**DISABILITY ADVISORY COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES**

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL**

**ARLINGTON COUNTY DISABILITY ADVISORY COMMISSION**

Monday, October 21, 2024

The **DISABILITY ADVISORY COMMISSION** convened its meeting at **7:01 pm** on **October 21, 2024**.

**PRESENT (VIRTUALLY)** Commissioner Alexa Mavroidis, chair

Commissioner Karen Audant

Commissioner Elizabeth Priaulx

Commissioner Doris Ray

Commissioner Bryant Atkins

Commissioner Suzette Riser

**ABSENT** Commissioner Duncan Barron

Commissioner Justin Boatner

**STAFF** **Courtney Sales**

**SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSIONS**

*Public Comment*

Mr. William B. Lawson Jr. - Variance Zoning Appeals

Mr. Lawson of The Law Office of William B. Lawson, P.C. is an attorney currently practicing in Arlington County. He has represented clients with disabilities who want to remain in their homes or would like to buy homes in Arlington however due to the county’s strict zoning coverage requirements make it difficult to do so. Mr. Lawson has been successful in requesting an order to exceed coverage variances for his clients in the past. He is currently representing a client who served in the military. The client’s health is declining to the point in which he will be using a wheelchair. This gentleman lives in a one level floor home however due to the unique topography has a second level. As a result, the client lives on the one level portion of the home. As his health declines he would like to build a balcony so he can access and enjoy the outdoors. Mr. Lawson needs to secure a variance from the Board of Zoning Appeals for his client. Five years ago, Mr. Lawson was able to work with Delegate Patrick Hope to amend the state code to authorize variances. Mr. Lawson is requesting a statement in support of the variance for his client as they proceed with the appeal process from the Disability Advisory Commission. Mr. Lawson has also requested support from the Commission on Aging, and Housing Committee.

Mrs. Molly Kiko - STAR

Mrs. Kiko has been a STAR customer for seven years. Mrs. Kiko works in D.C. for the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). She currently serves as President of the Employee Resource Group FEDS with disabilities. Because of her role and work with FEDS with disabilities, she was invited to the White House reception for Disability Pride Month and Americans with Disabilities Act Anniversary on September 9th.

Mrs. Kiko made her trip reservations with STAR (from her job to the White House) a week prior to the event. The day of the event, the driver arrived with no knowledge of knowing her destination. Mrs. Kiko had to provide and explain her destination to the driver. Per the directions on the invitation, attendees were directed to a particular entrance of the White House (15th and Alexander Hamilton Place Northwest). The driver proceeded to a different route (Pennsylvania Ave Southwest) and became lost.

While in route there were three close incidents of crashing with other vehicles.

As a result, Mrs. Kiko missed the event. Mrs. Kiko shared that she was provided the following explanation from Diamond Transportation; the White House address was geocoded wrong in the driver’s tablet. Mrs. Kiko wanted to share her experience, to be a voice for those in similar situations, that don't feel strong enough to stand-up for themselves and ensure services improve.

Follow up items: Commission requested a status update on the new contracts for STAR. Other avenues that can be used to report issues besides call center.

*Discussions and Presentations*

Fire Safety/ Community Connect- Captain Robert Bowen

Captain Bowen, Arlington County Fire Department, oversees community risk reduction. Part of his duties is community engagement and identify areas in the community where there are possible risks. After risks have been identified, the department implements programs that augment and/or mitigate those risks. Majority of questions received by the community are related to high rises or apartment buildings (i.e. evacuation assistance and other fire protection systems). Captain Bowen discussed evacuation assistance can be a challenge, regardless of whether someone lives in a single-family home, townhouse, apartment building or high rise. An individual with a disability that experiences challenges with evacuating in the event of a fire, is advised to make sure there are mechanisms in place to keep themselves safe. One of these mechanisms is a program called Community Connect. This is a program for the whole community. Community Connector will be pushed out to media, and everyone (residential and businesses) at the end of October. Those registered in the previous system will be notified to register. Arlington County Police use the same system however the department does not have access to the information entered by Fire/EMS.

* [Arlington Community Connect](https://www.communityconnect.io/info/va-arlington)

*Fire Safety Questions/Concerns*

Bonnie Ryan- A fire alarm sounds off in an apartment building, how are residents who are deaf/ hard of hearing supposed to be alerted if/when they are in their units?

Commissioner Suzette- Referenced community members registered for Community Connect who may not have the correct immigration status and living in homes that may not be fire safe due to added walls or rooms so they can afford a place to live. How can this population be protected? How is the information (Community Connect) used once a person registers. The concern, Fire/EMS goes to a home/apartment and discover too many people are living in one space. This could be a safety issue/hazard. Fire/EMS works with the Department of Human Services and Police. How will Police address this matter related to immigration status.

Commissioner Doris- Mentioned that multifamily homes are not required, by the Fair Housing Act (FHA) to have equipment installed in a resident’s apartment to alert residents when fire alarms sound off in the hallways. If a building was constructed with federal money the units would be fully accessible, including having the equipment necessary so that deaf or hard of hearing person could hear an alarm in the hall. Are there any zoning requirements to suggest to the county that people don't have to pay for the accessible equipment.

*Early voting- Commissioner Doris Ray and Mrs. Bonnie Ryan*

This seems to be a larger issue than just early voting. To be able to vote with independence and privacy, as called for in the Help America Vote Act, as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act, we must look at the following, federal initiative to ensure voting machines and ballot marking devices are accessible.

Mrs. Bonnie Ryan approached Commissioner Doris regarding her experience with early voting at the Aquatic Center in Pentagon City, Crystal City. Mrs. Ryan provided her observations and concerns about accessibility. Mrs. Ryan brought her perspective related to her situation of being a single person and person with multiple disabilities.

Mrs. Ryan experienced the following related to vision access, the voting machine was a touch screen, Mrs. Ryan was offered a radio button for high contrast, but it did not work. There was no zoom or enlarged text option. The machine did not have the ability to increase the size of the text. The format of the voting choices was complicated by ranked voting. Mrs. Ryan couldn't securely align the text with the voting choices. She requested a paper ballot, there was no enlarged text option. Mrs. Ryan was provided with a magnifying glass for the paper ballot.

Mrs. Bonnie Ryan experienced the following related to hearing access. Headphones provided didn’t work with Mrs. Ryan’s hearing aids (ear mold). Mrs. Ryan shared she had to choose an accessibility feature and could not use both. If a voter has a visual and hearing disability the machine is not designed to allow for both accessibility features to be used. Mrs. Ryan was provided with assistance from a poll worker.

Commissioner Doris- Recommended to the commission to work with the County Register and State Board of Elections who certifies the voting machines on the issues discussed. Some solutions were provided:

1. Update the [Virginia Request for Assistance](https://www.elections.virginia.gov/media/formswarehouse/election-management/election-day-instructions-and-forms/ELECT-649-Request-For-Assistance-Inside-Polling-Place-rev-07.2024-EN.pdf) form in an alternative format.
2. Amplification for people who are hard of hearing.
3. Voting machines without zoom text features should have the ability to magnify the screen.

Commissioner Bryant -Recommended to the commission to submit a letter to the Registrar and the Electoral Board requesting a post-election report and document these discussions of the issues (via public comment, email).

Commissioner Doris: Suggested that the Registrar come to a DAC meeting to present about access at polling places, voting machines/alternatives, and answer questions. The Commission and Registrar can work together on selecting an accessible machine and educating poll workers.

B*arcroft Land Use Analysis: Engagement Working Group-Commissioner Karen Audant*

Commissioner Karen, recapped questions for Matt McHugh regarding market rate and what is enforceable Type A unit rates and will follow up. Commissioner Elizabeth asked, if the commission could ask for a written commitment from the County holding the developers, Jair Lynch accountable to the 10% (Type A units) of new construction.

Action: Commissioner Doris will attend the Barcroft Form-Based Code Working Group meeting Wednesday October 23, 2024, from 7:00 to 8:30 (this is a virtual meeting) in place of Commissioner Karen.

*Recovery Residences Zoning- Commissioner Bryant*

Commissioner Bryant referenced Commissioner Doris's comments regarding the new zoning changes for recovery residences. Commissioner Bryant mentioned the County's reason for the amendment to the ordinance was to comply with the Federal Fair Housing Act (FHA).

Action: Commissioner Bryant will work on a letter to the County Board, directed to the Community, Planning, Housing, and Development (CPHD) requesting that they conduct an FHA compliance study of the zoning code and county housing policy, administrative codes and create an action plan.

Action: Commissioner Bryant Requested this topic (letter) added to November’s meeting agenda to approve.

*Community Development Citizens Advisory Committee*

Commissioner Bryant expressed interest in serving as DAC liaison on the Community Development Citizens Advisory Committee.

Action: Staff liaison will contact Community Development Citizens Advisory Committee staff liaison for information.

*Site Plan Review Committee Commissioner Doris*

Site plan committee has not met. Will be meeting next week.

*Housing Commission- Commissioner Doris*

October's Housing Commission meeting addressed the Recovery House Ordinance. The Housing Commission agreed to the language and cited the commission’s (Disability Advisory Commission) concerns. This is part of the Affordable Housing Master Plan zoning ordinance to ensure that people with all types of disabilities can occupy single family housing with more than four unrelated people to change that code, up to eight (8), which is what they're allowing for the recovery.

*Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)- Commissioner Doris*

The main concern for WMATA is funding. A committee was formed by the Metropolitan Washington Transportation planning board. The chairman of the WMATA Accessibility Advisory Commission, is the only person from the disability community. The committee has been tasked with looking at the finances for the future of WMATA. WMATA will report the options after November 14th, their next meeting. Metro Access update, Uber has been used as a contractor to provide services on a regular basis.

**MOTIONS & ACTIONS/VOTES**

Commissioner Karen motioned to adopt August 19th, 2024, and September 16th, 2024, meeting minutes.

* Commissioner Bryant seconded the motion.
* The Commission unanimously supported the motion 5-0.

Absent during voting:

Commissioner Duncan Barron

Commissioner Justin Boatner

Commissioner Suzette Riser

Meeting adjourned at **9:13 pm**.