



Mayor's Commission for Persons with Disabilities

Martin J. Walsh, Mayor

Annual Disability Commission Report 2014/2015

Communication Access

1. **Captioning** – Worked with City Cable Office to implement captioning of TV and web broadcasts of City Council Hearings, BRA Board Meetings, Boston School Committee Meetings, and Disability Commission Advisory Board Meetings. Contract provided through WGBH.
2. **City Council Chamber** – Installed a large-screen TV that shows all hearings live with captions. Also designated a “Reserved Accessible Viewing Area” with signage in proximity to the TV inside Chamber.
3. **Emergency Announcements** – Worked with the Mayor’s Press Office and the Mayor’s Office of Emergency Management to ensure ASL Interpreters at all emergency announcements. MCDHH and City of Boston worked together to fulfill 100% ASL Interpreter coverage of winter snowstorm press conferences.
4. **Communication Access Policy** – Participating in an inter-departmental working group to create a formal policy in City Hall of language translation services. Ensuring that ASL is listed in this policy as a unique language that requires certified interpreters.
5. **Staff Communication Capacity** – Hired a new staff person who is fluent in ASL, in addition to existing staff person who is blind and uses Jaws screen-reading software to test out websites and apps for compliance.

Accessibility in Buildings and Sidewalks

1. **BRA Accessibility Checklist** – Collaborated with the Boston Redevelopment Authority to add a checklist to the “Article 80” review process that gives a detailed description of accessibility elements in the project. The Checklist must be completed by developers and reviewed by the Commission before any new projects can be approved. It includes assessment of sidewalk conditions/compliance; map showing accessible routes to transit/government buildings/community centers; and explanation of any barriers that limit visit-ability.
2. **Sidewalk Café Design Guidelines** – The City’s Public Improvement Commission adopted a set of uniform standards to address the need for a clear, accessible path of travel on Boston public sidewalks.
3. **Beacon Hill Pedestrian Ramps** – The City’s PWD moved forward with installing concrete ped ramps with red tactile warning strips throughout Beacon Hill. Project is currently on hold pending injunction proceedings.

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Accessible Housing Initiatives

1. **Disability Housing Task Force** – In 2014 the Department of Neighborhood Development (DND) released *Housing a Changing City: Boston 2030* which establishes a plan for housing Boston residents for the next fifteen years. In collaboration with DND, the Mayor’s Commission for Persons with Disabilities established a disability Housing Task Force to engage the disability community around the specific needs and goals to increase housing opportunities for people with disabilities. The Task Force is currently meeting with stakeholders from City departments, disability agencies, and residents of Boston who have disabilities.

Employment Initiatives

1. **Youth Summer Internships** – For the fourth consecutive summer, provided internships for 5 transition-age youth with disabilities (ages 14-22) in partnership with BCIL, Dorchester Boys & Girls Club, Mayor’s YouthLine, and MCDHH. Internships often provide youth with their first experience in employment and their first time away from family support to develop soft skills, interact with peers, and gain office skills in a supportive setting.
2. **MRC Summer Internships** – For the fourth consecutive summer, collaborated with Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission to provide 10 internships to job-ready Boston residents with disabilities. Matched interns with City departments for 6-week internship according to skill set. Program is set up to become a model in other cities.
3. **Disability Mentoring Day** – As part of the national “DMD” initiative, we worked with MRC to place ten adults with disabilities in City Hall departments for a day of mentoring, job shadowing, and filling out applications in Human Resources. New in 2014, we included a number of youth with disabilities from Boston Public Schools.

Education

1. **Transition Summit** – Staff from our office worked with the Boston Public Schools on development and implementation of a "Passport to Your Future" transition conference at UMass Boston for 180 BPS students in the special education system, 60 educators, and 25 community partners. Students participated in four workshops on: higher education, independent living, community& volunteering, and employment, all conducted by community partner organizations.

Disability Commission Advisory Board

1. **Appointed New Members** – Over the past year, we have continued to increase diversity of ethnicity, disability, and neighborhoods represented on our Advisory Board through new appointments by Mayor Walsh. Currently, our Board members self-identify with having one or more than over 10 different disabilities. Additionally, our Board members come from 8 different neighborhoods and represent numerous cultural and ethnic diversity.

2. **Submitted Legislation** – Working with our Intergovernmental Relations office, our department submitted support for 2 pieces of state legislation. The first was to increase our Advisory Board Membership limit to 13 members up from our current limit of 9 members. This legislation is pending for 2015. We also supported the Remote Participation bill, which will allow Board members to call into meetings if they can't attend in person. This legislation recently passed, and will go a long way toward helping the Board reach quorum every month.
3. **Monthly Meetings** – In 2014, we held 9 regular monthly meetings of the Disability Commission Advisory Board. These meetings are all open to the public, and last year they included numerous presentations from disability groups and agencies. The Board also wrote several letters of support on a variety of issues (see Advisory Board Report for details).
4. **Communication Access** – All Advisory Board meetings have ASL Interpreters, and we recently began televising the meetings live with captions. Also, the Board now has a call-in number for those who would like to participate by phone.

Accessible Parking

1. **Advisory Board Ad Hoc Parking Committee** – Formed a special committee to review HP Parking regulations in Boston to look at local needs, national trends, and potential changes to existing parking programs in Boston, including:
 - a. Requiring Resident Stickers in order to park in HP Spaces in neighborhoods that require stickers
 - b. Limiting meter parking to 4 hours for people with HP Plates or Placard (involves changing MA Law)
 - c. Changing the language on signs from “HP” to “Accessible Parking” (involves changing MA Law)

These changes are all currently pending a decision on possible implementation by Mayor Walsh.

2. **Residential HP Parking Program** – In order to better assess needs of disabled residents and neighborhood concerns, we divided the application for a residential HP Parking Space into two separate categories: “driver” and “passenger.” This will help lead to greater balance of designated HP Parking spaces in the neighborhoods.
3. **PCA Parking Program** – Established a pilot program that allows Boston residents with severe disabilities to obtain a permit allowing their PCAs to park in Resident-Sticker Only Parking neighborhoods without a sticker.
4. **Parking at Meters** – Looking at national trends that impose time limits and fees at meters for vehicles with HP Plates or Placard. Considering a 4-hour time limit for metered parking in Boston with HP Plate or Placard; this would require either a Home Rule Petition by Mayor Walsh or a change in Massachusetts General Laws.
5. **State Task Force on HP Parking Abuse** – Participated on State Task Force formed by the Registrar of Motor Vehicles and the Massachusetts Inspector General to look at abuse issues related to HP Parking. Currently continuing to meet while working on recommendations for Mayor Walsh for potential changes to HP Parking

Accessible Transportation

1. **WAV Accessibility** – Continued working with BPD Hackney Division to improve compliance of WAV taxi cabs (Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles) to reach goal of 100% ADA compliance by 2017. Currently, 18 WAV cabs are fully compliant, with 6 more coming on in 2015. Letter-grade rating system of “A” – “F” on the rear left side of each WAV vehicle continues to inform passengers with disabilities about potential usability of individual cabs. Along with Hackney Captain, inspected and approved models of Toyota and Dodge minivans for conversion.
2. **Taxi Advisory Commission** – Appointed by Mayor Walsh to sit on the TAC to ensure that ADA compliance is addressed by Transportation Network Companies (TNCs), such as Uber and Lyft. Also working closely with taxi owners on issues of training, communication systems for Deaf and blind residents, service animals, and others.
3. **Uber Meeting** – Sat down with City Council members and Uber staff to discuss current lack of accessibility in Uber vehicles and discuss ways to improve accessibility moving forward. This group will be reconvening in 2015.

Outreach

1. **Social Media** – With increased staff capacity, the Commission began regular use and updates of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media outlets.
2. **Weekly Update** – Began sending out weekly updates on City Hall activities and Boston events that are relevant to the disability community.
3. **Disability News & Views TV Show** – Our office produced and aired 12 TV shows with updates from the Commission and guests from the disability community. The show currently airs once per month on BNN Cable TV.
4. **Hired Staff** – Our department added 2 new FTE Positions over the past year: Deputy Commissioner and Advocacy & Outreach Specialist, bringing our current staff positions to 7 FTEs.

Programs & Events

1. **Celebrating the ADA** – The 4th annual celebration of the Americans with Disabilities Act was celebrated on City Hall Plaza in July 2014, with over 300 members of the disability community and 30 disability organizations. Honorees this year included BCIL as an agency and Heather Watkins as an advocate. This event, which is the only large-scale ADA disability celebration in Boston, had guest speakers, food, music, and informational tables where attendees could find out more about disability services. Planning for the annual event began in late 2014 for the 25th Anniversary Celebration on Boston Common. This year, the Commission has introduced a poster art contest for Boston residents to discuss what the ADA means to them.
2. **Community Forum** – Held our 4th Annual Community Forum last spring. This event offers constituents a chance to weigh in on the City’s accessibility agenda.
3. **Disability Reframed Film Series** – Collaborated on community film events with the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities. Documentary and feature films that related to the disability experience were screened at a number of different venues throughout Cambridge and Boston. A variety of speakers led discussion groups post-film screening.

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