

COMMISSION ON DISABILITY

The mission of the Andover Commission on Disability is to address Andover's needs for the town, its residents, visitors, friends, employers and families relative to disability. The Andover Commission on Disability is a commission of nine volunteers serving three-year terms and appointed by the Board of Selectmen to advocate on disability-related issues. The majority of the Commission members must be disabled or directly related to disability.

The goals of the Commission are:

- To advocate for the full integration and participation of people with disabilities in the Town of Andover.
- To research the needs and problems of people with disabilities in the Town of Andover.
- To advise and assist Town officials and employees in addressing the needs of people with disabilities.
- To participate to the maximum extent possible in disability-related programs of a local, regional, State and Federal nature.
- To support training related to disability to people who reside or work in the Town of Andover.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2009, the Commission's areas of concentration were:

1. Project Lifesaver – A search and rescue project with the Andover Police Department
2. Access Projects – The Main Street Improvement Project, Park & Barnard Streets Project
3. Kids on the Block – Education
4. Playground Project – Ballardvale Playground Proposal
5. Senior Center Community Garden
6. Handicap Parking Program
7. Information Resource on disability issues

PROJECT LIFESAVER

Project Lifesaver continues to be a priority for the Andover Commission on Disability. The Commission originally sponsored the equipment and education of police officers for this search and rescue program for people who wander from safety. This program is available to all residents regardless of their ability to pay. The Commission has an ongoing sub-committee working with the Andover Police Department. Currently, the program has an enrollment of 10 families. Our main thrust continues to be outreach into the community to create an overall awareness of the program within Andover and surrounding communities

ACCESS PROJECTS

The Main Street Improvement Project

In June, two staff members from the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) reviewed the ongoing project from Main Street at the Old Town Hall to Lewis Street. Accompanying them were the Town's Senior Planner and three members from the Disability Commission. They found four items of concern. At their next visit in September, the MOD staff members walked Main Street from Old Town Hall to Harding/Stevens Streets with the Town's Senior Planner, the Town Engineer, the Project Engineer and three Commission members. There were seven items of concern. All items of concern were addressed prior to the completion of the project in the Fall. In November, Meg Robertson, Director Orientation & Mobility Department, Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) and two Commission members reviewed the Audible Pedestrian Signals in Elm Square and at Main and Chestnut Streets.

The Park and Barnard Streets Project

While continuing to advocate for accessibility improvements to the Main Street businesses that the Access Sub-Committee had studied, the Commission is reviewing the entrances and navigation within businesses on Park and Barnard Streets. The study will be completed in early 2010. Findings will be sent to both business owners and their property owners who are jointly responsible to provide access to handicapped residents as mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The findings will also be shared with the Town's Planners and the Andover Business Center Association (ABCA).

KIDS ON THE BLOCK

The Commission is delighted to sponsor the initiation of the KOB (Kids on The Block) Autism Program in Andover. An educational program through puppeteers and plays, our selected program was on Autism. The local chapter of Best Buddies, a program within the Doherty Middle School, will champion this program following through on training and presentations. In our constant quest to create disability awareness in our community, the Commission will provide a consultative role and monetary support for this important Disability Awareness Program.

The Kids on the Block, a troupe of educational puppets, are life-sized and act and look like real kids. This program is part of a successful education program that teaches children about real-life topics, such as prejudice, differences, disabilities, diversity and other social concerns. Kids on the Block presentations consist of powerful and attention-getting scripts with question and answer sessions that help keep children interested as well as involved along with interactive simulations for students to experience different challenges. The Kids on the Block Program encourages children to learn positive attitudes toward others and to increase awareness, sensitivity and acceptance of all differences. The initial performance is planned for Spring 2010 at a local elementary school.

PLAYGROUND PROJECT

Ballardvale Playground Project Proposal

This year, the Commission worked with the Ballardvale Historic District Commission to include improved accessibility as part of the Ballardvale playground proposal currently in the planning stages. The Commission's recommendations included: accessible parking, wheelchair

access into the playground, a hard-surfaced path wide enough to accommodate wheelchair access to all of the equipment, specialized play equipment, wheelchair accessible picnic tables and overall compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

The Commission joined local residents in proposing additions and suggestions for playground improvements such as the creation of new parking, closure of holes in the fence running parallel to the train tracks, a possible skateboard surface, the addition of more play equipment for toddlers, a horizontal slide, a wooden climbing structure, and a space for ice skating in the winter. A circular path could be considered for an all-age and all-ability walking path of the two acre playground. Considerable re-sloping of the terrain would be involved. Improving the accessibility of the Town's playgrounds is a multi-year continuing effort with the Plant & Facilities Department.

SENIOR CENTER COMMUNITY GARDEN

With encouragement from the Andover Community Garden Steering Committee, the Commission is the initial sponsor of an organic vegetable garden at the Senior Center. Often called "horticultural therapy", planning, planting, tending and harvesting a garden is a healthful and creative activity. The garden has been designed to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in order to provide safe and comfortable gardening experiences.

Staff from the Plant and Facilities Department leveled and surfaced the site with crushed stone making it wheelchair accessible. The beautiful and accessible planting beds were professionally constructed by a hard-working crew from the Youth Services Division. The garden consists of two raised 4'x10' planting beds with a height of 31 inches which can be worked by standing or sitting volunteer gardeners. There is accessible passage through the garden pathways for people using wheelchairs or walkers. There is also a 24'x2' bed for trellises to hold climbing vegetables such as string beans, cucumbers, squash, zucchini, peas, etc. The produce derived from the garden will go directly to the Senior Center for their daily luncheons and grill nights on the terrace. The Commission is proud of this partnership with Town departments and volunteers and has committed to a grant in support of the garden for two years.

HANDICAP PARKING PROGRAM

This on-going ticketing program consists of photographing vehicles parked illegally in official handicap parking spaces in Andover. Such parking violations are documented on special forms and submitted with the photos of the vehicle to the Andover Police Department. Citations are then issued for the violations. The program's intent is to support the Police Department and to help protect the rights of the handicapped.

INFORMATION RESOURCE

The Commission publishes a newsletter twice a year. The newsletter is available at various locations including the Town Offices, Senior Center, Old Town Hall, Memorial Hall Library, Public Safety Center and on the Commission's web site - <http://andoverma.gov/boards/disability>. It is intended to inform residents of programs and services for the disabled, the activities and efforts of the Commission as well as areas of concern needing advocacy.