

**Minutes for COUNCIL ON AGING Meeting
November 9, 2016**

Present: COA Members: Agnes Rogers, Yolanda Rodriguez, John Mulhane, Roberta Winitzer, Barbara Kean, Nancy Daly, Rita d'Entremont, Phyllis Bram, Phil Fullerton, Jean Doherty, Muriel Stark and William Wong. Staff: Ruthann Dobek, Dotty Bell, and Patricia Burns. Public: Clara Chin, Carol Fullerton, Cecelia Enkins, Monique Richardson, Faith Sudbury, Werner Lohe, and others.

Call to Order: Roberta Winitzer, Chair of the COA, called the meeting to order at 1:03 pm.

Move to Accept Minutes of October, 2016 Meeting: It was moved and seconded to accept the minutes of October 2016

Roberta opened the meeting by asking us to put the election results into perspective, to use it as a motivation to do better and spread the good.

Introduction of Guest Speaker: Roberta introduced the guest speaker for today:
WERNER LOHE, Chair Selectmen's Climate Action Committee & Brookline Green Electricity Sub-committee for the Town of Brookline

Topic: "BROOKLINE GREEN ELECTRICITY"

Werner started by saying that there has been a State law about green electricity on the books for 20 years. This law deals with deregulation and electricity aggregation. The law says that a Town can go to the marketplace with an aggregate of citizens to get a more competitive bid than is available to individual citizens.

In 2015 this idea was presented to the Town Meeting and the Board of Selectmen. The Town Meeting members accepted the proposal. The goals were: 1. Take advantage of an opportunity to buy in bulk at a reduced rate, have the opportunity for green energy and make it easier for the consumer; 2. Since the options would be vetted by the Town, there would be an element of consumer protection not always available to single citizens; and 3. The opportunity for either 25% or 100% cleaner/green energy. Today, the rates for each option are not yet available as broker negotiations are in progress, but all were urged to come to the open meeting on November 21st for more information and the rates.

All Eversource customers will receive a letter from the Town of Brookline in December or January explaining the options and saying that you need to make a decision within 30 days. (If you are not with Eversource, you will not get a letter.) There will be an 800 number for questions in the letter. The options are: Basic – essentially the same as Eversource, Green – 25% greener with a small increase in rates and All Green – 100% green/renewable and more expensive. While opting out is also possible, citizens are urged to choose Basic, a mirror of Eversource in cost, but good for the group so that the aggregate number and buying power will be higher. Look at the rates carefully and perhaps choose Basic over Eversource. If you do not act when you get the letter, you will be placed in the Brookline Green at 25% greener than Eversource and slightly more expensive.

Question: Should we opt out now? *Answer:* No, you need to wait until the program starts and you get the letter.

Question: Is there a certain number of consumers needed to form the group? *Answer:* No, but the negotiation power is better with more people in the aggregate group.

Question: What type of energy will it use and where will it be from? *Answer:* It will likely be solar and wind, but this is not yet final. Werner further said that other energy companies get their wind power from Oklahoma and Texas or Canada. Bottom line - we need more solar and wind in New England.

Question: If the time for selection is within 30 days of the letters, can we try the program 1st and then opt out later? *Answer:* Nancy Daly assured us that we could opt out at any time. However, changing within the categories other than opting out may need to be done during a specific period each year.

Question: Will we get the bill from the Town? *Answer:* No, the bills will continue to come from Eversource.

Question: What about common area electric bills for condominiums? *Answer:* Nancy said that condominium associations can make a decision the same as individuals.

Werner ended by urging all to attend the meeting at the BSC on November 21st when the rates should be available.

Committee Reports:

Springwell – Yolanda Rodriguez spoke about the Springwell area plan for 2018-2021 that Springwell is developing. The plan needs to be submitted to the government in December. The Advisory Council will review the proposal in 2017. The executive of Elder Affairs will send it to the State and aging associations. Priority populations will include: socially isolated seniors, LGBTQ citizens, and low income seniors. A committee will visit different communities to listen to their concerns. They visited 90 Longwood, Brookline in late October. They also visited BCAN's Livable Community group to listen and conduct a survey. Yolanda also said that the survey is available on line at springwell.com. Click under the picture at the right of their main page, and then Help Shape Senior Services in Your Community blog and the survey will be there. The survey will only be available for the month of November. Yolanda will bring some paper copies of the survey to the BSC for those who do not wish to fill it out on line or do not have access to the internet.

Nominating Committee – Ruthann said, and Nancy Daly concurred, that the Board of Selectmen voted on the new slate of members for the COA. The slate was accepted. Ruthann reminded all members that they must be sworn in by the Town Clerk.

Budget Committee – Ruthann said that the FY 2018 budget has been submitted. She said that 2018 will be a tough budget year and therefore ours is a level funding budget. She also said that it is possible that in January or February budget cuts will be requested of some departments.

Director’s Report:

Regarding the election, Ruthann reiterated that we are resilient and fighters. We have all been through tough times before and need to keep our focus.

BETS Taxi Discount Program – changes, changes, changes: We have been asked by the Commission on Disabilities to expand this program to include disabled people in Brookline. CDBG, HUD and the program are okay with this change. However, there will definitely be a cost to do so. Since we have limited funding for the program, we will start with a limited pilot expansion and track the costs. Another issue will be how to define disability. Another change is that after many years of the same amount of discount coupons per month and with ever increasing taxi fares, we are being allowed to increase the monthly maximum value of discount coupons from \$50 (cost to client \$25) to \$80 (cost to client \$40) effective January 1st 2017.

CDBG Grants 2017 – Ruthann said that we are in the process of working on how we will revamp our jobs program in line with the new CDBG changes. She said that there are some funds left for the Town in the Public Service budget.

Grant for Low Vision Computer Assistance: The Mass Association for the Blind and BSC are collaborating to implement the grant we received for low vision equipment to help visually impaired seniors. The grant will provide funds for equipment for our computer lab, programs and a part time trainer. Interviews for the trainer position will begin next week.

Autumn Benefit: Ruthann reported that the benefit was a great success and thanked everyone for their support. It was a great opportunity to honor Alan Balsam who has been such an advocate and supporter for seniors. She said that it is our job to train the new Director of Public Health about senior health issues.

Peabody Age Friendly: Having already assisted Newton to become an Age Friendly town, we have now been contacted by Peabody to help them. A meeting is being set up to do so. Ruthann also noted that since Brookline was the 1st Age Friendly town in New England, we are now considered the ‘trainer’ for other towns.

Shrimp Painting & Letter: We have recently received a donation of a beautifully created and framed original shrimp painting. Patricia read excerpts from the letter that accompanied the painting. In part it indicated that while Mr. and Mrs. Ruan did not have money to donate to the center, they wished to present the painting and some handmade items to support and show their love for the BSC.

Program Updates:

Craft Fair: Ruthann thanked everyone who participated and shopped at the annual Craft Fair. She said that so far close to \$4,000 was made. She also let everyone know that if they had not been able to attend last week that there would be another opportunity to support the BSC at the **LAST CHANCE Event on November 10th at Town Hall from 10-2.**

TRIPPS Challenge: Ruthann said that we are getting calls from seniors who want help downloading Uber & Lyft apps and are considering having Smartphone classes for seniors.

Springwell Thanksgiving Lunch, November 17th: Those interested in attending must call and sign up in advance. At this event we will start giving out the BSC 2017 calendars.

Elks Holiday Lunch, Saturday December 3rd: Ruthann reminded everyone who is interested to call and sign up for this very popular event.

Reunion Portraits: Ruthann said that there are still a few slots available for the Reunion event that will take place all day on November 18th here at the BSC. A professional photographer, Laurel Brody will take portrait photos and combine them with a photo from the past that participants will provide. These photos will be exhibited in the future at the BSC. This project is only open to women over 65.

Nancy Daly's Report on the Brookline New School: Nancy said that most everyone knows that the final site is the Baldwin School. It is a small school in Chestnut Hill on Heath Street. While there is still some resistance from neighbors around traffic, it is thought to be an excellent choice as the Sewell Recreation area with fields and facilities is close by.

Dancing With The Stars: Betsy Pollack did a fabulous job. Some said she had great presence and danced elegantly. Betsy's choice for the funds earned in the benefit will go to expanding transportation options for seniors in Brookline. Such funds would go towards transporting seniors to events such as the trip to the MFA earlier this year. Ruthann said that while we do not yet have a final tally, it appears that we will have 10-12 thousand dollars after our donation to the Rotary.

Town Meeting: Nancy said there will be an open Town meeting on November 15th. Ruthann showed the huge and heavy book of reports that will be discussed. While the meeting is open to the public, non-Town Meeting members will sit in the back of the room and will not be able to comment. Nancy said that even with the volume of items, these meeting go more smoothly than most as the reports are distributed in advance and members come prepared to discuss them. Interested non-members can find the documents on the Town website and the meeting itself can be viewed on our local cable station. If non-members have concerns after reading the reports, they are urged to call Town Meeting members and voice these concerns.

Thanksgiving: Ruthann said that in the spirit of giving thanks, we should be thankful for the dedicated Board of Selectmen and the Town Meeting members who work to make our Town and senior services strong. In the wake of the election results, she urged us to reach for gratitude, reflect on and move forward.

Library: Roberta said that the Coolidge Corner library will be getting an elevator as well as other rearrangements.

Elder Bus Driver: Ruthann said that she has submitted her request to replace Jimmy Tong as the Elder Bus driver. The request is on the agenda for the Board of Selectmen in the next few weeks. After approval, she can then post the position and start the interviewing and hiring process. Anyone knowing a good candidate should let Ruthann know.

Our next regular COA meeting will be on December 14th, 2016. The topic will be about consumer protection lemon laws.

Roberta asked for a motion for the meeting to be adjourned at 2:03. It was so moved, seconded and approved.

Respectfully submitted by Patricia Burns