

City of Worcester
Accessibility Advisory Commission
Tuesday, November 16, 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., Elizabeth Myska, Christina Parissi Joseph Prochilo, Stephen Stolberg

Members Absent: Fitzroy Hall, Darya Karuna, Linda Larrivee,

Staff: Jayna Turcek, Dawn E. Clark

Guests: Steve Rolle, Worcester Assistant Chief Development Officer and Brian Pigeon, Senior Transportation Planner

Call to order, instructions for virtual meeting, introductions

Chairperson Bureau called the meeting to order at 4:33pm and requested Director Turcek to provide the technology instructions for public access to the meeting. Commissioners then introduced themselves on roll call.

Approval of October 19, 2021 minutes*

Commissioner Parissi moved to approve the October 19, 2021 minutes as written. Commissioner Prochilo seconded the motion. All approved by roll call.

Conversation regarding Worcester NOW- Worcester's next long range citywide plan and Complete Streets Plan

www.worcesterma.gov/planning-regulatory/planning-initiatives/worcesternext

Steve Rolle, Worcester Assistant Chief Development Officer used a PowerPoint to introduce this ongoing conversation.

Department of Planning & Regulatory Services Roles and Responsibilities.

- a. Current Planning/Development Review.
- b. Comprehensive/Long-Range Planning.

Many other Departments are also involved with planning in Worcester. We are not starting from scratch. There have been a lot of work over the years internally and in partnership with the community that will be used in future planning. This department role keeps a pulse on this work done in other departments to organized projects with the goal of benefiting the city.

There are two major projects happening at the same time:

1. Worcester NOW/Next – Master plan
2. Complete Streets Program

What is a Master Plan? High Level Plan being called Worcester NOW/NEXT:

- A tool that guides growth and (re)development.
- Addresses the physical development of the city while encompassing important values (social, economic, environmental, etc.)
- Establishes a long-term vision and goals.
- Analyzes current conditions and considers how they may change in the future.
- Formulates recommendations and implementation priorities.
(Massachusetts by law requires municipalities to have a Master Plan. The loophole is there is no time frame for update: Worcester has a Master Plan and was last updated in 1987. This plan is not referenced given its age.)

Schedule: Right now contracts are being put in place and there will be an efforts to talk with groups soon. There will be two phases with two surveys. The plan is expected to be ready in 2023.

Complete Streets Funding Program:

Launched in 2016, the MassDOT Complete Streets Funding program is a first in the nation program to support municipalities in implementing Complete Streets.

There are three tiers to this funding:

1. City develop a complete street policy,
2. City develop a complete streets prioritization plan,
3. City is eligible to apply for up to \$400,000 to implement part of plan.

The Planning Department is aware of the Commission's findings based on previous Wheelchair Strolls and these will inform the Complete Street Plan.

The Plan development has been underway for about two and a half years with some roadblocks with previous guidelines that were in place, however, the planning is moving along at this point.

Complete Street Plan is expected to transform walking, biking and transit for the City. This would be a five year plan.

Be Involved:

- Social Media and Website
- DPRS will provide notices to the Commission
- Participate in surveys and meetings

Contact: DPRS: Planning@WorcesterMA.gov

Stephen Rolle, PE RolleS@WorcesterMA.gov

Assistant Chief Development Officer

Brian Pigeon PigeonB@WorcesterMA.gov

Sr. Transportation Planner

Mr. Rolle encourage all to be involved in the development of these plans. He will keep Director Turchek informed so the Commission can be aware of the progress.

Comments from the Commission/Public with responses:

Q: Recent Walk Audit did not have visually impaired people present. How is this community going to be involved?

Response: There will be two public meeting, listening sessions, city Council briefings, surveys, small focus groups where people work and live etc.

Comment: Need to talk with people on the street who know things that need to be changed.

Response: This is the plan with focus groups.

Q: Who chooses the contactors and what is the criteria for selection? Sometimes “people who don’t know hire people who don’t know then there are problems once the work is complete.

Response: There are three contractors who have applied for the Master Plan and four contractors applied for the Complete Streets Plan. A set of requirements were developed for each project for contractors to address as well as interviews. There was an exploration with the city’s Law Department to have other people participate in the selection process. Only City employees were eligible to participate. M. Rolle asked this Commission to work with the Planning Department on these Plans and he pledged his support to work with the Commission.

Q: What happens if staff leaves contractors left to their own decisions? Visually impaired people and people losing sight are not always as tech savvy as they could be and could be afraid of things being taken away from them so they do not say anything. An encouragement of multiple modes of communication be used in gathering input for these plans. Think about radio and word of mouth.

For example, with regard to truncated domes, if the contract states they need to be perpendicular to crosswalks, we may still have curb cuts leading blind people into the middle of intersections.

For another example, with regard to beacons, one was put across from Roosevelt School due to a fatality. No one will cross the street because the street is so busy.

Another example is on West Boylston, group of visually impaired people wanted to cross West Boylston Street and a policeman said not to cross because the cars just will not stop. Who is making the decisions where these beacons are installed and is anyone asked if they will use them?

Response: These are very insightful comments. These installations have been made without input from users and we are looking forward to engaging in the community so implemented plans will be helpful in the future.

Q: If the Compete Street planning progress has been in place since 2016 why is it taking so long to get the plan in place? Trees uproot sidewalks and cause problems for people using the sidewalk.

Response: Staff is frustrated as well and this is why these plans are so important. As far as trees are concerned there are ways to have trees and safe sidewalks. Streets have to be safe and accessible.

Comment: Consider print larger print signage. Some cities have new light systems.

Response: Thank you for that comment. As the input process rolls out it is important to not only know what the issues are but also what solutions could work.

Q: Can you comment on winter safety? One property not shoveled makes the whole sidewalk impassable.

Response: Hopefully this issue could be mitigated as this planning process proceeds.

Comment: We need to be actively involved and seriously listened to!

Response: This is why the Planning Department is here tonight giving you our road map. This is the very first step. People with passion about an issue please participate. Mr. Rolle agrees.

Q: There are homeless people at Lincoln Plaza and the area needs to be cleaned up. Who does one talk to about this?

Response: There is the Quality of Life Taskforce. This process will hopefully help the city deal with this type of situation.

Director Turchek shared that through this process the City will be able to update the ADA Transition Plan with respect to streets and sidewalks. She assured the Commission that they would be closely involved with these plans and this was an introduction of more to come.

Mr. Rolle and Mr. Pigeon appreciated the comments and look forward to working with individuals and the Commission on these plans.

Notice: MA COVID-19 vaccine

- **Walk-in Equity Clinics for COVID 19 vaccines Wednesdays & Saturdays at the Worcester Public Library, 3 Salem Sq.** Need an ASL Interpreter? To request interpreter/ accommodation call Michelle at 774-303-6976 or email mortizocasio.socialwork@gmail.com
- **Vaccine clinics and vaccine information:** <https://www.mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine>

Review of AAB notices and applications: (No City owned properties)

Notice of Action:

- #V21-168, Elwood Adams Apartments, 156 Main St.
- #V21-155, Learning First Public Charter School, 50 Richman St

Suggestions for upcoming agenda items

Update on Doherty High School building project

Announcements:

- **Next Accessibility Advisory Commission virtual meeting -**
December 21, 2021 - 4:30pm
- **WRTA Transportation Advisory Planning Group, Wednesday,**
December 15, 2021 – 1-2:30pm

Adjournment:

Commissioner Finn, Jr. moved to adjourn and Commissioner Prochilo seconded. All approved by roll call at 6:07 pm.

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