

City of Worcester
Accessibility Advisory Commission
Tuesday, October 19, 2021, 4:30 PM Minutes

Virtual meeting with WebEx platform
<http://www.worcesterma.gov/video-on-demand>
ASL interpreters provided

Attendance:

Members Present: Robert Bureau, James Delage, Philip Economou, Fitzroy Hall, Darya Karuna, Linda Larrivee, Elizabeth Myska, Christina Parissi Joseph Prochilo, Stephen Stolberg

Members Absent: John Finn, Jr.

Staff: Jayna Turcek, Dawn E. Clark

Guest: Commissioner Toni Wolf, Colleen Casey, and Ellen Spencer from Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

Call to order, instructions for virtual meeting, introductions

Chairperson Bureau called the meeting to order at 4:30pm and requested Director Turcek to provide the technology instructions for public access to the meeting. Commissioners then introduced themselves on roll call.

Approval of September 21, 2021 minutes*

Commissioner Larrivee moved to approve the September 21, 2021 minutes as written. Commissioner Parissi seconded the motion. All approved by roll call.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month Conversation with Commissioner Toni Wolf (Mass. Rehabilitation Commission)*

Chairperson Bureau welcomed Commissioner Wolf who thanked the Commission for inviting her and her team to celebrate National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) and provided an agenda for the conversation:

- New MRC location
- Vocational Rehabilitation Overview
- Who We Serve
- Community Living Overview
- MRC Connect
- Office of Individual and Family Engagement Office
- Communication and Branding

A power point was provided as a guide to this conversation.

1. New MRC Location – Worcester Area Office Director, Ellen Spencer, explained that for about 50 years the Worcester MRC Vocational Office was located at 359 Main Street in Worcester and in the summer of 2021 moved to 50 Southwest Cutoff in Worcester co-locating with the Department of Transitional Assistance which is on a bus route and para-transit access. If we know of people who cannot get to this location staff is available to meet in other location if requested. She is asking for feedback on the location’s accessibility so appropriate changes can be made.
2. Vocational Rehabilitation Overview
 - The Commissioner then set the stage for understanding Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR). MRC VR work is based in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.
 - The VR program is not solely intended to place individuals with disabilities in entry-level jobs, but, to partner with consumers to gain employment mobility.
 - To improve the quality and labor market relevance of workforce investment, education, and economic development efforts to provide America’s workers with the skills and credentials necessary to secure and advance in employment with family-sustaining wages.

We are doing everything we can to provide livable wage jobs,

3. Who MRC Serves

- There were several slides presented with data on people served by MRC and some specific to services provided to Worcester residents. As well as a slide on Looking Forward: Focusing on Occupational Growth. MRC looks at types of disabilities to understand trends and how to best serve people. MRC's computer system does not yet identify the neurological disabilities such as autism. As for the demographic information the racial mix has been consistent. MRC knows there is work to reach out to people of minorities need to be done as well.
- There is a larger number of younger people so if the Commission members think of other ways we can assist his population this would be helpful.
- This is the beginning of the third year with an agreement between Dept. of Mental Health and MRC to serve people with mental health with employment services. Worcester has two mental health specialists at the Worcester Office which serves Worcester, Southbridge and Milford. MRC meets with partners such as Open Sky who meet monthly to review cases and services for the client. They served 200 people his past year. There is a concerted effort to get people eligible for service quicker.
- Many people worked with the WooSox this past summer to get their "feet wet" in the job market.
- MRC serves between 18,000 -19,000 people a year and provides support around disclosure, job coaching and other services the person needs to be successful.

4. Community Living Division

- Cross divisional & integrated approach to serving MRC Consumers.
 - An integrated big picture view offers MRC the opportunity to deploy necessary services in a well-coordinated fashion – achieving greater success for our consumers.
 - Over the years, as MRC has expanded or changed its services, unintentionally, we have developed self-contained programs with different rules, regulations, requirements and organizational structure.
 - A cross divisional and integrated service delivery approach within MRC serves people better, more efficiently and effectively.
- The Community Living Division is comprised of a variety of programs, supports, and services that address the diverse needs of adults and transition age youth with disabilities:
 - To fulfill their desire/need for community integration
 - To gain maximum control of their destiny, and
 - To participate fully in their community

Providing wrap around services will often better assist the successful employment service outcome.

- Community Based Services in the Community Living division:
 1. Brain Injury Services
 2. Supported Living Programs and Array of Youth Services
 3. Identifying accessible housing
 4. PCA program
 5. Medication
 6. Finances
 7. Recreation
 8. Transportation
 9. Vehicle and Home Modifications

10. Home Care Services

- Assistive Technology- Enhancing Independence – This service area gives the person the opportunity to explore what will help with work and everyday life.
 - AT Regional Centers
 - Short-term/long-term device loans
 - AT Loan Program
 - Providers that can provide devices/trainings

- Independent Living Centers (ILCs)
 - MRC contracts with ten Independent Living Centers (ILCs) across the state, serving people of all ages regardless of the type of their disability.
 - At least 51% of the board and staff of ILCs are persons with disabilities. ILCs provide:
 - Peer Counseling
 - Skills Training
 - Information & Referral
 - Advocacy (Individual & Systems)
 - Transition services
 - Worcester ILC- Center of Living and Working

- Resources
 - **MRC** | www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-rehabilitation-commission
 - **MassMATCH** | www.massmatch.org
 - **Assistive Technology Regional Centers** | www.massmatch.org/inventory
 - **Assistive Technology Loan Program** | www.massatloan.org
 - **REquipment** | www.dmerequipment.org
 - **Assistive Technology Exchange** | www.getATstuff.com
 - **Independent Living Centers** | www.masilc.org
 - **TAP Programs** | www.ma-tap.net

- For more questions, please contact Anna.Hermann@mass.gov

5. MRC Connect:

This is a procedure MRC has been working on for the last year and a half and is still a work in progress but close to implementation. In the past people have had to apply for each separate service. MRC Connect is one application for service in the two divisions: Vocational Rehabilitation and Community Services. Hopefully when fully in place this will make it easier for people to receive services in a more timely fashion. Employees have been assigned specific roles to receive applications and determine eligibility.

6. Office of Individual and Family Engagement Office

- **Mission:** The Office of Individual and Family Engagement is committed to ensuring development and delivery of comprehensive services, supports and community engagement opportunities across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for individuals with disabilities. To do this, we partner with individuals with disabilities and their chosen allies to inspire, educate, develop, and break down existing systemic barriers.
- **Vision:** Our vision is based on the philosophy that individuals with disabilities have the same basic rights as people without disabilities. We aspire to become the model service delivery agency in Massachusetts and beyond. We will do this by breaking down barriers and ensuring individuals with disabilities have full and equitable access to the services and supports they want and need to live self-sufficient and fulfilling lives in the communities of their choice.
- **Focus:** identifying and addressing the needs and concerns of individuals served by MRC and their families:
- **Top 3 Office Priorities:**

- Recruit, hire and train disability and family partners (office champions) to help lead the office in priority development and implementation.
- Develop a quarterly newsletter and quarterly disability and family forum to connect with individuals and families and share resources, hear feedback, and partner to elevate services
- Create a cultural shift in the way MRC addresses, thinks and talks about disability through development of training and tools.

7. Communication and Branding

- The Office of Communication oversees all of the agency's communication channels, addressing the internal MRC community and the public at large.
- This includes internal communication, publicity for the agency, event announcement and coverage, and media relations. We also support departments and initiatives across the agency to spearhead and facilitate all marketing initiatives.
 - We strategize, initiate, and facilitate design projects in print and digital mediums ensuring consistent branding and voice.
 - MRC crafts the strategies, messages, and campaigns that bring our message to the world, and advances MRC as the Commonwealth's premiere agency dedicated to helping individuals with disabilities live and work independently
- Engage with MRC
 - Newsletters, announcements, campaigns through email marketing
 - Social media
 - Press releases
 - Stories for mass.gov
- Next Steps
 - There are so many issues and challenges facing individuals with disabilities and their families. MRC wants to work, partner and collaborate with individuals with disabilities,

families, allies, providers and stakeholders – in bringing attention and finding solutions to the most pressing issues.

- Opportunities to connect:
 - Participating in list serve for upcoming forums and newsletter
 - Participating in the Office Listening and Learning Tour
- Rebranding
 - The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) has been around for nearly 65 years but is not widely recognized by the public. It's time to find a new position for this vital organization and determine how to bring its mission, vision, and goals to life through a brand that is streamlined, proactive, and accessible.
 - There is an opportunity to evolve MRC's brand to become a leading force accessible to the Commonwealth's priority communities, now and in the future.

Connect with MRC:

600 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02114

www.mass.gov/mrc

Facebook: @MassRehabCommission

Twitter: @MassRehabComm

Instagram: @massrehabilitationcommission

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/massachusetts-rehabilitation-commission-mrc/>

Commissioner Toni Wolf

Toni.Wolf@mass.gov Cell Phone 857-283-0235

Administrative Assistant/Project Coordinator, Jacqueline Ryan

Jacqueline.Ryan2@mass.gov

Discussion and suggestions from the Commission members:

- Good to have more public information about MRC meeting people at places other than 50 SW cutoff
- Would be good to have appointment reminders – looking for funding for this system. - MRC is hiring a consultant to review MRC’s IT ability. Will be about a year before something in place.
- Worcester office is open working hybrid
- Limited Language Proficiency (LEP) and information. MRC is aware of this need and is hiring an agency to make messaging clearer and understandable. On-line language is translated into 11 languages. Interpreters are available locally.

Thanks yous were shared.

Recommendations to city manager for vacancy on WRTA's Advisory Board Disabled Commuter Population Position

Associate Commissioner James Delage is interested and will need more information before making a decision. The Commission agreed to visit this item at its next meeting.

Notice: MA COVID-19 vaccine

- **Walk-in Equity Clinics for COVID 19 vaccines Wednesdays at the Worcester Public Library-** Need an ASL Interpreter?
To request interpreter/accommodation call Michelle at 774-303-6976 or email mortizocasio.socialwork@gmail.com
- **Vaccine clinics** <https://www.mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine>
- **Homebound vaccination program** www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-homebound-vaccination-program

Review of AAB notices and applications: (No City owned properties)

- Variance application, 156 Main Street- Elwood Adams Apartments

Suggestions for upcoming agenda items: NONE

Announcements:

- **White Cane Day and Wheelchair Stroll Wednesday October 20, 2021, Contact accessibility@worcesterma.gov**
- **WRTA Transportation Advisory Planning Group, Thursday, October 21, 2021 – 1-2:30pm**
- **Next Accessibility Advisory Commission virtual meeting: November 16, 2021, 4:30pm**

Adjournment:

Commissioner Larrivee moved to adjourn and Commissioner Parissi seconded. All approved by roll call at 6:47pm.

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