

Minutes of the Accessible Commission

Date: October 28, 2025

10:00-11:00 AM

100 Cambridge St, Boston, MA, 02114

Members Present

Secretary Ed Augustus
Michael Muehe (remote)
Catherine Boyle (remote)
Matthew Steele (remote)
Allan Motenko
Valerie Fletcher (remote)
Danna Mauch
William Joyce

Members Not Present

Rep. Haggerty
Sen. Cyr
David Gillespie

EOHLC Staff

Jack Burke
Matthew Walsh
Philip Dearing
Will MacArthur

Others Present

Meg Ribera

Call to Order

Call to order at 10:02. Secretary Augustus entertained a motion to accept the minutes for the last two meetings of the commission, moved by Allan Motenko and seconded by Valerie Fletcher. The motion was unanimous (7-0) and the minutes were adopted. Secretary Augustus expressed his gratitude for the commission carrying on its work in his absence the previous meeting and thanked the committee for its recommendations to date. He noted that today will be an opportunity to hear from Matthew Steele and Allan Motenko on additional recommendations.

Working Groups Overview

Matthew Steele noted that both recommendations to be discussed came primarily from the Fair Housing Alliance of Massachusetts, a coalition of four fair housing organizations. The Alliance reached out to the working group and proposed a number of recommendations, which the working group whittled down to two. The first recommendation is that HLC issue guidance regarding transferring program participants between public housing and voucher programs to meet accessibility needs. Some LHAs and RAAs do not allow these transfers, and the working group recommends that subject to availability, tenants should be able to transfer between programs as a reasonable accommodation to meet accessibility needs. Further, the working group noted that HLC could advise local housing authorities that they may contact neighboring housing

authorities to facilitate transfers when needed to meet accessibility needs and to ensure that vacant accessible units are filled with residents who need the accessibility features of these units. Steele noted that in his time at the Boston Housing Authority, transferring tenants between programs was a frequent practice.

Secretary Augustus noted that Meg Ribera from Senator Cyr's office has joined.

Valerie Fletcher asked for clarification on whether this is more about raising awareness than any other change. Steele said yes and that the PHNs are a key vehicle for doing so.

Allan Motenko introduced the second recommendation. He noted that HLC has already created an Office of Fair Housing, and the working group proposes an additional step to create a Fair Housing Ombudsman. This ombudsman would be a point of contact for raising concerns of a systemic nature. Secretary Augustus requested clarification in the recommendation to note that the position would require additional funding in the legislature. Danna Mauch expressed appreciation for the Secretary's counsel to use a more active voice.

Secretary Augustus noted that William Joyce has joined.

Matthew Steele asked whether the current office has staff beyond Director Whitney Demetrius. Secretary Augustus responded that the office is currently a one-person operation and lauded Director Demetrius for her work in creating partnerships and leading HLC's fair housing work, and noted that the hiring freeze has posed challenges in bringing in additional staffing for the office.

William Joyce introduced a recommendation from the Accessible Development and Market Dynamics working group, to require 10% accessibility in projects funded by the MA Affordable Housing Trust Fund. Where the state is expending substantial resources funding projects, it is valuable to create additional accessibility beyond what is in the private market. Secretary Augustus noted the feasibility constraints for adaptive reuse and asked for clarification about whether the recommendation would apply to both adaptive reuse and new construction. Joyce said that adaptive reuse varies substantially in complexity and adaptability, where adaptive reuse of a mill with a large floor plate for accessibility is more feasible than adaptive reuse of existing residential structures. The category of adaptive reuse includes several quite distinct building types, and a residential structure with existing interior walls is far more complex than a mill conversion. Secretary Augustus noted that this complexity is a reason to lean toward more flexibility rather than a hard-and-fast 10% requirement. Joyce recommended that it may be worthwhile for the Trust itself to develop more fine-grained criteria for which building types can feasibly be adapted for accessibility. Fletcher noted that the group should remember the counsel of David Gillespie in a previous meeting who emphasized differences between reusing office buildings and old rectories. Steele reported that he has consulted with an architect at Davis Square Architects who recommended that it is better to provide it and have an exemption, rather than not requiring it, and that perhaps the recommendation should be to set a hard 10% requirement for new construction and a 10% requirement with a straightforward exemption

process for adaptive reuse. Secretary Augustus recommended taking the recommendation back to discuss with Housing Development and Trust staff at HLC to refine language. Catherine Boyle recommended that 10% accessibility must be considered in adaptive reuse, with a requirement that developers provide a reason for not providing 10% of units as accessible.

Michael Muehe offered the next recommendation, which is a recommendation for statutory change. The Massachusetts Architectural Access Board is limited in its ability to require adaptable units to be produced in a gut rehab. Muehe noted that the AAB has a thorough appeals process to allow exemptions for developers who prove that compliance would be impractical. Matthew Walsh noted that David Gillespie was unable to join today but had concerns with the initially submitted language, and that the language presented to the commission reflects a revision to the initial submission. Secretary Augustus noted that there is still an iterative process to come on language changes for recommendations and encouraged the Commission to continue carefully considering potential language changes. Fletcher and Joyce each emphasized that a key benefit of adaptable units is to facilitate aging in place with minor adaptations. Joyce further explained that Group 1 (adaptable) units are significantly less burdensome to build than Group 2 (fully accessible units) and cited information from Katie Dennis that there is not an appreciable cost difference between Group 1 units and other construction.

Wrap up and meeting closing

Secretary Augustus asked the Commission for any other thoughts on the recommendations or other matters before the Commission, then requested that Matthew Walsh provide an overview of next steps. Walsh stated that the next meeting will be in mid-November, which will be the final opportunity to provide any new recommendations, and will also feature a rough draft of the report. The December commission meeting will be an opportunity to review the final draft and provide feedback on updates since the November draft, as the final report draft will then be submitted by HLC to meet its December 31st statutory deadline for reporting.

Secretary Augustus noted that there will be some commonality between the three commission reports being submitted, and that it would be valuable to see cross-referencing between the commissions in each report. Matthew Walsh informed the commission that cross-referencing of recommendations will be included in each report for the commission's consideration.

Secretary Augustus entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting, moved by Allan Motenko and seconded by William Joyce. The motion carried unanimously (8-0).