



Mayor's Commission for Persons with Disabilities

Martin J. Walsh, Mayor

Annual Disability Commission Report 2016 – 2017

Accessibility Upgrades in City Hall

1. **Master Plan** – Provided technical assistance and gave user input to consultants working on a master plan for Boston City Hall. Several short-term recommendations are already underway, including the bathroom upgrades and City Council Chamber renovation. Long-term recommendations made by our office include adding an exterior elevator on Congress Street to connect it to City Hall Plaza, thereby creating an accessible route from Faneuil Hall to Cambridge Street, and adding a specified area for pick-up/drop-off of people with disabilities.
2. **Bathrooms** – Upgrading first floor public bathroom in City Hall to bring it up to ADA compliance. Also, adding door openers to the ADA Compliant bathrooms on the fifth floor.
3. **BDPA Conference Room** – Currently assessing the conference room to add a hearing loop system, electronic door openers, and ADA Compliant signage.
4. **Piemonte Room** – Currently assessing this meeting room to add a hearing loop system, electronic door openers, and ADA Compliant signage.
5. **City Hall Lobby (3rd floor)** – Worked with internal departments to give input on renovation of entire lobby to bring it into ADA Compliance, including: adding an accessible coffee kiosk, electronic information board, and improved security screening process. Renovation is currently in progress.
6. **TD Bank North Events on City Hall Plaza** – Worked with internal departments and outside consultants on ADA Compliance for events on City Hall Plaza. The *WinterBoston* event had some major accessibility issues, including missing ramps to chalets and the community stage. The 2017 spring / summer installation has corrected these violations and offers greater access.

Public Rights of Way

1. **Accessible Routes Project** – Continued work with PWD on our plan to create a tool that will allow users to map out an accessible pedestrian route from Point A to Point B.
2. **Sidewalk Reconstruction Priorities** – Working with PWD to give input in their creation of a matrix that will allow the City to identify priority pedestrian routes for reconstruction. Our input focused on improving ADA Compliance, equity, elderly/disabled housing, and MBTA stops. The current method of prioritizing sidewalks uses an outdated model to identify routes, with excessive funding going to the downtown residential areas.

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Accessible Parking Programs

1. **Accessible HP Parking in Boston Neighborhoods** – Working with BTS to create an option for Boston residents that will allow them to designate the accessible space they applied for as “Resident Parking Only.” Also working on designating certain on-street accessible spaces as “Wheelchair Van Parking Only.”
2. **Citywide HP Accessible Parking Space Locations** – Working with consultants who are developing tools that will allow drivers to search for locations of HP Accessible Parking space locations in Boston’s commercial areas. These tools, which include maps and apps, will be available in late 2017.
3. **State Task Force on HP Parking Abuse** – Currently participating on State Task Force formed by the Registrar of Motor Vehicles and the Massachusetts Inspector General to look at abuse issues related to HP Accessible Parking.

Annual Events

1. **ADA Celebration Day** – Collaborated with disability organizations, state agencies, and local advocacy groups to host a celebration of the 26th anniversary of the signing of the ADA. Over 300 people attended the event on Boston City Hall Plaza. As always, the event included a speaking program, entertainment, resource tables, food, and t-shirts. We recognized the MBTA last year because of their work on the new Government Center T Station, their ongoing commitment to the Ride, and their continual improvements in the fixed-route system.
2. **Disability Community Forum** – Held our 6th annual listening session at Boston City Hall. Approximately 150 constituents attended, and they identified various issues we have been working on this past year, including housing, Uber, sidewalks, and more.
3. **Disability Mentoring Day** – Collaborated with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission to offer a day of mentoring and job shadowing with City Hall staff, along with a corporate career networking session for 10 Boston residents with disabilities who were actively seeking employment. And we had *great* success! Through our event, four participants gained employment – 2 in City Hall, and 2 in the private sector.
4. **Civic Engagement Day** – Held our first annual event to assist residents with disabilities to get connected with their local government in City Hall by welcoming constituents to meet their City Councilors and their aides, see the new ADA Bathrooms, see the compliant ramp in the Council Chamber, and learn about ways to testify at a hearing. Residents also registered to vote, tried the AutoMark machine, and were able to practice voting at a sample booth.

Outreach and Engagement

1. **Accessibility Priority Survey** – Beginning in 2017, we will be taking on this a new initiative with a Rappaport Fellow from Harvard. The survey will help us figure out the needs of people with disabilities who live, visit, and work in Boston. The survey will be available in paper and online, so we can reach a wide variety of people with disabilities.
2. **Database of HP Accessible Parking Spaces** – Planning outreach and engagement initiatives for self-identified neighborhood residents with disabilities.

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Communication Access

1. **Hearing Loops** – Currently making plans to install loop system in public meeting rooms in City Hall.
2. **Emergency Announcements** – Continued to provide ASL Interpreters at City-run events for the public upon request and 100% of the City's Emergency Press Conferences.
3. **Communication Access Ordinance Signed** –Staff participated in the working group that developed the Communication Access Ordinance which was signed by Mayor Walsh this year. This ordinance provides a structure for the City to provide language services regardless of language needs or disability.
4. **Serving Boston Residents** –Continued serving residents with our multi-lingual staff, who currently speak the following languages: English, Spanish, French, Chinese, and American Sign Language.

Deaf Task Force

1. **Tax Preparation for Deaf Constituents** – Continue to convene a working group of national and local leaders in deaf/hard of hearing services to address tax preparation services under the City's free taxes prep program, which provides free tax returns for people in certain income brackets. The Deaf Task Force served over 60 deaf constituents this year over three days in both Allston and Roxbury.
2. **Financial Empowerment**- The Deaf Task Force hosted a workshop for the Deaf Community on credit scores, the first workshop of its kind to be put on for this community in partnership with the City of Boston.
3. **Model Program** – The Deaf Task Force is serving as a national model, and the staff who were involved in developing and implementing the program have provided webinars and one on one assistance to other states on how to replicate this work.

Architectural Access

1. **Disability Housing Task Force (DHTF)** – Concluded work of the task force, which was created in 2015 as an outcome of, *Housing a Changing City: Boston 2030*, a plan that assessed housing needs / options for Boston residents over the next fifteen years. The task force submitted final recommendations to Mayor Walsh, which will increase fully built-out ADA accessible units from 5%to 10%, and require that at least one accessible unit also be affordable.
2. **Accessibility Checklist** – All new developments in the city will be required to complete an updated "Accessibility Checklist" during the earliest planning stages of their project designs. This checklist requires developers to take a closer look at accessibility and inclusion, and to aim for *ideal design* rather than just "meeting compliance." Issues they must assess include: accessible routes leading to the building and throughout it; dwelling units; parking; access at all entrances; and "visitability."
3. **Architectural Access Board (AAB)** – Patricia Mendez, our Architectural Access Specialist, was appointed to the nine-member AAB Board in January. As such, Patricia is able to: promote ideal accessibility in all construction; learn about access issues in communities throughout the state; weigh in on potential solutions to accessibility barriers; and bring her information and knowledge to her work in Boston. Her appointment marks the first time an employee from the Commission Office has had a seat on the Board.

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Disability Commission Advisory Board

1. **Increased Seats** – Worked with state legislature and City Council to increase the number of seats on our Board from 9 to 13, to allow broader representation of neighborhoods, disabilities, and ethnicities.
2. **Assessing Board Appointments** – Conducting a broad search to increase diversity of the Board, to ensure that its makeup is representative of Boston.
3. **Meetings** – Held our regular monthly meetings, wrote letters of support/concern, and hosted presentations (see attached Board Report for details).

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, there are 44 WAV cabs that are fully compliant. 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.
2. **Uber Access** – Continuing talks with Uber, as well as with and private companies, to figure out ways to add accessibility to the transportation network. One business model we explored was a private company who wants to buy 6 WAV mini-vans to lease to Uber drivers. This is still a work in progress.
3. **MBTA / The Ride** – Expressed strong opposition to raising prices and eliminating services on The Ride. Continue to communicate with MBTA officials about Uber pilot program potential expansion.

Web Access

1. **New City of Boston Website** – Provided technical assistance and user input to web team as they designed a new website for COB. This website was designed with ADA access as a focal point, and is the first major overhaul of the City’s website since it was created. The new website was launched in July, 2016.
2. **Public Notices** – Assisted the IT department to ensure ADA Compliance of all public notices as the City transitioned officially from paper postings to electronic postings. Public notices are now provided electronically in City Hall as well as on the City’s new ADA Compliant website.
3. **New Apps** – Worked with DoIT team overseeing Tableau products (CityScore and City Employees Demographic Data) to create access for people who are blind/low vision by adding a button to download PDFs.

Elections

1. **Early Voting Initiative** – Worked closely with the City’s Election Commission to prioritize accessibility in the first Early Voting initiative in Boston’s history – a particularly critical undertaking in a Presidential-election year. Ensured that all polling locations were fully ADA Compliant, assisted with inclusive outreach and marketing, and served as a resource for staff and voters.

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2. **Poll Worker Accessibility Ambassadors** – Participated in training organized by the Elections Commission to train poll workers to be “Accessibility Ambassadors” at their local precincts during elections. Ambassadors were trained in etiquette, language, voting rights, and access to the polls. They also learned how to use the AutoMark machine.

Ongoing Programs

1. **Disability Reframed Film Series** – After a short hiatus the film series is being revitalized this summer in partnership with the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities.
2. **Disability News & Views TV Show** – Broadcast 12 shows on BNN TV providing info about upcoming events and interviewing advocates in the disability community. Directed and hosted by our staff Information & Referral Specialist, Ken Meyer, a member of the New England Broadcasters Hall of Fame.
3. **Abilities Expo** – Participated in national conference that is specifically for people with disabilities. Staffed table for 3 days to give out info on our work. Also participated in the 2nd Annual Disability Summit, organized by the Mass Office on Disability and held at the Abilities Expo.
4. **Youth Internship Program** – Collaborated with COB, BCIL, and other local agencies to offer summer internships to Boston youth with disabilities.
5. **Adult Internship Program** – Coordinated our annual summer internship program with MRC by placing 8 Boston residents in City departments for a summer internship.
6. **Year-round Internships** – Worked with the Elderly Commission, the Boston Public Health Commission, and the Mayor’s YouthLine to provide internships in our office throughout the year.