**DRAFT Minutes of the Accessible Commission**

Date: August 14, 2025

1:00 PM – 2:30 PM

18 Chestnut Street, Worcester, MA 01608

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Members Present**  Secretary Ed Augustus (Chair)  Matthew Steele (remote)  Valerie Fletcher (remote)  David Gillespie (remote)  William Joyce (remote)  Jeff Dougan (remote)  Catherine Boyle (remote)  Michael Muehe (remote)  Allan Motenko (remote)  Danna Mauch | **Members Not Present**  Rep. Haggerty  Sen. Cyr |
| **EOHLC Staff**  Jack Burke  Matthew Walsh  Philip Dearing  Josh Cuddy (remote)  Will MacArthur (remote) | **Others Present**  Benji Kemper  Center for Living and Working Staff  Meg Ribera (Sen. Cyr’s Office) |

**Call to Order**

Secretary Ed Augustus (Chair) welcomed members and called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm. Per Open Meeting Law, the Chair named those council members who are attending virtually. There was a motion to approve minutes from William Joyce, second from Valerie Fletcher. Accepted by roll call with Allan Motenko abstaining.

**Working Groups Overview**

Secretary Augustus shared an update that the legislature approved an extension for the commission to deliver its findings to the end of 2025. He thanked the working group leaders and turned it over to them for their initial recommendations.

Valerie Fletcher and William Joyce shared recommendations from the accessible development and market dynamics working group. They first shared that MA regulations have requirements related to mobility disabilities, blindness and visual impairment, and deafness and heart of hearing, but not clear standards on neurodivergence. Valerie pointed to the UK standard on neurodivergence as a good precedent. They recommended developing standards or requirements to also encompass mental disabilities.

Valerie and William then shared a recommendation that the Commonwealth invest more resources on data collection for individuals with disabilities. They shared that a number of key CDC datasets on disability have been cancelled and that good data is vital to inform good policy making at the state level.

As a third recommendation, they suggested increasing funding for affordable accessible dwelling units. Finally, they suggested that the appropriate agencies should develop standardized or model designs for accessible and inclusive dwelling units and sleeping rooms. They emphasized that this could increase awareness of accessibility needs amongst younger designers and potentially drive down the cost of development. Valerie emphasized how success pre-fab accessible efforts have been in Singapore and Japan.

The Secretary thanked them for their effort and opened it up to the group for questions or responses. Catherine Boyle emphasized how important data collection is and that autism data collection is declining federally, but is critical for determining how much housing will be needed for individuals with profound autism. Matthew Steele asked more about what specific MAAB reform might be needed. William answered that they are still figuring it out, but ideally outlining a new unit type that is not addressed in other aspects of the code. Valerie shared that she is gathering code examples from across the US and globally. Matthew emphasized that the home loan modification program could be enhanced to cover some accessible conversion work or the cost differential in construction.

Allan Motenko and Catherine Boyle then presented recommendations from the Housing Search, Tenant Selection, and Discrimination working group. Allan first recommended that HLC and MOD work together to create a new centralized website for one-stop shopping for folks with disabilities seeking information on housing search, retaining existing housing, and more.

Catherine then shared the recommendation that housing authorities add a black-box notice for individuals with disabilities to request reasonable accommodation. Catherine shared how long and complex housing applications are and how difficult it can be for individuals with disabilities to complete them within 10 days. She also emphasized other needs to help accommodate access such as flexibility on who needs to attend an intake meeting and allowing CHAMP to accept no-fault loss of housing from MCB, DMH, DDS, MassAbility, and other agencies in lieu of a court order.

Finally, Matthew shared a recommendation on improving Housing Navigator Massachusetts. This includes new legislation requiring property owners to post accessibility features on the website, to increase the vacancy notice period, and to allow potential tenants to access the application for units online. The Secretary shared about the investments EOHLC is making in creating a common application through Housing Navigator and that improving features could be included in that work. Matt added that there is often reluctance on the part of property managers to tag units as accessible or not because they could potentially convert adaptable units to become accessible. Catherine added that when you look on the housing navigator and are directed to websites, the market-rate and affordable units have different websites, and people who submit the market-rate application will be automatically rejected.

David Gillespie added some additional context as a frequent 40B developer. They need to have an affirmative fair marketing plan, so HLC could provide recommendations for additional groups that may want to get notice for lotteries that are happening for affordable housing, some of which is accessible. He also called out developers need to distribute the moderate-income units through all unit types in the building, so the group would need to figure out how to allow for more flexibility. The Secretary added that CHAMP currently encourages people to apply to all 229 authorities in the state which leads to longer wait times and higher vacancy rates of available units while they work through applicants that aren’t interested in units they applied for.

The group also had a discussion on tracking vacant accessible units. David shared that fair housing rules prevent developers from asking for too much information from tenants on their needs. The group agreed that this is an important problem to solve, but that the scope of the program is unknown.

**Center for Living and Working Presentation**

The Secretary thanked everyone for their work and turned it over to the Center for Living and Working to give a presentation as the host of the days meeting. Benji Kemper explained their campaign to make 10% of the affordable housing trust fund units accessible. He emphasized a research report that making adaptable units accessible doesn’t cost too much development cost for new construction, but does for rehabilitation. David added that in his development world, there can sometimes be a lower unit yield or that accessible units can rent for less money in a market-rate environment. He emphasized that he supports the effort, but that requirements should fit in with projects that pencil out.

**Wrap up and meeting closing**

The Secretary thanked everyone for their time. The third working group mentioned that they will present their recommendations at the next meeting. Matt Walsh emphasized the timeline that the plan is take the recommendations commission members have presented by November to try to draft a final report which we’ll report back to you in early December, and we’ll aim to make the adjustments we need to get it finalized by mid-to-late December.

**Allan made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Valerie. Voted unanimously (8-0) to adjourn at 2:25 PM.**