

Minutes of the Accessible Commission

Date: September 30, 2025

10:00-11:00 AM

100 Cambridge St, Boston, MA, 02114

Members Present

Eric Shupin (Chair Designee, on behalf of
Secretary Augustus)
William Joyce
Allan Motenko
Michael Muehe (remote)
Matthew Steele (remote)
Valerie Fletcher (remote)
David Gillespie (remote)
Catherine Boyle (remote)

Members Not Present

Rep. Haggerty
Sen. Cyr
Danna Mauch

EOHLC Staff

Jack Burke
Matthew Walsh
Philip Dearing
Josh Cuddy
Will MacArthur (remote)

Others Present

Meg Ribera (Sen. Cyr's Office)

Call to Order

Eric Shupin (Chair Designee) welcomed members and called the meeting to order at 10:03 am. Per Open Meeting Law, the Chair named those council members who are attending virtually. There was a motion to approve minutes from William Joyce, with a second from David Gillespie. Accepted by roll call unanimously.

Working Groups Overview

Eric thanked the working group leaders and turned it over to them for their initial recommendations.

David Gillespie shared initial recommendations from the existing building working groups. The first recommendation focused on zoning shifts. This would include expanding dimensional exceptions for accessible features, providing additional incentives for accessibility features beyond baseline requirements, and requiring expedited local reviews. William Joyce emphasized that the zoning only currently exempts ramps, but other lifts or similar means of accessing a building are not included.

Gillespie talked through the second recommendation to increase funding for local housing authorities to clear deferred maintenance backlogs, particularly for accessibility features. Joyce mentioned that MAAB has seen many complaints against housing authorities where elevators were down for months, but that don't have the funding to do these essential repairs. Allan Motenko added that MOD gets calls about this as well. He added that funding should be

allocated for accessible repairs since incremental maintenance over time is usually cheaper than expensive repairs later on. Not having working elevators undermines the point of accessibility features.

Gillespie shared the third recommendation to update the MAAB's updates to 521 CMR. This update would exempt certain upgrades from the 30% rule. Motenko added that some legislators have raised concerns about the new regulations, but that good progress is being made. William shared that the subcommittee has been doing the most significant re-write since 1996. They are adopting rules and language that aligns with the federal requirements and are ensuring that there are no compliance conflicts between state and federal rules. Next steps include harmonizing this existing work into full drafts, receiving public comment, and then finalizing regulations by the middle of 2026.

Michael Muehe mentioned that there has been language introduced to require more accessible housing when an existing building is rehabbed. He suggested that the commission could endorse that effort. Gillespie mentioned that this might make it a lot harder to make adaptive reuse projects happen economically. Matt Steele added that it is hard for developers to get an exemption under the current system and asked whether it is possible to have an exemption process that is easy to attain. Joyce suggested that they consider this more as a potential separate recommendation.

Motenko shared the updated recommendation from the housing search working group. He suggested centralizing information on the HLC website, ideally with filters and tools to allow users to find what they need as easily as possible. Steele added that this could help landlords as well who are trying to accommodate for tenants as well. Valerie Fletcher asked what the financial implication would be. Motenko responded that compiling information would not be too much of a cost, but significantly improving website usability might cost more money. Fletcher offered to do website testing if that is helpful to do.

Steele shared the second recommendation to have local authorities do a self-assessment of accessibility access. Rather than just doing a survey, this assessment could be included in the Annual Plan and the Portfolio Needs Assessment work. Cathy Boyle added that even if this was done once, it needs to be done in an ongoing way. If you embed it in the work they are doing anyway, it is more likely to get done and minimize the burden on them. Boyle added that the annual planning is a state requirement. Shupin mentioned that he can ask the state public housing team to discuss this in more detail.

Steele shared the third recommendation to support reasonable modifications in private apartments. Specifically, this would require property owners to pay for reasonable accessibility modifications if the unit is 5 or more units (rather than the existing 10 or more units requirement). Steele has used this law to get tenants ramps, showers, and other key tools. David mentioned an unintended consequence of this work is that smaller buildings could become condos. Muehe mentioned that he was successful in getting his landlord to modify his bathroom using this law. He emphasized that this is a critical tool for tenants with disabilities since they

have much less money than landlords in most cases. Boyle asked how common buildings are between 5 and 10 units. Shupin responded that we could try to pull how many buildings are of that size. If possible, it would be helpful to understand how many of these modifications occur each year, but that data would be hard to get. Motenko added that we might track the disputes and that we gather how many use the Home Loan Modification Program. Gillespie mentioned that his company spends \$25-\$50 per unit per year on reasonable accommodation, but that number is likely much higher for older housing stock than what he manages. Motenko further emphasized that most accommodations aren't that expensive.

Motenko introduced the fourth recommendation from their group to encourage local housing authorities to provide a preference for individuals with disabilities. He mentioned that ideally HLC would put out a public housing notice with best practice language for local housing authorities to use on this work. Boyle mentioned that her local housing authority didn't even know they had the ability to do this work and that they were worried that this would create a stampede from people outside of town. When Winchester implemented this, it cut 2 years off of the waitlist for individuals with disabilities and no major problems emerged.

Boyle explained the final recommendation that staff in school could be trained to understand housing resources for individuals with disabilities. Specifically, the working group recommended DESE incorporate this into their curriculum for the Transition Specialist Endorsement.

Shupin thanked everyone for their hard work on these recommendations. He suggested picking a date in November to hold on individual's calendars. Joyce also suggested finding a meeting in December to vote on the recommendations and the meeting.

Wrap up and meeting closing

Shupin thanked everyone for their time. Motenko made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Joyce. Voted unanimously (7-0) to adjourn at 11:02 AM.