

City of Worcester
Accessibility Advisory Commission
Tuesday, August 17, 2021, 4:30 PM 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., Fitzroy Hall, Nancy Garr- Colzie, Darya Karuna, Linda Larrivee, Elizabeth Myska, Christina Parissi, Joseph Prochilo, Stephen Stolberg

Staff: Jayna Turcek, Dawn E. Clark

Guests: Kristin Hartness, Executive Director of Canines for Kids, and Elana Regan
Charles Goodwin, Director Worcester Emergency Communications and Management
Massachusetts Representative James O'Day

Call to order, instructions for virtual meeting, introductions

Chairperson Bureau called the meeting to order at 4:30pm and requested Director Turcek to provide the technology instructions for public access to the meeting. Commissioners then introduced themselves.

Approval of July 20, 2021 minutes*

Commissioner Nancy Garr- Colzie moved to approve the July 20, 2021 minutes as written. Commissioner Linda Larrivee seconded the motion. All approved by roll call.

Conversation on service dogs and guide dogs *

Ms. Kristin Hartness is the Executive Director of Canines for Kids. She and Elana Regan, a student intern who uses a service dogs shared the

evening's presentation with a slide show. Ms. Hartness offered Commission members the opportunity to ask or share specific or personal questions/information she would be available after the presentation.

Slides, some with short videos included, were shared as follows:

- What is a service dog? A service animal is a dog, or miniature horse, that is individually trained to do work. The trained work or task must be directly related to the person's disability, comfort and emotional support do not qualify
There is slightly different terminology used in the Airline Carrier and Fair Housing Laws, but tie back to the Americans with Disability Act.
- Tasks taught the dog that directly impact the disability: Guide & Find, Turn lights on and off, Open doors, Alerting to specific sounds, Alert to oncoming seizures, Retrieve objects and much more. The silent video described by Ms. Hartness shows various dogs performing these tasks. Then Ms. Regan described the tasks her dogs does for her. She guides upon verbal directional commands, guides through crowded spaces of people and things, stop if there is a tripping hazard. The dog has been trained to find items such as chairs, doors and other common things in a room, assist with pedestrian walk signals. The dog knows the basics like stairs elevators etc. Ms. Regan can train the dog to identify new objects as well.
- Guide and Stability- There are two videos on this slide to connect these tasks because visually they look like they are doing the same thing. Both dogs wear harnesses. A guide dog harness will be angled in front so he/she can guide and lead. The harness for stability is straight up and down offering stability when leaned against. After showing the first video Ms. Regan shared the difference between using a guide dog and a white cane is the dog would alert the user to stop if there was danger. A white cane

would not offer this option. The second video shows Ms. Hartness working with her dog to stay stable by leaning on her.

- Access - Locations which serve the general public must allow service dogs to accompany people with disabilities in all areas the public is allowed to go - Service dogs must be under the handler's control Ms. Regan explains she takes her dog to school. Any public place she can go her dog is allowed as long as the dog is under the control of the handler and leashed (harnessed or tethered). The dog can be off leash to do a task under verbal control and when finished must be leashed. A video with a school employee expressing positive remarks on how successfully a service dog has adjusted to by all in school is included in this slide.
- Fetch and retrieve slide – Dog performing tasks: Towel being taken out of the fryer, dog picking up a drop key in parking lot, dog picking up a pen in an office, dog in training picking up shoes, dog in an office picking up a leash, dog in school picking up a pen that fell off a desk, dog in a kitchen picking up a fork, dog in an office picking up a quarter, dog taking a towel off a towel rack. Dogs are trained to take the object to the handler at a height the handler can safely take avoiding the risk of the person falling.
- Allergies and fear of dogs are not valid reasons for denying access to a person using a service dog.
- Service dogs cannot be protective or aggressive –These dogs cannot bark, growl or bare teeth. A dog can be protective without these kinds of behavior.
- Who can use a service dog? Adults and children with physical and psychological disabilities may qualify for a service dog. All candidates must be evaluated individually. Ms. Regan spoke to the evaluation process. There is paper work. She went to the eye doctor to verify she is legally blind. One must be legally blind to have a guide dog. Provide information what she use to travel and how. Also medical information. She then had an interview with staff from the dog guide agency

including a walk with her to judge her pace etc. Then they talked about what kind of dog she would like. Then there was a lot of waiting. It took about two years for her dog to be trained. She went to California where the dog had been trained. She had a two week training on how to use the dog. Ms. Regan had chosen this agency. She described this as an intense process taking about a year. There are other dogs and training at this particular agency. The minimum training hours once one has a dog is between 80-100 hours.

- Responsibility - Facilities (schools, restaurants, etc.) are not responsible for the service animal. The handler or in the case of a child under 14 or someone not able a third trained party usually a parent is responsible.
- Hospitals, Doctors and Service Dogs- Remember
 - Service dogs must be under control of the handler
 - Hospitals, like all facilities, are not responsible for service dogs
 - This means if you are unable to control your service dog while at the hospital you bring a handler or do not bring your service dog
- Service Dogs at School - Service dogs must be under control of the Handler; Schools, like all facilities, are not responsible for service dogs; This means if the student is unable to control his or her service dog the family can provide a handler or the service dog stays at home Ms. Regan spoke to being is school. She is responsible for bringing everything the dog needs including water, poop bags, etc. She needs to make a judgment about when to take her and when the situation would be to leave her at home.
- Respect -Do not touch or talk to a service dog without permission from the handler. If distracted and are working they could make a mistake that could be dangerous for the handler. Service dogs are tools first. An example used was eyeglasses. One is not likely to take off another's eyeglasses and start talking to them.

- 2 questions: These are the two questions any one can ask and every service dog user must be able to answer – 1. Is the dog required because of a disability? 2. What task has the dog been trained to do that directly relates to the person’s disability?
- Contact Information: Canines for Disabled Kids, 65 James St, Suite 210, Worcester MA 01603, 978 422 5299, info@caninesforkids.org, www.caninesforkids.org, www.facebook.com/Caninesforkids, <https://twitter.com/k94kids>, <https://www.instagram.com/caninesfordisabledkids/>
Canines For Kids work with both children and adults to find best Dog Service agency that meets there need. There may be scholarship funds available for those under 18 years of age.

Information gleaned from responses to questions:

- There are over 200 agencies in the United States that train service dogs. Like choosing college, it is important to find one that best meets the individual’s needs. A service dog may last between seven and ten years on average.
- Agencies may specialize in training particular skills. The list at Canines for Kids has about 35 agencies the train for those with hearing issues. All work with adults some work with children. Again agencies target specifics example: state resistance.
- 99% of the agencies require the individual do funding raising to cover the cost of the training. Training is very expensive. Cost may be one of the factors in deciding which agency to use. A guide dog costs between \$45,000 and \$55,000 over two years. A service dog costs about \$35,000 over a period of two years.
- Canines For Kids work with individuals to evaluate an agency that meets his/her needs.

- There are no federal regulations on the programs that need to be met. There are groups worldwide developing standards with an effort to weed out any disreputable group or individual that might use negative reinforcement as a training method. Look for open communications and customer reviews. Ms. Hartness emphasizes Canines For Kids service is free and would help identify agencies that meet the needs of individuals.
- The two most common breeds are Golden Retrievers and Labrador Retrievers. A mixed breed called a “Glab”, not a breed but combination is becoming common. Used 85% - 90% and most forgiving and willing to work with people with disabilities and equipment. Not so good for those needing stability. These breeds have fur rather than hair so allergy becomes a concern. A poodle may then be used. The further away from those dogs bred for the training the higher the failure rate. Smaller dogs with high energy are trimmed for hearing assistance have a high success rate.
- A person could see up to ten dogs in a lifetime is started using as a child without taking a break. For various reasons there may be a break between service dogs and would expect about 100 hours training with the individual after getting the dog. Currently there is no way of knowing how many service dogs there are in the United States. They are working with Massachusetts to do this and branching to the federal government. The estimates for service dogs is 50,000 and above. The thought in Massachusetts the count should be with the local municipality documenting when dog licenses are received. Not all municipalities distinguish between service dogs and emotional support animals. At last count the thought was about 10,000 service dogs in the state.
- Dogs and retirement – Some stay with handlers who have the ability to care for them. Some stay with family or friends. Some stay with people who have been trained to

care for an aging dog. The handler most times have a say in this.

- How does a person who needs a dog get a dog? Guide dog agencies have been around for a long time and have acquired endowments which can help.
- Dog goes where the handler goes. Small living space should not be the primary reason for not getting a service dog. Also don't wait until "I am disabled enough". Enjoy life, the dog is there to help. The MSPCA estimates it costs between \$100 and \$150 a month to care for a dog this includes feeding and medical costs.
- There are resources for those who cannot afford a service dog. One agency with endowment funds brings cost of dog down to \$3,000. Different clubs may support funding. Medical care of dogs are eligible s part of a person's medical tax deduction if claiming these costs.

Ms. Hartness thanked the Commission as did the Chairperson thanked her. Ms. Turcek will send her contact information to those at this meeting.

SMART911 presentation

Charles Goodwin, Director Worcester Emergency Communications and Management has been with the city for about a month and came from Natick.

He provided slides about SMART 911. The City purchased this program for the residents, employees, visitors and is free to use by the resident. Some people call it a code red system. It works in coordination with Alert Worcester. It also can be called a reverse call alerting residents to issues immediately effecting the city.

SMART911 can be understood as the opposite. It is a way for the caller to share information for a personal profile about the caller with the city before 911 may be needed beyond what would automatically come up

on 911 calls received like phone number, address. Data provided is the person's choice and only accessible when 911 is called. There is only about a 30 minute window that the data is available to give to first responders. This is an opportunity to shared information that may not be able to be shared when 911 is called.

The personal profile is available to all communities who have SMART911 service.

There is also an application with this program that woks in two ways. Personal information can be updated and alerts from the city can be received. If you are in another community the community alert would be received through the app.

Also noted: Text to 91 is available in every community in the state of Massachusetts.

Personal profiles re filed by phone numbers so a second profile is not able to be entered unless possibly trying to coordinate with a member of same household.

Notice and discussion regarding MA proposed legislation [H.446](#) and [S.184](#), “An Act expanding wheelchair warranty protections for consumers with disabilities”

Representative O'Day expressed his personal interest in filing H,446. People need to have access to their wheelchairs to live quality lives.

This Bill had a virtual hearing in late July with significant testimony from people having to live life without their wheelchair for too long. Disability Law Center provided additional information for the legislative Committee on Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure. This Bill intends to address issues about time sensitive repairs. There are always opportunity to strengthen the Bill. He is hopeful for a Bill that will provide a more timely service for the consumer.

Commissioner Prochilo stated that the Bill refers to a 2 to 3 year guarantee. Should the Bill move to the 5 year period? Representative O'Day was surprised to hear about this gap given the number of people that have worked on this Bill. The current repair process can take up to six months plus another time frame to get the corrected wheelchair to the person. He requested specific questions like these be forwarded to his office for review with other entities familiar with the details.

Thank you to the Representative were made.

Election of Officers

Chairperson Robert Bureau and Vice Chairperson Joe Prochilo expressed interest in continuing in their current roles. Commissioners expressed agreement. Commissioner Garr-Colzie moved to continue the current officers. Commissioner Larrivee seconded the motion. All approved by roll call.

Congratulations: Chairperson Robert Bureau and Vice Chairperson Joe Prochilo.

There were no nominations for the Office of Secretary whose main function is to keep the record of the Commission primarily through minutes.

Notice: MA COVID-19 vaccine

- **Walk-in Equity Clinics for COVID 19 vaccines Wednesdays at the Worcester Public Library- Need an ASL Interpreter?**
Please call Michelle at 774-303-6976 or email mortizocasio.socialwork@gmail.com to request an interpreter or reasonable accommodation.
- **Vaccine clinics** <https://www.mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine>
- **Homebound vaccination program** www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-homebound-vaccination-program

- **FAQ-Transportation to COVID-19 Vaccine Appointments for MassHealth Members and Health Safety Net Patients**

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/transportation-to-covid-19-vaccine-appointments-for-masshealth-members-and-health-safety-net-0/download>

Review of AAB notices and applications:

Nothing was received

Notice for upcoming agenda items

September: Worcester Master Streets Plan/ADA sidewalks

Announcements:

- **WRTA Transportation Advisory Planning Group**, No meeting in August
- **Next Accessibility Advisory Commission virtual meeting:** September 21, 2021, 4:30pm

Adjournment:

Commissioner DeLage moved to adjourn and Commissioner Hall seconded. All approved by roll call at 6:50pm.

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