

LGBTQIA+ Rainbow Commission 2017 annual report

In 2017, Town Meeting established an LGBTQIA+ Rainbow Commission to promote equality-affirming policies regarding the full spectrum of sexual orientations and gender identities, and to bring greater visibility and empowerment to the LGBTQIA+ population through education, advocacy, and collaboration with other Town agencies, schools, and community groups.

The Rainbow Commission has seven members: six appointed by the Town Manager and subject to the approval of the Board of Selectmen, and one appointed by the School Committee. The first Rainbow Commission meeting was held in March 2018. Anna Watson was elected to chair the commission, with Mel Goldsipe as vice-chair.

History

In 2014, Anna Watson—a lesbian mom and member of the Building Respect Task Force at Ottoson Middle School—approached the Human Rights Commission about creating a central place in town to post LGBTQ events and information and the need to have an identified town official to address complaints related to LGBTQ issues. AHRC created a subcommittee, which developed a needs assessment survey for the LGBTQ+ community. The Vision 2020 survey that went out with the town census at the end of 2015 included a handful of questions relating to LGBTQ+ issues in Arlington, along with a link to a longer online survey, which concluded in 2016.

Survey

Select findings from the Vision 2020 survey (number of respondents varied across questions):

- Out of over 6500 respondents, 76% rated it as important or very important for Arlington to be welcoming for the LGBTQ+ community.
- Of the 6250 respondents, 37% said that Arlington is currently neutral or not welcoming for the LGBTQ+ community.
- 68 respondents said they had experienced discrimination, harassment, or bias in Arlington because of LGBTQ+ identity.
- 471 respondents said that they and people in their household would be more likely to participate in LGBTQ+ activities if Arlington had a single contact person for all LGBTQ+ issues who would maintain an online resources list and calendar of events.

Select requests from the online survey for additional LGBTQ+ services:

- Town recognition of Pride month with flags and a social gathering and/or Town presence at the Boston Pride parade
- Additional activities for queer adults, not just youth or elderly
- Something for LGBTQIA+ families, such as playgroup meet-ups, etc.
- PFLAG chapter

- More arts activities: queer dance group, queer community theater, queer film series
- Free HIV/AIDS testing
- Partnership with homeless shelters to provide housing for LGBTQIA+ homeless youth

Next Steps

The Rainbow Commission will use the survey results and additional community input in developing a mission statement and five-year plan while also working on some short-term projects, which may include recognition of Pride Month and free health screening during Town Day.

The Commission also hopes to host educational events in support of retaining the state's Transgender Equal Access Bill (SB2407), which has been in effect since 2016.

For more information, see:

[https://ballotpedia.org/Massachusetts_Gender_Identity_Anti-Discrimination_Veto_Referendum_\(2018\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Massachusetts_Gender_Identity_Anti-Discrimination_Veto_Referendum_(2018))

The Rainbow Commission looks forward to providing a full report to Town Meeting next year.