

**Minutes for COUNCIL ON AGING Meeting  
January 9, 2019**

**PRESENT:** COA Members: Yolanda Rodriguez (Chair), Nancy Heller (Select Board) Vera Sharma, Rita d'Entremont, John Mulhane, Jean Doherty, Muriel Stark, Judith Chasin, Pat Ahlin, Martha Schieve, Helen Lew, Barbara Kean, William Wong, Mimi O'Connor, Roberta Winitzer, Joanne Katz, Fran Perler, Sherry Lee. Staff: Ruthann Dobek, Jessica Milley-Gee, Julie Washburn. Public: Joyce Wishnick, Monique Richardson, Saul Feldman, Dotty Bell, Sarah Kaplan and others.

**WELCOME:** Yolanda Rodriguez, COA Chair, welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming to the meeting.

**CALL TO ORDER:** Yolanda called the meeting to order at 1:02 PM.

**ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 12<sup>th</sup> MEETING:** It was moved, seconded and voted to accept the minutes of the December 12<sup>th</sup> meeting. No one opposed or abstained.

**INTRODUCTION:** Yolanda introduced the guest speaker for today: Sarah Kaplan—Community Relations Specialist/ ADA Coordinator from Brookline's Diversity, Inclusion & Community Relations Office.

**TOPIC: "ACCESSIBILITY IN THE ADA: ITS IMPACT ON YOU"**

Sarah Kaplan thanked the COA for allowing her the opportunity to speak. Sarah introduced herself in her role as the Town's Community Relations Specialist/ ADA Coordinator, and wanted to ensure that we knew both that the office is open and available to the public, and that she is here to serve the community. Her role is to make certain that the Town is meeting its compliance needs with the ADA. She is the contact person for any comments or complaints with regard to accessibility and other ADA regulations, and will ensure that they are investigated, and relayed to the correct departments.

Sarah came to Brookline's Diversity, Inclusion & Community Relations Office in March of 2018, but has been working professionally in the disability field for over a decade. While new to Brookline, she strives to make sure that everyone's accessibility needs are being met. Sarah reminds us that safety and accessibility regulations are beneficial to everyone, not just those who use mobility products or have physical limitations.

Sarah relayed that the Commission on Disability recently partnered with the Institute for Human Centered Design to complete a survey of Harvard and Beacon streets. The results of this survey were prioritized on a scale of 1-5—1 conveying a need to address an issue "as soon as possible," and 5 conveying likely ADA compliance, but also an opportunity for improvement. While it may take the Department of Public Works several years to address all the survey's findings, it is on their agenda. Relative to this survey, Brookline's Office of Diversity, Inclusion, & Community Relations has received a grant from the Massachusetts Office of Disability to address specific issues (e.g. pooling water) at the four corners of Beacon and Harvard streets at Coolidge Corner.

Sarah explained that when changes are made to a street, they must be made in compliance with ADA. Until these changes are made, however, bringing a street up to compliance standards is not necessary. She reiterated that she is available to speak to anyone regarding accessibility issues that they experience in Brookline, and urges us to call her office with specifics. Next, Sarah opened the floor for general questions.

## **QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:**

**Q. Is there any way that, when riding on the T, a person can alert the driver or other people on the train to their need for a seat?**

**A.** The MBTA has and advertises a recommended policy whereby certain seats are designated and asked to be made available for people with disabilities and the elderly. If one finds that their seating needs are not being met, there are MBTA workers available at station kiosks that can assist with boarding and disembarking as well as finding a seat. The green line functions differently than the other MBTA lines in that one can notify the driver in the first car of the train, and the drivers themselves should be able to assist with embarking, disembarking, securing a seat, etc. If one finds that they are being regularly refused a designated seat on the MBTA, they are encouraged to call Sarah Kaplan's office so that it might be addressed on a systematic level.

The MBTA offers both individual and group "travel training." If interested, contact the MBTA or Sarah's office for more information.

**Q. Are passengers required by law to give up their seat to those with a disability or the elderly?**

**A.** As far as Sarah is aware, this is not a law but a policy of the MBTA. Even so, if anyone is having repeated issues or negative experiences, the MBTA does have an ADA Compliance office, and Sarah can work with them to address these complaints with the MBTA directly. Additionally, there is an advocacy group called Senior Action that works with the MBTA to identify accessibility issues in transit relative to seniors.

**Q. In the study conducted on Beacon and Harvard streets, was there any reference to the timing of crosswalk signals in Coolidge Corner?**

**A.** There was not a reference made to crosswalk timing, but if individuals are recognizing issues with particular signals, they are welcome to bring them to Sarah's attention. Sarah intends to provide an update on the law surrounding signal timing by the end of next week (Jan 18<sup>th</sup>).

**Q. What is considered the appropriate amount of time for pedestrians to cross at a crosswalk?**

**A.** There seem to be a range of time increments, depending on the particular crossing. Sarah would like to do some research on the matter and revisit the question. Concerns regarding pedestrian right of way at particular crosswalks can be brought to Sarah's attention to be addressed.

**Q. Does the Commission on Disability work alongside the Pedestrian Advisory Committee on pedestrian-related issues?**

**A.** While the Commission is not part of the Pedestrian Advisory Committee, they are working with the Bicycle Advisory Committee on bike lanes and temporary parking bans on lower Beacon Street. They will be meeting on these issues later this month.

**Q. Are there any laws or regulations on the use of bricks in crosswalks or sidewalks (there is concern with safety and the effect of the bricks on mobility products)?**

**A.** Bricks are allowed materials in the construction of roads, and also for use as contrast (in place of a typical footpad).

Sarah Kaplan provided both her direct office line (**617-730-2329**) and her work cell phone number (**617-308-1134**) in the event she can't be reached at the office. She may be contacted with any questions regarding ADA compliance or community relations.

Sarah thanked the COA Board for inviting her to speak.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS:

**Nominating Committee:** No Nominating Committee report. Yolanda reminded those board members that were not able to attend the December 12<sup>th</sup> COA meeting that they must go to the Town Hall to be sworn in at the Office of Town Clerk.

**Springwell Committee:** No Springwell Committee report, as Springwell did not meet in December.

**Budget Committee:** No Budget Committee report.

**School Committee:** No School Committee report (see Report from the Select Board).

**Report from the Select Board- Nancy Heller:** In December, Brookline held the second session of the Special Fall Town Meeting that dealt with the question of whether to fund the schematic money for the Baldwin and Driscoll Schools. Nancy noted that the Baldwin School was fiercely contested as the current plan is to demolish and rebuild a school on the small Baldwin site. According to the current plan, the Baldwin playground and the Recreation Center would not be altered. She asserted that despite being heavily challenged, space issues exist in the South Brookline/ Chestnut Hill areas that require 140 regular ed. children be bussed to North Brookline schools. Smaller programs including special education and the various ESL programs would be split between North Brookline and the new Baldwin schools in a manner decided upon by the School Committee. Nancy explained that while enrollment may have some natural fluctuation from year to year, the need for additional space remains.

Overall, Town Meeting reflected an opposition to more feasibility studies. Additionally, Nancy revealed that there has been a lawsuit filed by parents in the Special Education Committee asserting that the current burden of overcrowding has fallen disproportionately upon special needs children. Ultimately, the funding for the Baldwin school was approved by more than a two-thirds majority. Also approved was the purchase of property on Oak Street to use for additional playground or parking space as needed.

In the days following this vote, it was revealed that Newbury College would be officially closing its doors. While there was an “unofficial” initial exploration of using the grounds of Newbury College for the new Baldwin school, Nancy explained that feasibility of this move is low for a number of reasons. The town may still be interested in acquiring the property for alternate use (e.g. affordable housing for seniors, administrative offices, parks, playground space). Nancy is articulating that the Senior Center is at its capacity, and that space could be used for older adult programming at Newbury or other sites. The Select Board will be meeting next week for further discussion of this matter.

Nancy revealed that dates had been approved for Town Meeting and the Annual Town Election—the Election will be held Tuesday, May 7<sup>th</sup>, and Town Meeting will be held Tuesday, May 21<sup>st</sup>.

## DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

Ruthann wished everyone a Happy New Year.

- **TRIPPS Update** – While the Massachusetts Dept. of Transportation did not renew the TRIPPS grant for a fourth year, we will be able to maintain a Brookline TRIPPS program with Community Outreach Specialist Maria Foster and our TRIPPS volunteers. We will continue to seek other sources and means of revenue to fund this critical program.
- **Update on Senior Tax Aid program**– We continue to work with the Assessor's Office and the newly formed Committee around assisting those who need help with their property taxes. The Town has collected approximately \$5000 for this cause, so please refer those who are in need of assistance.
- **Start of Income Tax Season**– Income tax season is beginning, and the Council on Aging will have an additional tax preparer from AARP this year. We will begin taking appointments for tax preparation assistance on Tuesday, January 22, so please make your appointments early.

- **Thank You letter from OLOC**– We received a thank you letter and a generous donation from Older Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC) as an expression of gratitude for the use of our space. This group meets at the Senior Center once a month on Sundays, and continues to be an important resource for the Brookline older lesbian community.
- **Program Updates**– a) History of the Lightship Service- Saturday, January 12<sup>th</sup> from 2-4 PM  
b) Brookline Historical Society- Thursday, January 17<sup>th</sup> at 1PM  
c) Annual Chinese New Year Luncheon & Celebration- Monday, January 28<sup>th</sup> at 12:30 PM. Registration fee is \$7.
- **Rideshare Revenue**– Each Uber and Lyft ride generated out of Brookline is taxed—.10 goes to the state, and .10 goes back to the municipality. Last year, Brookline received approximately \$242,000.00 in rideshare revenue. We are making a proposal that a portion of the rideshare revenue generated from this program go to subsidized transportation for older adults in Brookline in FY20.
- **Inspo:Expo January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019, 12-3 PM**– The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Brookline Action Fair is an opportunity to meet your neighbors, and learn about the various social action projects in Brookline. The Senior Center and BrooklineCAN will both have tables at this event.
- **UMASS Gerontology Institute- Older Parent/ Children Study**– the GI is continuing to recruit older adult parent/ child dyads for a study they are conducting on “aging together.” Following the study, the GI will be invited to report their findings to the COA. Please see flyer for more details.
- **Recreation Department Updates**– The Brookline Recreation Department is no longer offering trips for older adults, and there has been some concern regarding what the Department will do to fill the gap in services as a result. We would like to pursue having the acting department head from Brookline Recreation speak to the COA.
- **LGBT Cultural Competency Training**– On February 4<sup>th</sup>, Lisa Krinsky from the LGBT Aging Project will offer a “cultural competency training” for COA staff, giving participants an opportunity to learn more about LGBT issues, and look at how our community provides services to its clients.
- **Age-Friendly Coolidge Corner Shopping Map Available**– These maps are now available throughout the building. Sponsored by the Brookline Merchant’s Association, they designate age-friendly businesses. On a related note, Brookline Bank is rolling out a program that will help vision-impaired individuals with banking products. Brookline Bank has been a generous sponsor of the Senior Center, so please take the time to thank them and ask them to continue their support.
- **Government Shutdown Impact on Food Programs**– As a result of the shutdown, many government workers will not be receiving a check this Friday. The impact is broad, reaching our neighbors, friends, and even a member of the Senior Center family. In addition, if the shutdown continues, it will have an impact on our SNAP and food commodity weekly distribution programs.
- **Pedestrian Advisory Committee Meeting**–This evening at Town Hall- 7PM. Guest Speaker will be Meg Robertson, Director, Orientation and Mobility Dept. of the MA Commission for the Blind.
- **Redesign Meeting w/ Judith Mir**– This afternoon at 3PM- open to all. We are looking at a redesign plan for the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the Center, including new carpeting, and new furniture.
- **CNN Article Handout**– Please see this interesting article on ageism and children, titled “The secret to a long, happy, healthy life? Think age-positive”
- **Annual Survey of Volunteers**– By the end of the month we hope to issue our yearly survey of volunteers. It will be an opportunity to update emergency contact information and provide us with your feedback. Please participate.
- **New Medicare Cards**– Everyone should have already received their new Medicare cards. For those who may have discarded their new card due a non-descript envelope, please see our flyer for information on how to obtain their card.
- **New Refrigerator Fund** – It was brought to our attention that one of the basement refrigerators used in our weekly food distribution program needs replacement. To reduce waste and maximize the food items we receive for distribution, we are starting a “refrigerator fund” to replace this unit with a larger, more

efficient model. All are welcome to contribute—checks can be made out to the Brookline Senior Center with “refrigerator fund” in the memo.

***Our next COA meeting will be on March 13, 2019. Please note that the Board will not be meeting in February.***

Yolanda asked for a motion for the meeting to be adjourned at 2:08 PM. It was so moved and seconded.

**Handouts:**

- 1. Age-Friendly Coolidge Corner Shopping Map**
- 2. CNN Article: *The secret to a long, happy, healthy life? Think age-positive***
- 3. Inspo:Expo flyer**
- 4. UMASS Gerontology “Aging Together” Study flyer**
- 5. New Medicare Card notice**

**No Attachments.**

Respectfully submitted by Jessica Milley-Gee