

Meeting Minutes
Harwich Council on Aging Board of Directors
Wednesday, October 6, 2021, 10 AM
Harwich Community Center
100 Oak Street
Harwich, MA 02645
Channel 18 Studio

Meeting Attendance:

Board Members: Vice Chair Carol Thayer, Angelina Raneo Chilaka, Joanne Lepore, Ralph Smith

COA Staff: Director Emily Mitchell

I. Call to Order

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

II. Approval of Minutes

Ralph Smith made a motion to approve the minutes from the August 4, 2021 Council on Aging Board of Directors meeting. The motion was seconded by Joanne Lepore. Unanimous vote by members present to approve the minutes.

III. Public Comment

Selectmen Larry Ballantine shared that he was the liaison to the COA Board of Directors and looked forward to attending more meetings.

IV. Chair's Comments (R. Waystack): None

V. Director's Report (E. Mitchell)

- A. The COA is operating largely at pre-COVID scale with the addition of certain precautions including capacity restrictions and strict preregistration requirements for all programs. Staff have been diligent about enforcing program check ins – this is valuable both for contact tracing purposes and for collection of accurate program data. Many fitness classes, including large scale programs, resumed in recent weeks. They have been very popular – all are filled and many are running wait lists.

The first full week of October marked a transition back to onsite meals rather than the community distribution model adopted at the onset of COVID. The COA is offering both congregate dining and grab and go options. The majority of participants are choosing the grab and go option. The meal capacity is 45/day, down from 70 meals/day for the distribution program. Angie Chilaka inquired about meal options for individuals unable to come for the onsite meals. Emily responded that many of

those individuals are utilizing the grab and go option and have a neighbor, friend, or family member pick up their meals for them. Volunteers continue to deliver meals to a very small number of high risk residents. The COA also provides van transportation to meals with a capacity of 7 passengers per trip.

The COA is not planning any major changes to the scale of operations in the coming weeks. The department is planning a number of holiday programs including meals and gift distributions.

Selectmen Ballantine asked about the reduction in meal capacity from 70 to 45 with the switch back to onsite meals. He mentioned the importance of both nutrition and socialization that the meal program offers. Emily replied that the meal distribution program was eligible for FEMA reimbursement which allowed for the higher meal capacity. Onsite meals are funded through town appropriations and are budgeted for 45/day, approximately \$45,000 annually. To increase capacity, the department would need additional funding support – to bridge the capacity gap, the COA would need approximately \$30,000 more in funding. Selectmen Ballantine encouraged looking at pursuing additional funding.

- B. COA Role in public health areas (flu shots, COVID booster shots): Town Nurse Susan Jusell is partnering with Osco pharmacy to provide flu shots to homebound residents. Residents were able to self-identify a need for a homebound shot. COA staff also did direct outreach to at risk residents and residents who had received their COVID vaccines at home.

Carol Thayer asked about the percentage of seniors in Harwich who were vaccinated against COVID. Emily responded that the County periodically releases those figures. Currently, more than 95% of residents over age 60 are vaccinated.

Emily reported that the COA will be playing a minimal role in the COVID booster shot process. The primary role will be information sharing. Booster shots are currently relatively easy to access, much easier than when vaccines were initially rolled out last winter. The state and private pharmacies have online and phone-based registration options.

Public flu shot clinics are scheduled for October 13 and 18. The COA role is largely information sharing.

- C. COA Newsletter procurement update: Emily reported that the cost of newsletter printing and distribution meets the dollar amount threshold to require a formal procurement process. Emily had initially prepared project specifications that would cover COA newsletter printing for FY 2022 and 2023. After receiving quotes and intending to move forward with a contract with the vendor submitting the lowest quote, Emily learned that the vendor would not be continuing their operations for much longer. That vendor is able to print the first two editions of FY 22 while Emily goes through the quote solicitation process a second time. As a result of the disruption

to the process, Emily plans to revise the project specifications to cover only the remainder of FY 22 and then to reassess for a longer contract in future years.

Emily anticipates that there will be a funding challenge, both for the remainder of FY 22 and for future years. The vendor the department has worked with in recent years, and who had initially submitted the lowest quote for the FY 22/23 project, provides this service at a cost far below any other vendors. During past quote solicitations, the second lowest quoting vendor was still often twice the cost of the lowest quote. Emily expects a significant increase in costs going forward. Angie Chilaka asked about whether grants are available to cover these costs. Emily replied that she was unaware of grants specifically for newsletters, but that she would explore other funding supports. Emily further said that the nutrition program and newsletter printing are among the top funding priorities for the department – many residents rely on the printed resource to learn about departmental programs and services. Selectman Ballantine asked whether the COA had reached out to Cape Cod Tech for printing the newsletter. Emily responded that she had not, largely because of the very quick turnaround time required for this project, but said she would explore it further.

- D. Staffing updates: The COA hired a temporary Administrative Assistant in September. The new hire had been working with the department as a volunteer since July. The temporary position is a full-time, 35 hour/week position that expires after 90 days. The COA plans to post the full-time, permanent Program Specialist 1 position in the coming weeks. The department will also be looking to hire some per diem Town Nurse staff support to cover Susan Jusell during time off.
- E. Five year budget lookout and recommendations: Emily reported that Administration had tasked Department Heads with preparing a five year budget outlook for their departments. They were asked to come up with a “wishlist” outlining departmental needs, including both staffing and operations. Emily included the full request she submitted to Administration in the Board packet.

She reviewed some of the highlights including an immediate need for a Program Specialist II staff position that would provide comprehensive program planning and assessment as well as volunteer recruitment, training, and oversight. There is not currently a dedicated staff position that performs these functions and this is an area where Harwich is significantly lacking relative to other area COAs.

Other emerging needs in future years include the addition of a part-time Town Nurse, as the existing Town Nurse position is operating beyond capacity. This has impacted the ability of the department to provide the same scope and scale of service offered in the past.

Other areas identified include a gap in services for residents between the ages served by Youth Services and schools and those served by the COA. Emily recommended either an expanded Human Services division with additional staff support under the COA designed to provide services to residents in those age brackets or the creation of

a new standalone Human Services department to meet those needs. Currently, the COA gets a lot of calls and referrals for residents under age 60 and works hard to assist those residents, but the need exceeds the staff and resources currently available to the department. Board members reiterated the needs they see in the community for social services supports, particularly in the area of housing.

Operationally, the COA has historically taken on a catering role through the Town Chef position that falls within the department. The Town Chef has catered events both for other Town departments as well as for private community groups. In recent years, highlighted under COVID, the capacity for the department to absorb this function has diminished. There is also the issue of cost, as the department absorbs food and labor costs. Groups are charged a catering fee, but that fee is deposited as revenue in the Town General Fund and does not replenish COA costs. In addition to the ask on staff resources, this depletes funding available for COA nutrition programs. The Board discussed the potential benefit of pursuing a COA catering Revolving Fund to prevent the impact of catering time and food costs on the COA operating budget. This would be a new Town Revolving Fund and would require support from the Board of Selectmen and ultimately approval at Town Meeting.

Emily also included a request for wheelchair accessible raised vegetable garden beds. This would be several years out and would provide programming opportunities and support for the COA meal program. The costs for the beds and materials are reasonable, but this type of operation would require additional staff support.

Ralph Smith reiterated that additional Town Nurse support is and essential and immediate need.

- F. Volunteer needs, recruitment, and training: The COA is having a harder time absorbing medical rides into the van transportation as a result of the increase in van capacity for recurring trips. The department is looking to resume its volunteer medical driver program and is looking to recruit additional volunteers for this purpose. The program requires a lot of upfront and annual staff work to comply with requirements identified by MIIA and Town Counsel. Volunteers identify their preferred schedules and locations. The COA asks drivers to commit to two to three rides per month. Rides are always confirmed with a driver before the department agrees to take on the ride for the resident. There are some restrictions for passengers including that they must be independently mobile and not under anesthesia.

VI. Old Business: None

VII. New Business: Angie Chilaka brought up opportunities for new outdoor patio space for programs and events. This would be valuable as level, accessible space for COA and other programs. Emily has discussed this with Community Center Director Carolyn Carey after it was brought up at the August COA Board meeting. Emily expressed that Carolyn also seemed interested. Ralph Smith suggested following up on the topic at a meeting of the Community Center Facilities Committee.

Selectman Ballantine brought up the Harwich Accessibility Rights Committee and encouraged COA support to help fill vacancies and address ADA needs in Town. The Committee has current vacancies ready to be filled through the ordinary Town process. There is a state requirement that all towns have an Accessibility Rights committee.

VIII. Member Comments: None

IX. Adjournment

Ralph Smith made the motion to adjourn at 10:50 AM. The motion was seconded by Joanne Lepore. Unanimous vote by members present to adjourn.