

Commission on Disability Meeting

Minutes from Monday, January 28, 2014

Worcester City Hall, Levi Lincoln Room, 3rd Floor

(This meeting was rescheduled due to snow on January 21, 2014)

Attendance:

Members Present: Herbert Cremer, Chair; Stephen Stolberg, Vice Chair; Rachel Shannon Brown; Charles Hiamah; Paul Keister; Susan Swanson; Nancy Garr-Colzie

Members Absent: John Nah, Elizabeth Myska

Staff: Pam Callahan, Dawn Clark

Guests: David Clemmons, Director of Emergency Management and Sandra Mawdsley, Assistant Director of Emergency Management.

Members of the Public: Scott Ricker, Worcester Resident; Jackie Norton, Worcester Resident; Terry Burke-Dotson; Millbury Resident; Jo Hart, Worcester Resident

1. Call to Order: 4:34 PM. The Chair welcomed guests and commission members; each member introduced themselves.

2. Minutes: Minutes of the December 30, 2013 meeting were approved with 2 amendments by unanimous vote, 0- opposed and 0-abstentia

3. Discussion with David Clemons & Sandra Mawdsely - Emergency Management:

Mr. Clemons introduced Ms. Mawdsley and notified the board that she would be replacing Mike Borowiec. He said the department would be trying to foster relationships with the commission going forward and stated that Ms. Mawdsley will be a good resource for the COD.

Mr. Clemons updated commission members on Emergency plans and said that there haven't been any changes since his last visit to the board in May. Parts of the plan are reviewed annually.

In 2009 when Mr. Clemons took over Emergency Management, the main updates included shelters and staff member Mike Borowiec, working with the Red Cross, made sure the shelters were in compliance and met current Red Cross standards. The department was about to embark on updating other parts of the plan and will be engaging this board as well as other City departments to be sure plans are still relevant.

One change that has occurred in the past year is that the Emergency Planning Department finalized the homelessness annex to see if it is relevant and current. In partnership with UMass, they created a plan to communicate with homeless people in case of emergency. Many ways of communicating with the public, including media do not work with homeless so they put in this plan and have been evaluating it during the extreme cold weather. This will be the biggest change in emergency plans that were not there previously.

Mr. Clemons deferred to the Chair to continue the discussion. Mr. Cremer commented that in the past, the COD walked through schools used for emergency shelters and saw things like children's bathrooms too small for adults and therefore not adequate to be used as shelters and inquired if Forest Grove was still used as a shelter. Mr. Clemons said that the last shelter was at Technical High School on Skyline Drive and was pet friendly: pets were welcome. It was advertised in partnership with the Red Cross. At any given point there were 20-30 people who came to utilize the shelter. The only pet was one 'pocket type small dog', but the plan is to continue the service to the community.

Mr. Cremer stated that another community in which he lived had the shelter located in a high crime area and was glad to see the City's shelter was located close to a hospital.

Mr. Clemons explained the decision for shelter location includes factors such as whether or not it is in the affected area of the City. If it is in the impacted area with no water or electricity, it won't be used. The goal is to try to get as close to the impacted area as possible, but not in the affected area. A challenge with schools is having students in session; they are not able to use the gymnasium if people who cannot get back into their homes are still there. Mr. Clemons said he wanted the COD to know that there are many factors in play when choosing a shelter location. Warming and cooling centers are usually at the Senior Center because it is on a bus route and accessible by everyone.

Mr. Clemons said that all shelters have base power, whether they power kitchens or refrigerators isn't a requirement, but Tech High does have generator for basic service; it has power and makes it a good choice.

Mr. Clemons explained the procedure for requesting transportation is to call the advertised number for heating and cooling centers. Residents just call the dispatcher and they will arrange door to door transportation at no cost; the WRTA has been a great partner with this. In the past couple of years only 1-2 people have used the service. It is usually a para transit vehicle, however free transportation that is quick is the priority, not the vehicle.

Ms. Brown asked about the utilization of the registry:

The month of September was preparedness month with ads in papers and billboards in addition to a big push through the Human Rights and Disabilities Office to increase usage. In partnership with Jayna Turcek, they had presentations at the larger Worcester Housing Authority

buildings with the WHA, Emergency Management staff and the Fire Department and these events included emergency preparedness tips. With all the publicity, zero additional residents signed up.

Mr. Clemons said the registry is a good tool for people already on it. They have tried to get the notice out that the registry is safe, and that only people on City staff have access to it and it is only for preparedness and response in an emergency situation, but he said there is more work to be done. The last year has not seen many new people register and he will forward the report of how many are currently registered to the COD.

Susan Swanson asked for clarification on the different types of registries and their purpose:

Mr. Clemons explained there was only one registry and it was done with the City in partnership with public health, the CSRS (Customer Service Response Service) program and the sole purpose was to get their arms around the needs of the community for preparedness. An example is to find out, are there five, five hundred, or five thousand people with oxygen tanks?

During the ice storm there were people who had contracts with their oxygen providers and the trucks couldn't get through the roads, and there were people on dialysis. The City tries to think about how many have utility based needs; oxygen, dialysis; that's what the questionnaire was designed for to let us know; how many in the City have certain needs. It appears people are reluctant to put down their needs, but it is only for response purposes so that in an emergency they can refer to that registry to determine who is affected. If there is a power outage, they can look at the registry and see who they need to contact based on those needs. The information on the registry is only for planning and response.

Alert Worcester is the City's reverse notification system. It is based on the registry information regarding utilities for people who need power for oxygen or other equipment. It will call people identified as needing power for medical devices or oxygen and ask them, "are you ok, do you need services?" The resident pushes 1 for yes, they need help and the call is automatically diverted to a designated number- right now it is the customer service number for the city. Press 2 means no help is needed. It's designed to be that simple, press 1 will divert the call to a live person, press 2 means no help is needed.

Alert Worcester and the Registry is not the same thing. If you are on the registry, it doesn't mean you will get the alerts. We review the registry and have made calls but the intent was for planning, so they are 2 separate and distinct systems.

The registry is a web-based questionnaire on the City website designed with items from the public health MMRS (Metropolitan Medical Response System) system years ago with response needs. We do have the ability to change it so if someone sees that there should be something more current we can put it on there.

Mr. Keister asked if this was part of the 911 system and it is not. The State Verizon 911 system is completely separate; the state registry has 5 fields that may identify if the resident has a life support system, mobility impairment, is blind, deaf or hard of hearing, has speech or cognitive impairment and will put an indicator on the 911 screen for dispatchers on what kind of need may be there. This is all done by Verizon for the State. The indicators are only for dispatchers to know what type of need may be there, we cannot use the indicators for any other reason.

Ms. Brown asked if there could be something on the City's website that explains what each thing is and how to sign up for them. Mr. Clemons

said they could explain the differences between the registries and have responded to the Boards last request to cross reference the links; that has been done.

Mr. Cremer said that he finds the reverse call system useless when phones go dead and asked where to call to notify someone that help is needed and gave for an example that when power goes out his breathing equipment batteries are good for 8 hours. Provided he can get out the next day he will get them recharged, but what if he couldn't get out or power was out longer than that? Mr. Clemons said that was a 911 call. Having a medical need that is critical is a 911 call; the scenario Mr. Cremer described is critical and is an emergency and the number to call in an emergency is 911. Mr. Clemons said that if power is out for 7 days, as it happened in the ice storm, they would find a shelter or some way to provide the medical need.

Ms. Swanson commented she was viewing the Emergency Communications website and suggested the first page have more information for disabled residents. She also asked if the form was available in other languages. There is a google system on the City's website that will translate the form in other languages.

Ms. Swanson asked how the emergency program and registry form interfaces with parents who have children with autism. She asked how it was supporting the needs of these families. Mr. Clemons explained that the registry was really to address utilities; usually when parents call 911, they make requests such as no sirens as sometimes children who have autism may become upset. If there are other indicators that could be helpful to parents with autistic children it could be put on the registry.

Ms. Swanson said there was training for first responders for autistic adults and children and wanted to know if Worcester first responders

had such training. Mr. Clemons was not sure if other first responder-specific training for persons with autism is provided for fire, police, or ambulance staff. Mr. Clemons could only get information regarding ambulance from UMass as they hold the contract with them. Public safety would have to be contacted directly.

Mr. Cremer said he would like to return to the meetings they used to have with Emergency Management – he asked if Mr. Clemons would start setting this up. Mr. Cremer stated that this time he would not delegate this to a coordinator- but will handle it personally. He said it was more than just ice storms, like he saw in West Virginia with the water supply and a similar situation in Newton, disabled people could not go to the fire department and carry back a 12 pack of water, they were sick, they needed someone to bring it to them. During the snow storm, there were some disabled people trapped and he would like to get the committee set up now. He suggested they investigate the shelters as the committee had done in the past; they could go over with Ms. Mawdsley and with the health dept. The committee could start with the annex mentioned. Mr. Cremer reported that in 2008 there was a public hearing and the number one fear with disabled and elderly in shelters was having their medicines stolen. They were so packed in that they were afraid someone would steal their medicine and held it between their legs all night so it wouldn't get stolen. The Red Cross said they couldn't segregate homeless people from the disabled, and now it sounds like the homeless annex is going to separate them. Mr. Clemons said that was not true and the plan is that every type of situation has an annex. There is a winter storm annex, a nuclear accident annex and all the homeless annex talks about is communicating transportation- how to assist people who do not have the ability to communicate or have a phone or address. They are not segregated and still go to the same shelters. Every shelter since 2009 has a police officer on duty 24/7 while

the shelter is open. There has been armed security there to alleviate those fears. Mr. Clemons reiterated that they cannot segregate groups of people.

Mr. Clemons asked that there be a specific reason to form a committee or work group, and it should be formed with reason with expected outcomes. Typically ad-hoc committees are created for specific missions, addressing situations such as was done with shelters. Once the purpose is realized the committee is disbanded. Mr. Clemons said he would be open to it supporting a working group but first needed from the Commission a list of deliverables and what the body of work was going to be. Open ended meetings don't usually serve any purpose for the sake of meeting. There needs to be a body of work; what will be the deliverables from that body, topics to target, goal of the working group so at the end of the day the group can say, "this is what we completed." The Commission needs to discuss what this body will bring to Emergency Management. In order to support a work group with commission members with dedicated staff, Mr. Clemons asked the board to submit the following:

- The mission or goal of the group getting together
- A list of focused topics the group would target
- A beginning and end date for completing the list
- A list of expected outcomes or deliverables that will be the result of the working group

Based on discussion, Mr. Clemons thought a good place for such a work group to begin would be to review the registry, is it still current? Does it address all the needs of disabled residents?

Mr. Cremer stated that it would be nice if there could be references on both the Disabilities website and Emergency website and make it simple for one stop shopping.

Mr. Clemons said another deliverable that he would like to see come out of this could be a single brief page describing 911 disability indicators, the registry and the reverse alert system so that residents can look at it and based on their needs know exactly which system to sign up for. It should also remind folks to provide updated information if they move or circumstances change.

Ms. Brown requested this be put on the agenda for next meeting so that the commission can come up with the list of deliverables.

Mr. Cremer brought up a time when grants were available for emergency knapsacks which were given to disabled with supplies and asked if such were still available. Mr. Clemons said he was not aware of any grants to apply for at this time, however on the Emergency Planning website there are instructions for creating a 'to go' kit.

Ms. Norton said there is a master evacuation plan with the City in Phase I and asked if Mr. Clemons had an update on it. Mr. Clemons said they are creating a master evacuation plan and Phase I was for communities to get together and decide on an evacuation route to get out of the impacted area. One thing learned was that the Town of Holden identified primary roads they would use to get their residents out dumped into what Worcester considered their secondary or neighborhood roads. Phase I was getting community fire, police and emergency management together to see if roads and paths mesh, did it makes sense. If Holden comes from the north, did it make sense to use this road in Worcester or would another route be more effective. We go to 190 and 290 and they are state resources which require bringing state transportation and police

to the table. Mr. Clemons said that they recognize town boundaries, but disasters do not and if the south of the City is evacuated bordering towns may be evacuating as well and the goal is to plan on how to collaborate the evacuations. This will be a regional plan not just a Worcester plan, but they have not yet begun the part of neighborhood evacuations. The next phase will be working on how to evacuate and communicate with people and neighborhoods.

Ms. Norton asked if anything has been done in case of toxic chemical spills etc. Mr. Clemons said that small neighborhoods have been evacuated when necessary but he said they can do better and the regional planning will be a good partnership to address these concerns.

Ms. Swanson inquired into the time line for the phases. Phase I has been completed. Roadways and maps are being readied to distribute to fire and police in towns. When Phase I is distributed to communities, it is not known if it will also be available to the public. All discussion revolves around personal cars and transportation for those who have no car. Other modes such as rail do not work well in a moment's notice.

Ms. Hart suggested partnership with bus companies such as Peter Pan and other commercial bus companies.

Mr. Ricker asked if there was a contingency plan to inform individuals of at least when to shelter in place until they can get assistance. Mr. Clemons said plans, in addition to reverse notification, is to use Charter for emergency messages with tones and beeps. They have also sent public address systems into neighborhoods to broadcast emergency information. If EM is calling for sheltering in place, all of these mediums are put into practice; this is what residents are being told to do. If things change or they are sheltering in a different place they would give that message as well.

4. DCU Walkthrough:

The board was asked who would be available to attend the walkthrough with Mr. Kennedy as requested of the City Manager. Members who volunteered include: Mr. Cremer, Mr. Keister, Ms. Garr-Colzie and Mr. Stolberg. Mr. Cremer requested that someone meet them and let them gather inside the lobby so they would not be standing outside in the cold.

Mr. Ricker stated that he had made 2 prior visits to the DCU and said the needed to be included in the walkthrough, and wanted it to be on record that he should also be included. Ms. Callahan stated that the original petition did not include Mr. Ricker and that the request granted by the City Manager was for Mr. Kennedy and members of the COD. Mr. Ricker stated he had worked on the project for 3 years and should be included. Ms. Brown made a motion to allow Mr. Ricker to be part of the walkthrough. Ms. Callahan reiterated that she was not comfortable amending a request after it was accepted.

Mr. Cremer requested that another advocate of the public be allowed to attend, specifically Terri-Burke Dotson and Ms. Callahan said that it was not open to the public at this time and reminded the board and public that the ADA consultant has not finished his review or report of the facility. Ms. Callahan recommended that the board and Mr. Kennedy do the walk through. Ms. Brown said that Mr. Ricker has been before the board on many occasions in the past years regarding the DCU, and that was why she made the motion to include him, but agreed with Ms. Callahan about adding addition members of the public. She pointed out that the request that Mr. Estrella granted did not involve members of the public. Ms. Brown said that the COD is charged to view plans and construction in the City and hoped residents would have faith in their ability to do just that on behalf of residents. Ms. Brown's motion to include Mr. Ricker was accepted and voted on unanimously.

Ms. Callahan reiterated that changing the request after it has been granted, is not appropriate.

Mr. Cremer said that Ms. Burke-Dotson was dedicated and put in a lot of effort and he wanted her to be included. Ms. Brown asked Ms. Burke-Dotson about her background and knowledge of accessibility. Ms. Burke-Dotson said she had been on the Millbury planning board for 4 years and is used to reading plans. She said when the reconstruction plans came out she looked at them and said they won't work. She stated that her friends in wheelchairs had been season ticket holders for the Sharks but she can no longer get them there because of the parking. She stated that she had been in communication with Ms. Duncan at the DCU for 3 years regarding these issues. Ms. Burke-Dotson said she was a Millbury resident

Mr. Cremer called for a motion to include Ms. Burke-Dotson on the walkthrough. Ms. Garr-Colzie seconded the motion.

Mr. Kennedy spoke to the board and said while he always expected Mr. Ricker would be included he did not think a large entourage would not be appropriate, keeping it simple was better.

Ms. Swanson suggested the board ask Mr. Estrella if he would allow a member of the public. Mr. Cremer called for a motion to request that Mr. Estrella grant permission for members of the public to attend. Ms. Brown said she believed the board did originally intend for Mr. Ricker to attend and called for a vote to allow members of the public which would include Ms. Burke-Dotson. Vote was taken, majority voted against the amendment to allow Ms. Burke-Dotson or other members of the public to attend the walk through.

5. Bullying: A motion was passed to table bullying to another time and was so tabled by majority vote.

6. Communication Relative to Complaints.

The board reviewed the letter of communication sent to Mr. Ricker from Mr. Estrella, interim ADA Coordinator, regarding several complaints. Mr. Estrella's letter indicated that after careful review by Inspectional Services, it has been determined that the City is in compliance with access codes. Mr. Ricker wrote a rebuttal, Mr. Stolberg suggested that Mr. Ricker file his complaint with other state agencies who can determine who is right. The board advocated for Mr. Ricker to go through the grievance process the city has put in place and questioned whether Mr. Ricker's complaints were intended to be a grievance and whether or not the City understood them to be a grievance. Mr. Ricker said his complaints should have gone right to the City Manager as a grievance and asked the board to support his complaint and request that his rebuttal be considered as an appeal and go through the appeal process.

Mr. Ricker requested the board take a vote to support his position on the complaints; however the board voted to table all discussion pending further information on the matter and also on what the board's role is regarding this issue. The board voted to request Mr. Ricker's rebuttal be received as an appeal.

7. Snow Removal Services for Disabled and Elder Persons & DPW Customer Call Center

Mr. Cremer requested a motion to table this discussion to the next meeting due to the time. Ms. Brown requested Ms. Callahan bring to the attention of the City the curb cut on the Front St./Main St. corner of City Hall Plaza because it is buried under snow, eliminating access to the pedestrian walkthrough. The Board encourages all members and the public to use the 508-929-1300 customer call line to report all snow related accessibility issues. This is the line that can direct someone to

resolve the issues and is more efficient than waiting for the next COD meeting.

8. Commission Input for Future Agendas

Ms. Brown requested an update on the Temporary Event Policy Proposal originally proposed by Mr. Ricker.

Mr. Ricker requested the Board support remote participation on boards; Ms. Brown asked that the chair consider this for a future agenda item as remote participation could be a great thing for disabled members.

Mr. Cremer requested regular reporting on the types of calls and complaints that come to the disabilities office.

Meeting adjourned at 6:58 PM.

Submitted by Pamela Callahan