

**Commission on Disability Meeting**  
Minutes for August 20th, 2019, 4:30PM  
Levi Lincoln Chamber, Worcester City Hall, 455 Main Street

**Attendance:**

**Members Present:** Robert Bureau, Dee Karuna (late), Elizabeth Myska,  
Joseph Prochilo, Stephen Stolberg

**Members Absent:** Robert Bilotta, Dee Karuna, Nancy Garr-Colzie, Fitzroy Hall,  
John Gleason, Paul Keister, Lindsey Silva

**Staff:** Dawn E. Clark

**Guests:** Edgar Luna, Worcester Economic Development; Michael Seibold, Open  
Sky, Inc.

**Welcome, Call to Order & Introductions**

Vice Chairperson Bureau called the meeting to order. Commissioners introduced themselves. Associate Commissioner Stephen Stolberg was raised to full member for the meeting.

**Approval of July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019 minutes**

Commissioner Prochilo moved to accept the July 16<sup>th</sup> minutes as written.  
Commissioner Myska seconded. All approved.

**Conversation about City preparations for Census 2020\***

Edgar Luna from the City of Worcester Economic Development Office made the following presentation on the Census 2020: The Census is a federal mandate and the City is responsible for letting everyone know. City Assistant City Clerk Nikolin Vangjeli and Edgar Luna are spearheading this effort for the City.

This year there are some changes in how one responds to the census. Previously, a form was received in the mail, the receiver would fill it out and return it by mail. This year each household will receive a number and can respond by telephone, on line or mail. If by April or May 2020 a household has not responded a federal census taker will visit the home to see if any help is needed to complete the form.

In the past some of the under counted groups have been seniors, immigrants and children. Because of this the City has been working with the school department, the Housing authority, subsidized units and others to inform people about the census by April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. In addition there have been radio conversations and planned public service announcements. There have been meetings with groups across the city in an effort to inform people about the importance of the census. At stake is \$675 billion allocated based on the number of households that respond. For every person we demonstrate living in the City of Worcester we get more funds from the federal government. These are the funds we use for schools, roads and other projects every benefit from.

Mr. Luna emphasized that Worcester is the second largest city in New England and Massachusetts. Mr. Luna believes the city will prevail in this role. The City uses this fact in its marketing to attract businesses. It is important to provide accurate information. Working in Economic Development, Mr. Luna receives inquiries from companies' local and out of state to discuss their interest in locating in Worcester.

Many generations of immigrants came to Worcester and contributed what they had and today Worcester is what they created. Recently new groups of immigrants have come to Worcester and are adding their contribution to the city, for example the technicians from India, China, etc. There are many different languages spoken in the city as well. To reach as many people as possible there is a group of people working together with the city to make sure all people are informed about the importance of the census.

There was to be a citizenship question on the census, right now it is not on the forum, but could change. People are scared about how the data will be used. This has created a lot of fear particularly in the Latino and Puerto Rican (American born) communities about what the impact of their lives would be.

Please let him know of any group or activity that would benefit from a presentation on the census information. About 17% of the community did not respond to the 2010 census. Efforts such as the establishment of a task force comprised of service agencies are working with their constituencies to inform people about the census. The city is working with the schools, Senior Center and housing developments to improve participation.

Data on individual households cannot be shared with anyone. It is a challenge to convince people this is the case given the current rhetoric.

He provided the Commission and public with informational flyers and said that employment to be a census taker was still available.

Public comment: In the future there needs to be a question on the census about Deaf & Hard of Hearing. The concern will be directed to the regional office in New York.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Luna.

### **Open Sky informational conversation\* (Michael Seibold)**

Mr. Seibold handed out a one page fact sheet and thanked the Commission for the opportunity to share information about Open Sky. He is the Operational Director of Development for Open Sky and worked for 39 years for Alternatives which merged with The Bridge of Massachusetts in July 2018 and became Open Sky located at 4 Mann Street (off of Chandler) in Worcester. Together they serve over 2,000 people and have 1,100 staff in over 100 programs in Central Massachusetts. Their budget is \$83 million.

Their mission is: blending best practices with the power of community, we partner with individuals and families to see beyond and live beyond perceived limitations to fulfilling lives.

Services include:

- Services and supports for people who have mental health challenges, intellectual/developmental disabilities, brain injuries, autism spectrum disorder, substance use disorders, homelessness, and other complex challenges.
- Services and supports for LGBTQ+ youth through the Safe Homes Program and provide training for school and counseling personnel across the State through The Bridge Training Institute.

- Provide opportunities for people with and without disabilities to come together through arts and culture offered by Alternatives ValleyCAST at the Whitin Mill.
- The housing first philosophy is used. \$2.2million dollars are given yearly to families with no strings attached (About \$1,600 per family)

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Seibold.

### **Planning for School Committee Candidates Forum\***

The Chairperson made reference to postponing the forum to a date and place to be determined. There was no specific action on this point.

The Commission then reviewed the questions previously submitted with edits. The Chairperson read the questions aloud as requested by the Commission. There were nine questions divided into three categories. Candidates will be asked to respond to one question from each category as posed by the forum's moderator. There was a suggestion that candidates submit written responses to all 9 questions.

Commissioner Prochilo moved to modify question 3 to read: "Q3: How would you ensure inclusion in the classroom and access to all student activities for students with disabilities?" Commissioner Stolberg seconded the motion. All approved.

Commissioner Prochilo moved to proceed with the process of 2 minute opening statement, responses from one question from each of the three categories of questions ending with a minute and a half closing statement from each of the candidates. Commissioner Myska seconded. All approved. A set of count-down minutes will be needed.

We need now a date and location sometime late September or in October. These are being firmed up. Hopefully all the candidates who make it through the primary will be able to be present. We will also request their written responses.

### **Review of annual report and discussion of FY20 Goals**

The Commission reviewed the draft of the FY'19 annual report and offered some edits. The Commission picture will wait until more members are present.

The Commission began the process of suggesting goals for FY'20:

- Transportation Initiatives and On-Demand Service that is available, accessible and affordable.
- Review and follow WooSox Stadium for accessibility
- Complete assessing accessibility of Shrewsbury Street restaurants and develop guide book for city restaurants
- Continue Visually Impaired mobility walks and restaurant review

Commissioner Prochilo moved to maintain the suggested FY'20 goals suggested at this meeting and continue the discussion at the next meeting so other members can contribute their ideas. Commissioner Myska seconded. All approved.

**Election of Officers** This item was tabled so more members could be present.

**Review of AAB notices and applications:** **City properties in bold**

Variance Application

- 100 Institute Road, Docket # TBD

Notice of Hearing

- 16 Salisbury Street, Docket #19 168

Decision of the Board

- 140 West Boylston Street, Docket #19 170
- **Grafton Street, Docket #19 136**
- 155 Ararat Street, Docket #19 035
- 332 Main Street, Docket #19 060
- **47 Camp Street, Docket #V19 195**

**Public Requests to speak**

The Chairperson allowed the public requests to be heard for a limited time.

Anti-foreclosure group request

Grace Ross and members of the Anti-Foreclosure Group alleged that the Central Housing Court was not complying with a recent decision of the Massachusetts General Court regarding the eviction process and rights of persons with disabilities to participate in their cases.

Commissioner Prochilo made the following motion: the commission recognizes the rights of all individuals with disabilities in relation to having cases heard and handled by the Worcester housing court in accordance with the ruling by the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts as it applies to the local Housing Court in Worcester. Commissioner Stolberg seconded the motion. All Approved.

### Debbie Orzack

She was concerned about how she and other people with disabilities were going to have transportation to get to doctors and other appointments now that both accessible cabs are off the road. The Commission said there is a city-wide group working on available, accessible and affordable transportation initiatives and the City Manager has also established a working group to address the issue.

She wanted to know about the Canal District Shuttle not being handicapped accessible.

A third issue Ms. Orzack raised was safety on transportation vehicles.

### Announcements:

- **REDD (Rights, Equality and Dignity for the Disabled) Sept. 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019,** 4:00 – 5:30pm, Easter Seals, 484 Main Street
- **Audio Journal, Accent on Ability Radio Program: September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019,** 5-6pm, <http://www.audiojournal.net/>
- **Next Commission on Disability meeting:** September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019 4:30pm
- **Emergency Preparedness Meeting:** October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019 at 11:00am at 2 Coppage Drive.

### Adjournment:

Adjourned – 6:51pm

\*Material can be viewed at the Office of Human Rights & Disabilities during normal business hours.