

LANCASTER COMMISSION ON DISABILITY

ANNUAL REPORT 2019

In 2019 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 the town more accessible.

The first two phases of the preparation for the ADA plan referenced above were/ are, to a.) Perform a Public Right of Way Self-Evaluation (PROW) and b.) Evaluate/ inventory all Lancaster town buildings/ property. Stantec, a consulting firm hired by the town from Burlington, MA with extensive experience in ADA requirements, drafted the PROW plan to recommend to Lancaster which of the town's sidewalks, curb cuts and ramps for crosswalks needed to be updated and/ or repaired. For town buildings, the second phase, the town hired The Independent Living and Working Center from Worcester, MA (ILWC) to evaluate which buildings and property need to be made accessible. The ILWC began the inventorying process late in 2019. The COD actively participated in both of the above phases throughout 2019.

The COD in 2019 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. The College Church and The Village Church both held exemplary services that were focused on hidden/ unseen disabilities and accessibility respectively, which drew many people. The Thayer Memorial Library (TML) during October held an exhibit on the History of Disability that the COD developed in conjunction with McCue & Associates and co-sponsored with TML. The impressive 23 panel exhibit was well received, garnering a lot of viewing interest. In October the COD also exhibited in the Health Fair held at the Lancaster Community Center. October 2019 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 2019 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 (AAB) 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 2019 the COD monitored, worked with and advised town organizations on accessibility for numerous projects, most notably the Goodridge Estates 40B housing project proposal and a playground planned for the Thayer Recreation Campus. The COD extensively advocated for the town's interest to ensure that the Goodridge Estates designs were ADA compliant and supportive of persons with disabilities. The COD has also occasionally made suggestions for residents in need of assistance.

The commission is actively recruiting new members to replace vacant seats. In 2019 the COD developed a questionnaire for the town census mailing sent in January of 2020, in the hopes of expanding the commission and to also identify people in town with disabilities who may be in need of assistance in times of emergency.

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