

LANCASTER COMMISSION ON DISABILITY ANNUAL REPORT 2013

The Lancaster Commission on Disability (COD) continued its active pace in 2013.

The commission undertook important initiatives, provided advice to town organizations, and carried out myriad tasks, all designed to support the goals of identifying problems and providing solutions for Lancaster residents with disabilities. The commission continues to strive to make the community more accessible to those who are mobility impaired and have disabilities.

Highlights of the year included canvassing two town neighborhoods to determine firsthand if residents with disabilities might have special needs in the event of emergency or disaster. Such information is held in strict confidence with Lancaster officials handling first response and emergency preparations such as fire and EMT. The information supplements data that has been gathered via a town questionnaire that was distributed over the past several years and is part of a database the COD is building.

With the help of several volunteers, the COD conducted a canvassing session in June in Burbank, Harvard, Packard and Shasta neighborhoods, and a October session was conducted in the Lee Street and Settlers Path neighborhoods. These sessions have brought this pilot program to a close, to be summarized for future reference and analysis. The canvassing efforts have served to inform / educate and also provide awareness to residents on the role of the COD. In the process the COD has also identified for EMT officials some residents who are willing to be helped in the event of an emergency or disaster. Further, the commission has also provided input as relates to persons with disabilities to chief Hanson for master emergency planning and preparedness purposes. The COD has also developed a list of resources for various disability needs if individuals wish to inquire or reference certain entities that can provide information or assistance.

The COD in 2013 has identified and contacted certain public establishments and businesses that needed to meet compliance per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Massachusetts Office on Disability requirements. In addition, the COD has been developing a plan 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 2013 the COD has monitored, worked with and advised town organizations on projects such as accessibility for the Lancaster Community Center (LCC). Such LCC projects include the planned installation of an elevator, paving and signage for HC accessibility parking and a community garden. Other interface involved Thayer Field Recreation Campus Task Force, making recommendations regarding trails, skating rink, Pellechia Boat launch, and Bartlett Pond, among others. The COD has also made recommendations

to expedite plans to renovate the town beach to enable accessibility per ADA requirements.

On June 9th, two COD members attended a statewide conference held in Marlboro for all Massachusetts commissions on disabilities. The conference was well attended and proved to be a valuable resource for the Lancaster COD and an ideal venue to exchange ideas and information with fellow COD groups and learn more about current dynamics regarding the needs and laws of the disabled. On June 23rd, the COD had an information table and disseminated literature and files of Life at the Lancaster Town Day Event. Finally, in 2013 the COD formed the early planning stages for holding an accessibility awareness month for the town, an event to be established in 2014.

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 progressive role in this area that the town can be proud of.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael S. McCue
Chairman, Lancaster COD