

# **LANCASTER COMMISSION ON DISABILITY**

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2021**

In 2021 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 on Disability (COD) 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 address accessibility requirements that had been identified in 2020 in Lancaster's ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Self-Evaluation Plan, which the COD was involved in. The plan outlines and prioritizes how all Lancaster 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 2021 to initiate some of the work. The COD collaborated with town personnel, providing recommendations to update the Town Hall Prescott Building with hand railings for the upper exterior walkway entrance and other interior refinements, and recommended interior and exterior refinements for the Thayer Memorial Library as well. In July 2021, the town received a \$400,000 grant for phase 2 of the Complete Streets program that the COD was involved in along with other town entities. Phase 2 of the project is to extend sidewalks from the Nashua River bridge on Main Street to Whitcomb Drive.

To help identify key areas that need to be addressed for Lancaster residents with disabilities, the COD developed a town survey initiative in 2021. The survey was mailed to all residents in October, coinciding with Lancaster's Accessibility Awareness Month (LAAM) and was well received, providing valuable insight on what areas need to be improved the most in Lancaster. The COD will summarize the results of the survey and prioritize and recommend to town officials issues that need to be addressed that will ultimately enhance the quality of life for Lancaster residents with disabilities.

Also, during LAAM, the COD actively engaged schools and churches to help broaden community involvement. These efforts were successful, as schools added educational venues tying in with accessibility. This year the COD chose the topic of practicing appropriate etiquette when communicating with persons with disabilities. Both The Village Church and The First Church of Christ hosted COD members who made interesting and informative presentations on the subject that were very well received. In addition, the COD collaborated again with the Thayer Memorial Library to feature an exhibit on The History of Disability in two formats; a physical presentation of poster panels and a virtual format on the internet of the panels for persons desiring a "pandemic safe" version. The presentations were formatted by McCue & Associates and Portland Community College, and TML received many positive comments on the exhibit. 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 persons with disabilities.

In 2021 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 2021 the COD also monitored, worked with and advised town organizations on accessibility pertaining to sites such as the Gazebo, which the COD was very actively involved in, pertaining to the addition of an accessible ramp which was finally completed in 2021. The COD also collaborated with the Lancaster Recreation Committee to add a Handicapped accessible swing and Accessible Porta-Potty for the Thayer Playground. In addition, the COD helped bring to reality a key new feature for the Town Beach—an accessible beach wheelchair for use on sand and in the water. Throughout the year the COD also made suggestions upon request for residents in need of advice or direction pertaining to a disability or an accessibility problem.

The commission is actively trying to recruit new members to replace vacant seats. However, in 2021 the COD succeeded in recruiting several key volunteers, whose efforts to help support the commission's projects and initiatives were greatly valued and appreciated. The COD continues to meet remotely via Zoom, the third Tuesday of every month at 6:00 P.M. On a sad note, our commission lost two more members this year—Carolyn Stump and Lorry Doucet, who passed away. Their dedication and contributions to the COD will be sorely missed, and we are grateful to have had the privilege to work with them.

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