

LGBTQIA+ Rainbow Commission Report Arlington Special Town Meeting, December 2018

In 2017, Town Meeting established the LGBTQIA+ Rainbow Commission as a 7-member volunteer body: 6 appointed by the Town Manager and subject to the approval of the Board of Selectmen, and 1 appointed by the School Committee. The first meeting was held in March 2018. Anna Watson is chair and Mel Goldsipe is vice-chair.

The purpose of the Rainbow Commission is 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. We made progress in all categories.

The Police Department, Council on Aging (COA), and Robbins Library have designated liaisons to the Rainbow Commission, in addition to student liaisons from Ottoson Middle School's QSA and the Arlington High GSA. The Commission frequently collaborates on events with the COA, Mystic LGBTQ+ Youth Support Network (Queer Mystic), and the Library and also cosponsored events by the Human Rights Commission (AHRC), True Story Theater, and LexPride.

A major focus of our work this year was supporting Yes on 3 efforts to preserve equality for transgender and gender nonconforming individuals in the state. As part of this, in May we worked with the Select Board on a Pride Proclamation and a resolution for joining the Freedom for All Massachusetts Coalition. We also hosted 2 workshops to improve understanding in the wider community about transgender issues. In October we worked with the Select Board and the School Committee to pass resolutions explicitly endorsing Yes on 3, which succeeded on Election Day.

An annual Rainbow Commission project is to work with the Town Manager to evaluate and improve LGBTQIA+ policies and procedures in town. Documenting implemented changes helped improve the Town's Municipal Equality Index score by 4 points in 2018 (to 98 out of 100).

We expect that Pride Month will always be the Commission's busiest time. Our inaugural Pride Picnic attracted 150 attendees—the largest gathering of the rainbow community in Arlington. In June we also decorated Town Hall with rainbow and trans-pride flags, rainbow lights, and a rainbow crosswalk. We have enough of the temporary paint left over to decorate the Town Hall crosswalk again next year—hopefully under better weather conditions so it will last longer.

We work to provide events for people across all age groups. A Commissioner spoke at LexPride's screening of the film *Gen Silent*, about seniors considering hiding their LGBTQIA+ identities to survive in the long-term health care system. We also cosponsored a Parent Forum with Queer Mystic on "Encouraging Honest Conversation with Elementary-Age Children About LGBTQIA+ Topics," which was facilitated by a former applicant to the Commission. In addition to the picnic, all-ages events included a SAGE Table intergenerational meal, which the Commission cohosted with the COA and Queer Mystic, a crafts and potluck afternoon, and a post-election celebration of trans rights.

To communicate our work to the community, we published 2 guest columns and 2 letters to the editor in the *Advocate*, along with 3 joint public statements with other groups including AHRC and

the Police. We also created a website, social media accounts, and an e-newsletter, and posted our events to the various Arlington Facebook groups and in the *Advocate* and *Globe* online calendars.

We worked with the Police, AHRC, and Arlington Public Schools on restorative justice after a hate graffiti incident at Arlington High School (AHS) in May. We cohosted a vigil with AHRC after the hate graffiti, and we attended AHRC's vigil in support after the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting.

Our other outreach included a Town Day booth, 4 coffee drop-ins for Pride Month, attending 2 GSA meetings, and hosting an info table at the AHS production of *The Laramie Project*. We have liaisons from Ottoson Middle School's QSA and AHS's GSA who attend our meetings, events, and planning sessions to help shape our goals. We are in touch with the Cambridge LGBTQ+ Commission and LexPride and look forward to continuing to forge partnerships so we can better share information and cohost events with similar bodies in other neighboring towns to avoid duplicating efforts.

The Commission is still working to hone our vision and approach to LGBTQIA+ issues. We started with attending a 2-night cultural competency training hosted by AHRC in February, when the Commissioners had been appointed but not yet held the first meeting. In late June we had our first strategic planning sessions and we are about to revisit that process. At a strategic planning session later this month, the Commission will set the schedule for 2019 events and projects, and we hope to begin better serving additional subgroups within the diverse rainbow community and to continue creating opportunities for gathering together in solidarity and celebration.

Our 3 remaining events this year are below. More information is available on the Rainbow Commission website, www.rainbowarlington.org.

- Dec. 6: History of AIDS presentation by The History Project, 7 pm, Senior Center (cosponsored with COA and Queer Mystic)
- Dec. 12: Queer Book Group, 7 pm, Robbins Library 4th Floor Conference Room (cosponsored with Robbins Library)
- Dec. 18: Reel Queer screening of *I Am Not Your Negro*, 6:30 pm, Robbins Library Community Room (cosponsored with Robbins Library and COA)

We are proud of the work that 7 Commissioners and a few volunteers accomplished in our first 9 months, but there were additional requests from the community that we were unable to accommodate. The rainbow community is diverse, with some needs that don't overlap. Partly because of the urgent focus on ballot question 3, in October we were unable to offer events related to Asexual Awareness Week or Intersex Awareness Day. And although LexPride and Boston both hosted Trans Day of Remembrance events on November 18, which we publicized for Arlingtonians to attend, we hope that expanding the Commission will give us more capacity to host or share in hosting a local TDoR observance and other important events.

We ask for a bylaw change to add 2 optional Rainbow Commissioners to increase and diversify the LGBTQIA+ representation within the Commission and help us meet additional community needs. The language in the proposed bylaw change is flexible, so if the availability of applicants or the needs of the community decrease, the commission can shrink back to its original size.