

# Boston Survivors Accessibility Alliance: Renovation for Homes of Victims of Boston Marathon Bombings

April 15, 2013, should have been a joyous day for runners and the cheering friends and family of those participating in the famed Boston Marathon. But it will instead be memorable for the horrific tragedy which took place near the race finish line. Three people were killed and 275 were injured, many critically, from the explosions of two homemade bombs.

The day is emblazoned in the minds of employees of the Massachusetts Department of Public Safety (DPS), headquartered mere blocks away from where the bombing took place. The DPS, headed by Commissioner Thomas Gatzunis, is a regulatory, licensing and inspection agency, charged with the oversight of numerous activities, businesses and professions. DPS also provides administrative and legal assistance to 10 boards and commissions. Their goal is to ensure the safety of the public and to instill confidence in the safety of each of the regulated disciplines, including oversight of the Board of Building Regulations and Standards (BBRS). The BBRS is an 11-member board with the authority to adopt regulations, administer provisions of the state building code and operate various construction-related programs.

What the world witnessed that tragic day led DPS to take its mission to the next

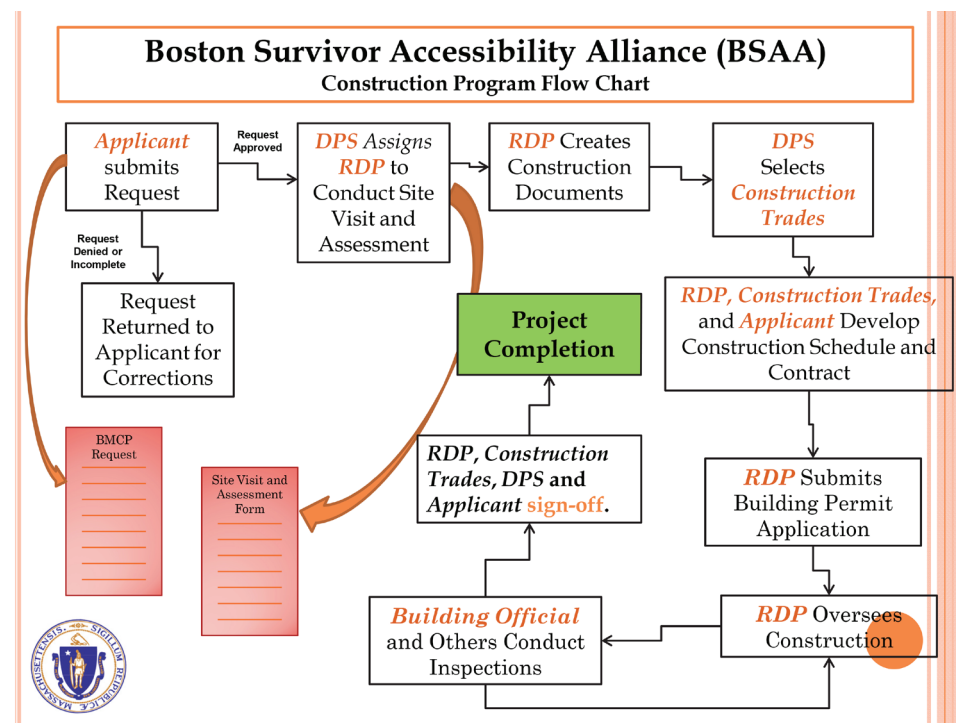


**New front stairs and landing with proper rise and run.**

level by establishing the Boston Survivors Accessibility Alliance (BSAA), in conjunction with concerned individuals and groups, to assist survivors of the marathon bombings. BSAA's goal is to assist bombing victims who may need renovations to their homes as they transition to new lifestyles. They do this through a partnership with the DPS, the Boston Society of Architects/Renovate for Recovery, public and private groups, and individuals in the construction industry to serve as a single point of contact for resources, services and goods necessary to make these modifications.

"As I realized the extent of the injuries, I knew that the survivors would need major modifications to their homes," said Gatzunis. "I knew that the Department of Public Safety was in the unique position of pulling all the necessary resources together. True to form, the design and construction industries stepped up and said, 'Just tell us how we can help.'"

The flowchart below summarizes the program:



The first project was out of state and was completed on August 30. It included a full bathroom renovation, which incorporated replacing an existing tub with a walk-in shower, adjustable shower head, shower seat, horizontal and vertical grab bars, a new ceiling light, changing out the existing sink and vanity with a higher-height sink and lever faucets, the installation of a comfort-height toilet and new grab bars throughout the bathroom. Additionally, all standard light switches were replaced with paddle-type switches, and all the door knobs were replaced with lever handles. New exterior entry steps were constructed to accommodate the survivor's walker. Since its inception, one project has been completed and several are in various stages of completion.



New walk-in shower, adjustable shower head, shower seat, and horizontal and vertical grab bars.

One of those projects under way involves a multi-level home where a third-level porch will be reconstructed, allowing access from inside the apartment to the outdoor deck without having to traverse multiple flights of stairs. Newly built front stairs incorporate non-slip deck boards, stair treads and code compliant handrails. This portion of the renovation was recently completed with the help, "Ask This Old House," which will air the segment on their PBS program shortly. Light sensors and timers will be installed in the entry hallway so they will illuminate for a longer time. Interior vinyl floor tiles will be replaced, and interior modifications will be made to accommodate a



**New front stairs with proper rise and run and new railings and handrails.**

wheelchair.

Dan Walsh, President of the Massachusetts Federation of Building Officials, said building officials, as part of issuing construction permits, lent a hand to coordinate all local permitting for applicants, like an ombudsman would, and DPS assisted at the local level when state regulatory conflicts arose. "Being able to use our professional expertise to help the survivors has been rewarding," he said.

Another renovation involves the construction of a two-car garage and the addition of a mudroom connector to provide access from the exterior to the first floor, avoiding the need for a large ramp in front of the house. Modifications to the existing bathroom are planned to provide a new roll-in shower, vanity and accessible sink. Plans also may include expanding the dining room area to allow for wheelchair circulation/access throughout the room. Raising the grade in the backyard to accommodate an easier transition from the existing deck to the yard is being considered, as is extending the deck across to the family room.

The BSAA also has committed to a full bathroom remodel, the installation of a

three-stop elevator and the construction of a garage for a survivor who recently purchased a new home. The BSAA is collaborating with the television network A&E, which will provide a full kitchen and bathroom remodel to be featured on their production of "Flipping Boston." A monetary donation to cover the cost of purchasing and installing this three-stop elevator was generously made through The International Union of Elevator Constructors Local 4.

Plans are being drawn for the possible installation of either a residential two-stop elevator or inclined platform lift for another survivor. The preliminary plans include the installation of mechanical pull-down shelves in all upper kitchen cabinets for easy access, reworking areas of the kitchen for accessibility and lowering the vanity sink unit in the master bathroom.

Another remodel, currently in the design stage, will include construction of an accessible master bedroom suite with an accessible bathroom. An elevator will be required to complete this modification. Plans for the expansion of the existing garage to allow accessible entrance to the residence also are being designed. A vertical lift will be required in the garage. This home also needs modifications to the front entrance so it will be accessible.

To further aid the BSAA, legislation was passed authorizing funds for individuals who either lost a limb or lost the use of a limb as a result of the Marathon bombings. These funds will be used not only for home modifications, but also for moving expenses for eligible victims to obtain suitable, accessible housing.

For additional information visit the [DPS website](#). People wishing to donate goods or services can email [BSAA Program Support](#) or call (617) 826-5239.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is currently enforcing the 2009 *International Building, Residential*®, *Existing Building and Mechanical Codes*®, as well as the 2012 *International Energy Conservation Code*® **bsj**