

**City of Worcester Accessibility Advisory Commission
Tuesday, February 28, 2023, 4:30 PM Meeting Minutes**

Virtual Meeting

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

ASL interpreters not available

Attendance:

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

Members Absent: Darya Karuna, Jully Khattar, Linda Larrivee Christina Parissi

Staff: Jayna Turchek, Dawn E. Clark

Guests: Alex Corrales, Worcester Housing Authority
Developer Steve Rothschild

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 4:38pm.

Approval of January 17, 2023 meeting minutes

Commissioner Stolberg moved to approve the January 17, 2023 minutes as written and seconded by Commissioner Myska. The motion was unanimously approved on roll call.

Conversation with Alex Corrales, Worcester Housing Authority,

Discussion on WHA portfolio and present and future accessible units

Mr. Corrales was welcomed. He began by expressing his concern with rising cost of rent and the affordability for low income people. WHA distributes over 4400 vouchers throughout Worcester County primarily for families and some 1 bedroom units. Five years ago for every 100 vouchers, 95 of them would get “leased up” within the allotted time as the regulations would permit. Over the year as the market for affordable housing has worsened, that number hovers around 70%.

This means a person could wait between 8 -10 years for a voucher. Once the person gets a voucher she/he has up to six months to secure an apartment, if they are unable to they have to start all over again.

When people come to WHA they need housing now. WHA is no different about 18,000 people mainly, families, on the voucher wait list for 3 to 6 years and another 15,000 on the public housing side. Depending on the unit size needed the wait time may vary. The elder housing need has increase dramatically as well going from a month the one to three year wait. He recognizes as does the community Worcester needs more accessible units as we age. The wait for accessible units can be three years up to 15 years. One of the contributing factors to longer wait times is if a younger person receives an accessible apartment that apartment will not be available for a number of years.

WHA provide services to residents and tries to build community. From accessibility standpoint, having an affordable rent and 24 hour access to services is hard to find.

The WHA Team is committed to upgrade the buildings: Some of them are 75 and 70 years old. They do not have the amenities the residents need such as elevators. WHA has hires people to do studies etc to learn how to do this.

1. First project is on Lewis Street called "A Place to Live". 24 units hope to complete by end of year. Targeted to chronically homeless or homeless. 2 of the units will be fully accessible. Completed by Fall.
2. Curtis Apartments – Family site – 390 apartments (372 are residential others are office space). It is a 1950 building (efforts to keep clean, plantings etc.) with opportunity the rebuild. The plan is to build 150 apartments in addition for about 530 units increasing the number of accessible units. Currently there are 11 accessible units. With elevators in the new buildings the plan is to have 52 accessible units. Doing in phases: first phase is to build 30 units with current residents move temporally. Second phase move people into new units and build. Each phase is anticipated about 18 months up to total of 8 years. Competitive fund may be an issue.
3. Lakeside apartments the oldest building, build in 1049 with 202 units with two wheelchair accessible units. Proposals have been submitted, but no

decisions have been made. The idea is to go from 2 to 30 accessible units of an additional 100 units.

4. Booth apartments on 7 acres land with 44 one bedroom units. Still in the discussion stage. For example is this a site for more one/two bedroom units for elders, singles, disabled with a community room with services on site. With additional 100 to 200 units there could be 25 accessible units. Currently there are 6 accessible units.

Funding for development is very competitive. These are WHA plans. WHA is the second largest housing Authority in New England with 3,000 units and 4,400 vouchers. WHA is working with the city and others so together there are solutions to the housing situation in the city.

In summary, there are 140 accessible units at last count and plan for another 90 accessible units for a total of 230 units.

Associate Commissioner suggested using universal design throughout the new construction would have all apartments available for those who need accessibility. A second question: What is happening with vacant property across from Great Brook Valley on East Mountain Street? Response to second question first WHA found that new property was being bought by developers so decided to look at WHA properties to maximize the space already owned. WHA intends to have adaptive apartments/universal approach.

Think about 44' entrance clearance, wider hallways, one bath on first floor etc. Zero-step is planned at the Curtis apartments as well as 36' doorways.

Commissioner Stolberg: Who sets rates for vouchers? The federal sets projections. Response: A few years ago they lowered looking at three year look back. WHA filed a complaint and who a 30% increase but went up a little bit this year. WHA try to work with landlords to work with clients. Cap is 40% of income. The WHA worker has been able to place 60 people this year. The WHA Board of Commissioners has the ability to pay up to 10% more than HUD allows. They have done this as a way to assist the clients.

Developer conversation with Steve Rothschild - 24 Jackson Street, accessible housing consultation

Please allow me to introduce myself. As a lifelong resident of Worcester, I have always been committed to Worcester and have exclusively invested in Worcester. Over the years I have built multiple companies in Worcester, including Empire Furniture Showrooms, Furniture.com, Bulbs.com, Applied Interactive, and Access Fixtures, creating hundreds of jobs in the process.

Over the years I have also developed multiple real estate projects too. Starting with fixing up residential properties and selling them, I moved on to larger projects including Ivy Corset Building (ICB) at 40 Jackson St., Armory Business Center (ABC) at 49 Canterbury St, 98 Beacon which is currently a WIP, and now 24 Jackson St. ICB was an underutilized mill building that I turned into a creative collaborative business community that maintains 100% occupancy and houses about 2 dozen business. Armory Business Center was an empty brownfield that now is 23,500 sq. ft. flex space building housing six businesses that previously were not located in Worcester. 98 Beacon is a mill building being converted to 54 studio loft apartments. 98 was larger than I was comfortable doing on my own, so I have partnered with Civico, now the managing partner, to complete that project. Now I have turned my attention to housing, and specifically fair market housing with accessibility.

There is no need to tell you that Worcester needs more housing, specifically housing that people with limited means can afford and accessible housing. While it may not be legally appropriate to include provisions for accessible housing in the zoning policy, that doesn't change the fact that there is a shortage of modern accessible housing. Accessible housing needs to be built and this is the primary demographic that the apartments at 24 Jackson Street will serve.

24 Jackson will be 100% fair market housing. Consisting of nine apartments, six of the nine apartments will be built for accessibility providing modern housing for a grossly underserved market. The apartments will feature a full-size kitchen with full size appliances including a dishwasher. The apartments will have air conditioning, an in-apartment washer and dryer, and two flat screen televisions mounted on the

walls. In other words, the apartments at 24 Jackson will be desirable regardless of the fair market rent rate. They will be clean, modern and have a great vibe.

Since getting into this development, I have reached out to and spoke with people who need accessibility to personally understand the challenges. Now I keep thinking about our what can be done to improve accessibility in kitchens and bathrooms. Today, in a conversation with a contractor we got into the topic too. We discussed a suggested support in the bathroom so the bathroom can have a lift mounted on the ceiling if required. We also discussed making the entire bathroom waterproof so there are no issues with water exiting the shower area. Naturally the architect will be involved in all of this and while we are designing the apartment. More conversations and review of the plans are required to make 24 Jackson and possible future projects a reality.

To make this project possible, I have a request. While typically I like to prove myself, earn your respect, and then ask for your support, I need community support to obtain AHFT funding. Councilor Bergman and Councilor Mero-Carlson have already endorsed this project. Why do I need your support and AHFT funding? This isn't a project that I can get investors behind or build on my own. While I have arranged a personally guaranteed construction loan, I will still need to put in a lot of personal capital to fund the project. AHFT funding completes what is required to make this project possible. As part of the application, I could really use some support from you.

The following questions were asked:

What is the projected price for the accessible units?

Response: The units are modified one bedroom. By putting closets on one side and an extra wide hallway, bedroom on one side with three walls around it with a canvas on the opening if needed. There is better accessibility. The cost is based on fair market housing of \$1,105 a month. The unit is about 450 sq. ft.

What is the timeline to construct and move in?

He would like to begin construction this summer. The land has been purchased. This project will have to be reviewed and approved by multiple city commissions which takes time. Finance, Team and corporate structure are all in place.

Would you accept a Housing voucher?

Response: He did not have enough information. He would not deny based on funding.

You have looked at bathrooms. Are you willing to look at additional options?

Response: He is willing to meet with others to understand the needs. CLW asked about the ability to use a Hoyer lift. Almost anything can be include if new construction.

Would you be willing to provide me with a letter supporting this project for ATHF? Thank you in advance for your response.

Commissioner Bureau moved to support Mr. Rothschild's idea for accessible housing in the city when he goes to the American Trust Housing Fund for funding. Commissioner Stolberg seconded. All in favor by roll call vote.

Review of AAB notices and applications: No City owned properties

- Variance application - Madison Residential Development

1 Green Island Blvd, Worcester (new construction, mixed use residential)

Nathan Klein from Cube3 and Chris Santoro of Cosentini representing this project reviewed the five variances being requested.

The project consists of the new construction of a mixed-use residential complex consisting of two (2) separate buildings, and is five (5) stories in height. The building includes mainly residential apartments, with an enclosed parking garage, as well as mercantile, amenity, and storage occupancies.

In accordance with M.G.L., c.22, § 13A, this letter and the accompanying Architectural Access Board Application for Variance documents our request for a

variance from the following sections of 521 CMR Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB): ·

Variance 1: §43.3.2 – Group 1 Kitchen Sink Depth Requirements ·

Variance 2: §9.5.6 – Electrical outlet locations in Group 1 units ·

Variance 3: §39.4 – Light switch location in Group 1 units ·

Variance 4: §39.4 - Light switch location in Group 1 units ·

Variance 5: §9.5.7 – Light switch locations in Group 2 units

After hearing the alternatives being proposed for the variances, Commissioner Myska moved to notify the SSB of the Commission’s agreement with the proposed alternative solutions being offered. Commissioner Stolberg seconded the motion. The motion was approved by roll call vote with Commissioner Myska recusing as she as a member of the AAB.

The Chairperson suggested that when building, access should be kept in mind and variances should not be part of the design.

Notice: MA COVID-19 testing and vaccine

Vaccine clinics and vaccine information:

<https://www.mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine>

Suggestions for upcoming agenda items

A tour of Polar Park to see accessibility Updates

Question:

Associate Commissioner Delage asked if an appointment of a Disability Representative had been appointed to the WRTA Advisory Board. Yes, a woman from Westborough has been appointed.

Announcements:

- Next Accessibility Advisory Commission meeting:
March 21, 2023 - 4:30pm
- WRTA Transportation Advisory Planning Group Wednesday,
April 19, 2023– 1-2:30pm

Adjournment:

Meeting was adjourned at 6:26pm by a unanimous roll call vote moved by Commissioner Bureau and seconded by Commissioner Myska.

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