

The Human Services Subcommittee of the Advisory Committee held a public hearing on the FY20 budget of the Council on Aging (COA) on Wednesday, February 20, 2019, at 7:00 PM in Town Hall, Room 103. The meeting was duly posted.

Attendees included William Wong, COA member; Sonia Wong, COA staff; Yolanda Rodriguez, COA chair; Regina Frawley (TMM 16); Ruthann Dobek, COA director; Roberta Winitzer, past COA chair ; and these members of the subcommittee: Ben Birnbaum (Chair), Kim Smith (TMM 6); and Claire Stampfer (TMM 5).

Budget

The proposed FY20 budget of \$961,605 represents an increase of \$3,792 (0.4%) over FY19 for an agency that is “responsible for planning, coordinating, and providing comprehensive services for services for Brookline residents over age 60.” An estimated 12,000 citizens fell into that category in FY19, of whom some 3,100 took advantage of the services offered. These include provision of social work services, transportation, legal and employment aid, and homecare, among many other offerings. In addition, the Winchester Street Senior Center offers breakfast and lunch five days a week, health clinics and health education programs, exercise and adult education classes, recreation and creative opportunities, a food pantry for impoverished seniors, support groups from those suffering from dementia and for their caretakers, and assistance with the Town’s property tax abatement programs for eligible seniors. Importantly, the COA liaisons with other Town offices as well as businesses and non-profits in aid of senior services in a wide range of areas. A robust list of the programs and services to be supported in FY20 can be found on page IV-106 in the Financial Plan book.

PROGRAM COSTS - COUNCIL ON AGING					
CLASS OF EXPENDITURES	ACTUAL FY2018	BUD GET	REQUEST FY2020	FY20 vs. FY19	
				\$ CHANGE	% CHANGE
Personnel	777,312	822,520	826,708	4,187	0.5%
Services	39,165	43,583	43,583	0	%
Supplies	19,722	19,763	19,763	0	0.0%
Other	1,682	4,250	4,250	0	%
Utilities	58,746	19,763	61,601	(395)	0.0%
TOTAL	902,328	957,763	961,605	3,792	0.4
BENEFITS			503,035		
REVENUE	0	0	0	0	0.0

COA programs, it bears noting, are partially but generously funded through grants and private fund-raising, including \$254,000 in the current year from the Brookline Multi-Service Senior Center Corporation and \$34,000 in other grants and gifts. It also bears noting that more than 400 volunteers have been trained and are active in work with seniors, contributing an estimated 45,000 work-hours per year.

Challenges

Two particular issues arose in conversation with Ruthann and others associated with the COA. One is the planned groundbreaking, this spring, for a senior residence on the Congregation Kehillath Israel “campus.” Under the management of 2Life Communities—formerly Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly—the residence, which will stand behind the Senior Center, will be home to some 100 seniors. And while the new facility will provide a range of services for its residents, it seems clear—and right—that these new Brookline residents will draw on the Senior Center’s and the COA’s resources. Relations among 2Life Communities, the COA, and the Town are excellent, and good communications will need to continue in support of that relationship.

A second issue concerned the growth over the years in the number of seniors who take part in COA programs at the Senior Center, and the pressure this puts on the facility’s one House Worker. In 2011, 10 years after its opening, the Center served an estimated 2,000 individuals. The estimate for 2019 is 3,100 individuals.

As regards hours, the Senior Center was open 40 hours per week in 2001, when it was founded, 45 hours per week 10 years later, and will be open an average of 58 hours per week in 2019.

In addition to janitorial responsibilities, the House Worker sets up rooms for events, including moving furniture and equipment, takes and distributes deliveries, and makes deliveries. Each Tuesday’s food distribution for the indigent elderly, for example, requires off-loading some 2,000 pounds of edibles from delivery trucks. The custodian/houseworker is salaried at 37.5 hours per week, and so far this year has worked 129 hours of overtime at a cost of \$5,100. He is still unable to meet the needs of the Center.

The COA has asked the Town for a part-time House Worker, at 20 hours per week, and at a cost of \$15,750. That request was turned back.

Given the development and growth of the COA/Senior Center and its programs and its cohort of patrons over the years, it seems to the Subcommittee that a modest investment of \$15,750 in covering the Senior Center’s needs is a fair and useful investment of Town funds.

Vote

By a vote of 3-0, the Subcommittee recommends the approval of a budget of 977,355, which includes the approved budget and a provision of \$15,750 for the purposes described above.