



Boston Disability Commission Advisory Board

BOSTON CITY HALL | ONE CITY HALL SQUARE | 9th FLOOR | ROOM 967 | BOSTON MA, 02201
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Minutes for Monday April 23rd, 2018
9th Floor BRA Board Room 900, Boston City Hall, 5:30 – 7:30 PM

KRISTEN MCCOSH
Commissioner

Commission Members

Zary Amirhosseini

Feleshia Battles-Byrdsong

Jerry Boyd

Eugene Gloss

Dusya Lyubovskaya

Carl Richardson

Kyle Robidoux

John Winske

Present:	Staff Present:
(JB) Jerry Boyd (CR) Carl Richardson (DL) Dusya Lyubovskaya (ZA) Zary Amirhosseini (FB) Feleshia Battles-Byrdsong (KR) Kyle Robidoux (JW) John Winske Not Present: (EG) Eugene Gloss	(KMC) Kristen McCosh, Commissioner (PM) Patricia Mendez (JC) Jaymi Cohen (JD) Jessica Doonan (SL) Sarah Leung
Guests: Stephen Walter, The Mayor’s Office of New Urban Mechanics; Caroline Whiddon, Me2 Orchestra	

February and March Meeting Minutes: Kyle Robidoux (KR) made a motion to approve the minutes and Jerry Boyd (JB) seconded. All members unanimously approved the minutes.

Disability Organization Presentation: Me2 Orchestra, Caroline Whiddon: Caroline (CW) began her presentation by speaking about her husband’s mental health challenges and why they decided to start an orchestra for people living with mental illness. The orchestra started in late 2011 and it is now a full orchestra of 60 people, with and without mental health challenges, who perform in prisons, rehabilitation facilities, and in other locations. The mission of the orchestra is to erase the stigma of mental illness and to changes the minds of people who live with these diagnoses. The orchestra began in Boston, and the Department of Mental health offered to support them and gave them practice space. The program is starting to expand into other states across the country.

Feleshia (FB) asked for the location of the Me2 Orchestra in Jamaica Plain and about the cost of the program, and CW responded that they were at Hope Central Church and they are now at Bethel A & B Church. She also said that there is no fee to join, there is no audition, and people of all ages and abilities join. Dusya (DL) asked if the orchestra ever plays compositions by people who have mental illnesses or if they have done a search of that. Caroline responded by saying that the most feasible composers to use are the traditional ones. However, the long-term vision for the orchestra is to commission works from people who are living with these disorders.

Jerry (JB) asked when the season runs and CW said that it runs the school year, typically September through May. She also said there is a free concert for patients and the general public on Monday, May 7th at the Fuller Mental Health Facility. Zary (ZA) asked if hospitals could schedule the orchestra to come perform, and Caroline said they are always interested in new venues; however, they do have over 40 people so they require a larger space. FB asked how they recruit and CW said they are always looking for new people to join, especially string players. They are also hoping to someday create a Me2 Chorus for those who do not play an instrument.

Website information: Me2orchestra.org
info@me2orchestra.org
802-238-8369

City of Boston Department Presentation: Mayor's Office on New Urban Mechanics (MONUM), Stephen Walter:

Stephen (SW) introduced the work that MONUM does and described some of their projects, which intend to inspire questions and start conversations. MONUM was formed in 2010 as one of the first offices in the United States that does this type of work. They partner with other departments and community organizations to try new things. Their work is not limited to a certain topic, and unlike other city departments, MONUM has the ability to fail by trying new things. When they succeed at something, MONUM works with departments to scale the work. SW then described MONUM's work in three phases: explore, experiment, and evaluate. First, they conduct research to see if anyone else is already doing the work. Then, they experiment and put something out in the real world to test and evaluate it. SW emphasized that innovation is not just about data or applications or internet of things; rather, it is about people.

SW continued to discuss five specific lessons that MONUM has learned over time. These lessons include build things that people want and need, such as City Hall to Go. Next, how you build is just as important as what you build, with the example of a 285 square foot apartment. The third lesson is to encourage and enable civic behavior with everything they do, such as Citizen's Connect which turned into Boston 311. The final two lessons learned are to use experiments to build trust and compassion, such as city workers taking a selfie fixing a problem, and be delightful, such as Tidraphone which is a piano that is on the bridge above the Charles River to inform people about tides and climate control. SW then touched upon the Boston Engagement Center, which is a location where people can hang out, play games, read books, and feel a little more human. As a result, sometimes MONUM takes a technological approach and sometimes they do not. Their staff comes from a diverse set of backgrounds and interests.

SW described the Aira project in partnership with the Disabilities Commission. Aira technology's aim is to provide rich description services to people who are blind or low vision through a phone. You can either use the camera on your phone or the glasses that have a camera. You can call up Aira services and the video feed is sent to a call center, where another human is looking at what you are seeing and describing it. This is helpful for navigation, facial cues, or business meetings. The City of Boston experimented with this around the Boston Marathon and One Boston Day, where the technology was free to use. SW said that there were 38 unique callers, 69 total calls, and the average call length was 38 minutes, which indicates that people were using it as a companion to get a sense of the experience of the marathon itself.

JB asked if there is typically a fee to use the Aira service, and SW said it is typically \$80 per month for 90 minutes, similar to an old school phone plan. Aira also allows places to pay for a subscription, such as a Starbucks. The Perkins School for the Blind and the MA Association for the Blind have the service paid for on their campuses. KR asked about the "who" of what MONUM is doing and SW said they aim for the margins first, specifically the people who have not had the benefit of being designed for. They are always looking for community partners to fit their gaps in experience and expertise. KMC said that MONUM often reaches out to disabilities, most recently on self driving cars. She said they are very forward thinking when it comes to accessibility and inclusion.

David Viera of Hyde Park asked if MONUM has approached the Boston Public Library with the Aira idea, and SW said they have worked with BPL before, and they will reach out to them in the future. Aira transpired within the course of the month, but they are hoping to reach out to BPL, BPS schools, parks, and more.

Chair's Report: Carl Richardson

No new business at this time.

Commissioner's Report: Kristen McCosh

KMC began her report by providing an update on the Advisory Board's open seats. Two years ago they received the approval at the state legislature level to increase the board from 9 members to 14. They continue to work with Intergovernmental Relations to find space that can accommodate all 14 members and have enough space for wheelchairs. The Deaf Tax days were completed a few weeks ago, which consisted of three full days of tax preparation work for people who are deaf. KMC then spoke about the Commission's Accessibility Priorities Survey. Over 400 surveys

have been completed and the goal is to have 500. In September, the Commission will begin analyzing data to create a strategic plan.

The Commission is also working on a list of AP Commercial spaces to make public. Further, the office has a fellow from Muldova starting at the end of this week. He will be focusing on policy research, government services, equity, and disability and human services. KMC then discussed the Commission's focus on systemic accessibility. They are working with all departments, such as MONUM, the BPDA, BTD, and Elections, to implement policy changes that increase access and inclusion. Currently, they are working on a Disability Housing Task force to create opportunities for people who are disabled and elderly who are often left out of programs and policy work. The Commission also works with the Office on Fair Housing and Equity on housing lotteries to ensure that more people with disabilities apply for accessible units. KMC discussed their work with Human Resources in developing a hiring toolkit of affirmative outreach, policy training, and intentional outreach, so that the city reaches more people with disabilities.

KMC transitioned to speak about upcoming events. The Community Forum will take place on May 23rd, 2018 from 2-4 pm at the Boston Public Library, in the Guastavino Room, which is where the Transportation Summit was held. ADA Day will be on July 24th, 2018 from 12-2pm. The Abilities Expo and Civic Engagement events will take place in September.

Jessica Doonan (JD) provided a summary on the transportation summit held in March. She thanked board members for attending and said there were around 100 attendees, many who we have not historically reached. The summit lasted two hours and it was co-hosted with the Metropolitan Planning Organization. It consisted of 10 different breakout tables with ranging topics including bicycles, sidewalks, MBTA, busses, Uber, and more. Each table had a scribe and facilitator and we are waiting to receive the feedback from the MPO. Overall, the Commission was very impressed with the turnout and the feedback received from the event.

KMC said they have commitment from the BPL to have a ramp installed for the Community Forum in May. DV asked how the Commission will be distributing notes from the transportation summit. KMC responded that because there is so much information, the MPO will be pulling together summaries and trends of the report. The report will be on our website, in our newsletter, and at all of our events. JB noted that City Hall will be having upcoming events on the plaza in the good weather and was curious about accessibility. KMC announced that the architectural access staff created a City Plaza Accessibility Checklist for these events.

Architectural Access Update: Patricia Mendez

Patricia Mendez (PM) discussed summer events coming up on City Hall plaza. Sarah (SL) has been producing a 1 page accessibility checklist, specifically for events at City Hall. This checklist will be used for all events coming up this year. The checklist includes items such as an accessible entrance, notifications on websites for event planners, information and resources, and it also encourage people to call the architectural access staff for more information. PM said they will send the checklist to board members. She also informed the board about House bill H2498 and Senate bill S1379 which would update architectural access requirements, including "employee only" areas and the quantity of adaptable (Group 1) apartment units. PM said that there is still an opportunity to contact legislators in support of those two bills because they increase the employment and housing numbers for people with disabilities. There are only 9 more weeks in general session before they break at the end of July.

CR noted that since the board is expanding to 13 members, he is wondering if there is a system where they could electronically share variance requests so that the Commission could help give approval or disapproval for them. PM said the Variance training will take place on May 18th and it is intended for ADA Coordinators of Municipalities and Commissions on Disabilities. KMC said new members should be appointed before May 18th.

Old Business

No old business at this time.

New Business

No new business at this time.

Action Item

No new action items at this time.

Public Input

DV commented that seasonal bikers can become a problem for people with disabilities. Bikers often park and lock their bike son poles that obstruct walkways and they often ride on sidewalks and down one way streets. DV would like the Commission to have a discussion with the Boston Bike Coalition to urge them to respect the pedestrians that are trying to traverse the streets and sidewalks of the city. DV said that Chapter 85 of Mass General Laws has specific rules that we don't seem to be enforcing in the city.

Elizabeth Dean Clower (ED) from Back Bay said that she continues to have a problem with alternative transportation for wheelchair users, especially with the MBTA-RIDE vans with lifts. She said that a number of new vans are now on the road, but it seems that they do not have user input. In other vans, you could safely strap down 2 chairs, but the new ones have a permanent bench space which makes it less feasible to have two wheelchairs. KMC asked if ED has reached out to the RIDE about this and ED said she hopes the Commission would offer insight on how to proceed. KMC responded that the MV1 Company went out of business and was not very stable. She said that all minivan measurements are based on the ADA. KMC encouraged board members to write letters about any of the discussed issues.

Jim from Saugus discussed seasonal bikers who use Hubway. He said those who use Hubway are all over the road. He also said that he hopes Uber comes up with a solution for UberWAV. KMC said that UberWAV and Taxi WAV drivers met in January. ED said that Lyft has actually been more responsive and more customer/client friendly. She said Lyft also has a specific Boston representative who you can call.

Adjournment

JB made a motion to adjourn the meeting and FB seconded.

Next meeting: Monday, May 21st, 2018 5:30 – 7:30 pm