

COMMISSION ON DISABILITY 2000 Annual Report

Introduction and Overview

The year 2000, was an active and rewarding year for the Commission on Disability. Our work plan was created at our annual retreat work session in November, 1999, and all members of the Commission participated in making those plans reality. Our staff liaisons, Bob Palmer and Steve Seefeld, worked to help coordinate meetings and provided valuable insights and information relating to city department operations and administration. We were sorry to learn of their decision to leave their positions with the Commission in the year 2001. Members of the Commission who resigned during the year were Nathan Montgomery, David Marckres, Initha Stuckey, outgoing Commission chairman Mark Kramer, and Lila Vizzard. Former Chairman of the Commission, Don Fish, completed his term at the end of 2000, and we will miss his expertise and contributions. New appointees to the Commission included Susan Williams, Kathryn Johnson, and Robert and Romola Fritz. The Commission undertook to revise and update its bylaws, enjoyed presentations by and about community groups in service to people with disabilities, and discussed a proposed change regarding boards and commissions to the City Charter. Main areas of focus for the Commission in 2000 included handicap parking, employment, transportation, Visitability, and the Mayor's Awards.

Handicap Parking

A study of available handicap parking in the downtown and Old Town areas of Fort Collins was precipitated by the numerous oral complaints by citizens with disabilities.

They felt that they were being discouraged from shopping in the downtown and Old Town areas because of the lack of sufficient designated parking places near the merchants or areas that they wished to access. A survey of the number and placement of handicapped parking areas adjacent to city owned and regulated public properties (i.e. city hall, city park, the police station, public library, parking garages, and streets around the county court house) was done to determine the rationale used by the City in designating the numbers and locations of handicapped parking spaces in these areas. Downtown and Old Town street parking were mapped to determine the numbers and locations of both handicap and regular parking spaces.

A survey will be done of the number of all licensed drivers in Larimer County in relationship to the number of handicap permits (both permanent and temporary) issued, to determine a ratio of permits to licenses and to match these numbers to the ratio of regular parking spaces to handicap parking spaces in the downtown/Old Town area. A report and recommendations will be given to the appropriate city officials later this year.

Employment

The Employment Subcommittee, under the leadership of commission member Alan Apt, continued to function during 2000. In March, Dana Shea-Reid met with the Commission to discuss potential for increased employment of disabled individuals by the City.

Resulting from this discussion, the Commission drafted a Disability Employment Survey to obtain information from City service directors, division heads, and department heads about information and resources for hiring persons with disabilities. Mayor Ray

Martinez was asked to sign the cover letter accompanying the survey. Responses to the employment survey will serve as a basis for the group's efforts in 2001.

The subcommittee continued to build upon its connections with outside community groups, including Easter Seals Colorado and the Business Leadership Network. The Commission unanimously agreed to make employment the focus of the Mayor's Awards event in October, Disability Awareness Month.

Transportation Issues and Dial-A-Ride

Transportation issues of people with disabilities continued to be a topic of discussion for the Commission during 2000. The COD listened to a presentation about a flag system used in some communities around the country, that facilitates crossing at busy intersections for people with disabilities. Concerns about the hours of operation and schedules of Dial-A-Ride were primary items. Transportation limitations for this segment of the community prohibit much participation in community affairs, as well as social contacts. The Commission re-iterated its commitment of emphasizing the importance of the City funding for extended service hours of Dial-A-Ride. During the summer, the Commission addressed a letter to City Manager, John Fischbach, supporting the efforts of outside groups to get the para-transit item on the City's budget exemption list. In December, Tom Reiff, from Transfort, presented the draft Service Plan for Transfort to the Commission. Again, concern was expressed about services for citizens with disabilities. Since this issue is of major importance to the members of the physically challenged community, the Commission will continue to address these concerns in 2001.

Housing and Structures

The City Building Department asked the commission to review plans for the renovation of the downtown Northern Hotel. During this presentation by representatives from the developer, the Commission gained valuable insight about how historic preservation constraints and the needs of citizens with disabilities can work cooperatively. A member of the Commission, Mark Beck participated, at the request of the County, in discussion concerning a variance requested by Comfort Inn with respect to accessible rooms. This marked the first intergovernmental action in which the Commission was involved. The Commission also received a preview of the new information kiosk to be located at Walnut and Linden Streets, and gave input regarding usage by people with disabilities.

Public Relations and Communications

The COD website continued into the year 2000, providing information about the Commission, resources available in the community for citizens with disabilities, and links to other sites of interest. Later in the year the website suffered considerable erasure from City intervention. The Commission hopes to restore the website in 2001. Considerable media activity was promoted by the Commission in October, concerning Disability Awareness Month and the Mayor's Awards. Commission members made contact and met with reporters and editorial boards of the Coloradoan, Northern Colorado Business Report, and The Forum. Media afforded excellent coverage of the Mayor's Awards. The Commission recommended to the Mayor and City Council to provide Braille and large print materials and sign language interpreters at City Council meetings. The sign

language interpretation was agreed to on a trial basis through the end of 2000. Evaluation of the extent of usage will take place in 2001. The Commission continued to provide information and an audience for visitors attending Commission meetings.

Visitability

The Commission established a subcommittee under the leadership of Mark Beck, to explore incorporating Visitability into building practices in Fort Collins. Visitability is a building practice for new single family construction that prescribes a barrier free entry into a home with accessibility into all areas of the ground floor. Officials in other cities that have adopted this program were contacted for information and guidance. An ordinance proposal was drafted and presented for review by the Mayor and the City Council. The Mayor and Councilman, Mike Byrne attended a Commission meeting at which Mr. Beck presented the proposal. Mike Byrne related feedback and suggestions in response to the presentation, and requested a statement from the Commission regarding City involvement. This item will be addressed in 2001. In November, Mr. Beck made a presentation at a Brown Bag Lunch with the City Manager, several department heads, and members of the Home Builders Association. The response was supportive. The Commission will continue to promote the idea of Visitability through research and development of educational programs by an expanded subcommittee structure.

Mayor's Awards

The Mayor's Awards represent a major effort of the Commission each year to recognize the efforts of the City and individuals and agencies that serve the disabled in our

community. The award presentation was held on October 20, 2000, at the University Park Holiday Inn. Steve Sutter, a member of the Employment Subcommittee, arranged and coordinated exhibits from vendors whose products and services benefited persons with disabilities. Keynote speaker for the event was Bill Dougherty, General Manager of the Westin Westminster, who has a long history of hiring people with disabilities and serves as an advocate for these hiring practices. Awards were presented as follows:

Employer of the Year – Harmony Road Safeway Store

Volunteer of the Year – Steve Horak

Service Provider of the Year – Larimer County Mental Health

Dorothy Lasley Award – Laura Burnett

The Commission will continue and build upon this important community event.

Planning Session

A planning session for 2001 was held on November 9, 2000, to create a work plan to guide the Commission's activities. A copy is enclosed.