

**City of Worcester
Accessibility Advisory Commission**

Tuesday, April 20, 2021, 4:30 PM Minutes

Virtual meeting with WebEx platform

Live streaming on City's website:

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

Call-in conference line and ASL interpreters provided

Attendance:

Members Present: Robert Bureau, Philip Economou, John Finn, Jr., Nancy Garr-Colzie, Fitzroy Hall, Dee Karuna, Linda Larrivee, Elizabeth Myska, Joseph Prochilo, Stephen Stolberg

Members Absent: James Delage

Staff: Jayna Turcek, Dawn E. Clark

Guests: Professor John Rogan, Clark University; John Maher, Spectrum Charter Communications

Call to order, instructions for virtual meeting, introductions

Chairperson Bureau called the meeting to order and requested Director Turcek to provide the technology instructions for access to the meeting. Closed captioning is available for this meeting. This is artificial intelligence (AI) not live interpretation. Commissioners then introduced themselves.

Approval of March 16, 2021 minutes

Commissioner Linda Larrivee moved to approve the March 16, 2021 minutes as written. Commissioner Nancy Garr-Colzie seconded the motion. All approved.

Presentation of analysis on tree cover/greenspace and environmental justice neighborhoods in Worcester

The Chairperson welcomed and introduced Professor Rogan of Clark University Geography Dept. He presented information on tree coverage/green space and environment justice in Worcester neighborhoods. Over the past twenty plus years he has partnered with an undergraduate research group called HERO (Human Environment Regional Observatory). He specializes in GPS and sensors above the ground.

About ten years ago he and others began to look at Massachusetts and Central MA as a result of the impact of the Asian Long-horned beetle outbreak and devastation. Looking at the effect trees have on the environment has become particularly important for Worcester since then. At this point science has verified that the more tree cover the lower the temperature. They cool hot top, asphalt and other hard surfaces during the heat of the day. More recently is the looking at the justice issue of health and people related to the environment.

Gleaned from the many charts and maps he shared the following information was provided:

- The Worcester air temperature has increased since 1960. Globally the increase has been about 2%. This helps with deciding what kind of services and green space that are needed.
- In Worcester there has been an increase in short intense periods of perception from 1960 on with longer periods of drought. Tree infrastructure will help in keeping moisture in the ground and air cleaner.
- Temperature forecasts for Massachusetts and therefore Worcester for 2030's on up to 2070's will be like New Jersey, then Virginia, to South Carolina in climate. Trees have the ability to sustain a climate.
- *There are two ways in which trees can affect public health. One is air quality.*
 - o The leaves absorb particular matter.
 - o They modify air circulation acting like a wind break.
 - o On the down side there is a small amount of ozone emission. BOC's can interfere with the respiratory system.
Pollen production – affects allergies with sometimes requires medication.
Trees can trap pollutants creating poor air quality.
Clark U. is currently doing air quality research in various sections of the city.

He quoted large scientific studies about air quality with access to medical records.

- With trees there were lower cases of childhood asthma (New York). There was some criticism of the study around allergy to the particular tree type. He used because of the preponderance of evidence of the benefit of trees.
- Another multi-year study done with people of all ages in England in various locations on vegetation. The result was the more vegetation the less asthma and hospitalization.

- A third study done in Michigan in 2017 on insect infestation of Emerald Ash in 2001 (currently in Worcester). The larva will eat the top preventing the root to nourish the tree. This study looked at women and cardiovascular disease. Women living in counties with emerald ash infestation were 41% likely to have this disease. This study is classified as a natural experiment.
- *The second way in which trees can affect public health – Heat mortality*
A Massachusetts study showed the consecutively extreme hot days brings a higher mortality rate. (7.2 more deaths Boston area) There was a greater effect of Heat mortality on people of color and poor in environmental/economic communities.
- Mr. Rogan suggested this is a complex issue and needs to be more study, yet there is a connection between heat mortality and trees.

Worcester – Long-Horned Beetle Infestation

- HERO has not done heat related studies in Worcester. The process will begin soon. Data may be available in the Fall.
- HERO has worked with the Worcester Tree Initiative and the MA Dept. of Conservation Starting with the long horned beetle infestation when ext. 30,000 trees were removed. Map was shown before and after the tree removal (mainly Norway Maples).
- Residents were quoted: “I felt like I picked up and moved.”; Prior to the infestation our neighborhood as bright, healthy and cheerful now it looks depressed.
- Another way trees play a part in health relates to mental health and a sense of community.
- With the start of the Tree Initiative and the planting of trees, this has been enormously successful.
- Summer temperature is homes prior to the infestation 73% and 5% hotter after the tree removal.
- Impervious surface is key in aiming to mitigate heat when judging tree cover needed
- The trees planted ten years ago have given about 2.5F degrees cooler in areas where trees were removed.
- In some places, the micro climate is the difference between 82F and 90F.
- As a summary. Pollution and heat on a street or neighborhood can significantly affect elderly and children. With tree or vegetation cover both these factors can be reduced making for healthier people.
- Worcester and other cities are experiencing longer summers in places where there are no trees.

- National Grid bills were reviewed before and after the tree removal and found that utility bills were 40% higher because of the increase usage due to hotter weather. Thus the state established the Greening the Gateway Cities Program to include Fall River, Chicopee, Pittsfield, Leominster and others.
- Mr. Rogan shows maps done about Worcester using data from Mass. Environmental Bureau including racial, immigrant and low income data map, Tree Canopy is 40 – 50% not distributed evenly. Lower income neighborhoods have from 10% or less. Temperature map where red is the center is hot and the blue is cooler temperature.
- Environmental Justice Factors and Air Quality Map (Afternoon) – At 3:00pm temperature across the city is about even.
- Environmental Justice Factors and Air Quality Map (Evening)- In the evening there is about a 5°F higher difference between the Environmental Justice Neighborhoods and others which cool down in the evening more and less tree canopy cover.
- The city core remains hot at 7 oor8pm.
- Buildings and building height will trap the heat.
- There are ways to mitigate the public health and economic sustainability of the city. A map was shown of Chicopee showing how this can be done with vegetation which resulted in energy savings which over time can be substantial.
- Aggregating energy savings for 800 trees in Chicopee, the savings would be \$118,000 in 30 years. In addition to a healthier community.
- Potential for future tree plantings in Worcester is high.

Commission question: What is tree planting plan for Polar Park? Director Turchek will follow up. She will also ask Park Commissioner Robert Antonelli also Tree Warden, to provide tree planting and removal policy when he visits the Commission again.

Cable and internet discounts for seniors and persons with disabilities

Mr. John Maher from Spectrum Charter Communications presented the following information. Spectrum Charter Communications offers Worcester two reduced cost programs for seniors and persons with disabilities as part of license with Worcester

1. 10% discount on basic cable for a Worcester head of household 65 and older or handicapped. One has to qualify with SSI, Medicaid Veteran Services benefits or eligible for senior tax abatement program. Basic cable is \$15.00 without the discount.

2. For 17.99 a month for Spectrum Internet Assist with an additional \$5.00 to add Y FI. One has to qualify as head of household 65 and older or handicapped. One has to qualify with SSI, Medicaid Veteran Services benefits or eligible for senior tax abatement program.

Commission member said his visits to Spectrum headquarters on Grafton Street resulted in staff not knowing about the program. Mr. Maher will connect the office about this.

A third program would be the Emergency Broad Band (EBB) was signed into law a few weeks ago. Commissioner Myska forwarded EBB information for the Commission. Mr. Maher was not sure when or how Spectrum would carry this out.

The Commission requested that Spectrum post the availability and specifics of these discounts on their websites. They also requested Spectrum use the same eligibility guidelines as the federal program to avoid confusion. Director Turcek agreed to follow up with these requests and clarify information.

Notice: MA COVID-19 vaccine

- **Eligibility and appointments** <https://www.mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine>
- **Homebound vaccination program** www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-homebound-vaccination-program
- **FAQ-Transportation to COVID-19 Vaccine Appointments for MassHealth Members and Health Safety Net Patients**
<https://www.mass.gov/doc/transportation-to-covid-19-vaccine-appointments-for-masshealth-members-and-health-safety-net-0/download>
- **Worcester Mobile Equity Vaccine Clinics**
www.worcesterma.gov/uploads/7b/1b/7b1b9a6da4845690a43f34241f277b4f/wmevc-community-guide.pdf

Notice: Virtual film screening and discussion of Crip Camp,

Thursday April 29, film 4pm, discussion 6pm Email accessibility@worcesterma.gov for Zoom link

Review of AAB notices and applications: No City properties *

Amended Notice of Action:

Docket #V20-214 Commercial Building 1098-1102 Pleasant Street

No Action taken

Suggestions for upcoming agenda items

A walk with Park staff to see Commission's suggested changes related to accessibility features for last month Park presentation.

Announcements:

- **WRTA Advisory Board Meeting April 29, 2021, 8:30am, Contact:**
tsebastian@therta.com
- **Next Accessibility Advisory Commission virtual meeting:**
May 18, 2021, 4:30pm

Adjournment:

Commissioner Fitzroy moved to adjourn and Commissioner Larrivee seconded.
All approved at 6:28pm

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