

Meeting Minutes - DRAFT
Harwich Council on Aging Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, September 2, 2020, 10 AM
Remote Participation Only

Meeting Attendance:

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

COA Staff Member: 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 the motion to approve the minutes from the September 2, 2020 COA Board of Directors meeting. The motion was seconded by Joanne Lepore. Roll call vote – unanimous vote to approve by members in attendance.

III. Public Comments: None

IV. Chair's Comments (R. Waystack)

- Discussion of how dramatically things have changed since the last COA Board meeting in March 2020 when the COA and Town more broadly were operating normally. Things changed quickly, there were a lot of unknowns, and town operations altered dramatically. The COA had to continue to provide onsite and community-based services to meet essential needs.
- Amidst the pandemic operations, the COA lost its Social Services Coordinator. While there was a town-wide hiring freeze in place, Emily was able to articulate a need for an exemption to the hiring freeze to the Board of Selectmen and Interim Town Administrator to fill this essential position. She was able to gain that support and fill the position.
- Thank you to Emily and full COA staff for their exceptional work in support of the community.
- Opportunity for the Board to check in and to further discuss ways to support the COA and community.

V. Director's Report (E. Mitchell)

A. Overview of COA COVID-19 Operations – all operations have been overhauled to maintain safety and prioritize essential needs (meals, grocery/pharmacy support, transportation)

1. Community Lunch Distribution – switch within one day from daily onsite meals to a community distribution within one day – no lapse in service. Made possible with the efforts and creativity of Town Chef Linda St. Pierre. Meals must be cold, suitable for storage and transportation. Meals are delivered by

a combination of volunteers and COA staff. Initial capacity of 35-40 meals per day. Linda has expanded capacity to approximately 70 meals a day, over 350 per week. An eligibility policy was implemented to make sure the program could operate within its capacity and to prioritize the most at-risk folks in the community. Emily stated a concern regarding funding for this program. The program has been FEMA reimbursable to date, with reimbursement expected to end on September 30, 2020. Meals are budgeted for in the COA budget, but not at the quantity the COA is currently serving. Emily has requested supplemental funds to support the increased capacity which will be subject to Town Meeting approval of the full Town operating budget.

2. Transportation – has been continued throughout the full course of the pandemic. The COA has two vans – an 8-passenger and a 12-passenger. COVID has impacted van capacity. For the majority of the pandemic, the capacity has been 1 rider per trip. Beginning in July, the capacity has increased to 2 riders per trip on the 12-passenger van where 6 foot distancing can be maintained. The van is disinfected between each trip. Locations have expanded to include grocery stores, pharmacies, the bank, and to essential medical appointments. The volunteer medical transportation was put on hold immediately with the onset of COVID and remains on hold indefinitely, so as not to put volunteer drivers at risk and because it is impossible to maintain recommended distance in passenger vehicles.
3. Grocery/Pharmacy support – includes transportation to stores, partnership with the Family Pantry to place orders and deliver them to residents, and occasional COA staff grocery shopping or medication pick-up and delivery
4. Social Support calls – social support phone calls with older adults partnered to call each other. Meant to build relationships and minimize isolation. Supplemented by a partnership with the Academic Public Health Volunteer Corps, a group of Masters and Doctoral level students in public health who provided wellness calls to seniors.
5. No onsite programming. Trying to find creative ways to bring programming to people at home (e.g. indoor vegetable gardening program, exercise equipment distribution, activity and wellness kits). Working towards implementing remote programming through either Zoom or Channel 18. Working to address technology barrier, both access to technology and knowledge of how to use it. Other factors: payment and liability. Mask distribution to seniors and families and caregivers of seniors. Slowly resuming 1:1 appointments with COA staff and professionals like podiatry care, elder law attorneys, and mobile dental hygiene clinic.

B. Anticipated COA Operations

1. Continuing to build on 1:1 appointments both with staff and professionals. Will continue to serve people by phone and email to the full extent possible.

Push to implement remote programming in the near term. Continuously reevaluating options to resume small and large group onsite programming based on guidance from aging agencies, the Harwich Health Director, and public health trends. Unlikely to bring back larger onsite programs until there is a COVID vaccine or treatment.

2. The COA is now looking to bring back more volunteers into the building to help with office tasks. Answering the phones is a major task, as the COA is receiving more calls than ever. She would love to be able to bring in 2 people a day – one in the morning and one in the afternoon for some relief. Volunteers are welcome – please call Emily or Julie.
3. Carol Thayer suggested setting up a training program for Volunteers. Set up a brief seminar so that our volunteers could see what is needed and how to be successful at the job. Richard also suggested that this video be made available on Channel 18 and YouTube so that it is more broadly available to anyone interested.

C. Updates re COA Staffing

1. Julie Witas was promoted from the COA Program Specialist 1 position to the Social Services Coordinator position. Filling this vacancy required a vote by the Board of Selectmen to exempt it from the town-wide hiring freeze. They voted unanimously to fill the position at their July 6, 2020 meeting. August 24, 2020 was Julie's first official day in the new position.
2. The Program Specialist I position is now vacant. On September 16th, Emily will meet with the Interim Town Administrator to discuss options for filling this vacancy. Richard reiterated that the need to fill this position and have a fully staffed department is critically important.
3. One COA van driver position is still vacant. It has been filled by a temporary hire since October 2020. The vacancy predates the hiring freeze and was allowed to proceed beginning in January 2020. The process was almost complete when the onset of COVID-19 delayed finalization. Emily will also discuss permanently filling this vacancy during her meeting with the Interim Administrator.

D. COA Budget Discussion

1. Revisions to FY 21 COA Town-appropriated budget request – costs associated with the COA lunch distribution program have been FEMA reimbursable since the start of the pandemic. This reimbursement is expected to end on September 30, 2020. The COA budget does include funding for lunches. However, when Emily first submitted the FY 21 budget request, the pandemic had not yet hit and the COA was serving a lower quantity of lunches. In advance of Town Meeting, Emily has requested supplemental funds to support the increased food costs for the remainder of FY 21 following the FEMA reimbursement period. She has also requested

supplemental funds for additional van driver hours to accommodate new locations and to meet essential transportation needs in light of van capacity restrictions. Other supplemental requests include staff cell phone coverage needed to support remote work and additional funding for the copier lease, as the COA received a significant overage bill due to multiple departments sharing this equipment. Emily identified budget reductions, made possible with altered operations under COVID, to help offset the supplemental requests.

2. Richard also reminded us that the Annual Town Meeting is on September 26, 2020 at 10am at the Monomoy High School Stadium Field. The FY 21 Town budget, including the COA budget, will be voted on at Town Meeting.
3. The FY 21 Formula Grant, awarded to all Massachusetts COAs by the Executive Office of Elder Affairs is expected to be reduced during the state's budget cycle. An exact figure has not yet been shared with COAs, but they have been told to prepare for up to a 25% reduction. For FY 19 and 20, the funding level was \$12/senior (person age 60+) living in the Town of Harwich at the time of the 2010 US Census. The Formula Grant is used to fund the majority of the Program Specialist 1 salary (27 hours/week), to pay for newsletter printing costs, and for other important projects and services.

VI. Old Business

- A. Volunteer Recognition Event Planning Update – this event has been canceled due to COVID-19.

VII. New Business

- A. Richard would like to resume a regular meeting schedule. Consensus of the Board is to resume meetings on the first Wednesday of every month at 10 AM. Meetings will be remote, using the GoToMeeting platform, for the foreseeable future.
- B. Discussion of COA Board Role during COVID-19
 - Advocacy in filling staff vacancies – ongoing shortages are leaving the department in a responsive position and focuses on day-to-day management, rather than being able to plan for the future and look at bigger picture ideas.
 - Office volunteer support – next big volunteer push. Looking to have two volunteers at a time helping Julie with the front office. Joanne and Angie offered to assist with office support.
 - Remote programming – has been a goal of Emily and COA since early on in the pandemic, but it takes a lot of staff time and work to put it together. Board members with comfort with this technology who help provide training and practice for seniors who are not familiar

with it yet. Richard offered to help with training, putting written/visual directions together to facilitate access.

- C. Elder Services: Joanne Lepore – There was a remote meeting in June that did not work out well in terms of access and technological difficulties. There were not meetings in July and August. There is a September meeting that Joanne plans to attend and which she will report back on at the next COA Board meeting.

VIII. Member Comments – Unanimous thank you to Emily and full COA staff

IX. Adjourn:

Carol Thayer moved to adjourn the meeting at 11 AM. The motion was seconded by Joanne Lepore. Roll call vote – unanimous vote to adjourn by members in attendance.