

COMMISSION ON DISABILITY
2001 Annual Report

Introduction and Overview

In the year 2001, the Commission on Disability took the initiative to become pro-active on behalf of Fort Collins citizens with disabilities. Our work plan was created at our annual retreat work session in November 2000, and concentrated our efforts in the areas of housing, employment, transportation, safety, and the Mayor's Awards in recognition of Disability Awareness Month. In April, the Commission honored past members with an appreciation luncheon. It provided an opportunity to catch up on the activities of present and past volunteers. Our staff liaisons, Steve Seefeld and Bob Palmer, helped coordinate our meetings, provided information about city departments, and facilitated the necessary contacts to accomplish our goals. We sorely missed Bob Palmer's help and insights after he stepped out of this role part way through the year. The Commission received no resignations in 2001, but Chairman of the Commission, Nancy Baker, ended her term at the end of the year. Commission members, Susan Williams, Laura Burnett, and Mark Beck were re-appointed for new terms. New members appointed to the Commission in 2001, included Diane Dittus, Jill Lancaster, Ruth Bell Skogerboe, and Paul Ostrof. Community member Steve Sutter continued to assist the Commission in an ad hoc capacity. His talent and expertise were greatly appreciated. Steve Seefeld retired as staff liaison at the end of the year, and will be replaced by Rachel Palmer and Tracy Ochsner. The Commission looks forward to working with them in 2002.

Employment

Commission Member Alan Apt continued to lead the Employment Subcommittee in 2001. After reviewing the results of the Disability Employment Survey that was done in 2000, the subcommittee recommended that a training workshop for city department and division managers be held to address the primary needs expressed in the survey. The results of the survey were reported to the Mayor and City Council through the City Manager's office, and permission was received to conduct the workshop. Contact with the Center for Community Participation determined that Kathy Schelley of that agency would be willing to deliver the training program based on the needs expressed. The subcommittee was unable to schedule the workshop in 2001, but hopefully will be able to coordinate this event in 2002. The subcommittee also agreed to help focus on employment as the theme for the Mayor's Awards again in 2001. Community members, Steve Sutter and Roger Van Lieshout assisted the committee in its work.

Housing

The Visitability subcommittee of the COD had regular monthly meetings on the first Monday of the month throughout the year. The committee is comprised of members of the COD; mark Beck, Ruth Skogerboe, Paul Ostrof, Michelle Jacobs of NCHBA, Felix Lee of the F. C. Building Dept. and Kimberly Stenberg.

The primary goal of the group is to encourage builders and developers to routinely offer routine accessibility in building designs to their consumers. Routine accessibility prescribes a barrier free entry into a home with accessibility into all areas on the ground floor. The five design features are:

One ramp or no-step entrance on an accessible route with an entrance door that has a minimum clear opening of 32 inches, (it can be at the front, side, back of the house or in the garage);

First floor interior passage doors that have a minimum clear opening of 30 inches and lever handle hardware;

A 36 inch wide level route, except at the doors, throughout the first floor of the dwelling unit with ramped or beveled changes at door thresholds;

A usable first floor bathroom: Includes a minimum 32" door, a 36" clear passage and reinforcement in bathroom walls utilizing lateral two-inch by eight inch nominal wood blocking installed flush with stud edges of walls (centerline of blocking must be 34 inches from and parallel to the floor) around the toilet and tub/shower, and

First floor light switches, thermostats, and electrical panels no higher than 48 inches above the floor, receptacles at least 15 inches above the floor, and outdoor electrical panels adjacent to an accessible route with the same height requirements.

The name of the committee was changed at the June meeting to the Practical Housing for All Project to better reflect the goals of the group.

To promote the idea the committee has created an educational program that includes brochures, a Power Point presentation, a 15-minute video with a short lecture and discussion. The presentation was given Sept. 10, 01, in the CIC room with invitations sent to city council, builders, Realtors and architects. The presentation was also given in Boulder, Oct. 13, 01 at the Accessible and Affordable Housing Options Summit. Response from those in attendance was very favorable to the concepts with reservations as to how to implement the program. Plans are being formulated for future presentations to the Northern Colorado Home Builders Association and other builder groups in the area.

The committee is also developing strategies to create incentives from the city building departments that would encourage builders to offer design options.

The committee will continue in 2002 with meetings on the second Thursday of the month, preceding the regularly scheduled COD meeting.

Voting Issues

In February, the Commission held a session with Wanda Krazicek and Jan Kuhnen, from the city and county elections offices. The Commission was updated on accommodations and balloting methods for people with disabilities. A sample of a new voting booth accessible to wheelchair users was displayed. The discussion was lively and shared information resulted in a clearer understanding for both the commission members and the election clerks.

Library

In January 2001, the Commission met with Brenda Carns, Director of the Fort Collins Public Library. Commission member, Susan Williams, had spent time in the library surveying accessibility since becoming “stranded” during a fire alarm at that site. Brenda reported that accommodations had been made in response to Susan’s work, and they were reported to the group. Brenda also acquainted the Commission with library services available to people with disabilities. The capacity of the library to provide these special services is constrained by funding, and the possibility, at that time, of the county discontinuing library funding weighed heavily on the group. The Commission agreed to send a letter to both the Mayor and the County Commissioners urging library funding. The Commission Chairman at subsequent meetings with City Council member Mike Byrne, and City Manager, John Fischbach, and other city staff also discussed this topic. The result was that the city found funding in the budget to continue the position of outreach services coordinator who oversees many of the services benefiting people with disabilities. This meeting marked the beginning of a meaningful dialog between the library staff and the Commission.

Transportation

Transportation continued to be a topic of discussion in 2001. In response to a request from the Northern Colorado Cross Disability Coalition, the Commission added support for expanded Dial-a-Ride service. In April, the discussion continued with John Daggett, Senior Transportation Planner, giving a presentation on the proposed strategic operating plan for changes in Transfort routes. At a later meeting, the Commission also heard from

John Fischbach about budget considerations and Lee Carter, the Community Transportation Manager for Easter Seals Colorado and Coordinator for Project Action in Denver. Project Action is a collaborative effort between the federal government and Easter Seals to address paratransit issues for individuals with disabilities. As a result of these discussions, the Commission indicated that it could not support the proposed plan. The Commission strongly supported the concept of moving transportation from a secondary to a primary service. The 2002-2004 budget was approved with a line item for expanding paratransit service. City staff presented a Dial-A-Ride display at the Mayor's Awards. In December, the Commission viewed the new Dial-A-Ride video.

Safety

The Commission began extensive work on safety issues including pedestrian safety, heavy doors, and handicapped parking. These areas were seen to impact not only the disabled population, but also the general citizenry of Fort Collins.

During the year, Commission members Rob and Romola Fritz headed a comprehensive study of disabled parking spaces. The first phase of the project focused on city properties, using design, accessibility, usefulness, numbers and safety as criteria. In June, recommendations were made to Randy Hensley, Transportation Planning and Parking Manager for Fort Collins. These were accepted and are now being implemented, including the addition of several designated spaces in the Oak Street parking lot and one at City Hall. The second phase of the project was directed at increasing the number of disabled parking spaces in the downtown/Old Town shopping and commercial area.

Research determined that statistically 17% of Fort Collins households have a disabled member. It was found, however, that only 2.8% of the parking spaces in the downtown/Old Town area were designated for the disabled. In July, the Commission made the recommendation to Mr. Hensley that increasing the amount to 3.8% would be a start in making the number of disabled spaces more equitable. Mr. Hensley requested the funds needed for these changes in his 2002 budget, and has informed the Commission that the request was approved and the changes will be implemented. The Commission, on behalf of the disabled population of Fort Collins, expresses sincere gratitude to Mr. Hensley for his cooperation and assistance on the project. He is helping the Commission to significantly improve the quality of life for persons with disabilities.

2001 marked the beginning of discussion about pedestrian safety. Commission member, Kathryn Johnson, opened the discussion by obtaining copies of the Pedestrian Safety Handbook from the American Council of the Blind. The Commission cited particularly dangerous intersections for persons with disabilities, and, in July, met with Eric Bracke, Fort Collins Traffic Engineer, to discuss these issues. Mr. Bracke was receptive to the discussion and requested that the Commission provide a list of particularly difficult intersections so that adjustments could be made. There was additional discussion about signage reminding motorists of Colorado state law giving pedestrians the right of way. Both Boulder and Estes Park employ this signage. Mr. Bracke agreed to look into the matter. The Commission thanks Mr. Bracke for his attention and cooperation.

At the end of the year, several Commission members began an assessment of heavy entrance doors to buildings in Fort Collins. The Commission expects to receive more information in 2002.

Mayor's Awards

October 26, 2001 marked the twenty-first annual Mayor's Awards. Displays from service providers and representatives of assistive technology and equipment companies lined the room at the University Park Holiday Inn. Dr. John Burnett, Professor of Marketing at Denver University delivered an enthusiastic and informative address on "Marketing to People with Disabilities," based on research he has conducted over a number of years. Award recipients were: Business of the Year – Walrus Ice Cream; Volunteer of the Year – Bill Livingston Holt; and Service Provider of the Year – Quota International of Fort Collins, for their initiation and maintenance of the Larimer County Hearing Aid Bank. This year Hewlett Packard sponsored the Dorothy Lasley Memorial Award, which was begun by The American Legion. Gladys Russell, for her work with Hear-N-Colorado, received the award as well as a check for \$1000 for the organization. This marked, what the Commission hopes will be, the beginning of private support for the public recognition of citizens helping others in the community. The Commission undertook extensive de-briefing about the event and plans to build on it next year. The Commission thanks Mayor Martinez for his participation in this important public recognition of volunteerism in Fort Collins.

Accessible America 2001

At the end of the year, the Commission drafted a grant application on behalf of Fort Collins for entry into the "Accessible America 2001" contest sponsored by the National Organization on Disability. The prize is \$25,000. The Commission members felt strongly that Fort Collins has made exceptional efforts to accommodate persons with disabilities and improve their quality of life. The prize will be awarded in February, and the Commission will track the process.

Planning Session

A planning session for 2002 was held on November 8, 2001. The resulting work plan is included.

The Commission on Disability completed an active and involved year. The concern for persons with disabilities that is present in the Fort Collins community is remarkable, and the Commission takes pride in contributing to the example that the City administration has set.