote 6-0-0.*

**Commissioner O'Callahan:** Does an increase in competition decrease the likelihood that we will see municipal broadband in the city? And if so, will there be low cost options of the lower economic status who may have trouble affording it? Are there certain mechanisms that we could use to make it more affordable?

**Paul Matthews:** These excellent points are hard to answer. Verizon has embarked on the level of investment here in the city, but I do not know how that might impact the likelihood of city action. I do think that Verizon's investment is notable in that, and it should have significant benefits. It is intended to be a multi-year effort.

RE How the current infrastructure is performing. I think all of us know that upload speed is critical, in terms of download and upload, from M-Lab, an objective third party source. (See slide presentation for charts showing comparison by month and to other communities.) The chart showing the comparisons between Worcester and Boston, where Boston has multiple service providers, shows how having multiple options for providers causes improvements.

What can be done to improve Broadband in Worcester: the city has been investing in public Wi-Fi. Last year the city's capital improvement plan included \$0.5 million to add another half dozen sites. That is not the solution. But the city is investing in trying to alleviate some of the burden placed on residents. Potential municipal policies that come up in some communities are “Dig Once” policies which, according to a study done on the federal level done by the general accounting office, that showed that whenever a roadway is open for construction dropping a conduit in so that it is open for use by any provider, would prevent needing to reopen the street anytime a provider comes in to look at installing fiber. “Micro-trenching”, or using a shallower and narrower cut to install fiber, is a common tactic, but it is used in a lot of warmer climates and I am not here representing an engineering perspective, but there are genuine foods of thought in the northeast here with our climate regarding the appropriate width and depth of the cut. Both have impact on private investor investment.

*Chairperson Creamer motioned to recommend to the city manager that any new large construction be required to have a public access wi-fi access point. Commissioner Shemitz seconded. Passed on roll call vote 6-0-0.*

**Paul Matthews:** There are existing dark fiber lines in the city. This means that those lines are not being used to their full potential. Some other cities have partnered with the public-private partnerships such as Si-Fi or Entry Point Networks, both of which are national companies.

RE Federal and State Broadband Access Initiatives: Massachusetts legislature has identified as a priority, through the July 2021 report of the Health Equity Task Force, and the October 2021 report of the Senate's Committee on Reimagining Massachusetts Post-Pandemic Resiliency, a response of the creation of the Special Commission on Equity and Access to Telecommunication Service. There are plans to make recommendations to address inequity and the digital divide for students and families with limited access to telecommunications services and it is shared by the Merrimack Valley legislatures with reporting expected later this year. There are also efforts underway to improve consumer protections.

The Baker/Polito administration's broadband initiatives are led by Massachusetts technology collaboratives, Massachusetts broadband institute. The Mass Internet Connect with MassHire career centers provides qualifying job seekers with an Internet subsidy, hotspots, device access, and digital literacy resources. As of September 26, Worcester Career Center served 393 community members with Chromebooks, 147 with digital literacy and 16 with Internet subsidies. The state has also connected with a contractor to develop a statewide broadband coverage map that draws on data from providers and other sources to show serviced and un-serviced locations throughout the Commonwealth.

ARPA Funding. The state created a \$15 million broadband innovation fund to close the digital divide by facilitating equitable broadband service adoption and unserved and underserved communities they are so expanded digital literacy and are empowering communities to you just

digital tools through the provisions of devices, connectivity, and training. The state has set aside another \$2.5 billion for ARPA for later use and the city of Worcester plans on \$5.96 million to be used on broadband infrastructure to quote focus on solutions and potential enhancements through federal funding.

RE: Our Recommendation:

- A city and other community groups, or stakeholders, need to coordinate responses. There is a lot of ongoing pieces regarding this topic. It requires that everybody work together with a degree of coordination and communication. Some should be municipal governments, while others should be community-based groups. Others should include the school department.
- The task force that was set up can assist the city in reviewing responses and looking at operational feasibility, cost effectiveness and access to outside funding.
- Private sector initiatives, like Verizon's, can be looked out relative to the benefits of the city.
- Given the complexity, and the technology elements of this, it is acceptable for the city to draw an ASI technical assistance.
- At the Bureau, we are generalists, we did throw ourselves into this, but I am by no means suggesting that I am an expert on this particular topic.
- Dig-Once and Micro-Trenching should be considered.
- An ongoing investment in public Wi-Fi should be strengthened.
- Whenever possible, areas of higher need should be prioritized.
- Given the school department outreach, there is an opportunity for coordinated community education and outreach and should be supported and expanded by community stakeholders so that it does not fall squarely to them.
- ARPA and municipal funding should be utilized strategically to position the city for further state and federal funding in the state should prioritize gateway cities in their broadband access initiatives using \$50 million in appropriated ARPA funds.
- Additionally, the state should consult municipal governments on an ongoing basis to determine how best to support their residence.

State Broadband Innovation Fund: this one was administered by the Massachusetts technology collaborative Massachusetts broadband institute and released in September period the digital equity partnerships program with partners working with local and regional entities focus on these six main areas, Wi-Fi access initiative, public space Internet modernization initiative, connectivity initiative for economic hardship, digital literacy initiative, device distribution and refurbishment program, and education, outreach and adoption. that's fine. I and I'm finishing up my meeting minutes for my internship, and then heading to campus. I am going to finish the trial brief edits and print out financial statements for India to sign. Victor may be joining us he is not sure yet.

## **5. Follow up discussion on voter access**

The WRRB's 2020 Voter Report examined data on race, ethnicity, housing, age, and geography. In the 2019 municipal election there was a 17% turnout. That is 17,500 voters out of

the 100,600 registered voters. Of the 2019 voters 60% also voted in 2017 and 48% also voted in 2015. 29% of these voters were voting in their 5<sup>th</sup> straight election. 63% of the voters were in single-family homes. In terms of age, residents over the age of 55 were 62% of the electorate in 2019, but only 37% of the registered voters and only account for 30% of voting age residents.

Only 16% turned out in the 2021 election but 64.4% voted in November 2020 general elections. Underrepresented groups in terms of the municipal elections include younger residents, occupants of multiunit housing, the first-time potential voters, non-white residents, and residents of low turnout areas such as downtown.

#### **6. Adjournment at 8:00pm**

Our next meeting will be November 7, at 6pm in person at City Hall and over Webex.