

Needham Council on Aging Board Meeting

January 11, 2024

Present: Colleen Schaller, Chair, Penny Grossman, Vice Chair, Helen Gregory, 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, Assistant Director of Counseling, Aicha Kelley, Assistant Director of Programming

Advisory Board: Ann Cosgrove

SHINE: Michelle Gucciardi

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

Ms. Schaller noted Denise Garlick, State Representative, will be attending at the end of the meeting postponed from November.

Aging Services Division

2. Social Work, Ms. Jessica Moss

Ms. Moss noted it has been a busy month. The numbers are trending slightly higher than in December. COA received a grant from the Executive Office of Elder Affairs for tech and tutors' program. 200 tablets will be provided. The grant is for just over \$40,000. The MetroWest funding for the mobile market was denied but the COA was encouraged to resubmit in the spring and provided guidance on the MetroWest funding model. Isabelle Dick has made 42 visits in 2 months helping clients with Housing and SNAP application issues at the Needham Housing Authority. Shed continues to have regular meetings at the Needham Community Council food pantry from 10:00-1:30 once a week. Kerri Cusack has a new women's social group with a psychologist at Needham Housing which is popular. She is also working matching students from the social justice course at Olin College of Engineering with the senior center to build cross generational relationships. Ms. Moss noted she is certified through ServSafe for another 5 years and so is Ms. Cusack, and Ms. Steele. Ms. Kelley will be recertified soon. Ms. Moss is also organizing a front desk and kitchen volunteer meeting this month as a refresher.

3. SHINE, Ms. Michelle Gucciardi

Ms. Gucciardi noted that she has two big updates. Open enrollment ran from November 17-December 7th was a success with the final numbers still being tabulated but the 737 appointments in Needham surpassed the last three years.

She has additional grant funding from the State that needs to be spent by June 30. She has hired two administrators through June and their main task is outreach to community organizers and large employers to develop more connections and make more staff within these groups aware of SHINE. They are also tasked with reaching the disabled and non-English speakers.

4. Directors Report, Ms. Latanya Steele

Ms. Steele thanked all the staff for their hard work. She noted she is working on a memorial service for clients and staff for the regulars who died during 2023. CATH unfortunately lost many long term clients.

Ms. Steele also noted the significant increase in programming attendance with many new participants.

Ms. Steele noted that Dinner Bells is not planned for January and February but will resume in March through the end of 2024.

5. Programming, Ms. Aicha Kelley

Ms. Kelley requested that the Board attend coffee hours between March and June to encourage open communication between the CATH clients and the Board. She will send out a solicitation to the Board with various dates. She noted the Café is busiest at 10 am and in the early afternoons.

Ms. Schaller mentioned serving at Dinner Bells would also be a promising idea as those who have served have met patrons.

Ms. Kelley noted that even with My Senior Center not counting every user from January-December 2023 there were 42,000 participants through the system. This does not count those who attend continental breakfast and the games room. This is an average of 810 participants per week. She also noted many fresh faces and a younger demographic, the 60 to 70 year old demographic.

Ms. Kelley noted programming is planned through April and she has just started the May-June period.

The Board noted the quality/range of programming as a tribute to the staff's hard work. They took note that Ms. Kelley would like a door counter to collect data.

6. Transportation. Ms. Steele

7. Ms. Steele noted that the driver positions are posted again. There are 6 drivers currently working. In answer to Board questions Ms. Steele noted she will speak with Mr. Grably about the possibility of rides at 4 pm. The two components to not having late transportation is a shortage of drivers as they are all Level C with the Town part-timers who cannot go over 19.5 hours.

A brief discussion occurred on emergency preparedness kits, warming centers and a phone tree of how seniors are notified of emergencies. There was a discussion about whether the Exchange Club could help coordinate an emergency kit with Mr. McDonald, Director of Health and Human Services. Ms. Steele will speak with Mr. McDonald and report back to the Board.

8. Minutes November 16, 2023

Ms. Gregory noted she had not attended the November meeting. Her name was removed. Ann DerMarderosian noted her name is spelled with a capital M. This changed in the minutes. **Mr. Cosgrove made a motion to approve the November 16 minutes as amended. Ms. Robey seconded the motion. The minutes were approved with one abstention Ms. Gregory.**

9. Advisory Board Discussion Continued

The Board agreed the Advisory Board needed to meet separately and work out a plan for their work. This will include setting goals and recruiting new members.

10. New Business

Housing Changes

The Board had a general discussion about the various housing plans and what plans to support and letters required.

Mr. Cosgrove noted that the Linden and Chambers street Housing Authority rebuild is necessary as the buildings need major repairs, are reaching the end of their useful life and so are becoming unsafe. They want to expand the units by a bit and the funding is both state and federal.

Ms. DerMarderosian noted there have been public meetings with the architects and there is controversy around the design and the budget for the Housing Authority rebuild. She will collect data and report back to the Board.

The MBTA requirements are for more multi use housing around all the commuter rail stations within a half mile. Hersey is excluded because of previous development. The Wingate development is just outside the half mile perimeter. This issue is included in the Needham Housing Coalition group that has been meeting at the library once a month to have conversations with all residents and to learn more about needs of the community including the kind of housing. The Board noted there is space near Needham Junction on the small side streets off Chestnut Street.

The Home Group is looking into the expanded ADU's on private property and examining other areas around Town for multifamily unit housing.

Ms. Schaller noted it is important the Board is aware of the various housing efforts.

A brief discussion ensued on the Wingate development which now has 72 units planned.

Ms. Schaller also mentioned that HOME group has their next meeting on January 18th in Powers Hall and the Housing Coalition's next meeting is January 31 at the Library and on Zoom.

Mr. Ted Prorok, VFW Representative

Mr. Prorok noted the Veterans Day event at Memorial Park was well attended. The reception at the VFW Hall afterwards was also a success.

The December Dinner with the Police was also well attended. The annual meeting will be the first Thursday in February joint with the Exchange Club. The local winner for the Voice of Democracy award as well as Patriots Pen will be announced.

The Veteran's package as a part of the Hero Act (Senate Bill 1882) was part of Governor Healey's November 9th press release. He notes there are parts of that legislation not addressed by the various Town so he will report back after the West Suburban meetings with the Veterans Officer and Town officials from the five West Suburban officials later in February.

Ms. Denise Garlick, State Representative

Ms. Garlick attended and took question after her presentation. She noted that since COVID she has been trying to meet as many community groups as possible in her District of Medfield, Needham and Dover. She is rebuilding relationships. She encouraged members to attend the February 12 Representative meeting at Powers Hall and noted she is happy to do a presentation at the COA during the day on February 12th if Ms. Steele and the Board would find that useful.

Ms. Garlick noted that the Estate Tax threshold has increased from 1 million to 2 million before estate taxes are assessed. This will help seniors plan for their heirs especially given how high the real estate values are in Massachusetts; older adults can be house rich but cash poor.

The Senior Circuit Braker has been fully funded in the House budget. This will mean that older adults can engage in a volunteer work program for their Town and earn up to \$2400.00 towards their real estate taxes. This is up from the current \$1200.00.

Ms. Garlick noted that the Governors Budget is presented January 24 and then will go through House revisions followed by Senate revisions before it is signed into Law late May for the FY 25.

The disabled annuity needs its language changed to match the federal standard. Ms. Garlick is advocating for the change. The federal language reads if you are a disabled veteran when you die your heirs are eligible for this annuity. The Massachusetts language states your heirs are only eligible for this annuity if you die from what made you disabled.

Ms. Garlick noted she was concerned about the budget to be released January 24 as there will be cuts to social services affecting seniors through both the Public Health funding and Health and Human Services divisions. She noted the proposal is level funding which translates to less services. She noted that Governor Baker did not fill agency heads and other staff positions as staff left during COVID with his goal of small government but this means the agencies have less staff to advocate for their services and to meet needs. She noted the older adults are often invisible. She noted that Governor Healey is doing a respectable job in her opinion but the fiscal situation she started with was not of the best and the revenue projections have needed to be updated every 6 weeks because the economy has changed so much. Ms. Garlick referred to as in "whiplash mode."

In answer to Board questions

Ms. Garlick noted her power is to broker meetings and get various constituencies to the table. She needs to be aware of needs to help with local issues.

One Trustee asked if she could check on the MBTA stalled parking spaces on Hillside Avenue which the Cath needs for program parking. Ms. Garlick mentioned that if Mr. McDonald called her, she would follow up and advocate for MBTA meetings.

Ms. Garlick noted that SHINE was funded as a partnership between federal and state funding. She does not believe the proposed budget includes cuts but will follow up with Ms. Steele after speaking with the Chair of Human Services Mr. Stanley from Waltham.

The VFW representative asked her to check on the Community Preservation Act real estate waiver for Veterans which in other Towns does not require a lengthy application or asset information. Ms. Garlick mentioned that the law may be written with a local opt out option. She will check and report back to Ms. Steele and Ms. Schaller.

Ms. Garlick also noted that many earmarks have been eliminated from the Governor's proposed budget. She noted that an earmark funded the kitchen feasibility study at the CATH and they provide a service and a revenue source to help communities who do not have local budgets to cover such expenses. This is one of her concerns with the budget proposal overall.

She does not believe there are budget cuts for the Councils on Aging but will check again.

Ms. Garlick recommended following the numbers closely in the upcoming budget proposal.

Ms. Garlick encouraged everyone to email or call her office with other concerns.

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