

Commission on Disability Meeting  
Minutes for April 19th, 2016, 4:30PM  
Worcester City Hall, Levi Lincoln Chamber 3<sup>rd</sup> Flr.

**Attendance:**

**Members Present:**, Francesca Abbey , Robert Bilotta, Robert Bureau, Nancy Garr- Colzie, Lindsey Silva, Elizabeth Myska, Paul Keister, Douglas Russell, Jr., Stephen Stolberg

**Members Absent:** Herbert Cremer, Joseph Prochilo

**Staff:** Pamela Callahan, Dawn E. Clark

**Guests:** Barbara Lee, BenePLAN; Antoinette Donovan, Red Cab owner

Members of the Public: Roy Leary, Jamie Dotson, Edward Robinson, Mike Sigel, Peter Kelp, Michael Kennedy, Maria Siemazko

**Welcome, Call to Order & Introductions**

Vice Chairperson Nancy Garr-Colzie welcomed commission members and the members of the public present.

**Approval of March 15th, 2016 Minutes**

Commissioner Stolberg moved to approve the minutes as written. Commissioner Myska seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Presentation about Social Security Disability Insurance benefits BenePLAN) (Barbara Lee)**

Vice Chairperson welcomed Ms. Lee. BenePLAN is one of two programs in the state that helps people on SSDI go to work without losing benefits before one is settle in a secure job. The second program is Project Impact. BenePLAN is administered and staffed by the

University of Massachusetts Medical School's Center for Health Policy and Research.

BenePLAN assists individuals with disabilities who receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI), who are looking for employment or are currently working, to understand how work earnings or wage increases impact these and/or other public benefits.

BenePLAN is available to provide services to staff and consumers of state agencies, employment provider organizations, school systems, etc. in the following Massachusetts counties: Essex, Middlesex, Worcester, Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire. The remaining counties of Massachusetts are covered by Project Impact. The staff is highly skilled and experienced Community Work Incentives Coordinators (CWICs), trained and certified by Virginia Commonwealth University.

BenePLAN works with a number of agencies and advocates. These programs enable us to provide the most accurate and timely information.

- **Disability Law Center:** is the Protection and Advocacy agency for Massachusetts. DLC's mission is to provide legal advocacy on disability issues that promote the fundamental rights of all people with disabilities to participate fully and equally in the social and economic life of Massachusetts.
- **Jobs Without Limits:** is a job board for job seekers with disabilities to connect with employers in Massachusetts.
- **Project IMPACT:** is operated by the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission. Project IMPACT provides benefit planning services in Massachusetts for clients of MRC.
- **Social Security Administration:** provides information that allows BenePLAN to provide its core service.
- **University of Massachusetts Medical School's Center for Health Policy and Research:** is dedicated to research, evaluation, and education initiatives that advance public health policy and

outcomes worldwide. The Center is home to the Disability, Health and Employment Policy unit, where BenePLAN and Work Without Limits are both situated.

- **Virginia Commonwealth University:** provides BenePLAN staff with training and technical assistance, ensuring the highest quality services available.
- **Work Without Limits:** is a statewide network of engaged employers and innovative, collaborative partners that aims to increase employment among individuals with disabilities. Work Without Limits is managed by the Disability, Health and Employment Policy (DHEP) unit at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

Ms. Lee provided the Commissioners with a packet of information including a number of fact sheets on BenePLAN services and how SSDI/SSI and employment can work together. She concluded her presentation assuring the Commission that people who received SSDI/SSI and go to work do not automatically lose their benefits.

The Chairperson thanked Ms. Lee for her presentation.

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

#### **Decision of the Board**

- 102 Russell Street, Docket # C14 069
- 894 Grafton Street, Docket # C12-026
- 50 Water Street, Docket, #V16 001

#### **Stipulated Order**

- 29 Sunderland Road, Docket # C14 044

### **Announcements:**

- **REDD (Rights, Equality and Dignity for the Disabled)**  
May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016, 4:00 – 5:30PM, YWCA, Members Lounge
- **Emergency Preparedness Meeting:** May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016 at  
8:00 am, Parks Department, 50 Skyline Drive

- **Reporting Disabled and Elder Abuse Training:** Worcester Senior Center, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016, 1-3PM (Open to the public-RSVP)
- **Audio Journal, Accent on Ability Radio Program:** May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016, 5-6pm, <http://www.audiojournal.net/>
- **MassDOT Capital Investment Plan:** Tuesday, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016, 6:30pm Union Station, Worcester
- **Next Commission on Disability meeting:** May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016 4:30pm.
- **WRTA Transportation Planning Advisory Meeting:** May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016, 1-2:30pm, WRTA Building, 287 Grove St.
- **Yes Health Speak Up:** May 12<sup>th</sup> 3-4pm. Or May 18<sup>th</sup> 12 – 1pm. (Participate by phone at 1-617-307-7374)

**Emergency Preparedness Tip:** People with disabilities may want to consider having several gallon containers of water per person at home for emergencies.

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

- Presentation on Best Buddies
- Conversation with Dr. Malika Carter, City of Worcester Diversity Officer

### **Red Cab Accessible Cab with Guest Speaker Toni Donovan, Owner/Operator of Red Cab**

Ms. Donovan from Red Cab greeted the commission and told them it was her pleasure to provide accessible van service to the community. She stressed that wheelchair accessible vans were available for all holidays, religious celebrations, ceremonies, medical appointments and airports including departure and arrival. Vans are available for social occasions such as Bingo and friend or family events. Ms. Donovan said

she would try to answer the prepared questions she had been given from the commission and then answer any further questions members may have.

Overarching Concerns:

Regarding Evening and holiday hours: Red Cab vans are available 24 hours 7 days a week – weekends and holidays

Complaint procedures: All complaints should go through the dispatch system and either she or her office manager will reply to every complaint. To date there have been little complaints and none that could not be dealt with in a satisfactory manner to the customer. Ms. Donovan said that she would personally handle any complaint regarding the accessible van service and in the event she was away, her office manager would personally take the call. Ms. Donovan said that all calls left for her are generally returned by the next business day.

Regarding number of vehicles: Ms. Donovan said she would think about adding to the number of vans, however at this point the two are not fully utilized at this time.

Regarding driver training: Ms. Donovan stated that she had a background as a registered nurse at UMass Memorial Hospital and both she and her general manager were certified trainers for drivers of disabled passengers. She is active in the Taxi Cab, Limousine and Paratransit Association (TLPA) and has been for 40 year. She declared that passenger safety and customer service were her upmost concern and all her drivers are pre-screened by Worcester Police Department in addition to Sexual Offender Record Investigation (SORI) as well as a CORI and drug test. She said in addition to ADA regulations, drivers receive training on rules and conduct but in the end it is the personalities that make the accessible vans so successful. She said that she carefully places the right people in the vans to insure passengers have friendly and professional drivers. Ms. Donovan said she would be happy to attend any training the community has to offer.

Ms. Donovan said that her auto shop was open six days a week and if vans need work, they are generally back on the road in a day if not hours unless they are waiting for parts. She said the vivid lime green was

purposeful to be conspicuous in snow and other weather conditions. Wheelchairs are secured and bolted down for safety. She said that the vans are only equipped to accept regular wheelchairs at this time and could not accommodate larger pieces of equipment such as scooters etc. This was due to the fact that the chairs must be wheeled up a ramp rather than having a lift. When asked if she had plans to include a lift vehicle in the fleet, she said that she was waiting to see what the manufacturing and technology trends were bringing before she invested.

In closing Ms. Donovan stated that she would appreciate help getting the word out that the vans are available 24/7 for any transportation needs. She said her vans have provided transportation all over New England from Worcester and one time even Florida. She stated that customers have used the transportation to attend weddings out of state and they are happy to accommodate.

Maria Siemaszko from the audience asked Ms. Donovan if they had multi-lingual staff and stressed how important this was to accommodate the disabled community who also had limited English proficiency. Ms. Donovan said she had Spanish speaking dispatchers but would think about other bi-lingual staff.

### **Adjournment:**

The meeting was adjourned.