

Town of Amherst Council on Aging Meeting *Draft* Minutes
Thursday, February 11, 2021
9:00 AM
Via Zoom

MEMBERS PRESENT: Pat Rector (Chair), Timothy Neale (Vice-Chair), Sue Dierks (Secretary), Greg Bascomb, Chad Fuller, Rosemary Kofler, Mila Montemayor, Mary Beth Ogulewicz (Director of Senior Services), Ivette Palacin, Jacquelyn Smith-Crooks

ABSENT: Mary Elmer (Assistant Treasurer, Friends of the ASC), Barbara Slovin (Friends of ASC Treasurer)

GUESTS: Ben Breger (Town of Amherst Planner), Leigh Anne Taylor (WalkBoston), Jeanne Ballantine (Amherst resident, advocate for senior walking)

CALL TO ORDER: The Chair called the meeting to order at 9:02 and welcomed all on zoom with a roll call. The Chair gave a special welcome to the guests, Ben Breger, a Planner with the Town and Leigh Ann Taylor from WalkBoston.

The Chair stated : “Pursuant to Governor Baker’s March 12/20 order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law GLC 30, this meeting of the Council on Aging is being conducted via remote participation and is being recorded.”

PUBLIC COMMENT: The Chair invited any public attendees who wished to express their views for up to 3 minutes to raise the hand icon and be recognized. The Chair welcomed all guests on zoom. The Chair expressed condolences on behalf of the Council on Aging to member Greg Bascomb on the death of his father.

PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS:

Third Draft, ACOA Committee Structure:

The Chair reviewed that since October we have been looking at the sub-Committee restructure from five committees to three committees so as to expand participation for COA members. From COA feedback and with the help of Mary Beth and Rosemary, the third draft has been sent to COA members. A notable feature of the revisions is that non-members are encouraged to participate on these committees, thus enlarging engagement by others in the Town. The Chair invited comments.

- Bulleted items help give specific action focus and bulleted items are fluid as committees work together and new circumstances arise.
- Chad inquired if there was a problem that led to proposed changes. He suggested that increasing the diversity in the number of committees might increase participation. He also suggested making use of a new study in the Town that might have useful statistics and data to guide the Council in making a new strategic plan for the next three to five years.
- Pat replied that with a new board and director, it was time for a new strategy plan and that we plan to draw upon a variety of possible sources (studies, focus groups, census data, reports and hearings), in collaboration with the Director, in arriving at recommendations.

- Tim commented that the long-range plan is a good one and that to reduce the workload of council members to three rather than five committees was helpful.
- Rosemary stated that this structure gives direction so people know how to be involved
- In response to a question about how we go about doing a new study, Chad replied that we survey members of the Council and look at national and state surveys on Aging plus the new survey on aging that is going to be done in the Town. That way we take the data and use it to get the needs from the community and roll them into our strategic plan.
- Pat explained that this change from five to three committees was to meet the requirements in the By Laws stating that all members serve on a sub committee. We are still figuring out how these committees would work and when. She supports that we do a robust outreach to seniors and that there are a variety of ways of soliciting needs and information from the community. We still need to discover changes in the needs of a changing senior population.
- Tim suggested we add the name of the committee in the “Charge” and that in order to be more positive we use “sensitivity enhanced” rather than “harm prevented” in the third charge. Tim also suggested that the terms “racism” and “harm-prevented” had loaded/negative connotations.
- Pat explained that these terms helped to expand a public space, and ensure that it is open to all people. In addition, the use of these terms is an acknowledgement that racism and harm have indeed existed in our town. She added that at this time of national racial reckoning, we can’t fight a problem we don’t name.
- Chad suggested that these details be discussed via emails amongst the Council.
- Pat noted that other committees in the Town are having discussions like this and that the town Manager has stated that the elimination of structures of institutional racism is a priority.
- Yvette suggested that instead of “race” we have a comment that celebrates that we care for one another and acknowledge that we love all the cultures in Amherst.
- Greg asked why we were doing this review and what we were going to do with it?
- Pat replied that many across the country are taking a fresh look at racism and looking at which changes could take place. It is our duty as a public organization to see where inequality exists.
- Greg stated that part of our mission is to advise and have opportunity to spell out what the Council is going to do.
- Jacqueline added that this discussion is important and encouraging and that there was a boldness in the language of the proposal. Racism has to be dealt with delicately. The language is important. The racist factor is lost over time, so it is important to deal with it because we have been making visible what was once invisible to some.
- Mila added that language usage is cross-cultural, intercultural and international. She reminded the Council about the study done in 2009 and on file at the Senior Center. She had prepared a proposal but it was postponed which she thought was good now that everything has changed. We need to know what data we have already.

- Pat thanked everyone for the open and honest conversation and asked if the council was ready to vote to accept the new proposed three-committee structure.
- Tim responded that he felt we were not yet ready to vote and that we needed to see in writing the proposed changes to the document.
- Pat agreed and stated that the Council would look at the revised document again.

Senior Walking: Funding Age and Dementia-Friendly Project:

Ben Breger (Town Planner) presented an update on a new project in the Town. Because of the pandemic, the State announced different projects for Massachusetts communities. One project was “Shared Streets” which enabled outdoor dining during the warmer months and this was supported by a grant in the Fall. The State announced another round of grants that focused on identifying mobility around the Town, especially for seniors. One grant covers three aspects: increasing safety and visibility of the crosswalk in front of the Bangs Center; installing an ADA ramp from the parking plaza to the Musante Health Center, connecting walking routes for people from the Clark House area to the downtown area; and identifying possible walking routes around the Town with improved signage and identified by colored footprints indicating different lengths of the routes. He has just applied for this grant and should hear by February 20th. He will be working with Mary Beth to identify walking routes appropriate for seniors.

LeighAnne Taylor (WalkBoston) spoke about a program for working with towns regarding shared space and especially age-friendly walking routes. This is the third year of such a project and now during Covid people are walking more. The program helps train seniors to lead walking groups. Leigh Ann referred the Council to a website: walkboston.org//agefriendly. The program encourages community participation.

The Chair commented that the Council would be having further discussions on this topic in connection with Age/Friendly/Dementia Friendly initiatives and thanked both guests for their information.

Highland Valley Elder Services (HVES):

Norma Hallock reported on the HVES Nutrition Project Council Meeting she attended on January 6, 2021. HVES has been able to operate during the pandemic and there has been an increase in the number of meals served through the “grab and go” system. All of the holidays were celebrated with holiday type meals. The kitchen is now COVID safe. Although the nutritionist has resigned, she is still working part time in the evening with the Director. With the departure of some of the volunteer drivers due to Covid, new ones are needed. The kitchen has received a grant through Snap Chef in which they pay student chefs to help out. Jo Comerford visited the Walter Salvo group and Channel 22 news was there to report and raise the awareness of support needed through funding and grants. One problem arose during the snowstorms when some of the Councils on Aging and HDM drivers closed the meal provision without notifying HVES.

Updates and Looking Ahead:

Mary Beth Ogulewicz (Director of Senior Services) reported that the most important work she and the staff are doing is with the covid vaccination program. She is working with an army of kindness and compassion as they assist seniors at the vaccine sites. The

information on the town website is maintained and updated daily. The Town receives over 700 phone calls a day regarding registration and inquiries. They are also providing transportation for anyone who needs it to get to the vaccine site. Regarding the earlier comment in the meeting about a survey to provide data and a strategy for planning for senior services, the survey will be conducted in July.

The Chair commented that she had received information from the Town Health Director, Emma Dragon, about seven questions people ask about covid. The Chair will pass this on to the Council.

SECRETARY'S REPORT:

The Minutes of the ACOA meeting for January 14, 2021 were approved.

TOPICS NOT REASONABLY ANTICIPATED 48 Hours prior to the meeting:

No Topics were presented.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The Council members were reminded of the due dates for responding to and completing the Conflict of Interest Training Requirement.

The Next COA Meetings: **Thursday, March 11, 2021 9:00 – 10:30 AM**
Thursday, April 8, 2021 9:00 – 10:30 AM
Thursday, May 13, 2021 9:00 – 10:30 AM

The meeting adjourned at 10:34 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Sue Dierks, COA Secretary

There is a Cloud Recording of this meeting available through the Town of Amherst.

DOCUMENTS LIST

The following Documents were made available to all members of the COA prior to and during the meeting. They are available for review at the Amherst Senior Center, 70 Boltwood Walk, Amherst, MA.

1. COA Meeting Agenda for February 11, 2021
2. Minutes of the COA Meeting for January 14, 2021
3. Working Document on ACOA Committee Structure, Draft 2, Revised 1/14/21
4. Highland Valley Elder Services Communication Guidelines agreement copy