

**City of Worcester Accessibility Advisory Commission
Tuesday, December 19, 2023, 4:30 PM Meeting Minutes**

**City Hall, Levi Lincoln Chamber (3rd floor)
Hybrid Meeting**

ASL interpreters onsite and video

https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_MTJhNDdmNjQtMGZlMy00ZWVlLThhZWQtZiQ0MjVhMjBhNTVh%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%22f25998dd-1be6-42c6-a44c-8785f3e6deb6%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%2202af705d-5ebe-4000-83cf-64efc45b8c33%22%7d

Meeting number: 271 185 130 443 Password: SEg7KZ

**Join by phone: 469-998-7682 Access code: 397 384
563#**

Attendance:

Members Present: Robert Bureau, James Delage, John Finn, Jr., Darya Karuna, Elizabeth Myska, Joseph Prochilo, Stephen Stolberg

Members Absent:

Staff: Victor Perez, Dawn E. Clark

Guests: Communications and Training Manager Lilia Melikechi and Assistant Director for Community Services Jeff Dougan from the Massachusetts Office on Disability

Call to order, instructions for virtual meeting, introductions

Chairperson Bureau requested Director Perez provide the technology instructions for public access to the meeting. A unanimous roll call vote was taken to start the

meeting at 4:33 pm. Chairperson Bureau welcomed Commissioner Joseph Prochilo as a member of the Commission.

Approval of November 11, 2023 meeting minutes

Commissioner Prochilo moved to approve the November 11, 2023 minutes as written and seconded by Commissioner Myska. The motion was unanimously approved on roll call.

Discussion with Communications and Training Manager Lilia Melikechi and Assistant Director for Community Services Jeff Dougan from the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD)

Lilia Melikechi and Jeff Dougan shared presenting programs and resources MOD provides. MOD is a very small State Agency with about 15 staff members.

The Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) provides neutral **information**, **guidance**, and **training** on architectural access and disability-related civil rights and obligations. They help people with disabilities understand their rights. They also help cities, towns, state government agencies, and places that serve the public understand how to comply with disability laws and regulations and be accessible to people with disabilities.

MOD supports people with disabilities, housing providers, employers, businesses that serve the public, etc with:

Information

- Clarification of disability civil rights laws and how they apply to different situations, including:
 - Fair housing
 - Reasonable accommodations at work
 - Service animals
 - Architectural access

Guidance

- Applying for vocational rehabilitation (VR) and independent living (IL) services and issues
- Addressing issues and filing complaints effectively
- Site visits

Training

- Community Access Monitor (CAM) training – Expanded for FY’24 – now three parts.
- Emergency preparedness for individuals with disabilities
- Quarterly Tea with MOD: Hot topics in the disability community
- Disability and Employment workshop series

MOD supports Municipalities:

Municipal ADA Coordinators

- Role of the ADA Coordinator
- Municipal ADA compliance
- Architectural access requirements

Municipal ADA Improvement Grants

- Planning grants
- Project grants

Commissions on Disability

- Establishing a Commission
- Understanding your role and relevant laws

- Statewide networking meetings

• mass.gov/info-details/commissions-on-disability

- What is a Commission on Disability?
- Contact your local Commission on Disability
- Start a Commission on Disability
- Important laws for Commissions on Disability to know
- Helpful resources and information for Commissions on Disability
- Attend a statewide Commission on Disability meeting
- Invite MOD to your Commission on Disability meeting
- Update your COD contact information with MOD

The next quarterly Tea:
Architectural Access Updates

- February 13, 2024
- 1 –2 PM
- Massachusetts updates, federal trends, and pending state legislation
- Cohosted by the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council (MDDC)
- Visit mass.gov/MOD to sign up

Contact MOD

MOD-Info@mass.gov

617-727-7440

mass.gov/MOD

1 Ashburton Place Room 1305

Boston, MA 02108

Question:

Was the join meeting between Scituate and Hingham strictly an Awareness meeting or was it a recruitment effort?

MOD: Recruitment was a byproduct. We invited other groups working with people with disabilities and local Commissions. It is more like a resource fair.

Question: Do you know how many disability-related commissioner there are?

MOD: There are about 200 local Commissions on the website list of Commissions. That's on the uptick. In 2017, there were 95 Commissions.

Question:

On-line housing applications in Worcester can pose a challenge for the blind. Do MOD training address sensory disabilities in particular? Or are there fact sheets that can be given to folks who are monitoring development in Worcester?

MOD: The relevant standards are for multiple disabilities. A lot of standards address mobility issues. There is general information about housing accessibility on MOD website. However, there are so many different situations that people should call MOD as these arise. MOD needs to develop "Fact Sheets" to address these issues.

Mr. Dugan informed the Commission that the new "Rights of Way" regulations have been published in the Federal Register. Thus, being one step closer to being adopted by a federal agency. This will have a huge positive impact for people with disabilities using the sidewalks/streets.

Update on Chief Equity Officer hiring process

The interview process has been completed with a handful of candidates. Several groups of people were involved Commission representatives including Chairperson Bureau, City Staff, community partners and the City Manager. Once the Chief Equity Officer is in place the next step will be to hire the remaining 7 members of

the 9 member Department. Mr. Perez and Ms. Clark are the current members. Hopefully an announcement can be shared at the next meeting.

[New Update: Emergency Winter Shelter Open to Serve Worcester's Homeless](#)
[Emergency Winter Shelter to Open at Former RMV Site Downtown | City of Worcester, MA \(worcesterma.gov\)](#)

The new shelter opened a week ago operated by Southern Middlesex Opportunity Council, Inc. (SMOC). This is a sixty-bed shelter working 24 hours a day through the winter months. This is a temporary shelter and serves all people.

There was the hope that a representative from SMOC would come tonight to inform the Commission about services being provided, accessibility features, common issues etc. This was not able to happen and hope to have a representative present at the next meeting.

A member of the public spoke to the need for adequate housing and shelter summarizing the current situation and history of shelter in the city. Mr. Perez appreciated the comments. He offered to meet with the member of the public after the meeting to get more specific information about issues one individual reportedly encountered in seeking entry to the temporary shelter.

Suggestions for future agenda items

- Follow-up on RMV Shelter and Stafford Street Housing
- Bus Shelters in the middle of Mill Street may not be accessible for people using wheelchairs – Check the design for Bike lane and getting to bus shelters
- Review possible projects for FY'24 MOD Grant for August 2024 submission
- Mobility Action Plan – tap Ms. Goodwin, Dept. Transportation and Mobility
- Making sure there is communication access for Deaf who are homeless.

Review of AAB notices and applications: None

Announcements:

- **Next Accessibility Advisory Commission meeting: Tuesday, January 16, 2024 - 4:30pm**

- **WRTA Transportation Advisory Planning Group: Thursday, December 27, 2023 at 1- 2:30pm**

Adjournment:

Meeting was adjourned at 6:04 pm by a unanimous roll call vote moved by Commissioner Bureau and seconded by Commissioner Myska. Approved by roll call.

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