

DISABILITY ACCESS COMMISSION

The Disability Access Commission's membership changed with the resignation, for personal reasons, of Commission Secretary Celeste M. Andrade, to whom the Disability Access Commission expresses a debt of gratitude for her services. The Commission voted in Joan Hantman as the new Secretary. The Selectmen strengthened Commission ranks by appointing two new Members, pediatrician Dr. Gopal Gupta (Stony Brook Road) and Patricia Livingstone-Espiet (Pine Street), Founder and First Chairperson of the Belmont Disability Access Commission. Fran Williams was sworn in as a full voting member in November.

The Commission convened six duly posted open meetings during the calendar year, five of those with a quorum: January 24th, March 23rd, May 18th, August 10th, September 21st, (no quorum), and November 30th.

The Disability Access Commission continued to advocate for a comprehensive review of compliance status, across Town departments, with respect to access provisions and the timetable set forth in a Superior Court Consent Agreement of 1998 that resolved an ADA lawsuit by a Town resident with disabilities. The review by Town department heads of specific provisions for which each had responsibility was initiated in January by Tom Younger, Town Administrator and ADA / Section 504 Compliance Officer. Mr. Younger reported preliminary, partial results of this review at mid-year, but the process had not been completed by year's end.

Among the access issues the Commission addressed during the year was the variance request by Filene's / Macy's with regard to front and rear entrance access issues at their 75 Leonard Street retail facility. A non-disabled citizen had filed a complaint with the MA Architectural Access Board (MAAB) against this 'anchor store' in Belmont Center. The Disability Access Commission prepared and submitted, by invitation, a detailed advisory memo (6/16/06) to MAAB as input to their hearing process. The Commission also monitored various Town building projects by its representation on building committees for the new Senior Center and rebuilding of the Wellington School. The Commission provided, upon request, suggestions for wheelchair-navigable pathway surfacing between plant beds of the Cheney Middle School Courtyard Garden Project, a Habitat Intergenerational Program effort that created a native garden under the auspices of the Mass. Audubon Society that has been recognized by the National Wildlife Federation.

Representative members of the Commission attended the June 14th meeting held by the MA Office on Disability.

The Commission entered into a contract with Doyle Post Production Services, revised in May, to produce a Disability Awareness video of several vignettes in a multi-chaptered DVD format. Filming on location at sites in Belmont took place in late spring and early summer, employing local talent, including persons with disabilities. In celebration of the 16th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the *Belmont Citizen-Herald* ran a very prominent front-page feature story, "Lights, Camera, Access!" in its July 20th issue, with a large color photo of the camera crew in action at a Belmont Center restaurant. That issue of the local newspaper also included a commemorative Guest Perspective article, "The ADA at Sweet Sixteen" authored by the Commission chairperson. The public was invited to a special screening of rough cuts from the filming of several disability vignettes at the Studio Cinema on the evening of July 26th, the date on which President George H.W. Bush signed the ADA into law in 1990. Admission was free; those attending enjoyed pastries donated by local shops and a discount on tickets to the evening's feature film from the theater management.

On August 29th the rough cuts of the disability awareness video, with the addition of a set of disability educational slides, was shown repetitively on the Commission's table at the "Meet Belmont" event for newcomers held in the High School cafeteria.

The Commission requested that Town Counsel prepare a by-law amendment that would permit associate members of the Commission, who ordinarily do not have voting privileges, to vote on occasions where there is otherwise no quorum. The article could not be prepared in time for inclusion on the warrant for the fall Town meeting.

The Commission continued operation of its Disability Assistance Program, matching up callers' assistance needs with the capabilities of able-bodied volunteers. A bright blue flyer promoting the program and its new Town Hall telephone number (617-993-2699) was prepared and printed by the Commission and inserted into the October bills sent out by the Municipal Light Department to each residence and business. Additional bundles of copies of this flyer were placed with community facilities like libraries and with physicians' and dentists' offices, as well as local pharmacies. To date, the Commission has received approximately 50 calls from Belmont residents, at least 1/3rd of which are from potential volunteers. The BDAC is working with the COA to ensure that a CORI evaluation (as mandated by law) is conducted for all persons over the age of 18, working with seniors or those with those disabilities.

In October, in commemoration of Disabilities Awareness Month, the BDAC collaborated with the Belmont Special Education Advisory Council (BSEAC) to mount a display of titles focusing on a variety of disability issues. These books, both fiction and non-fiction, were available in the adult and children areas at the Belmont Memorial Public Library.

The Commission heard, at its November meeting, a briefing from the Belmont Housing Trust and the architects / developers of the Waverly Woods 40-unit affordable housing unit project planned for the intersection of Trapelo Road and Mill Street. Commission members voiced concern over the small number (two) of fully accessible units, the fact that all other units have internal stairs, and wheelchair access to the site, as planned, is inadequate because of the steep grade of the proposed sidewalk approach.

Respectfully submitted,
Raymond E. Glazier, Ph.D., Chairman