

**City of Worcester Accessibility Advisory Commission  
Tuesday, June 20, 2023, 4:30 PM Meeting Minutes**

**City Hall, Levi Lincoln Chamber (3<sup>rd</sup> floor)  
Hybrid Meeting**

**<http://www.worcesterma.gov/video-on-demand>  
ASL interpreters on-site and over video**

**Attendance:**

**Members Present:** Robert Bureau, John Finn, Jr., Darya Karuna, Linda Larrivee,  
Elizabeth Myska, Stephen Stolberg

**Members Absent:** James Delage, Jully Khattar

**Staff:** Jayna Turchek, Dawn E. Clark

**Guests:** Robin Schwartz, Manager – Worcester Consumer Rights Program  
Robert Antonelli, Worcester Assistant Commissioner of Parks  
Sarah Plutnicki, CMRPC Resiliency Planner and Coordinator of the  
Accessible and Inclusive Trails Project

**Call to order, instructions for virtual meeting, introductions**

Chairperson Bureau requested Director Turchek provide the technology instructions for public access to the meeting. A unanimous roll call vote was taken to start the meeting at 4:50pm.

**Approval of April 11, 2023 meeting minutes\***

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

**Presentation by the Worcester Consumer Rights Program\***

**(Robin Schwartz) [www.worcesterma.gov/human-rights/know-your-rights/consumer-rights](http://www.worcesterma.gov/human-rights/know-your-rights/consumer-rights)**

Robin Schwartz, Program Manager, presented on the work of the Worcester Consumer Rights Program (WCRP). This program was part of the Office of Human Rights and Accessibility in City Hall Room 101 and has recently moved to the Senior Center on Providence Street.

She presented by way of a PowerPoint:

### **1. Who we are and what we do?**

- Created in 2016
- One of 18 local consumer programs (LCPs) in Massachusetts. The LCP initiative began in 1973.
- A consumer advocacy group that works in cooperation with and is funded by the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office
- Voluntary program with no cost to the consumer or business
- Staff consists of: Program Manager, 2 Program Assistants, 2 summer Interns

### **2. Supported Communities**

WCRP serves the residents of Worcester and neighboring towns of Auburn, Berlin, Blackstone, Boylston, Clinton, Cochituate, Douglas, Grafton, Holden, Hopedale, Leicester, Medway, Mendon, Milford, Millbury, Millis, Millville, Northborough, Northbridge, Paxton, Shrewsbury, Southborough, Sutton, Upton, Uxbridge, West Boylston, and Westborough.

Worcester's program has added a few towns this year. The Metro-West Program closed and then another agency reopened and served fewer towns. Worcester has the towns that are not now served by Metro-West.

### **3. What Does the WCRP Do?**

- Mediate consumer disputes and assist in finding resolutions. Make appropriate referrals if needed.
- Promote awareness and education through community outreach.
- Provide additional outreach programs during the annual National Consumer Protection Week in March.

- Direct residents who have not filed a complaint to appropriate agencies.

#### 4. Common themes in consumer complaints:

Car Sales and Financing  
Defective Products  
Home Improvement Contracts  
Consumer Fraud  
Debt Collection  
Telemarketing Fraud  
Utility Bills  
Identity Theft

#### 5. Consumer Rights Agencies

**Worcester Consumer Rights Program**  
Human Rights and Accessibility Office  
Room 101, Worcester City Hall, 455 Main Street  
Worcester, MA 01608  
*P: (508)799-8486      F: (508)799-1218*

**Attorney General's Office**  
**Central Massachusetts**  
10 Mechanic Street, Suite 301, Worcester, MA 01608  
<https://www.mass.gov/how-to/file-a-consumer-complaint>  
*P: (508) 792-7600      F: (508) 795-1991*

**Federal Trade Commission**  
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 205580  
<https://www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov>

#### 6. Trends

The WCRP has seen a rise in complaints:

- From elderly and disabled consumers
- From consumers who don't speak English

(The program utilizes Language Line Interpreter Service. This service is helpful. There can do a conference call to include a business and the consumer with interpreter)

- For auto-related problems (could be 40% to 50% of complaints)

**7. Program specific results for through the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of FY 2023**  
**Worcester Office of Human Rights and Disabilities (LCP)**

Cases Received	609
Cases Closed	596
Open Cases as or 6/1/2023	174
Amount saved/Recovered	\$ 271,106.62
Resolved	324 (52%)
Unresolved	255 (43%)
Other	3%
Average case length	71 days

**Totals for the 18 Local Consumer Programs**

Cases Received	4725
Cases Closed	4654
Cases Resolved	2277 49%
Cases Unresolved	2135 46%
Other	2%
Avg. Case length (days)	93 days
Total recovered/Saved	<b>\$ 1,472,021.94</b>

## **8. National Consumer Protection Week**

- March 6 – 10, 2023
- 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Local Consumer Programs
- WCRP Events throughout March:
- Tabling at local libraries and senior centers
- Constant Contact E-mails
- Presentations

## **9. Useful Tips**

**Know your credit score before applying for a loan**

[www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com)

**Search the vehicle history report before you make a purchase**

**Ask dealer to provide a free report**

[www.carfax.com](http://www.carfax.com)

[www.nicb.org](http://www.nicb.org)

**Report or dispute any unusual activity on your credit report immediately**

Equifax: 888-202-4025

TransUnion: 855-681-3169

Experian: 888-397-3742

**Verify that your contractor is licensed in MA**

[www.mas.gov/ocabr/licensee](http://www.mas.gov/ocabr/licensee)

**Report unfair business practices**

[www.bbb.org/central-western-massachusetts](http://www.bbb.org/central-western-massachusetts)

[www.consumerfinance.gov/complaint](http://www.consumerfinance.gov/complaint)

**Get your warranty information before making a purchase.**

The phone number will be changing right now the program can be reached at 508-799-8486. Complaints can also be submitted on-line at the Mass Attorney General's website.

Questions: When it comes to mediation, do you educate?

Response: Yes, as well as provide appropriate referrals.

**Annual Parks master plan and construction update \***

[www.worcesterma.gov/parks](http://www.worcesterma.gov/parks)

Assistant Commissioner Robert Antonelli of the City Public Works and Parks Department gave the following presentation.

**Construction Projects – Projected Start date**

**Green Hill Park Community Garden - Summer 2023**

The contract has just gone out. The baseline for this project is a new community garden near the barn. The current garden is not accessible. The plan is to move this garden and build a greenhouse and raised accessible beds with stable walking surface. Accessible parking will be part of this plan. This renovation includes two other updates: 1. Redo of roadway coming into Greenhill Park. 2. Build another greenhouse to raise plants that will be used for city properties. Site will be fenced and have security cameras like all sites presented at this meeting.

This piece of land was the site of the Green Family Mansion. Once this structure was no longer sound it was torn down. Same happened with the park facility building that replaced the mansion. There is a wall here that will be spruced up and the area be made accessible.

The Park is generally open dawn to dusk. Each person with a bed will have a key or code.

Eventually there will be a way to recognize the historical significance of this area.

**Tacoma Street Playground Improvements - Summer 2023**

This project is a combination of funds from federal grant, tax levy and ARPA sources. A playground will be built. There use to be a basketball court, playground and swimming pool that outlived their useful life.

A field with a synthetic floor will be constructed which will include soccer, field hockey and women's lacrosse. A playground with a spray structure will be created with new parking and a dog park. Lighting will be LED lighting and the water is recirculating. The lighting will allow the use of this facility to extend to about 10PM. Residential units are at a distance.

The bid will go out soon with the plan to break ground at the end of August. All walkways and amenities are accessible.

### **University Park Spray Facility - Summer 2023**

This is a land and water federal grant received with tax levy dollars to build a spray park with concrete surface. where the old school used to be on Gates Street side of park. If enough dollars a playground would also be created. Street parking available. The topography may be difficult for accessibility so there is one HP space to be consistent with other parks with this situation. Walkways will either be concrete or asphalt

At both the Tacoma Street and University Park the bath houses have three individual accessible stalls with baby changing table and changing area for adults. Playground surface will be poured in place rubber. Playground equipment still being determined. Some options would be a merry-go-round like Polar Park and transfer stations. He will have to check if any equipment is specific for those visually impaired.

As for music/nose makers, there needs to be a balance with the neighbors.

### **Bell Hill Improvements - Summer 2023**

This is a redesign of the facility. Plan to build out the basketball court to meet professional regulations and add lighting; redesign the parking area to have a better flow in/around the site from Belmont Street and additional parking; update the multi-use stall (with baby changing stations) restrooms in the current 1970's building plus a new roof and color both in and out; upgrade the 17-year-old playground equipment. This redesign will help people with mobility issues get to the water more easily.

### **South Worcester Sport Court Renovations - Summer 2023**

This is the next phase of the park. The basketball and handball courts are in place. The handball court currently has sidewalls that the city has taken down in other parks for two reasons -1. They become a catchall for debris 2. They are hiding sites

for inappropriate activity. Plans include: the wall being replaced with a single regulation wall working with handball and regulatory groups; accessible access from Cambridge/Camp Streets and lot by the building; repainting the courts.

### **East Park Little League Renovations - Summer 2023**

Several years ago, the Joe Demario Little League Field was relocated to East Park, when the Mount Carmel Church and property were sold for housing. The renovation plan is to create more parking when other teams play so restaurants and residents using Shrewsbury Street for parking will not be impacted. Dug outs, walkways and roadways are accessible. There is a plan to build a facility with restrooms. Additional lighting will be added.

### **Duffy Playground Safety Surfacing Renovation - Summer 2023**

This facility has an existing playground. It has been 10 years since the poured in place surface was done. This renovation involves replacing the surface with poured in place surfacing and repairing or updating playground equipment.

## **Master Plans**

### **Lake View Playground**

The facility is heavily used by the Coburn Street School children during the school year. There have been some complaints. The basketball courts are along the neighbor's side. The intention of this work is to move the mail use functions to the middle of the property. Changing from half to full basketball court and expanding the playground. There was community input, and the design is from the fifth and sixth grade students. As to the lighting it is better to have lighting to manage rather than relying on a streetlight which is not manageable.

Commission comment: was wonderful to have the students involved.

This was done through the civics class giving the students how projects get done in the city. His information is on the Parks website.

### **149 West Boylston Drive**

Coming south on 190 on the right where the lake is next to the highway, the parcel is right after that. The city of Worcester has a 99 year lease with MassDOT. This project will not be developed until Indian Lake Park and Morgan Landing is complete. The neighborhood school children developed six different designs for this parcel. The neighborhood residents were invited to make their choice of designs using sticky notes. Park's staff condensed this information resulting in the design presented here. There is a playground, picnic area, open lawn, and fishing peers.



There is a spillway into Indian Lake that needed to be accessible for DPW sewer staff to be able to manage the gate. There will be accessible picnic tables and benches. One hp space out of the 12 parking spaces. The entrance is tight. Cars coming in yield to those going out. A Firetruck is able to enter the space.

### **Miscellaneous**

#### **Mobile Accessible Elevated Stage**

This stage was brought through a grant in the 1990's and is not accessible. It as a set for stairs and about 4 ft. high. Staff continues to repair it, but parts can not be found.

There are a couple of options to making it accessible. 1. A lift attached to the stage. Staff has seen it in catalog, but not in person. 2. A ramping system – which is probably the better way to go. There is no electronics to deal with. It comes in pieces and a little bit more manageable. The price point increases as things like covers and hydraulics are added. This is a chance to open discussion with the Commission as they are not ready for any decision to be made. We want everyone to be able to use this stage.

This stage is used frequently as a viewing stage, parade vehicle, concerts at University Park etc. The Park Department have other needs so if a grant could be secured for part of all he cost the city would be closer to having an accessible stage for rent.

Ms. Turcek pointed out that in the City's special events permit packet, there is a disclaimer that the city's mobile stage is not accessible. Organizers for events are still required to ensure their event is accessible.

Commented [CDE1]:

One of the ideas for funding is the FY'24 Municipality ADA Grant Program for projects. The Commission would want to endorse a grant submission for this funding. This grant opens in August and the deadline for proposal submission date is unknown.

Commissioner Karuna moved to support the concept of submitting a proposal for the FY'24 Municipal ADA Grant for an accessible mobile stage. Commissioner Larrivee seconded the motion. All approved by roll call.

**Discussion regarding the Central MA Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) Accessible Trails project \***

Sarah Plutnicki, CMRPC Resiliency Planner and Coordinator of the Accessible and Inclusive Trails Project made a PowerPoint presentation.

1. Project Overview

**Goal:** The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission seeks to create an Inclusion and Accessibility Trail Guide. This guide will serve as a toolkit to assess and improve knowledge, accessibility, and utilization of trails across the region. Through the development and implementation of a trails assessment toolkit, it is our hope to increase outdoor recreational opportunities for all populations.

*Accessibility* – The quality of being easy to obtain or use; the quality of being easily understood or appreciated.

*Inclusion* - The practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized; a state of being valued, respected, and supported.

*Improve the understanding of what obstacles marginalized communities face when accessing trails and provide recommendations to better support these groups so that it is easier to use trails.*

This project has been made possible with MassTrails Grant funding provided by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation.

2. **a. This is NOT a revision to any accessible design standards.**
- b. This will NOT be a mandatory assessment.**
- c. This WILL take a holistic approach to improving inclusion on trails.**

What obstacles prevent someone from accessing a trail before getting there?

What obstacles create a hinderance once someone is on a trail?

### 3. **Inclusion & Accessibility Toolkit Overview**

This Inclusion and Accessibility Toolkit aims to

- a. Create a Rating/Grading System for Trails.
- b. Provide Recommendations for Improving Access to Trails.
- c. Develop Mapping Criteria to Highlight Accessibility Concerns along Trails.
- d. Demonstrate Examples of the Toolkit Being Utilized on Seven (7) Trails in the Region

### 4. **Potential Users of the Toolkit**

Local Governments

Land Trusts

Trail Committees

Other Landowners

Trail Users

### 5. **Youth Trails Stewardship Pilot Program**

*Encourage our youth to be out on the trails!*

*Partnering with YWCA*

- a. Assist with our Inclusion & Accessibility Toolkit
  - Develop Ranking Criteria
  - Perform Trail Audits
- b. Assist with General Trail Mapping Activities
- c. Lead a Trail Walk in the Region (All Ages Trail Event)

### 6. **Accessibility Considerations**

#### **a. Knowledge & Awareness of a Trail**

Do you know the trail exists? Is there a map?

#### **b. Location of and Transportation Access to a Trail**

Is the trail close by? Is there a parking lot? A bus stop?

**c. Physical Features of a Trail**

What is the surface material of the trail? How wide is it?

**d. Comfort While on a Trail**

Do you feel safe on the trail? Do you know where you are going?

**7. Trail Dialogue Events**

**Dialogue #1 (2/28/2023) Brainstorm attributes to add to the rubric for each rubric category**

**Dialogue #2 (6/12/2023) Stakeholders give initial feedback, revisions and suggestions on draft rubric**

**Dialogue #3**

**-Upcoming, looking at September 2023 to go over trail audit results and overview finalized grading rubric**

**Stakeholders invited include trail organizations, non-profit advocacy organizations, environmental organizations, local disability advocates (well over 200 stakeholders)**

**8. Next Steps**

Finalize Draft Rubric

- a. Apply comments from dialogue #2 to draft rubric
- b. Additional literature review on best practices Youth Stewardship Program
- c. Form group of youth stewards
- d. Hold discussions on trail use and accessibility
- e. Train on GPS-use, trail walks, etc.

Trail Audit Trial Run

- f. Perform trail audit on 7 trails in the region

- g. NEED volunteers and permission to audit trails
- h. Complete audits by end of July/beginning of August

Toolkit Completed, Presentation of Findings

- i. Finalize toolkit
- j. Present findings in early Fall 2023
- k. Project completed by December 2023

If you are interested in helping CMRPC carry out trail audits using the grading rubric OR if you are a trail manager that would be interested in having us audit one of your trails, please contact Sarah Plutnicki [splutnicki@cmrpc.org](mailto:splutnicki@cmrpc.org)

Question: Has there been an audit done in the city of Worcester?  
Response: Not yet. Waiting for a reply from the city.

Question: How many trails are you hoping to audit?  
Response: Seven – We have permission for four – 2 in Sturbridge; 1 in Westboro, working on one in Northborough, hoping for 2 in Worcester and 1 in Hardwick. Looking for one more.

Question: Once the trials are audited, what are the next steps?  
Response: Finalize the Tool Kit, make recommendation for each trail, and suggest ways others can use the rubric.  
Assistant Commissioner Antonelli appreciated the presentation and indicated Worcester stays with boardwalks to provide accessibility on trails because this is what works in Worcester. Depending on the federal or state mapping for environmental justice would determine the trail that would be audited in Worcester. There may be something in the Hadwen Park area for the State. The Worcester area that would fall int the federal mapping would be from the Leicester line to Great Brook Valley. The Greater Worcester Land Trust may have greater availability of trail elements than the City does. He agreed to have staff meet with Sarah.

Question: Could a crowd sourcing app accompany the Tool Kit to identify the trails?

Response: We will research the possibility of doing that.

Comment: Suggested testers be used to assure accessibility. You are welcome to come back to the Commission. The Commission's role is to advise on issues such as this.

Question: Of the stakeholders, were there people with disabilities identified?

Response: Between the two-dialogue session a little less than a third were people with disabilities or representatives of the disabled. We are trying to get all groups ie. youth, race, disability etc. involved.

Question: Have you talked to people that are aging? There is a difference between being accessible and using. You mentioned barriers. One of these is transportation and some of the trails are in other towns. These venues are unfamiliar and would need someone to guide. Would suggest something tame like Elm Park or Newton Hill which is less tame. There were a lot of age friendly stakeholders at these dialogues. Wayfinding and transportation will be included in the project. They can go beyond what they have.

**Review of memo from the Dept. of Transportation and Mobility and request for future conversation on the development of a City of Worcester Public Rights of Way Transition Plan**

This is a two-page memo that provides the background on the new City Department of Transportation and Mobility and what it will be able to take on short and long term to advance the ADA Transition Plan relative to the public rights of way. Public Rights of Way is one of the two big "buckets" left to evaluate and create a plan as part of the City's ADA Transition Plan. Streets and sidewalks (public right of way) are expensive and expansive. The Chief of T&M will visit the Commission soon for a more comprehensive conversation.

Background information about the ADA Transition Plan was given by Director Turcek. When she was hired 11 years ago, she was given the responsibility of developing the City's ADA Transition Plan. A decision was made to hire a consultant and the work was divided in two parts. Part A was building related (vertical) and Part B the horizontal (or the Public Rights of Way). Bidders could

submit proposal(s) for one or both projects. One proposal was received for Part B at a high cost. At the time it was not going to produce the results we wanted given the city structure and resources. The City chose not to pursue part B at that time and proceeded with hiring a consultant (The Institute for Human Centered Design) for Part A. Once Part A was complete the city then did two supplemental projects. One was the review of the city's website and the other was a review of the city's polling places. We have been reviewing with the Commission and updating Part A bringing Departments aboard annually.

We are now back to Part B. With this new Department's planning role, it is time to focus more intensively on Part B Rights of Way. It is important the Commission understand the role of the Department of Transportation & Mobility so that it can advise the Department in a helpful way given the City's resources and obligation. The memo refers to some of the areas worked on over the years.

Commission's response: This was helpful as to the importance of the Commission's role given the next agenda item. We look forward to working with Chief Rolle and his staff.

#### **Update from meeting with City Manager Eric Batista**

Commissioners Bureau, Larrivee, and Stolberg along with Director Turchek met with City Manager Eric Batista and Assistant City Manager Hung Nguyen in late April.

The purpose of the meeting was to learn how the Accessibility Advisory Commission would function within the new Department of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Commissioners' reflections from the meeting.

1. The Manager explained his reasons for creating this new department, but the Commissioner is afraid the larger DEI issues will snuff out the voices of the people with disabilities.
2. The City Manager and the new Department was a good change. The Commissioner said we will have to wait and see.

3. In the meeting, disability was like race, veterans, and other statuses. Would Accessibility get the back seat to issues concerning race and gender? Would there be enough of staff's time for the city's need?
4. The other concern raised was the hiring process of the person who would head this Department. Would this person understand the issues related to disability and overall accessibility? Many people in DEI positions do not have this expertise/lived experience. Would this be considered in the search? Does the consultant leading the search understand disability issues? Would the city's search Committee understand the nuances that come with disability issues?
5. Chairperson Bureau asked that a person with a disability with the Commission's knowledge be appointed to the search committee for the new department head. The City Manager assured that this would happen.

Director Turchek suggested the Commission think through who the Commission wants to put forth to the City Manager as their recommendation for and representative on the search committee.

Discussion:

Suggest the Chairperson ask the City Manager about the hiring process timeline.

The names of 2 former Commission Chairpersons were suggested.

Question: Would it be important to have a current Commission member?

Remember it is DEIA. The A can easily be forgotten and lost.

Suggestion made to review the Commission's ordinance and ask Director Turchek to have conversations with the former Chairpersons.

Chairperson Bureau was suggested, and Commissioner Stolberg is interested.

Decision tabled until next month.

### **Disability PRIDE event on the Common July 20**

**Pre-movie music from Matt & Marty begins at 6:30pm.**

**Movie (Turning Red) will start at dusk**

**See: <https://www.downtownworchester.org/events/>**



**Review of AAB notices and applications: No City owned properties**

Variance application: 275 Pleasant Street

**Suggestions for upcoming agenda items**

None – Ideas in between meetings should be brought to the attention of the Chairperson or Director Turchek.

**Announcements:**

- Next Accessibility Advisory Commission meeting: July 18, 2023 - 4:30pm

**Adjournment:**

Meeting was adjourned at 7:10pm.

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