

LANCASTER COMMISSION ON DISABILITY

ANNUAL REPORT 2018

In 2018 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 development of a Lancaster ADA plan (Americans with Disabilities Act). The commission provided guidance and input to assist the town planner, ADA coordinator and consultant with the Montachusett Regional Commission (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.

Speaking of ADA compliance, during the year, extensive construction along much of Main Street took place to install ADA compliant sidewalks and curb cuts. Many residents are already reaping the benefits of this excellent program, which was a direct result of the "Complete Streets" initiative that began several years ago with town planning and the Montachusett Regional Commission, via the guidance, input and support of the COD.

This year the COD 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, churches posted notices and the College Church held an exemplary "Accessibility Sabbath" that was focused on accessibility and emergency preparedness, which drew many people. Also during the month, "The Theory of Everything", an award winning movie tribute to the genius physicist Steven Hawking, took place at the Thayer Memorial Library (TML). 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. LAAM also included an event held at Unified Health & Performance, a fully inclusive gym on Mill Street. Lancaster supporting programs for people with all forms of abilities or disabilities. October 2018 was a very busy month for the COD and LAAM was a success. 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 2018 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 and 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 2018 the COD has monitored, worked with and advised town organizations on accessibility for numerous projects such as the Prescott Building Renovation, and proposed new developments such as the Pellechia canoe launch, Goodridge Estates, and has also occasionally made suggestions for residents in need of assistance.

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 (MOD) so that the entire state may benefit as well. As such, the COD began building content and designing a format for an Emergency Preparedness Guide.

In 2018, the COD office was moved from the community center and set up in a vacant office in the old town hall, where the COD is now located.

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