

LANCASTER COMMISSION ON DISABILITY ANNUAL REPORT 2017

In 2017 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 disability 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 began the process of supporting the development of a Lancaster ADA plan (Americans with Disabilities Act). The commission will be providing guidance and input to assist the town planner, ADA coordinator and consultant, (should the town receive a grant), to draft the plan. Having an official town ADA plan will not only provide the proper vision and direction the town should have to be ADA compliant. It will also improve the town's chances to receive state funding for projects designed to make our community more accessible.

Highlights of the year also included activities during The October Lancaster Accessibility Awareness Month (LAAM) program. The October Accessibility Awareness program was developed by the COD in 2014 to create more exposure to all town citizens on the subject, with the ultimate goal in mind of helping disabled residents in Lancaster live more full and productive lives with dignity. To our knowledge, Lancaster was the first community ever (anywhere) to institute an Accessibility Awareness Month.

This year the COD actively engaged schools and churches to help broaden community involvement in LAAM. These efforts were successful, as schools added educational venues tying in with accessibility, churches posted notices and the College Church held an exemplary "Accessibility Sabbath" that was focused on accessibility, which drew many people and also included presentations by Angels of Deaf Ministries. Also during the month, an entertaining, informative, well attended event featuring actor Sheryl Faye who presented the reenactment of Helen Keller's life, was performed at the Lancaster Public Library. During October the Library in collaboration with the COD, also featured a month-long special book display for children and adults. In addition, the TML website highlighted a unique, educational timeline display on the history of the ADA. The COD also exhibited at the Wellness Fair held at The Lancaster Community Center on Oct 4th. LAAM also included video broadcasts on SLCT of two commission members on the importance of accessibility. October 2017 was a very busy month for the COD and AAM was a success, as evidenced by the town's decision to acquire a special beach – accessible wheelchair for the town beach, a recreation facility in need to accessibility improvement that the COD has been making recommendations on. All 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 2017 the COD identified and contacted certain public establishments and businesses that needed to meet compliance per the ADA and the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (AAB) requirements. 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 2017 the COD has monitored, worked with and advised town organizations on accessibility for numerous projects such as the Prescott Building Renovation, efforts to make the Town Beach accessible, and proposed new developments.

In November/December the COD participated in the town annual census outreach mailing by including a questionnaire designed to identify residents with disabilities that may need assistance during times of emergency.

The COD has also been evaluating Emergency Preparation for the Disabled. This is an area in need of being addressed not only in Lancaster, but regionally, as well as at state and national levels. Communication and instructions on what disabled residents need to do in the event of an emergency are either nonexistent or sketchy and are generally inadequate. We are endeavoring to improve communication tools for the benefit of both Lancaster residents and for the Massachusetts Office on Disability (M.O.D.) so that the entire state may benefit as well.

Regarding the M.O.D., some COD members also participated in a Community Access Monitor Training program held in May in Leominster. This program helps keep COD's up to date on ADA laws and best practices on observing and monitoring businesses, retail establishments and public places, to ensure they are accessible.

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 over 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
Chairman, Lancaster COD