

Norwich Commission for Persons with Disabilities  
2020 Yearly Report

Although the pandemic severely truncated the work of the Commission in 2020, we did manage to accomplish some goals and maintain the cohesion of the group.

Guest Speakers:

In-person meetings were held in January, February, and March, before restrictions were implemented. Although requests for virtual meetings were submitted, the City permitted only one such meeting (in September). Because steps of many initiatives require votes, the limited number of meetings precluded most decision-making.

During the meetings early in the year, the Commission hosted two guest speakers. In February, Sergeant Nick Rankin, Supervisor of the Norwich Police Department Community Policing Unit, spoke about crime against people with disabilities. The invitation to Nick was generated by a newspaper article about a violent crime committed against a Norwich resident with a disability at the end of 2019. The second guest speaker, in March, was Tina Yeitz, a member of the Rose Arts Festival planning committee. Tina requested assistance from the Commission to create a more accessible environment at the next Festival, scheduled for June 2020. (That event, of course, was cancelled.)

Initiatives:

The Commission continued its advocacy to have accessible spaces restored in the re-paved lot of a Norwich shopping center on West Main Street. Although the Commission's work is generally limited to ADA Title II issues, we felt that the opportunity to effect enforcement of the Connecticut State Building Code by the City's Building Department was an appropriate agenda item. The owners of the lot finally complied with the City's requests/orders and installed excellent, well-marked accessible spaces, most likely in consultation with the Building Department. Thanks to Deanna Rhodes and her staff for this positive resolution.

On a very limited basis, the Commission continued its initiative, in conjunction with Chris Riley of NPU, to install in the City at least one outdoor charging station for motorized mobility equipment. That project will most likely regenerate once the Commission is able to meet again, either in person or virtually.

(Although an amenity rather than an ADA requirement, the installation of these stations would satisfy a demonstrated need in the community.)

An issue brought to the Commission's attention early in 2020 was the lack of an accessible bus stop at the drop-off on Town Street across from Stop and Shop. The Commission commenced advocacy on this issue, but the lack of opportunity to develop strategy at meetings resulted in a postponement of continued action.

#### Disability Awareness Week, 2020

At all four meetings held in 2020, some planning occurred for Disability Awareness Week, October 12 -16. The budget of \$1,200, which included a substantial expenditure for sign language interpretation, was approved at the September meeting and submitted to the Comptroller. \* The week included three distanced activities: a Zoom presentation, hosted by Otis Library, on medical etiquette and people with disabilities, presented by Melissa Marshall; a radio segment on the Stu Bryer Show (WICH) featuring Nick Rankin addressing crime against people with disabilities; and a virtual Artreach poetry reading featuring work created by Artreach members.

#### Budget:

As an adequate balance (\$3,861.71 on December 31, 2020) was present in the Commission's account, the Commission did not request additional funding for 2021-2022.

#### Conclusion

As always, the Commission thanks the City of Norwich – the Mayor's Office, City Departments, and the Commission's liaison, Brigid Marks - for its continued support of the rights of people with disabilities.

Report submitted by Elanah Sherman, Commission Chair

\* \$500 - Melissa Marshall Disability Policy Consulting (payment); \$200 - Artreach (honorarium); \$500 - Disabilities Network of Eastern Connecticut, Interpreting Service (payment)