

**Town of Harwich Council on Aging Board  
Meeting Notes**

**Wednesday, December 20, 2023 at 10am**

**Harwich Community Center  
100 Oak Street, Harwich MA 02645  
Channel 18 Studio**

**Meeting Attendance:**

Present: Richard Waystack, Linda Roderick, John Bathelt, Ralph Smith, Director – Julie Witas, Executive Assistant – Lauren Swift, Social Services Coordinator – Andrea Sidoruk.

Absent: Carol Thayer, Angelina Chilaka, Justin White

Guests: None

1. **Call to Order:** Chair Richard Waystack called the meeting to order at 10:03am. Richard Waystack introduced Linda to the board and introduced the board to Linda and explained the COA.
2. **Approval of last meeting minutes:** The approval of the October 18, 2023 meeting minutes was tabled for a future meeting.
3. **Public Comment:** No members of the public were present for comment.
4. **Chair's Comments:** Select board March 6, 2024 joint meeting to advocate for and support director. Few committees in town that interact with many volunteers.
5. **COA Director – Julie Witas Report:**
  - a. Operations: Julie asked Andrea to speak. Andrea introduced the concept of a “Dementia Friend,” which entails how to understand how to empathetically interact with someone who has dementia. Andrea is trained as a “Dementia Champion,” which means she is able to train individuals to become a Dementia Friend via a one-hour training. The COA believes it would benefit the community to train residents of all ages, Town staff, and COA Board members, to become Dementia Friends. This helps to build awareness of dementia and gives people a small but meaningful action they can take to help those with the condition. This would also be a first step to becoming a “dementia friendly community.”
    - Questions and feedback from Richard Waystack:
      - Budgetary implications – None, other than Andrea’s time.
      - Process – Scheduling trainings via the COA newsletter and ideally, also for the Board. We also plan to offer to all Community Center staff (will be optional of course).
      - Richard recommended that we share the plan with the Select Board and invite them to the COA Board training. The Board agreed.
    - The Board discussed whether to pursue Age and/or Dementia-Friendly community status. Julie expressed that this should be viewed a very long-term goal taken in

small, incremental steps. She sees the series of Dementia Friends training as the first in a very long series of steps towards these goals. More research will also be needed in order to determine what other priorities should be addressed for Harwich.

- Richard asked for a motion to go forward with the plan to train the Board and support the training of community members as Dementia Friends, including inviting the Select Board to participate. John Bathelt made the motion, Ralph Smith seconded the motion. Unanimous vote.
- b. The first round of budgets for FY25 have been submitted for review, in accordance with the directive to limit expenses to a maximum increase of 1.5%.
  - c. Grants: Julie reported that the past several months, she has applied for a few grants. She described the outcomes.
    - Harwich Cultural Council - \$550 still pending. Optimistic though.
    - \$2500 Harwich Fund – cultural arts series.
    - \$2500 Mass Cultural Council – Spring Fashion Show in March 2024 (one-time).
    - \$5910 Mass COA – Support Modernization of the COA.
  - d. Volunteer Needs:
    - Julie reports that Linda needs help in the kitchen and dining room for lunch and breakfast service. This would not be for cooking and prepping, but rather would be for a more service-oriented role, such as serving food and drinks and clearing plates. The typical hours are 10:15am – 12:30pm. One to two volunteers are needed.
    - A new need is for Technology Assistance – volunteers would help with a specific issue for approximately 1 hour time increments. This would be done at the COA or the person’s home. We will accept as many volunteers as possible.
6. **Old Business:** Julie asked if there were any relevant updates to report on the progress of Charter Review Committee, which was briefly discussed at the last meeting. Richard Waystack indicated that Carol Thayer is more knowledgeable about that, so would defer the discussion until she is present again.
  7. **New Business:** Discussed the possibility of a Needs Assessment, to be funded by the Friends of the HCOA. Richard Waystack asked for a motion to go forward. Ralph Smith made the motion, John Bathelt seconded the motion. Unanimous vote by the board. This would also need to be presented to the Select Board for their support. Julie will pursue a date.
  8. **Board Member Comments:** None
  9. **Adjournment:** Ralph Smith made the motion to adjourn; John Bathelt seconded the motion. Unanimous vote to adjourn. Meeting adjourned at 10:54am.