

**Minutes for COUNCIL ON AGING Meeting
March 13, 2019**

PRESENT: COA Members: Vera Sharma, Jean Doherty, John Mulhane, Helen Lew, Judith Chasin, Barbara Kean, Barbara Scotto, Nancy Heller, Yolanda Rodriguez, Rita d'Entrement, Clara Chin, William Wong, Phil Fullerton, Joanne Katz, Pat Ahlin, Fran Perler, Mimi O'Connor and Martha Schieve. Staff: Ruthann Dobek, Jessica Milley-Gee, Julie Washburn, Jamie Jensen, Olga Sliwa, Michael Allen and Patricia Burns. Public: Marcia Goldstein, Frank d'entrement, Joyce Wishnick, Saul Feldman, Gerry Small, Carol Fullerton 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 1:03 pm.

ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 9th MEETING: A motion was accepted and seconded to accept the minutes of the January 9th meeting. No changes or comments were offered.

INTRODUCTION: Yolanda introduced the guest speaker for today: **Leigh Jackson, Acting Director, Brookline Recreation Department**

TOPIC: Active Recreation in the Older Brookline Adult Population: Brookline Recreation's Mission, Trends and Options

Leigh thanked the COA for inviting her to speak. She said she was excited to be here and to share a short version of the report on the vision for FY 2020. She then gave a brief overview of her experience prior to becoming the Acting Director when Lisa Paradis left as the Director in June of 2018. Leigh has a Master's Degree in Outdoor Recreation and Education and a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology. She spent 10 years fulfilling her passion for recreation in Alaska, then 10 years in colleges in North Carolina and Georgia and 9 years as the Regional Director of REI in New England.

Leigh said that Brookline Recreation has a mission to provide exceptional services for all ages. She said that this year is a transitional year with the director and 3 fulltime staff leaving for other positions. She said that another part of the mission is to build and grow staff to enable them to progress professionally. Efforts are underway to onboard more staff including ones that support COA and elder recreation options.

Leigh then said that there were 2 goals for FY 2020:

1. Strategic marketing to better connect all Brookline residents to recreational opportunities. This would be done by elevating our brand through social media.
2. Customer-centered registration – With 83,000 registrations for aquatics and 250 for girls' soccer, to name a few, revamping registration is needed. Now 75% of registration is done by phone and only 25% on-line. This should be the opposite. They are in the process of identifying a candidate that can reverse this registration trend.

Leigh said that programming needed to be based on customer experiences with more focus on the customer and bringing private schools and community partners into the conversation. She said that she wants to know what we feel is relevant, what we think should change, what we think should stay the

same. She is inviting us into the discussion. She stressed that this group (COA) and other keystone partners such as parks and the private schools are important to the success of the department.

On Brookline Day 2018 a survey was conducted. The results showed that 95% of the 383 participants who completed the survey were highly satisfied with Brookline Recreation activities. She said that she will work towards making that 100%. When asked about the budget, Leigh said that 90% is spent on the Brookline community, 5% regionally and 5% for participation in a national conference. Brookline Recreation is one of the largest in the nation and THE largest in New England.

A comment was made that Brookline is named as an Age Friendly City, but Brookline Recreation is NOT Age Friendly. The feeling is that trips for seniors have been deteriorating yearly and that there were either none or cost prohibitive trips since December 2018.

Gerry Small said that he and his wife had prepaid, as was required, for the Turkey Train. However, Gerry was diagnosed with cancer and so they were unable to take the trip. When they called and explained the situation and asked for a refund, they were told no. Gerry said that the more than \$100 that was not refunded would have gone a long way for groceries. The person on the phone did not seem to care and just refused to give them the refund.

Additionally, Gerry raised that it appeared that activities for kids and families were increasing at the same rate that activities for seniors were decreasing. Transportation to events and to use parks and other opportunities in and around Brookline was a problem. He requested a van program from the COA/BSC to parks and adding 1-2 extra stops to the existing van. Bottom line – it seems that Brookline Recreation Department is trying to destroy the senior programs.

Leigh said that seniors are a critical group for the success of the Recreation Department's mission and it is important that their customer service changes. She then said that Lisa Paradis, before she resigned, had looked at identifying trips and programs for active recreation versus passive recreation (trips). She also said that there are many for-profit and non-profit organizations in the community, some of which are trying to do everything. She feels that each should focus on what they do well and support other groups rather than competing with the same offerings. She hopes to continue small group conversations like ours to inform the department's decisions. She also said that mid-management recreation staff's time would be better utilized in active recreation activities rather than driving a bus for senior trips. She admitted that some focus has moved to sports for adults regionally and nationally rather than for seniors. A senior requested that transport to parks could be combined with walking. It was suggested that we come up with some programs together.

Vera Sharma said that some trips had been cancelled because of low registration. As a member of Brookline Livable Communities, she says that they are anxious for trips to resume.

Gerry Small voiced that the price of trips was too high. He gave an example of a trip for \$148 and asked if there was any way that low income seniors could get help with these fees. There was no response from Leigh.

Fran Perler said that she had just finished looking at the new spring catalogue on line and saw nothing listed for seniors, especially active seniors. She suggested masters level pickle ball or tennis. It seems that since 2014 the focus has been on teen and family activities.

Pat Ahlin asked how the budget was divided and how much was allocated for senior activities that were not only active, but educational. She asked if the budgeted amount was based on the proportion of seniors (>12,000) in Brookline and how the amount had changed between last year and this year. Leigh responded that the budget is based on a cost recovery system depending on the benefit to the community, but that it was okay to lose money. She said that it is not population based. Ruthann then said that the focus is on living a healthy lifestyle that could only be done by offerings from Adult Education, the Recreation Department and the COA providing a variety of programs to meet seniors' needs. It is necessary to grow programs for this group such as yoga, walks and body/mind meditation.

Ruthann asked what percentages of Sarah's position was for the over 55 group, planning and managing Brookline Day and supporting the growth in sports programs. It was suggested that some programs could include drop-ins for seniors.

Leigh then outlined the timeline for the strategic plan. She said that the field assessment is out to bid and a commission will be set up. These activities will take a few months.

Marcia Goldstein reiterated that the cost of trips now excluded many seniors who would like to participate, especially since the cost of the trip does not include lunch. If the cost of the trips could be reduced and lunch could be included, participation would increase greatly.

Rita d'Entremont asked that Leigh pass along the message to her colleagues that seniors are 'not dead yet'. Rita suggested some National Park Service activities that are quite inexpensive such as the John Adams house in Quincy or the Lexington battlefields.

Olga Sliwa supported the idea that the main focus definitely is geared towards family field sports. It appears that the Recreation Department does not seem to feel that senior activities are their responsibility and that seniors can get some activities in Adult Ed. She said that trips with walking are appropriate and that seniors' specific needs should be addressed. Leigh said that she cares about seniors and has a passion for supporting us.

Jamie Jenson asked about collaborating with other communities and said that Framingham has many trips for seniors.

Pat Ahlin suggested a seniors' only survey that would expose different results than the one-size-fits-all survey for the Town that was done at Brookline Day. Pat also suggested that the money being earmarked for consultants could be saved for trips and that committees of seniors could work with the Recreation Department directly instead.

Leigh said that we would continue conversations like today. She also said that she was honored to have been here and was committed to hearing more from us.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

- **Springwell Report** – Yolanda reported that Springwell, in conjunction with the Executive Office of Elder Affairs and the Norfolk & Middlesex District Attorney Offices, will be providing a training for providers on the topic of Protective Services on April 9. She also said that at the Springwell January meeting, Ruth Beckerman-Rodau who had been CEO for the past 5 1/2 years resigned effective June 30, 2019. Ruth had been instrumental in growing the organization in many ways including the wonderful senior leadership and finance teams. The President of the Board is forming a committee to select a search firm. Ruth will be greatly missed. A replacement will not be easy to find.
- **Budget Report** – Ruthann reported on the budget process. She said that it will be coming to the Advisory Board meeting tomorrow (3/14). Our budget asks for additional maintenance staff to cover Jimmy Tong's time off and the many evening, weekend and other busy activity times. The budget will go to the Select Board on Tuesday, March 19.

Report from Select Board: Nancy Heller – Nancy said that there will be a public hearing for the Driscoll and Baldwin school issues and whether these school renovations should be combined on the May ballot. She said that at last night's meeting it was agreed to bundle them. The 3rd – Pierce school is not included since that renovation will be funded from Parkman and State agency money.

The Driscoll & Baldwin projects form more than 2/3rds of the project – the Baldwin School will house 27 classrooms for regular education and increased need from South Brookline. She said that the anticipated increase with the Hancock Village expansion is estimated at 200 additional students. Also, Baldwin will include pupils from South of Route 9 and Chestnut Hill plus Special Ed and ESL students bused from all parts of the town. The Driscoll expansion will result in 8-10 new classrooms as well as renovating the boiler and modernizing the space for current classroom needs. Driscoll along with Pierce - projected to add 4 classrooms - will serve the extra needs of North Brookline.

The subject of the Newbury College land versus Baldwin School was raised. Nancy said that they are not even sure if we could get the land or how we could fund it. She said that it could take 11-17 years to try and solve all of the associated problems. Also the Newbury site is 2 blocks from Runkle School and close to Heath School. This would put 3 schools in a very small radius and in an area with few children. This would mean more bussing and less walking. Baldwin is more walkable. Also, delaying building schools increases the cost greatly.

Nancy then brought up electric scooters. She said that the contract for them has been approved. There are concerns about their use on sidewalks. She said that users must drive in the bike lanes and park them on the tree lawn, not the sidewalk. If you see them on the sidewalk or parked on the tree lawn for more than 2 hours, take a photo and send it to the company. The company's phone number will be on each scooter. She said that the town will be monitoring them closely during the pilot period of April 1 – November 1. The town really wants to know of any problems.

A question was asked about private scooters. Nancy said that they are also required to use the bike lanes. However, handicapped scooters can use the sidewalk.

Report from School Committee: Barbara Scotto – Barbara added a few more pieces of information to Nancy's report on the school renovations. She said that if we went with the Newbury College site, we would be talking about at least 5 years for the planning stage again and it wouldn't solve the current

problem. She said that the current building and number of classrooms is very limited and that the Town can only do one renovation at a time using funds from MSBA. Now that Coolidge Corner (Devotion) is done, we can apply for Pierce, but will be waiting until June for the final answer. It is expected that it will be 4-5 years for completion.

She also said that there are ten 40B proposals in the pipeline, some of which are anticipated to have large numbers of children.

Nancy said that yes, we should buy the Newbury land. She and Ruthann had been talking about the potential of having additional Senior Center space there as a satellite location.

Report from Director: Ruthann Dobek - Ruthann started by thanking everyone for speaking out during the discussion with Leigh Jackson from the Recreation Department. Ruthann said that it is our job to identify the gaps and continue to work to solve the issues for the 12,000+ Brookline seniors. Letters of support for recreation activities for seniors need to be articulate and our voices loud!

She also announced that in addition to the trips being cut, that CDBG funding for BETS has been cut by 25%. The reason cited is that the taxi industry has declined. However, this decline should not be on the backs of seniors.

1. March 28th @ 3 pm TRIPPS event – Some TRIPPS events are being held to help fill the Recreation Department’s gaps. Maria Foster and Barbara Keane recently led an MBTA trip to *Eatily*. There is also funding for a trip to the new Fisher Hill Park. We were asked to write our ideas and send them along to Barbara or Maria.
2. Update on Senior Tax Aid Program - There is a small amount (\$5,000) to alleviate financial real estate tax burden for seniors. So far, no one has applied for the funds. Application can be made at the COA or at the Assessor’s office.
3. Income Tax Season Ends – Many seniors have been disappointed in the decrease in their tax refund this year. Ruthann stressed that this is NOT the AARP workers’ fault. It has been caused by the new tax rules. In addition to our few remaining appointments, some appointments are still available at the Brookline Library.
4. Program Updates – Ruthann urged everyone to take and read the monthly Newsletter.
 - a. March is Social Work Month- Theme is “Elevate Social Work”
 - b. Piatagorsky Concert Saturday March 23rd at 1:00 pm – Richard Dowling, pianist and Erika Wueschner, soprano will be featured
 - c. Elvis Program Monday, March 25th at 1:00 pm
 - d. Rainbow Meetup film, ‘CLOUDBURST’ Thursday, March 28th at 6:00 pm
 - e. Dr. Suzanne Salamon Program- April 2nd @ 1-2 pm
 - f. Deidre’s Enhancing Connections in Aging Program- Tuesdays in April from 3-4:30
5. Candidates Afternoon at Senior Center April 30th @ 4pm
6. State Rep Tommy Vitolo Meet & Greet April 4th at 10:00 am- office hours – an opportunity for funding for seniors and transportation – his focus.

7. Volunteer Luncheon- April 10th – Invitations and nomination requests will be mailed later this week. Please RSVP as soon as possible.
8. Annual Survey of Volunteers – Patricia reported that to date she had received 115 completed surveys. She asked that anyone who had not submitted theirs yet, should do so by the end of next week (March 22) so she could analyze the results. She did note that thus far most who replied were 80 or above, that most said that they exercised 3 times each week for at least 30 minutes, the top exercise activities were walking, strength training, yoga and balance classes, and that having more trips and outings would help them increase their activity.
9. Rideshare Revenue – Ruthann said that the COA is going to apply for some of the Uber and LYFT rideshare tax. We will submit our proposal in June and it will be voted on at the Town Meeting in November.
10. Age-Friendly Business Filmed at Eureka – This film will air on Channel 2 next week
11. Refrigerator Fund Update – Ruthann thanked this group for their generosity and fundraising. Brookline Bank has generously offered to pay the balance. The new refrigerator should arrive by the Volunteer Luncheon.
12. *Lovin' Spoonfuls* – last year they delivered 88,000 pounds of food to the Food Pantry at BSC.

Handouts- Articles

- a. *Enhancing Connections in Aging* flyer
- b. *Uber and Lyft are Losing Money* article
- c. *Aging and Driving in the 21st Century* article
- d. *Who Are You Calling Senior?* article

OUR NEXT MEETING: *Wednesday, April 10, 2019 @ the Annual Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon*

Yolanda asked for a motion for the meeting to be adjourned at 2:20. It was so moved and seconded.

Respectfully submitted by Patricia Burns