

City of Worcester
Accessibility Advisory Commission
Tuesday, December 21, 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, John Finn, Jr., Fitzroy Hall, Linda Larrivee, Elizabeth Myska, Christina Parissi, Joseph Prochilo, Stephen Stolberg

Members Absent: Darya Karuna

Staff: Jayna Turcek, Dawn E. Clark

Guests: Niko Vangjeli, Worcester City Clerk; James Brooks, City of Worcester Director of Housing Development and Healthy Homes

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 November 16, 2021 minutes*

Commissioner Larrivee moved to approve the November 16, 2021 minutes as written. Commissioner Parissi seconded the motion. All approved by unanimous roll call.

Review of Automark machine performance during last election

The Commission heard from Niko Vangjeli, City Clerk. He also oversees the Elections Division for the City of Worcester. He provided a history of the city's use of the Automark which operates as a pen to

allow independent voting for those who may need an alternative method of voting. Languages available are English and Spanish. The city has one Automark machine for each of the 50 polling location plus a few more as back up. They were provided by the Secretary of State's office in 2006 or '07 with the Help Vote Act and tested prior to each election.

The City Clerk is looking into what is possible for replacing the aging machines. The Clerk expects an increase in the number of Worcester poling locations next year. Finding additional old, working machines like what Worcester is using is a concern sue to expense and availability of replacement parts. A newer product would make Election day a lot easier.

The Election Commission is currently debating what to do and is looking at what options may exist. The Secretary of State is ultimately responsible for certifying any equipment proposed.

A video of "the Express Vote", a newer product, was then shared. This produce is compatible with current tabulating machines. Voter card gotten from poll worker. Ballot is a card. Approved by Federal election Commission, but not certified in Massachusetts.

With regard to cost, the city would have to put out a bid if they were to independently make these purchases. If State purchases the state would pay. The State currently owns the Automarks used in Worcester.

There is no available data on how often the Automark is used. The City Clerk said a survey may be considered in the next election.

He asked the Commission to support the Election Commission's effort to secure accessible voting equipment. **Commissioner Prochilo made the motion to support the Election Commission effort to secure accessible voting equipment having as many options as possible to choose from. Commissioner Larrivee seconded. The motion was unanimously approved by a roll vote.**

Update on accessible housing survey project Holy Cross student video and data groups*

Students from both these groups were present: Hailey Tietjen, Clare Casey and Amanda Wilderman. This was a semester long project. Commissioner Prochilo worked with these students. The video group produced and shared a video explaining the features of accessible housing. This project raised the student's awareness of the need for accessible housing in the city. The students also learned the importance of public boards. They testified to the fact that first hand experience can greatly enhance a student's awareness and knowledge of this and other subject matter.

A member of the public suggested Deaf, hard of hearing and vision impaired terminology might be learned. The video is good on physical terms but not as clear on these. Also the use of Braille and intercom accessibility features are areas to add.

The data group contacted private multi-unit complexes to determine how many accessible units were available. About three-quarters of the semester was getting access to buildings. This group found that even though they had a letter explaining what they wanted to do they still experienced push back from project managers in the form of unanswered phone calls and receptionists that were not entirely helpful. Going in person to the complexes rather than calling on the phone produced better data results.

Things they found noteworthy: There are age requirements for many buildings that people need to be aware of. There were no ASL interpreters available. Often the managers did not know the ADA requirements for accessibility.

The student spokeswoman for the data group is majoring in ASL and has learned the accessible housing needs of the Deaf population. There is more identifiable information about mobility accessibility needs than for other forms of disability. She suggested that the city aim to build

universal design units so there would be more accessible units. 16 housing complexes were surveyed for accessibility.

Vice Chairperson Prochilo thanked the students for their work that will help the Commission in its effort to achieve a listing of accessible housing units in Worcester.

Concerns and Comments raised as follows:

Commissioner Stolberg asked if the Worcester Housing Authority had been contacted. He would be willing to work with the Director.

Commissioner Parissi wants to encourage the Commission to continue this project. The Mass. Access Registry and the MA Housing Navigator websites will likely be merged in the near future. Director Turchek will follow up with CHAPA.

Mass Access Registry <https://www.massaccesshousingregistry.org>

MA Housing Navigator <https://search.housingnavigatorma.org>

Discussion of local accessible housing database

James Brooks, Director of Housing Development and Healthy Homes for the City, works mainly with Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds that come into the city. This year 22 units received HUD funding including 126 Chandler Street, Worcester Common Ground project; Main South CDC project on Grand Street; etc. There is a new data base of HUD funded units. The data is being captured at Inspectional Services when permits are being pulled. Data could possibly be captured from 2010 going forward but before that it would mean going through paper files for accessible unit data.

For a federally-assisted new construction housing project, Section 504 requires 5% of the dwelling units, or at least one unit, whichever is greater, to be accessible for persons with mobility disabilities. An additional 2% of the dwelling units, or at least one unit, whichever is greater, must be accessible for persons with hearing or visual disabilities.

The city tries to leverage additional units with developers and then the question becomes what size unit is needed. Commissioners noted that Worcester residents do not always get the unit.

The City is establishing ad-hoc committees to review various priorities for federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding within core areas - social services, mental health, business assistance and arts & culture. \$28 million is set aside for housing. If you are interested in serving on one of these committees, please send a cover letter and resume to ARPA@worcesterma.gov. More information can be found online: www.worcesterma.gov/arpa

Response RE: Doherty HS construction: No changes since last presentation to Commission that impact accessibility of building. This response is the result of an inquiry of a Commissioner's suggestion for future agenda item made at the November 2021 meeting.

Grafton Street (MassDOT project) site review discussion and Recommendations *

Three members and staff did a site visit with MassDOT staff on November 30. A write-up was produced of issues/concerns and will be shared with MassDOT lead engineer on this project and city engineer. Of note were numerous mid-street crosswalks, numerous apex curbcuts in locations where Commissioners believe a perpendicular curbcut was warranted, poles in path of travel, and extremely steep slope without handrail on corner of Plantation and Grafton Streets.

Notice: MA COVID-19 vaccine

- **Walk-in Equity Clinics for COVID 19 vaccines Wednesdays & Saturdays at the Worcester Public Library, 3 Salem Sq.** Need an ASL Interpreter? To request interpreter/accommodation call Michelle at 774-303-6976 or email mortizocasio.socialwork@gmail.com
- **Vaccine clinics and vaccine information:** <https://www.mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine>

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

Variance Application and Notice of Action:

- 22-28 Mulberry St (Alta Seven Hills) (new apartment complex)

Notice of Hearing:

- 50 Richland Street (Learning First Public Charter School)
(V21-155)

No action was taken.

Suggestions for upcoming agenda items

Announcements:

- **Next Accessibility Advisory Commission virtual meeting:
January 18, 2022 - 4:30pm**
- **WRTA Transportation Advisory Planning Group**
No December meeting

Adjournment:

Commissioner Prochilo moved to adjourn and Commissioner Larrivee seconded. All approved by roll call at 6:35 pm.

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