

**Meeting Minutes**  
**Harwich Council on Aging Board of Directors**  
**Wednesday, January 19, 2022, 10 AM**  
**Remote Participation Only**

**Meeting Attendance:**

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

**COA Staff:** Director Emily Mitchell

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Richard Waystack at 10 AM.

II. Approval of Minutes

Ralph Smith made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 15, 2021 Council on Aging Board of Directors meeting. The motion was seconded by Joanne Lepore. Unanimous roll call vote by members present to approve the minutes.

III. Public Comment:

Larry Ballantine, liaison from the Board of Selectmen, reported that the focus of the Selectmen is currently on the budget and warrant articles. Selectmen Ballantine reported that his liaison assignments had changed recently to include COA Board, Community Center, and Library, and that he was excited for the collaborative efforts between these groups and hopes to see them continue.

Chair Richard Waystack replied that the breadth of services provided by the COA Department has a great benefit directly to the community and for the volunteers who help provide these services. The number and type of volunteer hours is well documented. There is huge need for COA services in the community.

IV. Chair's Comments (R. Waystack)

A. Check in with members

Richard reiterated that all COA Board members are also active volunteers in other capacities with the department and the community. He asked members to speak to their volunteer rolls. Ralph Smith mentioned his role on the COA Board and as a lunch delivery driver. Joanne Lepore reported serving as a reception volunteer multiple times per week and mentioned participating in and enjoying a number of COA programs. Angelina Chilaka mentioned her role helping planning volunteer recognition events, as well as helping with other projects as needed.

Selectmen Ballantine mentioned ongoing meetings about the Treasure Chest and hope that it will reopen in the spring. The Treasure Chest can help people access items they need. He also reported excitement that Assistant Town Administrator Meggan Eldredge is serving as the ADA Coordinator. He reported needing additional volunteer involvement in the Harwich Accessibility Rights Committee, a certain number of whom must have disabilities.

Richard followed up asking Carol Thayer and Justin White to share their volunteer involvement with the COA. Carol mentioned her involvement with the volunteer appreciation events and that she looks forward to working on that again. She reiterated her support to help the department in any way. Justin highlighted his role as a liaison between the COA and Fire Department in support of residents.

Richard expressed his hope that Justin White would be appointed as a full member of the COA Board, from his role as alternate member. Larry said he would follow up on that process.

V. Director's Report (E. Mitchell)  
A. Overview of current and anticipated operations

Emily reported that the COVID Omicron surge was impacted both COA staff and operations. At the end of December, the Board of Health passed a mask mandate that applied to staff, volunteers, and visitors in all Town buildings. A number of COA programs are incompatible with a mask mandate, specifically Senior Fit and congregating dining. Those programs will be suspended until the mask mandate is lifted. Grab and go meals are still offered at full capacity, up to 45 meals/day, in place of onsite meals.

A few other programs have been impacted by the surge, specifically fitness programs. They are considered to be paused until public health trends improve. The department is targeting the week of February 14<sup>th</sup> to resume those programs if it is safe to do so, even if the mask mandate is still in effect.

A number of staff members have been impacted directly by COVID - the office is operating without full staff which is impacting response times.

Richard highlighted a specific example of a local resident without many local family or other supports who benefits from COA programs and meals.

Ralph offered to assist with meal deliveries if the need has increased. Emily replied that volunteer deliveries have expanded and that she is grateful for Ralph's support in making that possible.

## B. Staffing Updates

One of the COA van drivers, John Chatham, has resigned. John served the COA and community for approximately 2.5 years. Emily expressed her gratitude to him and that he is already missed.

The position is part-time, non-benefitted, and part of a union. It is currently posted for internal applicants. If there are no internal applicants, it will be posted externally. Emily has coordinated transportation coverage for Wednesdays, the day covered by this open position, with the other two COA van drivers for the next three weeks. If the position is not filled quickly, there will likely be some lapses in driving coverage. Once a new driver is hired, they will have to go through the training and certification requirements.

Selectmen Ballantine asked Emily about the relationship between transportation provided by the COA Department and by the Friends of the Harwich COA. Emily replied that the services are entirely separate. The Friends own their minibus and it is driven by volunteers. The COA operates with vehicles leased from the Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority with paid staff who go through certain contractually mandated trainings. The scheduling and selection of routes is entirely different. Both organizations cross refer to one another. The Friends have great opportunities for socialization on their bus, where the COA prioritizes locations like grocery stores, pharmacies, and medical appointments.

Richard added that the Friends have adopted the safety requirements in place by the COA. He also reiterated that transportation is among the top three needs facing local seniors.

## C. FY 23 Budget process updates

Emily mentioned that she had gone through the initial FY 23 departmental budget request at the December COA Board meeting. The information is included in this packet as well.

The next step in the process is for Department Heads to meet with the Town Administrator and Finance Director to discuss their requests. The Town Administrator has requested supplemental narrative, answering specific questions, from all Department Heads in advance of those meetings. The questions are included in the packet. Emily will share her full supplemental narrative with the COA Board when it is complete. Emily expects that the meetings will take place in the next one or two weeks.

Emily went through several questions. One asks if any budget requests go beyond the core mission of the department. Emily shared that nothing in the request goes outside the core mission. In fact, the request cuts funding to several core programs, notably to nutrition, to offset cost increases in areas like salaries in order to comply with the directive to level fund relative to FY 22. At the requested amount, the nutrition line item would only support 40 meals/day, down from 45 in FY 22.

Emily did request funding for two enhancements of services in the initial proposal. One is for supplemental nutrition funding, approximately \$31,000, to increase the daily meal capacity to 70 – this was the capacity maintained throughout the pandemic when supplemental non-municipal funding was available. This shows a significant unmet nutrition need among older adult residents. The other enhancement of services request was for the addition of a Program Specialist 2 staff position. Emily has been working towards this for about two years. This position would support the work involved in running a community based lunch delivery program. This position would also expand programming as well as the internationality behind the department’s volunteer programming including recruitment, training, and assigning tasks. The enhancement of services requests are intertwined; the department would not have the capacity to operate the expanded meal capacity without additional staff support.

Richard asked if any members or if Selectmen Ballantine had questions about the FY 23 budget request. Selectmen Ballantine said the need was well communicated, it’s just a matter of finding the funding.

Richard reported that, in his capacity as a member of the Board of Assessors, he has seen firsthand the financial need of seniors in the community. Many people are living supported by very minimal income and are in need of support like the services offered through the COA. Emily followed up on the financial need many face in the community. She mentioned another area the Friends of the COA have assisted with. The department runs a volunteer medical program where volunteers drive residents to medical appointments. Volunteers provide transportation in their own vehicles, assume the risk and wear and tear of this service, and are reimbursed only a small amount for gas, between \$5 and \$15 per trip depending on location. Emily reported that many riders have been unable to pay even the \$5 for a ride to an essential medical appointment.

#### D. COA ARPA Funding Request

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds are beginning to be distributed at the County and municipal levels. The Town has already received approximately \$630,000 and is set to receive an equivalent amount this coming June or July. The Board of Selectmen is currently considering the best ways to expend those fund. The Town Administrator did announce that department heads could submit requests for use of the funds.

Emily submitted a request to the Town Administrator and Finance Director for a full-time clinical social worker/mental health counselor. The position is meant to be temporary, only for the duration of the ARPA funding period, not a permanent add to staff.

When initially considering a request, Emily said she planned to request additional Town Nurse support. In talking with Town Nurse Sue Jusell, it became clear that there was a need for additional mental health services. A huge portion of Sue’s caseload has become focused on mental health crises more so than physical and cognitive health matters, or broader public health services. There is not a comparable clinical position already within the Council on Aging. The Town has a clinical role in the Youth Services Counselor, but once residents age out of that service, there is no Town-supported resource to address these needs. Mental health

needs have magnified as a result of COVID, but are always relevant especially in light of the shortage of resources in Harwich and across Cape Cod.

This position falls within several enumerated allowable uses of ARPA funds including responding to a public health emergency and bolstering public sector capacity.

Emily included the full proposal here including the need, how the funds may be suited to meet the need, and potential costs associated with the request. Emily is unsure what the next steps will be now that she has submitted the request, but will keep the Board updated.

Emily included both the budget message communicated to Department Heads from Administration, as well as the initial COA FY 23 request she submitted, in the Board's packet.

Selectmen Ballantine mentioned that ARPA Funds will be available to use for several years. The Board of Selectmen is just beginning to consider potential uses.

Richard and Carol spoke to the needs they've seen in their professional roles as realtors working with isolated and at risk seniors. Carol mentioned that it would be a benefit for many of the clients they work with to have access to professional counseling services and that there is a shortage of resources.

Larry spoke to the work Outer Cape Health provides the community. He affirmed the need for additional community supports.

#### E. Volunteer needs, recruitment, and training

Emily reported two needs. The first is for an additional volunteer medical driver, as there is continuously increasing demand for this service. This role requires the volunteer to go through background, driving, and vehicle checks. They also provide the service in their personal vehicles and assume the risk and insurance liability of driving. The department relies on a number of passionate people to provide this service. The program covers rides between Hyannis and Wellfleet. Riders are only transported if they can operate independently; it does not include anyone who has been under anesthesia, who needs assistance entering or exiting a vehicle, or who needs assistance during their appointment. Drivers are asked to take two to three rides per month. A ride is scheduled in consultation with the driver to confirm that they are available and feel comfortable driving to that location.

The department is also looking for additional Friendly Visitors. This helps match volunteers with isolated residents. Staff work with the volunteer and resident to help match people with similar interests, backgrounds, and experiences who may develop a beneficial relationship. Friendly visiting can be done by phone, zoom, and in person.

#### VI. Old Business: None

VII. New Business: None

VIII. Member Comments

Members thanked Emily and all COA staff and expressed support for upcoming programs and requests.

IX. Adjournment

Ralph Smith made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:50 AM. The motion was seconded by Carol Thayer. Unanimous roll call vote by members present to adjourn.