

Commission on Disability Meeting  
Minutes from Tuesday, April 15, 2014, 4:30PM  
City Hall, Levi Lincoln Chamber 3<sup>rd</sup> floor

**Attendance:**

**Members Present:** Francesca Abbey, Rachel Shannon Brown, Nancy Garr-Colzie, Herbert Cremer, Paul Keister, John Nah, Susan Swanson, Stephen Stolberg

**Members absent:** Charles Hiamah, Elizabeth Myska, Lynne Towler

**Staff:** Jayna Turchek, Dawn Clark

**Guests:** Christopher Korenowsky, Head Librarian; City Manager Edward Augustus; Pamela Callahan; James Estella; James Delage, WRTA; Ellen Dalbeck, City of Worcester Customer Service; Stacie Brimmage, Regional Environmental Council

**Members of the Public:** David Johnson, Jackie Norton, Scott Ricker & others

**1. Call to Order:**

The Chairperson welcomed guests and commission members each member introduced themselves. Associate members Nancy Garr-Colzie, Paul Keister and Susan Swanson were raised to member status for the meeting. The Chairperson announced that Mr. David Clemons resigned as the City's Director of Emergency Management. He had been responsible for Emergency Preparedness in the City.

**2. Minutes:**

Motion made by Mr. Cremer and Ms. Swanson seconded to approve January 28, 2014 minutes with amendment. Voted: yes – 6, no – 0, abstention - 1 Mr. Cremer thanked Ms. Callahan for her good work on the January 28, 2014 minutes.

Chairman Cremer requested Vice Chairperson Stephen Stolberg to continue the meeting as Chairperson.

**3. Public Comment Period:** Mr. Cremer made a motion to move this item to later in the meeting. Mr. Keister seconded. Vote: yes - 7, no - 0

#### **4. Presentation of One City One Library Branch at Burncoat Preparatory School**

Chairperson Cremer welcomed Christopher Korenowsky, Head Librarian along with James Estrella of the City Manager's staff. Burncoat Preparatory School is one of four Worcester Public Schools' that are partnering with the Worcester Public Library. The other three school library branches are Roosevelt, Tatnuck Magnet and Goddard School of Science and Technology. At Burncoat Preparatory, current space will be renovated to hold two kindergarten classrooms and a conference room with a separate entrance. The library and accessible rest rooms will be open to the public after the school day. The cost will be about \$650,000. The work is expected to be done during the summer so school is not interrupted with the expectation of a fall opening.

Information gathered as a result of questions asked by Commissioners and visitors from the public.

- Computer stations will have accessible clearance for wheelchair use. The tables will also be accessible and the chairs at the stations will be movable.
- The school has an old heating system that does not heat the hallway or classrooms adequately. The city is exploring a new green HV system to heat the library and modular units.
- Suggestion to make HP space wider is appreciated
- Requests for audio listening devices will be provided by the school for school functions. A request for this accommodation should be made to library staff for library functions.
- Mr. Korenowsky was asked to check on the availability of screen readers.

- Restrooms will be handicapped accessible. There will be room for a chair to maneuver and the sinks will meet code.
- I pads will be available for in library use and can be checked out by the educator teams. Encouraged maximizing use of technology applications such as co-writer, writeoutloud (text to speech) as well as other applications that assist children with disabilities. Head-phones are provided so others can concentrate. The library is working hard to continue to develop a relationship of trust with schools' principals and teaching teams.
- Request to consider using an application for a person with one hand.

### **5. Presentation by James Delage, WRTA: Updates on announcement system, customer complaint and question line and safety features on new bus fleet**

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. Delage. Mr. Delage indicated that his duties at WRTA have increased to include community relations and customer feedback as well as scheduling the para-transit services. Many things are going well at WTRA. He acknowledged there is a long way to go.

The customer complaint process has information gathered as a result of questions asked by Commissioners and other members of the public. Previously a complaint may have been handled, but the result may have not been known to the individual filing the complaint. Two new employees have been hired to take complaints. They are available 8:00AM – 4:45PM. Each caller is given a ticket # which identifies the caller/complaint. If you leave a message, a ticket number will be given to the caller. If you talk with a person, the person will log the number with the information. The new system is an effort to reduce the numbers of phone calls the caller needs to make. When you call WRTA and press “1”, information on buses, passes etc.is given. Pressing “2” gives the caller customer feedback. Please leave the important information about your concern like day of concern, time, bus #, nature of concern etc. This is a 24/7 service. The computers on the buses, vans and cabs have

the ability to tell WRTA where the vehicles are at all times so concerns can be addressed. WRTA is able to report out the concerns more specifically.

This new system allows reporting out by many different factors. For example, if a caller said a bus was early. The person on the phone could go into the data and learn the time the bus arrived at a particular stop and ask the caller what time she/he had and compare. Buses should be on time and a minute or two late. If the bus turned out to be early, this would be reported to David T. to confirm. The bus driver's union contact addresses time management. If the bus was early than the driver would be spoken with and his/her explanation would be taken into account before action is taken.

There are videos on the buses. This past weekend a complaint came in that a bus had gone by the caller. Upon looking at the video, the caller was standing at an intersection on a cell phone giving the driver no indication that the person wanted to take the bus. The driver was spoken to with the suggestion the bus be stopped and open the door to be sure something like this doesn't happen.

WRTA is excited about this system. Even if a caller does not identify oneself, there will still be an investigation. They want a safe and reliable transit system.

At the Hub the call out system is working about 96% of the time. The announcement calls out the bus as it pulls in, calls out the bus #, the bus route and tells what slip it will be in and when the bus is leaving the announcement comes off the board. Staff from the Commission for the Blind have been training people. This is making their job a lot easier and people are able to find their buses.

Every driver has been instructed to stay in place for two minutes after all announcements have been made before leaving the slip even if the bus is late. In the event that the announcement is not automatically (in the 4%

error) made the driver would then alert the starter/inspector (by pushing a button in the bus) to made the announcement manually.

There still is a significant problem with the LD commuter screen over Dunkin Donuts. The company is scheduled to come next week.

Information gathered as a result of questions asked by Commissioners and visitors from the public.

- The big sign inside the Hub announces by the arrival of buses. For visually impaired people it may be easier to categorize by bus route. There may need to be two signs in the vestibule each sorted differently. Mr. Delage will take this suggestion back to WRTA Planning meeting. (This is not a public meeting.) Administrative, Management and IT staff meet to address issues pertaining to operations of WRTA.
- Will there be a wider truncated domed yellow stripe? The person was asked to bring this to WRTA staff through the feedback line.
- Lack of railing concern has been reviewed with builder to be sent to the architect and WRTA is awaiting findings. This is in the hands of the AAB.
- Buses are now coming with external cameras as well as the four or five internal cameras. All buses have low floor capacity and ramps which make getting on and off buses easier for both riders and drivers.
- Some routes start at 4:55AM and some run as late as midnight. Others end at 7:00PM and 9:00PM. Starting and ending times will depend on passage count on the routes.
- Bus stops are determined by the City of Worcester. Suggestions for new or removal of Bus stops requests can be done through the feedback line. Staff from WRTA would do a site review. If WRTA agrees the request makes sense, WRTA would support the site as a bus stop.
- There are new routes including one to Northbridge which is good for people with disabilities.

## **6. Presentation by Ellen Dalbeck, City of Worcester Customer Service, 2013 -2014 Sidewalk Snow Removal Calls**

The Chairperson welcomed Ellen Dalbeck from the City of Worcester Customer Service. Customer service received just over 1,000 complaints about sidewalks and ramps not cleared of snow and ice this past winter. Residents have ten hours after the snow has stopped to have sidewalks (4 feet width) shoveled. On a daily basis customer service will send complaints received to the police department. The police then goes out and makes an inspection and takes whatever action is necessary. That may be to notify the property owner/resident they are in violation of the ordinance and then re-inspect within 24 hours. If there is no action to remove the snow/ice the police will issue a citation. One frustration is that vacant properties because by the time notification is given an accident may have occurred.

This year we have fewer complaints so hopefully the information is getting out to people.

Information gathered as a result of questions asked by Commissioners and visitors from the public.

- To get information about City owned property check with the Street Division. Customer service works with residents
- There are snow removal crews that go out to shovel etc. The Street Division oversees this process.
- The Worcester Police Department has the citations and amount of fines collected this past year.
- City crews should not pile snow on curb cuts.
- A request was made to have DPW come to the next meeting to discuss snow removal on City properties.
- Deputy Chief Sean Fleming and Tom Mulvey are Ms. Dalbeck's contacts in the Police Department. WPD should be able to address the accident rates along vacant buildings.

- Getting to a sidewalk because of snow is a problem. Businesses would lose customers
- **The phone number to report snow/ice on sidewalks is 508-929-1300**
- All personal experiences with snow removal on city property should be reported to the Customer Service line for action
- When a complaint is made by a resident usually within 24 hours a customer service representative will call the resident back with the action taken. If the resident calls with a complaint the caller will be given a reference number. If the resident calls to find out information on action taken with regard to the complaint and gives the reference number, the log identifies all notes on the complaint including the times the resident called and can be given to the resident. Once a complaint is resolved the resolution will be logged as well.
- The responsibility for shoveling out bus stops is WRTA

The Chairperson thanked Ms. Dalbeck for her presentation.

## **7. Presentation by Stacie Brimmage of the Regional Environmental Council (REC) Community Gardens Program**

Ms. Brimmage oversees the Community Gardens program at REC. She was born and raised in Worcester and went to school in Maine. When asked the Commission members were aware of the REC. REC is comprised of two programs: The Environmental Health Justice Program and The Food Justice Program. The Environmental Justice Program works to address the environmental hazards including lead poisoning, air pollution and high asthma rate that burden Worcester's low-income neighborhoods. This program includes: Weatherization Worcester which encourages residents of low-income areas to weatherize and make their homes more energy efficient. Worcester Diesel Pollution Solution which is a campaign to reduce diesel pollution in the city. Another is Worcester Trash Action which brings the city's residents together to remove trash/refuse from the city's streets and parks. And Worcester Green and

Healthy Homes Coalition comprised of over 30 organizational partners and grassroots community members working to eliminate an array of environmental health hazards in homes in Worcester's lowest-income neighborhoods.

The Food Justice Program has four programs that work to increase access to fresh, healthy, affordable produce for Worcester's lowest-income/most food-insecure residents. These programs are Community Gardens, a network of 52 community and school gardens managed by over 400 volunteers. Farmer's Markets which provide affordable, local produce from June – October to residents of Worcester's most food-insecure neighborhoods. A third is cooking classes where volunteer chefs and nutritionists provide low-income families with life-long tools prepare healthy meals affordably. And the 4<sup>th</sup> is YouthGrow, a youth development program that trains 35-plus at-risk local teens annually in life skills and the basics of urban agriculture, via managing 2 urban farms, one at Oread Street and the other at Bell Hill Park. Four youth work throughout the year and three additional youth are hired for the summer. They grow over 2,000 pound of organic vegetables. The food is used for families, neighbors and the farmer's market. They are now venturing out to get the food into stores.

Ms. Brimmage showed some photos of the workshops for the youth held last summer. Youth have a three day work week during the summer, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. On Tuesday and Thursday discussions in the morning, farm work, lunch and team work in the afternoon. This team work would include preparing lunch for visits to other farms on Wednesdays, prepare for annual block party etc.

REC hosts three standing Farmer's Market's in Worcester from June to October on Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays on Lincoln Street at Hanover, Chandler Street by the Youth Center, and Main South behind the YMCA. There is also a mobile market that goes to 17 sites throughout the city on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The markets take SNAP, WIC and senior coupons. There have a program so that SNAP



coupons can be doubled. There are cooking demos, live performance and a Kid Zone for children attending the markets.

The Mobile Market partnered with Mass Farmer's Kindergarten School Initiative and brought the mobile market to the classes. Students would then tour the market. They would also get food from the farmers. This project resulted in bringing 8,000 customers to the farmer's and increased 185% in SNAP sales.

The YouthGrow Program is comprised of a network of 52 local groups 18 of which are at Worcester Public Schools. REC Supports gardens at schools, housing complexes, the senior center, YWCA, Youth Center and AIDS Project Worcester. They also partner with social services helping refugees to grow produce for neighbors with similar produce needs. Together these groups grow over 15,000 pounds of food annually. REC provided support such as compost deliveries and workshops. The REC has patterned with Verizon for iPads for teachers and students to use. They are always looking for a new spot for a garden.

REC is working to develop a curriculum for schools for teachers to feel comfortable with gardens. Last year 8 new community gardens were added to the mix involving 1,700 students from Head Start to High School.

The annual spring festival and plant sale May 17th is the season kick-off. This festival, the major fundraiser, is held on Oread Street. A November dinner was held for people to debrief the summer activities. About 50 people attended last year.

How can you or anyone get involved? First is applying for a Community Garden plot. They have gardens throughout Worcester. This is really the first step in the process. Another way is to volunteer your time. Helping to get gardens up and running in the spring. We need help setting up the festival and the day after.

Information gathered as a result of questions asked by Commissioners and visitors from the public.

- REC gardens do have and can provide assistance with raised beds and other ways of providing support for people with disabilities. All of the school gardens are raised beds and the Grant Square garden. These gardens are handicapped accessible. The beds are about three feet high.
- Backyard gardening is encouraged. REC has the urban gardening workshop series that offers tips for gardeners as well as specially workshops. This year these workshops open to the public will be held at various gardens.
- Information on the 2014 Farmer's Market schedule is on the REC website. The kick-off date is Saturday, June 14<sup>th</sup> at the YMCA Family Park on Murray Ave.
- Anthony Gardner, REC staff, can discuss relationship with Mass In Motion
- Self-sustainability is important given the recent weather conditions in other parts of the country. 90% of our land in Massachusetts used to be in farms. We have land to grow food.
- Hydroponic gardening is not something the REC specialized in but the garden at Maywood and Park may be working with this type of gardening in the future.
- There is a list-serve that anyone interest can join for information on Community Gardens

Mr. Cremer thanked Ms. Brimmage for her presentation

## **8. Review of AAB notices and applications**

The Commissioners received the following AAB notices and applications:

455 Main Street – Worcester City Hall Plaza: hand-rails

125 Summer Street – St. Vincent's Hospital Egress: Spiral Stairs/Elevators

1121 Grafton Street – HP Van Parking Sign

540 Massasoit Road – Honey Farms countertop

60 Foster Street – WRTA Hub Handrails

134 Country Club Blvd. – Housing complex build in early 70”s waiver request for garage accessibility

Center For Living & Working encourages exceeding the 5% requirement for accessible units.

## **9. Public Comment**

Michael Kennedy from Center for Living & Working asked the Commission to review the Accessible Taxi statistics for the last six months.

## **10. Announcements**

**WRTA Transportation Planning Advisory Meeting**

April 16, 1 – 2:30pm, WRTA building, 287 Grove Street

**REDD (Rights, Equality and Dignity for the Disabled)**

May 5<sup>th</sup> at 5pm, at the Worcester Public Library

**Next Commission on Disability meeting**

May 20<sup>th</sup>, 3:30pm

## **11. Adjournment**

Mr. Cremer moved to adjourn.