

Meeting Minutes
Harwich Council on Aging Board of Directors
Wednesday, May 5, 2021, 10 AM
Remote Participation Only

Meeting Attendance:

Board Members: Vice Chair Carol Thayer, Angelina Raneo Chilaka, Joanne Lepore, Ralph Smith, James Mangan, Justin White

COA Staff: Director Emily Mitchell

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Carol Thayer at 10:07 AM.

II. Approval of Minutes

Angelina Chilaka made a motion to approve the minutes from the April 7, 2021 COA Board of Directors meeting. The motion was seconded Ralph Smith. Unanimous vote to approve by members present.

III. Public Comment: None

IV. Chair's Comments (C. Thayer):

Vice Chair Carol Thayer checked in with all members. Carol also mentioned the quality of the most recent edition of the COA newsletter and praised the information contained within.

Emily mentioned that Chairman Richard Waystack is planning a program with a regional task force on June 15, 2021. He will be able to speak to the program details at the next meeting.

V. Director's Report (E. Mitchell)**

A. COVID-19 Vaccine – COA Role and Current Information.

Over 95% of Harwich residents age 75+ are fully vaccinated, between 80-90% of residents age 65+ are fully vaccinated. Emily reported that this has been a tremendous level of progress since the beginning of Phase 2 in the state's vaccine rollout plan which was announced January 27, 2021.

For people still looking for vaccines, a few updates: Barnstable County has joined the state's preregistration system; the County will no longer announce clinics in advance for clinic-specific registration. Emily reported that people have been contacted relatively quickly after completing the preregistration. Vaccine appointments have become markedly more available across the board, particularly at local retail pharmacies – often with same day appointments.

The COA helped coordinate a second round of homebound vaccinations for 8 residents. The process was impacted by the pause on the Johnson and Johnson vaccine – in place, residents

in this round were given Moderna. Second doses are scheduled for May 20. The COA is still taking names for people in need of homebound vaccination, but the COA is not receiving many calls at this time. This service was again provided in partnership with Outer Cape Health Services, Harwich EMS, and Harwich Health Department.

Cape Cod Healthcare/Cape Cod Community College site – the COA assisted approximately 300 residents to secure appointments through this priority list. Demand for this service has also dropped dramatically. CCH has transitioned to a standard registration model using a website or dedicated phone line, rather than the priority list model.

B. COA Staffing Updates

The COA has been in the process of hiring a per diem Town Chef to provide back up to full time Town Chef Linda St. Pierre. One finalist will be meeting with the Town Administrator and then presented to the Board of Selectmen for notification next week (week of 5/10/21). The COA has had to cancel lunches a few times during Linda's absence; Emily reported that she is happy and thankful to onboard a per diem Chef to provide Linda with time off without impacting meal services.

Emily has been working on a staffing reorganization since September 2020 as a result of the vacancy in the Program Specialist 1 position. The Program Specialist 1 position was made vacant with Julie Witas was promoted to Social Services Coordinator following the resignation of the prior Coordinator in April 2020. Emily has proposed to reorganize departmental staffing to leave the Program Specialist 1 position vacant and instead fill a Program Specialist 2. She had been discussing this change with the Town Administrator since September 2020. Program Specialist 1 and Program Specialist 2 are job titles that already exist within the Town and both fall within the Harwich Employee Association (HEA). In conversations with the Town Administrator in the Fall, the concerns were related to budgeting and to the impact on active union negotiations.

When going through the budget process for FY 22, Emily did include funding for the higher level Program Specialist 2 position, with feedback from the Finance Director and in compliance with the directive from Administration to submit a level funded budget. In March 2021, HEA negotiations were finalized. With the town budget process approaching its final form in the lead up to town meeting and with finalized negotiations, Emily followed up with Administration to resume discussions about the proposed reorganization.

Emily met with the Assistant Town Administrator in April and was informed that the Town administrator would not be supporting the reorganization at this time. The Assistant Town Administrator had conveyed to Emily that the Town Administrator was prioritizing reorganizations in other departments and would not reconsider this for six to seven more months. The Assistant Town Administrator gave Emily the option to hire temporary administrative help or to hire the existing Program Specialist 1 position.

Emily reported that she is not sure which option she will pursue. Emily articulated that there is a very significant different between what a Program Specialist 1 and a Program Specialist 2 can offer to the department and to the community and that it is a significant loss not to be

able to proceed with the reorganization. Importantly, a Program Specialist 2 allows for more intentional and responsive community engagement, solicitation of feedback, incorporation of evidence based programming, volunteer recruitment and training, and quality publicity. Emily mentioned that these are areas where the Harwich COA is falling behind other area COAs.

Carol shared that she had read the supporting materials in the packet including the statement of departmental needs, memo from Emily to the Town Administrator requesting the reorganization, and the two job descriptions and felt they were a good idea and was sorry the Town Administrator put it on hold. She mentioned that filling the Program Specialist 1 position may hurt in the long run with the forward movement of the department and that hiring temporary administrative help may be better to bridge the gap. Joanne agreed with Carol's statements.

Emily responded that she was thinking along the same lines. Having professional help with staff members who have professional aging services backgrounds is what will best move the department forward. She raised the concern that there is no guarantee that the Town Administrator will reconsider or support the reorganization in six or seven months.

C. Overview of current and anticipated COA operations

No major substantive changes to onsite operations – continuing 1:1 onsite services. Van capacity remains at 2 passengers/trip. Continuing community-based services in full swing. Lunch capacity remains at 70 people/week and there is space to add new participants every day of the week (currently serving 65-67 people/day).

The COA is considering scaling up onsite operations in light of state-level reopening guidance and public health trends. The COA does not have the staff or resources to scale up onsite services without scaling down community based services which many people are still relying on. The lunch program would be most impacted. The COA plans to put out a survey to lunch participants to assess need and the impact of scaling back. The resumption of onsite programs includes consideration of safety, liability, and capacity concerns. This also provides an opportunity to evaluate prior programs to see if they are still providing value and meeting community wants and needs, rather than just continuing them as status quo. Emily still anticipates the resumption of some expanded onsite programs in July.

Remote programming through COAST (Councils on Aging Serving Together) has remained successful – there are 25 programs planned for May and June, many have had great attendance. Emily mentioned she hopes this collaborative will continue even as onsite programming expands, as it has benefitted the Cape communities and removed many town specific barriers to program access.

For all onsite programs, the COA is still asking the full scope of COVID screening questions for all participants, regardless of the individual's vaccine status. These questions are sometimes more restrictive than current CDC guidance for people who are fully vaccinated. The COA is doing so to ensure equitable access to services for people regardless of

vaccination status and because there is no mechanism for staff to ask about or confirm vaccine status.

D. New CCRTA Leased Vehicle

The COA has received the new leased vehicle from CCRTA as of March 2021. It was presented to Town Administration and to Town Counsel for review. Counsel did propose some language changes so those will be sent back to CCRTA for their review. The vehicle cannot be operated until the agreement is signed.

E. COA Volunteer needs, recruitment, and training

Since the last COA Board meeting, the COA has onboarded two new reception volunteers – one new person and one person who volunteer pre-COVID and is coming back on board. The COA would like to onboard one more lunch driver, with a 60-90 minute commitment a couple days per week.

Carol asked if there have been any complaints about transportation. Emily responded that the reduced per-trip van capacity has allowed for more individualized transportation services. There have been no complaints. Emily is unsure how that may be impacted by a transition back to a more defined transportation schedule as capacity increases.

VI. Old Business

A. Discussion and possible vote to appoint new liaison to the Elder Services of Cape Cod and the Islands Board of Directors

Joanne reported that the Director of Elder Services asked Joanne to stay on through the annual board meeting in May, after initially planning to step down in April. Joanne consented to stay on for the additional month.

Carol asked if anyone was interested in stepping up to fill that position. No one volunteered at that time.

VII. New Business

A. Update from Elder Services Board Liaison (*J. Lepore*)

Joanne reported that Elder Services has been very happy with the new Meals on Wheels vendor.

For home services, Elder Services is planning to resume expanded in home/in person services, rather than remotely.

New grant opportunities have been announced with applications due in July.

Elder Services is continuing to assist with vaccine access for their members.

VIII. Member Comments

Joanne expressed that she is very upset by the decision of the Town Administrator relative to the staffing reorganization. She said she felt he has let the Council on Aging and staff down.

Carol agreed that she is disappointed in the decision and that Emily has made a strong, comprehensive, and well thought out argument for the reorganization, especially when the funding was available.

IX. Adjournment

Joanne Lepore made the motion to adjourn at 10:38 AM. Motion was seconded by James Mangan. Unanimous roll call vote by members present to adjourn.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, June 2, 2021, 10 AM by remote participation only.