

# **LANCASTER COMMISSION ON DISABILITY**

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2020**

In 2020 the commission undertook projects, provided advice to town organizations, and carried out a range of tasks, all designed to support the ultimate goals of identifying problems and providing solutions, for residents with disabilities in Lancaster. The commission continues to strive to make the community more accessible to those who are mobility impaired and/or have other disabilities.

During the year the COD continued the process of supporting the town to provide recommendations and input for the Independent Living and Working Center of Worcester, MA, who developed and then completed for the town, Lancaster's ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Self-Evaluation Plan which outlines and prioritizes how all public buildings/ properties need to be updated to meet ADA accessibility compliance. The COD helped prioritize key elements of the plan, which was in turn submitted by the town to the state to request grant funding to help implement the plan. The plan was instrumental in helping the town secure a \$24,000 grant in January of 2021, which in part will help the town begin the involved process of making the public buildings such as Library, Town Hall, Police and Fire, Community Center etc. become fully ADA compliant.

The COD in 2020 actively engaged schools and churches to help broaden community involvement in Lancaster Accessibility Awareness Month (LAAM). These efforts were successful, as schools added educational venues tying in with accessibility. This year the COD chose the topic of mental and emotional disabilities which are especially pronounced during a pandemic. The College Church held an "Accessibility Sabbath" live-streamed and in-person, focusing on mental health challenges during COVID-19, and the COD made available to the town an online resource guide from the National Association for Mental Illness (NAMI) on helping people cope with stress, anxiety and depression. In addition, the COD collaborated again with the Thayer Memorial Library to feature an exhibit on The History of Disability, this being a different, online "pandemic safe" version formatted by McCue & Associates and Portland Community College. LAAM events were covered by local and regional media, which in turn generated exposure and awareness on accessibility, and educated our community on the needs of people with disabilities.

In 2020 the COD identified and contacted certain Lancaster public establishments and businesses that needed to meet compliance per the ADA and the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) requirements. The COD regularly interfaces with the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) while also keeping abreast of any matters, events etc. pertinent to accessibility. In addition, the COD continues to expand outreach efforts to identify more extensively, businesses and public facilities in need of improvement and/or updates to meet the aforementioned compliance.

In 2020 the COD also monitored, worked with and advised town organizations on accessibility pertaining to sites such as the Gazebo, Thayer Playground, and signage at the Town Beach. The COD also made suggestions for residents in need of assistance during the year.

The commission is actively recruiting new members to replace vacant seats. However, in 2020 the COD succeeded in recruiting several key volunteers, whose efforts to help support the commission's projects and initiatives were greatly valued and appreciated. One such example of support was the development of the new COD Facebook page, which was successfully launched in the fall of the year.

The COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020 profoundly affected the entire world, changing life as we knew it and posed even more challenges for the most vulnerable among us, including the disabled. While our commission was temporarily sidelined by the inability to meet from March through May due to closed town buildings, we resumed meeting remotely via "Zoom" for the balance of the year, effectively advocating as strong as ever for persons with disabilities.

The Lancaster COD is a vibrant commission that ultimately enhances the lives of residents and visitors, especially those with disabilities, at almost no cost due to the collective efforts of dedicated volunteers who staff the commission. In a state where approximately half of the communities do not even have an organized disability commission, Lancaster is playing a very progressive role in this area that the town can be proud of.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael S. McCue

Chair, Lancaster COD