

Needham Council on Aging Board Meeting

November 16, 2023

Present: Colleen Schaller, Chair, Penny Grossman, Vice Chair, Dan Goldberg, Carol de Lemos, Kathy Whitney, Kate Robey, Lianne Relich, Ed Cosgrove, Ted Prorok, VFW representative, Ann DerMarderosian, Needham Housing Authority Representative

COA: Latanya Steele, Director; Jessica Moss, Social Work

Advisory Board: Anne Cosgrove

Friends: Carol Ditmore

1. **Call to Order** The meeting was called to order by Ms. Schaller at 5:05 pm combination of in person and on Zoom.

Ms. Schaller noted Denise Garlick, State Representative had to cancel at the last minute and will be rescheduled.

2. **Mr. Ted Prorok, VFW Representative** Mr. Prorok discussed the letter sent to Joint Committee on Revenue Senate Bill 1882 he had planned to share with Ms. Garlick which provides disabled veterans property tax relief. He noted the bill is endorsed by former Massachusetts Commander of the VFW as the money for the relief comes from marijuana revenue, sports betting and casino revenue not by increasing other citizens tax bills. This will assist those who have served the country. He also noted that other States have had this relief structure for many years. The Governor has said she will sign if it gets to her desk.

3. **Aging Services Division, Ms. Latanya Steele**

Ms. Steele noted that Ms. Aicha Kelley provided an event update. Events were well attended. The last Dinner Bells is December 19th is the last for the year.

Ms. Steele noted that she and Ms. Moss have met with the leadership team regarding the operational budget and she is hopeful it will pass.

The front door has been replaced but there is still an issue with the lock on the new door but that will be repaired soon.

4. **Social Work, Ms. Jessica Moss**

Ms. Moss noted it has been a busy month and the team is very glad to have Isabelle Dick on Board who formerly worked for the Needham Community Council so knows the issues and Needham. She is at the Community Council food pantry 10:00-1:30 providing office hours and information on everything available at the CATH. She has 20 minute consultations. She provides information in general for those under 60.

Ms. Moss also noted that they are still trying to start the mobile food pantry—food insecurity remains an issue. The team has been applying for more grants. We would love to start mobile food pantry at the CATH.

Homeless Prevention Coalition continues to meet and has refined their mission. They are working on pooling their resources because there have been more incidents recently. Ms. Moss noted they have assisted a couple of people in their mid-50's.

Ms. Whitney noted that Friends of the Board of Health and Traveling Meals has been formed to help fund homeless issues and has taken out an 11-month CD to have money to help next year. Ms. Moss noted she will reach out to them. The average age of the homeless person is mid 50's so the issue is close to the COA demographic.

With the addition of the BC intern and Ms. Dick Ms. Moss noted the counseling wait list is manageable.

Ms. Moss also noted that the volunteers are now number 26 and the gift shop/boutique meets monthly. She is working on getting more volunteers safe certified.

Ms. Schaller noted that the COA needs to get more people safe certified.

Ms. Moss noted that SHINE could not attend tonight but they only have a few appointments left with open enrollment in Northboro. SHINE has been prominent during the summer in advertising their services. They also have partnered with Springwell on disseminating information on the Mass Health requalification period.

Ms. Moss noted that Mr. Grably will have one of the vans repaired in December and has been working on a capital plan for 2027. He also noted that the hydraulic system to lower the chairs and allow for wheelchair access is very expensive and needs to be worked into a future capital budget.

5. Board Goals Discussion

Ms. Steele noted she will resend the Selectboard goals to inform the December discussion. Ms. Schaller noted that she had sent the notice to start talking about the 2024 Board goals.

The Board agreed that affordable senior housing and more options in general for senior housing should be a top priority.

Ms. Dermarderosian mentioned the advocacy needs with the Finance Committee as the COA is up against many larger departments and competing needs including school renovations. Several Board members mentioned attending in larger numbers at their meeting to advocate forcefully for senior needs. The Board noted that largest demographic group who votes in local elections are seniors.

Ms. Steele noted that the drivers are category C part-time employees who cannot work more than 19.5 hours. There are more drivers and trying to coordinate more trips for after 2 pm

The Board felt that the short term goals should include switching the fitness room with the games room and obtaining credit card authorization for program payment. The kitchen remodel to include possible catering and handling Traveling Meals should be the third short term goal. A short term goal could include longer CATH hours but this requires additional staff.

There was also a discussion on having more Dinner Bells coverage for the community at large—ideas include the Needham Observer online newspaper, the News to You put out by the Town and signs at churches and on the lawn/front of the Cath.

Most Board members felt there should be 3 to 4 bullet points for goals—operational separated from the senior housing priority needs and raising awareness among the many younger citizens and younger members of the Selectboard of food insecurity, senior housing challenges that will take years to solve but we can move towards making people aware of the overall issues, and socialization needs and advocate/market the senior needs. The survey showed these needs and that information can be utilized as a part of the advocacy. Several Board members mentioned having a regular attendee at the Housing coalition groups.

It was noted that the food pantry idea for the CATH fell through we are approaching it as an accessibility issue with ready made meals. Ms. Moss noted it would be in the CATH café.

The bid for the kitchen redesign fell through. There has been no Town request for new bids.

It was also noted that the Housing Coalition outcome needs was to build more housing with ½ mile of all the train stations except Hersey.

A brief discussion ensued on the continuing need for repairs and having the Needham Exchange Club group work as an on call service (some Exchange Club members are available other times of the year) and to better advertise the current once a year opportunity with the Needham Community Council who was unaware.

6. Minutes October 12, 2023

Mr. Goldberg made a motion to approve the October 12 minutes. Mr. Cosgrove seconded. The minutes were approved by voice vote with two abstentions from Ms. Mullaney and Ms. Schaller who did not attend the last meeting.

7. Advisory Board Discussion

Ms. Dermarderosian noted it was formed as a subdivision of the COA when the building was built 20 years ago. She thought its mission and usefulness might have changed, especially with Mr. Hart's resignation.

Ms. Cosgrove noted that those who use the CATH still come to them with questions and concerns and she feels they have an advocacy role to play.

But with both Mr. Hart and Ms. Adele Chang leaving the group the only way to have it continue is to have new members. There needs to be an open discussion before dissolving the group.

And if it is not to be dissolved then the advisory board needs to set goals with the staff on what its purpose might mean with changing needs and then actively work to recruit new members. This probably means having a large meeting at the CATH and advertising it with the community to determine both the needs and the goals of the revamped advisory group. As Ms. Moss noted, patrons prefer to express concerns to an advisory board member rather than a staff person.

8. Friends Board Report, Ms. Carol Ditmore

Ms. Ditmore noted that two members resigned and two new members joined. The gift shop is now the “boutique” and has been doing well as the custodian installed new shelving and the displays look great now that the new acceptance policy is in place.

9. Old Business

Ms. Steele that she would like a Diversity Advisory Board to oversee providing a welcoming environment. This might be combined with the Advisory Board reconfiguration.

10. New Business

Ms. Steele noted that the Needham Resilience Network is meeting again and will be looking for more volunteers. Ms. Dermarderosian and Ms. Mullaney will speak to Ms. Steele about possibly serving. The network meets bimonthly to address climate change issues and protocols during emergencies.

11. Motion to Adjourn

Mr. Cosgrove made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Cosgrove seconded the motion. **The Board meeting was adjourned by unanimous voice vote at 6:25 pm.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Faith Crisley

Recording Secretary