

**City of Worcester Accessibility Advisory Commission  
Tuesday, April 11, 2023, 4:30 PM Meeting Minutes**

**Virtual Meeting**

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

**ASL interpreters available**

**Attendance:**

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

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

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

**Guests:** Project Manager Derrick Marsionis from VHB, others including Chris Anderson, staff from UMass and the architect representing the 378 Plantation Street AAB Variance application

**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 4:35pm.

**Approval of February 28, 2023 meeting minutes\***

Commissioner Larrivee moved to approve the February 28, 2023 minutes as written and seconded by Commissioner Myska. The motion was unanimously approved on roll call.

**Debrief Polar Park annual tour and accessibility update/ review of WooSox Accessibility Guide**

Mr. Lorin was unable to attend today's meeting. Members of the Commission took our annual tour of Polar Park on March 28th. Members attending included Commissioners Bureau, Myska, Finn, Jr., Assistant Commissioner Delage and staff liaison Jayna Turchek.

## Commissions' thoughts:

- WooSox have been listening to the Commission even though there is still work to be done. There was receptivity to those who were present. A big thank you to Mr. Lorin and to the WooSox Organization.
- So many things that were improved from last year.
- This is our third year to tour the Park. Each year we see improvement. Mr. Lorin would be the first to say things were not perfect. The effort being made is appreciated. Mr. Lorin offered a monthly email update on our concerns.
- Assistant Commissioner Delage will be following up with Mr. Lorin about a shuttle for the Team and participants.
- Mr. Lorin is asking for feedback on the Accessibility Guide for Fans on the WooSox website. This is an A-to-Z listing.
- Only one of the shuttles were working on Opening Day 2023.

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

### **Variance applications:**

- 378 Plantation Street – Approximately 4-acre site

Project Manager Derrick Marsionis from VHB, others including staff from UMass and the architect representing this AAB Variance application made the following presentation.

UMass. bought this nursing home to expand bed capacity of the existing campus. The site is adjacent to the campus and will create 72 new in-patient medical/surgical beds. There will be a complete renovation to meet current health codes and is expected to open January 2024.

Variance request from 521 CMR Section 20.2, 20.9 and 22.3 to permit a newly constructed walkway from Plantation /street to the main entrance of the building along the existing driveway to exceed a running slope of 5%. The maximum slope being requested is approximately 12%.

Facts given related to the request: 1. The grade change is 22 ft. 2. There is a stream running through the site that flows into a wetland area next to Plantation Street. 3. There is a wall and guiderail on the wall on both sides of the driveway. The driveway is about 25 ft wide in existing condition.

Proposing to narrow the driveway to 10ft. wide lanes and provide a 6 in. curb with a five ft. walkway and maintain existing grade and guardrail. The first 100 ft. is 3.5% and the rest of the sidewalk is 12.5%. Toward the building it flattens out to about 1.5%.

Question: There is a significant increase in grade over the 3%. Was there an effort to flatten out the grade?

Response: Yes. They wanted to keep the slope relatively flat at the entrance at Plantation Street and at the main entrance to the building where the handicap parking is located. This is the reasoning for having the steep slope in the middle.

Question: The curb cut at Plantation Street appears not to be in line with the crosswalk. Is this the case?

Response: Yes, the plan is to turn the curb cut a bit so it will be in line with the crosswalk.

Question: Is this the former Universality Commons building and then Beaumont Nursing Home? Observation, more concerned about wetland than people. Agreed with previous questioner. The building has four levels. The plan is to have 18 medical/surgical rooms on each floor. People may be using the walkway opposed to driving. The steep slope would be hard on visually impaired people and perhaps people using chairs. Wondered if there would be any signage/tactile aid would make visually impaired person more comfortable.

Response: Yes, it is the former Commons. The main goal is to provide a protected walkway that wasn't there before. Mr. Marsionis appreciated the comments about signage and accessible parking.

Question: Is there a bus stop nearby?

Response: The bus stop is at UMass.

Most people would be using a van service or driving. Plantation Street does not see a lot of walkers.

There are no walk-in services. People will be transferred with appropriate transportation.

Question: Is the walkway a nicety and not intended to be used?

Response: That was the intent to provide a protected sidewalk on the curve.

Question: How will this sidewalk be kept up in the winter?

Response: This will be under UMass. Facilities Department and will be plowed, sanded or salted as any other surface.

Question: What if a person goes up the walkway and gets stuck weatherwise?

Response: There is an accessible van service that is used for visitors to go between campuses.

Question: How does one know about this service? How about visually impaired people. Signs won't help in this case.

Response: UMass will need to be sure current and future services are known and accessible.

Noted: There may be an opportunity to review Plantation Street for its walkability. There are many health services on this street.

Commissioner Stolberg motioned to send to AAB with approval recommendation. Commissioner Larrivee seconded. Motion passed upon roll call with Commissioner Myska recusing herself as she is a member of the AAB.

- 204 Main Street

No one was present to represent the property owner. The Office did receive a Notice of Action today. On May 13, 2023 the AAB approved variances requests as follows:

43.3.2 **GRANTED** as proposed on the condition that: Language is included in lease specifying a tenant may request installation of a complaint sink, that said installation shall be completed within 30 days, and that the installation shall be at no cost to the tenant, and when Group 2A units become available for rent proper notice is given to the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission pursuant to MGL Ch. 151b Sec. 4.

9.5.6 **GRANTED** as proposed

39.4 **GRANTED** as proposed on the condition that: the light switched is equipped with motion sensor.

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9.5.7 (SB-SA light switches) **GRANTED** as proposed on the condition that: the light switched is equipped with motion sensor.

9.5.7 (Closet light switches) **GRANTED** as proposed on the condition that: the light switched is equipped with motion sensor.

No action taken.

**Communication received: Annual report on sidewalk snow removal enforcement**

Worcester Police Dept. – Winter Sidewalk Report

34 Total Complaints.

6 Warnings.

2 Citations.

The contractor was not used. There were no repeat offenders this winter. Several of the sidewalks had already been cleared (or melted) upon WPD arrival.

## **Brainstorm accessible/inclusive restaurant award**

This idea came up a few weeks ago.

The following draft was received by Commissioners for discussion. In the past the Commission has worked to inform restaurant owners about accessibility and affective communication via a brochure which is sent with the annual licensing of the facility. Also the Commission took part is surveying restaurants along Shrewsbury Street a number of years ago.

*The draft included:*

### **Call for submissions- April 11, 2023**

The City of Worcester Accessibility Advisory Commission wants to know your favorite restaurant and how it ranks with accessibility for persons with disabilities. What matters most to you? What restaurants truly deliver on inclusive hospitality? The Commission will provide recognition and awards to the top ten Worcester restaurants for Accessibility in the summer of 2023.

Rules:

- Restaurants must be physically located within the City of Worcester, MA
- Anyone can enter a submission (persons of all ages and abilities, Worcester residents as well as visitors, even restaurant owners and workers)
- Only complete submissions can be considered (sorry we need all the information for a fair review)
- Deadline for submissions: May 31, 2023

### **Application (to be uploaded on a google form)**

Name:

City/town of residence:

Email:

Phone:

Restaurant name:

Restaurant address:

Restaurant web address:

Accessible features (check all that apply): HP parking, zero threshold entrance, automatic door opener, accessible seating, accessible restrooms, large font menus, braille menus, online ordering app/website is compatible with screen reading apps and meets webpage accessibility guidelines, other categories may want to be added.

Are there other accessible features/amenities/services they provide? (Open ended question)

What matters most to you regarding restaurant accessibility? (Open ended question)

How does this restaurant deliver on inclusive hospitality? (Open ended questions)

Is there a specific population(s) this restaurant caters to? (Check all that apply):

families, vegetarians, kosher/halal, persons with food allergies, young adults, seniors, other categories may want to be added.

Suggestion: Develop a list of restaurants that have shown to be supportive in the following ways maybe on the Commission website. Note: That if restaurants are not listed it does not mean they are not accessible.

Question/Comments from the Commission:

What is the purpose or expected outcomes of a project like this?

Response: Perhaps learning the top appreciated accessible restaurants in the city.

This would not relate to ADA compliance rather patron's experience. The Commission may wish to develop wording for a certificate tonight.

The Commission may have other ideas as well.

Is there a way to generate a list of restaurants that have shown to be supportive of accessibility in the following ways: Braille (ck) etc.) A statement that there may be others not listed that may be supportive and not listed here.

Response: Fine suggestion and could be incorporated.

The Chairperson notes that this idea is a work in progress and no decisions have been made.

## **Planning for July accessibility event**

In October 2015 a group of agencies including the Commission held a program called “Tapping into Awareness” which was a flash mob on the Common to celebrate “White Cane” Day.

Commissioner Myska suggested groups come together for a brief gathering to celebrate ADA Anniversary on Wednesday, July 26, 2023 to show that Worcester is inclusive and about people. The idea is to invite people in the business district to assemble at City Hall/Common and walk to St. Vincent’s Hospital converging at the air-conditioned Atrium. CLW was amenable. The Commissioner left a message for Easter Seals.

She asked for the Commission’s feedback.

- Concern about the accessibility. The walk is at grade. She will check with St. V’s about parking.
- Commissioner liked the idea and would participate.
- St V’s would help with alerting the press
- Request a mayoral proclamation for ADA Anniversary.
- Would be great to find a Massachusetts politician who was part of the 1990 ADA vote. It was noted that John Kerry was a State Senator at the time.

Chairperson Bureau moved to have Commissioner Myska proceed with the plan as proposed above to include Commission and all agencies/groups which choose to celebrate the 33<sup>rd</sup> ADA Anniversary in this way. Commissioner Larrivee seconded the motion. The motion approved unanimously by roll call vote.

Commissioners willing to work with Commissioner Myska to please contact her.

## **Notice: Reorganization of Office of Human Rights & Accessibility and transfer of Accessibility Advisory Commission to the Executive Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

See City Council Meeting March 28, 2023, Item 14a. Eric D. Batista, City Manager, transmitting an edited reorganization ordinance for the Executive Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.



Questions:

Would Ms. Turchek continue to be the Commission's staff liaison?

Response: This is unknown.

Would the Commission be focused less on accessibility and include other areas thus diluting the Commission's mission?

Response: there has been no indication of this being the case.

Do we know if the current two accessibility staff will continue in their roles?

Response: We only have the ordinance to work with, Ms. Turchek is currently director of two divisions: Human Rights and Accessibly Divisions. Any changes that are made as a result of the new ordinance is unclear.

Comment: Anything that has to do with diversity or equality should be dealt with by human rights.

Comment: Would like to know more about ADA compliance would be a focus of the Commission. A little worried about this being "watered down". Also, concerned will the public's voice be heard about accessibility issues?

Is there a reason this reorganization is happening?

Response by the Chairperson

He was not sure of the full story, but there had been some difficulty with keeping a Diversity Officer. I think there was an effort to consolidate. The term Diversity Equity and Inclusion is now being used across municipalities, corporations and organizations. We don't know how this will affect the commitment the Worcester has given to disability and accessibility over the years related to ADA compliance and programs.

Is there a way to ask someone to come to the Commission and explain how this reorganization will continue to be a priority?

Response: This is a request we could make. We also could ask the city manager's office to meet off-line. If we did would there be people that would like to be a part of this meeting?

Commissioners Larrivee, Finn, Jr., Stolberg expressed interest

Commissioner Myska notes she felt there was a misconception in the public that accessibility is included in DEI. It really is DEIA. If we don't spoke up, there will be a belief that accessibility may or may not be included in the DEI formular.

The Chairperson noted that a number of Commissioners would like to meet with the City Manager to discuss this reorganization and how accessibility will be a priority.

He suggested people come prepared with the afore mentioned questions and others.

Checking with Director Turchek if she would be the person to bring a request for Commission members to meet with the City Manager. She said she is and would. She noted that four or more Commissioners meeting would constitute a quorum outside of an open meeting which she would not recommend. She suggested the leadership, or a small group meet with the City Manager.

Commissioner Larrivee motioned that the leadership of the Commission request to meet with the City Manager to discuss the upcoming reorganization and its impact on the Commission. Commissioner Myska seconded for discussion. She felt others would represent the Commission rather than her as Vice Chairperson. She named Commissioners Bureau, Larrivee, Stolberg. Commissioner Finn seconded. Motion was approved by roll call. It was noted Commissioner Stolberg had left to attend City Council meeting.

**Notice: MA Commission for the Blind Commissioner steps down**

**[https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/04/04/metro/head-state-commission-blind-steps-down-following-globe-report-turmoil-within-agency/?s\\_campaign=breakingnews:newsletter](https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/04/04/metro/head-state-commission-blind-steps-down-following-globe-report-turmoil-within-agency/?s_campaign=breakingnews:newsletter)**

The article noted the Commissioner step down amidst turmoil in the department. No discussion.

**10. Notice: The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)** is a U.S. government program run by the [Federal Communications Commission \(FCC\)](#) to help low-income households pay for internet service and connected devices like a laptop or tablet.

You are likely eligible if your household's income is below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line, or if you or someone you live with currently receives a government benefit like SNAP, Medicaid, SSI, WIC, Pell Grant, or Free and Reduced-Price Lunch.

If your household is [eligible](#), you could receive:

- Up to a \$30/month discount on your internet service
- Up to a \$75/month discount if your household is on qualifying Tribal lands
- A one-time discount of up to \$100 for a laptop, tablet, or desktop computer (with a co-payment of more than \$10 but less than \$50)
- A low-cost service plan that may be fully covered through the ACP\*

<https://www.affordableconnectivity.gov>

### **Suggestions for upcoming agenda items**

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

### **Announcements:**

- Next Accessibility Advisory Commission meeting:  
May 16, 2023 - 4:30pm- Virtual meeting – Parks Department Annual Meeting with the Commission
- WRTA Transportation Advisory Planning Group Wednesday,  
April 19, 2023– 1-2:30pm

### **Adjournment:**

Meeting was adjourned at 6:10pm by a unanimous roll call vote moved by Commissioner Bureau and seconded by Commissioner Larrivee.

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