

**City of Worcester Accessibility Advisory Commission
Tuesday, July 18, 2023, 4:30 PM Meeting Minutes**

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

<http://www.worcesterma.gov/video-on-demand>

ASL interpreters on site and over video

Attendance:

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

Members Absent: Jully Khattar

Staff: Jayna Turchek, Dawn E. Clark

Guests: Benji Kemper – Center for Living & Working, Inc.

Victoria Mariano, Program Director of the Worcester Downtown Business
Improvement District (WDBID)

Julie Lynch, Chief of the City of Worcester Facilities Department

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 4:49pm.

Approval of June 20, 2023 meeting minutes*

Commissioner Larrivee moved to approve the June 20, 2023 minutes as written and seconded by Commissioner Myska. The motion was unanimously approved on roll call.

Presentation on accessible housing (Benji Kemper and Steve Stolberg, Center for Living and Working Inc.)

Center for Living & Working, Inc. is the local independent living center based in Worcester serving 4,000 people with disabilities in Central Massachusetts. There was an invitation to join a group supporting accessible housing on Friday's at 2pm.

They are coming to the Commission to grow the group for advocating with the City and Worcester Housing Authority to provide more accessible housing. They can be reached at BKemper@centerlw.org.

Achievements over the last year and a half included holding a housing panel of people with disabilities explaining how the lack of accessible housing have affected them in collaboration with Central Mass. Housing Alliance; advocating that the Worcester Affordable Trust Fund include more accessible housing; speaking with Senator Robin Kennedy; working with Worcester Together Affordable Housing Coalition to pass inclusionary housing measures to be the second Massachusetts municipality to link affordability and accessibility successfully. In this new age of technology adaptability should be available to developers.

Commissioner's comments:

Noted: There is a need for more visitable units for people visiting friends and relatives who live in inaccessible housing.

Conversation about accessible downtown event planning with Victoria Mariano, Program Director of the Worcester Downtown Business Improvement District

The WDBID represents the property owners of four by five business blocks around City Hall. Their goal is to create a more vibrant and safer environment in downtown Worcester. As Program Director she is responsible for beautification, maintenance and placemaking. One of those responsibilities is events. The WDBID partners with the City of Worcester providing movies and support to the "Out to Lunch" Program and their own "Winter Feast" in February. Also, a new series in the glass tower yard and greenery called "MERCARDO" every Saturday from Noon - 4:00PM for eight weeks. They provide an event kit for those who apply to have an event. The ambassadors from the WDBID will bring, set up and take down. Those applying to the City also have access to this kit.

Evelyn Dowling has been the Executive Director since its inception and is overseen by a Board of Directors who are property owners in the district. It was started by the Mass. Development Office and the City of Worcester about five years ago and has been in business for about four years. They are in the process of submitting the renewal papers.

The Board needs to vote to renew every five years and get a monthly update of activities. It is paid for by an extra tax to the business owners.

She is responsible for the beautification projects which include the flowers downtown. There are eight ambassadors the cruise the area keeping the area clean and assisting people.

As far as the events being accessible, she is working with Eye Audio Radio for audio description, and she is looking for other ways to make events accessible. Using Partners in Interpreting for American Sign Language (ASL). Looking for the right material for wheelchair users to navigate the lawn or grass.

They are looking for appropriate material to assist wheelchair users to navigate the lawn or grass. She would appreciate any suggestions from the Commission.

Commissioner's Questions:

Is there anything being done to encourage downtown night life after 5pm?

Response: Yes. This concern has been expressed many times. A Community Engagement Ambassador job description for Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings has been posted.

Is there a way to advertise the events so there is a synergy with restaurants and other businesses/vendors could work together? Perhaps Reels (short videos) could be use as part of the social media.

Response: This is part of the marketing strategy.

As far as making events accessible, is a portable accessible stage needed for these events?

Response: There is no storage space for a stage. We are not doing events that might need one. The city is looking for grants and other ways to make its portable stage accessible and wanted to let the WDBID about the stage.

Are there restroom accommodations when events are happening on the Common?

Response: Yes. City Hall will be available. Other events like the ‘MERCADO’ there will be an accessible porta potty.

Comment: It would be helpful to tell how things will be accessible because accessibility means different things to different people.

Response: Thank you. Flat surfaces are being used for users of wheelchairs. Eye Audio Radio is being used for audio description for persons who are blind. Closed Caption is being used for the deaf and hard of hearing. Using Partners in Interpreting is being used for American Sign Language (ASL).

Suggestion for Ambassadors: They approach people using white canes and service dogs rather than presuming they are alright. Non-visual communication is important.

How far in advance is the list of events available?

Response: There are annual and new events.

What kind of communication does the BID have with WRTA? Buses could help people get to the events and back home.

Response: That introduction was made today and appreciated the ideas.

Facilities ADA Update. Introduction to and conversation with Julie Lynch, Chief of the City of Worcester Facilities Department

Ms. Lynch has been in this position since October 2021. There are two pieces to the house. One is capital and the other is operations. When she was hired there was a vision that there could be a more robust team. Therefore, the Facilities Department was formed. Traditionally, the Department of Public Works was responsible for some city buildings and mostly public schools including some design work.

There was a recognition that there was deferred maintenance work that needed addressing and there was a change working with more architects and the Mass. School Building Program. With the issues of climate change and sustainability a capital improvement plan has been considered. The Energy and Asset Management Team (EAM) had taken some of the work but still more work needed to be done. This included accessibility.

The Facilities Dept. still supports the EAM projects. She is now reviewing the

ADA Transition Plan to understand what has been completed and what needs to be done. As a licensed architect she wants to make the city's buildings as sustainable and accessible for as many people as possible. This is the goal.

She invited feedback from the Commission.

Commissioner question:

What is the Department's portfolio?

Response: There are currently 13 buildings and the department is directly responsible for 11. The ballpark is a leased facility. The other building is the DCU Center. The management company went through and made some accessibility improvements. There is some overall work to be done there.

Other buildings include:

*Union Station – complex and open 22 hours a day.

*Senior Center

*Main Library and Francis Perkins Branch Library

*100 Providence Street is a leased property. For ambulance to provide emergency services in that area

*61-62- and 69 Seaver Street, which is a new purchase. Future use is not clear.

They are making a plan to share with City Manager at this time.

Accessibility will be included when looking at all the city's buildings.

Comment:

The Commission may want to make visits and review accessibility like we do at Polar Park.

Response: This would be helpful.

Review of AAB notices and applications: No City owned properties

Variance applications:

- **16 Laurier St. (Proposed childcare facility)**

Notice of Action:

- **275 Pleasant St (Public housing facility) (V-23-126)**

No Action taken.

Vote on recommendation for person to represent accessibility perspective on Chief Equity Officer hiring process

Chairperson Bureau moved to recommend himself to represent the accessibility perspective on Chief Equity Officer hiring process. Assistant Commissioner Delage seconded the motion. Approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

Election of Officers

Nominations for Chairperson was opened.

Robert Bureau nominated himself for the position of Chairperson.

There being no other nominations, nominations were closed.

Commissioner Myska moved to elect Commissioner Bureau as Chairperson.

Commissioner Larrivee seconded the motion.

Commissioner Bureau was elected Chairperson by a roll call vote. (5/0/0)

Nominations for Vice Chairperson was opened.

Commissioner Myska accepted the nomination for the position of Vice Chairperson.

There being no other nominations, nominations were closed.

Commissioner Bureau moved to elect Commissioner Myska as Vice Chairperson.

Assistant Commissioner Delage seconded the motion.

Commissioner Myska was elected Vice Chairperson by a roll call vote. (5/0/0)

Nominations for Secretary was opened.

Assistant Commissioner Delage accepted the nomination for the position of Vice Chairperson.

There being no other nominations, nominations were closed.

Commissioner Bureau moved to elect Assistant Commissioner Delage as Secretary.

Commissioner Myska seconded the motion.

Assistant Commissioner Delage was elected Secretary by a roll call vote. (5/0/0)

Announcement: Staff changes effective August 2023

Director Turchek announced her resignation as of July 28, 2023. The Commission member were saddened and expressed their sincere appreciation for her leadership of the past eleven years.

Suggestions for upcoming agenda items

Burncoat Street sidewalk from the Summit to around Clark Street has Hanging bush and obstacles that make walking dangerous.

Announcements:

- 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 (with closed captioning and audio description)
See: <https://www.downtownworcester.org/events/>
- Next Accessibility Advisory Commission meeting:
August 15, 2023 - 4:30pm
- WRTA Transportation Advisory Planning Group - Wednesday,
September 20, 2023– 1-2:30pm

Adjournment:

Meeting was adjourned at 6:22pm.

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