

Meeting Minutes
Harwich Council on Aging Board of Directors
Wednesday, December 15, 2021, 10 AM
Harwich Community Center
100 Oak Street
Harwich, MA 02645
Channel 18 Studio

Meeting Attendance:

Board Members: Chair Richard Waystack, 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 Chair Richard Waystack at 10 AM.

II. Approval of Minutes

Carol Thayer made a motion to approve the minutes from the November 3, 2021 Council on Aging Board of Directors meeting. The motion was seconded by Ralph Smith. Unanimous vote by member present to approve the minutes.

III. Public Comment: None

IV. Chair's Comments (R. Waystack)

A. Check in with members

Richard Waystack thanked Vice Chair Carol Thayer for running the last few meetings in his absence as he's dealt with a family health issue. He also thanked the Board for changing the recurring meeting time from the first Wednesday of each month to the third Wednesday of each month due to standing caregiving obligations that conflicted with the first Wednesday meeting time.

B. Discussion of annual COA Board report to Board of Selectmen on November 15, 2021
Richard reported that he had presented the annual COA Board report to the Board of Selectmen on November 15th. In addition to the verbal report, the COA Board submits a lengthy written report outlining the activities of the Board and the Department. He shared that the report went well, there were not many questions, and that the Selectmen expressed their thanks to members and COA staff.

C. Discussion of Friends of Harwich COA Retreat on December 9, 2021

Richard asked Angie Chilaka, who also attended the retreat, to report to the group with her feedback. Richard mentioned that the retreat was spearheaded by a new member to the

Friends Board, Jim Knickman, and was attended by about 30 local stakeholders who are involved in senior services or advocacy in some way across Cape Cod.

Angie reported that the event lasted about 2.5 hours and was well-spent. The event facilitator did a good job keeping the conversation moving and keeping participants engaged. During the event, participants discussed ways the community was serving seniors well and other areas that needed some improvement. Angie reported that many people came to similar thoughts and ideas, even coming from different backgrounds. Attendees are looking forward to getting feedback from the Friends after the information is compiled.

Richard responded in agreement that the facilitator, Sky Freyss-Cole, was excellent and recommended her services for any group in need of professional facilitation going forward. Richard also reiterated that there were trends that emerged from the conversation, including the need for making information about programs and services more widely accessible.

V. Director's Report (E. Mitchell)

A. Overview of current and anticipated operations

Current programs and services are listed in the January/February newsletter which was going to print that day and is set to reach people at the very beginning on January. There are a wide variety of recurring and new programs coming up designed to meet the interests, skills, passions, and needs of older adult residents. Emily highlighted a few new programs including a 13-week series called "Philosophy and Film", a memoir writing group, a Valentine's Day event, a new COVID support group, and a new partnership with Brooks Free Library called "Send a Story" which will be held at the COA by appointment.

Emily reported that the annual partnership with the AARP Tax Aide program will continue with tax appointments beginning in February. The 2022 cycle will return to pre-pandemic procedures: appointments will be in person at the Chatham Community Center. The AARP Tax Aide Program does operate with a defined scope of practice and is meant to serve low and middle income residents. It is not age limited, though older adults certainly benefit from the program and are encouraged to participate. Because appointments are held in Chatham, all participants will be required to abide by the Chatham Board of Health policies and restrictions that are in place at the time of their appointment. At the time of the meeting, Emily did not yet know exactly how many appointments would be available for Harwich residents. All AARP Tax volunteers go through AARP and IRS trainings. Emily expects to have more concrete scheduling information by the second full week in January.

In addition to new programs, other recurring programs are resuming or expanding. Senior Fit is returning after a holiday hiatus. Jill Brown's Exercise class is beginning a new session and adding another day of classes each week. Balance Boosters is returning after a two month hiatus as well. There has been a pent up demand for fitness classes, so the COA is working to provide as many and as wide a variety of programs as possible to meet this need.

All programs continue to operate with strict preregistration and capacity restrictions.

Ralph Smith asked about the firewood project the COA was working on in partnership with the Harwich Conservation Trust (HCT). Connor O'Brien at HCT had reached out to Emily about 6 weeks earlier to report that the Trust was working on some land maintenance at their Pleasant Bay Woodlands site. The trees they were removing were an invasive species that makes great firewood. Connor reached out looking to get firewood to residents in need of some support heating their homes through the winter. The day of the event, Emily attended part of the day, Connor and HCT volunteers assisted, and about 16 AmeriCorps Cape Cod volunteers made the cutting, splitting, and distribution of wood possible. In total, they distributed wood to 36 people. A number of people reached out to Emily after they had reached capacity. Emily has been talking with Connor and he's shared that land trusts in other Towns are working on similar projects which may help meet some of the remaining need.

Ralph also asked about COA lunch numbers. Emily reported that onsite numbers are still low and range from 12-20 per day. Grab and go numbers are higher. Combined grab and go and onsite numbers range from 30-40 per day. The capacity per day is 45.

Richard asked about soliciting feedback from people who used to participate in the COA lunch program, but are not currently attending. Emily replied that they will solicit that feedback, particularly from residents who were participating in the lunch distribution the COA operated throughout the pandemic and those who dined onsite pre-pandemic.

Ralph asked about increasing volunteer delivery of lunches in addition to onsite and grab and go meals. Emily replied that the process of coordinating the deliveries is exceptionally labor intensive for staff and that there is not enough staff time to coordinate deliveries at any sort of scale while also operating an onsite model. Emily added that she has included a request for additional funding, both for food and for an additional staff member, as part of the FY 23 budget cycle which would give the Department the capacity to run onsite and community-based lunch models. She acknowledged that the Department was better serving the community's nutrition need with the delivery model, but there is a capacity gap without additional funding and staff. There is value in both models to provide nutrition as well as socialization. Richard added that there is a socialization component of the delivery model when the volunteer makes contact with the resident during the delivery itself which Ralph affirmed.

Emily also reported that the COA has resumed the volunteer medical driver program in full scale.

Ralph inquired about whether the Social Security videoconference appointments had resumed. Emily replied that, as far as she knows, Social Security Administration staff continue to work remotely and so don't have access to their side of the videoconference technology. Social Security services are available by phone and email.

B. FY 23 Budget process and initial COA request

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.

Administration directed Department Heads to level fund their FY 23 requests relative to their FY 22 appropriation. There were contractual increases to salaries and wages, as well as increases to expenditures including bulk fuel and postage. Emily also chose to increase the amount of funding appropriated to support Harwich residents who attend the Orleans Supportive Day Program. To offset those increases, Emily made cuts to training for staff and volunteers, paid advertisements for programs and services which is intended to expand outreach beyond people who already receive the newsletter or participate in services, and to the nutrition line item as the only remaining place to cut. The cut to the nutrition line item would reduce daily lunch capacity from the current scale of 45 meals/day down to 40 meals/day.

Emily reported that Department Heads can request expanded funding using an "enhancement of services" line item request. Department Heads can make enhancement of services requests for both personnel and expenditures. Emily did request two enhancements of services. The first was for a new full-time Program Specialist II. Emily had tried to accomplish this through the staff reorganization process which was not supported by Administration. This role would be responsible for programming and for volunteer management. Absent this position, the majority of programming responsibilities fall to the director. The addition of this role would support things like the lunch distribution program amongst others. Emily also requested an expenditures side enhancement of services in the amount of \$31,000 for the nutrition line item which would bring the meal capacity back up to 70 meals/day. This capacity was supported throughout the pandemic with other funding sources. The Department saw consistent need that met or exceeded 70 meals per day, demonstrating significant unmet nutrition needs among senior residents.

The budget process will go through multiples steps. The next step is for Department Heads to meet with the Town Administrator and Finance Director. Then the budget goes to the Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen, and then finally to the Annual Town Meeting.

Richard mentioned that the COA Board can play an advocacy role, particularly at the meetings with the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee, to support funding that meets the needs of local seniors. Richard mentioned the value of working within the process. He encouraged the COA Board to attend these public budget meetings and reiterated that their presence has had a positive impact in the past.

C. Staffing Updates

The COA has filled the vacancy in the Program Specialist 1 position. Kate Seeley has officially joined the COA staff as a permanent member after serving as a temporary Administrative Assistant beginning in September. Emily and the COA are very excited to welcome her to the team.

D. COA Newsletter procurement update (FY 22 and 23)

Emily reported that the COA had initially sought to contract for newsletter printing and mailing for both FY 22 and 23. In the initial procurement process, the Department began the process of contacting with the vendor who has provided this service for many years. During that process, the vendor disclosed that they would no longer be providing these services. With the mid-year disruption to the process, Emily revised the project specifications to include only the remainder of FY 22. When soliciting quotes, she only received one. Emily is excited to report that the Department was able to finalize a contract as of the morning of this meeting with that vendor. She reported that the price has increased significantly – about double the cost of prior years. The printing costs are paid using Formula Grant funds. The increased cost will not be sustainable going forward, so Emily will need to look at alternatives. She reiterated that many residents do rely on print media to learn about programs and services.

Carol Thayer stated that, given the importance of communicating these services to seniors, newsletter printing is not an area to skimp on. Richard encouraged looking at other grant opportunities to support this printing service, as well as revisiting advertisement supported models.

E. Volunteer needs, recruitment, and training

The COA is seeing an increased demand for volunteer medical rides. The Department is looking to onboard three to four more volunteer medical drivers. Emily shared that there is an intensive process for onboarding new volunteer drivers including CORI, SORI, and driving records checks, drivers providing copies of their insurance policies, and DPW inspections of their vehicles. The COA plans to take the names of interested volunteers for several weeks and then to schedule the DPW inspections all at one time as new volunteers are onboarded.

Ralph asked about how volunteer hours are logged for services like lunch delivery or volunteer medical rides where the volunteer does not come onsite. Emily replied that staff manually log those hours on volunteers' behalf for those specific circumstances.

VI. Old Business

A. Richard expressed that the Board is still looking for someone to serve as the liaison to the Elder Services of Cape Cod and the Islands Board of Directors. This liaison position has been vacant since Joanne Lepore stepped down in the spring. Richard asked if anyone on the COA Board was interested, and if not, to reach out to the Friends of Harwich COA Board to see if any of their members were interested in serving.

VII. New Business

Ralph asked if the COA Board was at full capacity. Richard responded that they are waiting to have Justin White appointed as a full member, rather than as an alternate.

VIII. Member Comments

Board members expressed happy holiday wishes and gratitude. Richard also affirmed that COA Board meetings will consistently move to a third Wednesday of the month schedule moving forward.

IX. Adjournment

Ralph Smith made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:40 AM. The motion was seconded by Carol Thayer. Unanimous vote by members present to adjourn.