

**Minutes for COUNCIL ON AGING Meeting
May 8, 2019**

PRESENT: COA Members: Jean Doherty, John Mulhane, Sherry Lee, Muriel Stark, Judith Chasin, Barbara Scotto, Nancy Heller, Yolanda Rodriguez, Rita d'Entrement, Clara Chin, William Wong, Doris Toby Axelrod, Joanne Katz, Roberta Winitzer, Pat Ahlin, Fran Perler Staff: Ruthann Dobek, Jessica Milley-Gee, Julie Washburn and Patricia Burns. Public: Marcia Goldstein, Joyce Wishnick, Claire Slater, Monique Richardson, Asya Zimbov, Ian Lang, Kathy Turner 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 1:01 pm.

ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES OF THE APRIL 10th MEETING: A motion was passed and seconded to accept the minutes of the April 10th meeting. No changes or comments were offered. It was unanimously voted to accept these minutes.

INTRODUCTION: Yolanda introduced the guest speaker for today: Ian Lang, Executive Director of the Brookline Center for Community Mental Health

TOPIC: Brookline Community Health Center – One of Our Important Community Partners: Introduction by the New Executive Director

Ian started by thanking the COA for inviting him to speak today. He has been the Executive Director for the Brookline Center for Community Mental Health (BCCMH) for about 18 months. He said that he feels like an infant relative to others who have been there for 38 - 40 years. He noted that he sees this session as more of a conversation than a talk. This fits with the mission of the BCCMH that serves the community and is always seeking ways to serve the community better, expand our reach and improve access to our services.

Ruthann asked Ian to give us a bit of his background. He said that he is originally from Rhode Island where he started in government and politics, which is a good foundation for his current position. He worked on a campaign for Lincoln Chafee, then in mental health for the Providence Center working on advocacy and community relations, helped build the Health Exchange for Obamacare, and collaborated on development of Health Resources for Rhode Island and Care New England, both guides to outpatient mental health. Ian was recruited after Cindy Price retired. He lives in Natick with his wife and two children and is active in his community and as a coach for his son's baseball team.

Ian then gave a brief overview of BCCMH. It has been in existence for more than 60 years and aims to provide affordable and high quality services to residents from 3 – 90 years old. The main offices are on Garrison Road in Brookline, but they are also active in the Brookline schools and the Hebrew Senior Life buildings. They continue to be focused on providing mental health services where the people are. Their newest partnership is with Pine Manor College that has many 1st generation college students who take advantage of BCCMH's services.

Prior to the 1950s and 60s, people requiring mental health support were institutionalized. After that time mental health was recognized as an illness that could be treated.

Two challenges are payments and remaining a smaller community-based entity. Unlike many other mental health facilities, BCCMH does accept insurance, although reimbursements do not cover all of the fees. Also BCCMH aims to remain as a community-based organization and not be taken over by a large corporation. BCCMH gets some funding from the Town and also some donations from residents. BCCMH works with the police, schools, housing, COA and individuals.

BCCMH sees 4,000 outpatient clients each year, 55% of whom are adults and 45% are children. In addition to social workers, they have a doctor and a nurse practitioner on staff giving both individual and group services.

Ian then asked for suggestions on areas where they could play a bigger role. Concerns and suggestions included:

- Individual and group support for seniors who live alone and do not have relatives close by for decision-making and resources for senior issues including hospice. Ian said that this concept has been started with Hebrew Senior Life facilities and will be expanded elsewhere.
- Resource listings for finding providers and especially those who do accept insurance for mental health services. Ian said that about 50% of mental health providers do not accept insurance since they would not get enough reimbursement to cover the cost of the service.
- Meeting people where they are – many seniors can manage occasional appointment transportation, but cannot manage transportation to regular weekly or monthly appointments. Ian said that BCCMH does provide some in-home services and is hoping to continue breaking down the barriers of payment and access to receiving services.
- Facing possibility of not surviving an operation or treatment – another topic for group or individual support for seniors living alone. Ian said that perhaps some of the Town support could help pay for this using BCCMH's trained staff.
- Safety Net Program – Ian described this program for those who were not familiar with it. It has been in existence for at least 10 years and is funded by the Brookline Foundation. The funds are meant to cover unusual rent, medical or essential appliance replacement costs up to \$800-\$1,000/year. Eligibility includes Brookline residency, and income level, although it is situation specific. Ian then said that most people who lose housing owe less than \$1,000. For most, \$1,000 - \$1,500 would prevent the person from becoming homeless.
- Senior loneliness and senior pride were raised. The common impression is that everyone in Brookline is making out okay. It is hard for seniors, especially those who have been independent all their lives, to admit that they need help. It was suggested that we observe our neighbors and encourage them to come to the Senior Center. They might find things that they did not know that they needed.
- It was suggested that perhaps, BCCMH could write up a small item for the COA News & Events telling what their services are in addition to having some of their brochures available in the BSC.
- Ian said that they are always looking for ways to get the word out. We were assured that BCCMH's services are listed in our Senior Resource Guide. One senior at the meeting said that she has lived in Brookline for many years and this was the first time that she knew about BCCMH. She said that she wished she had known it when her husband needed adult day care

and her child was in school. She said that Brookline High School did not mention it to her. There needs to be more knowledge about their services in the community.

- Requests for contributions for BCCMH – Ian said that they had just held their annual fundraiser and had done well. He said that 50-60% of their costs were covered by paid fees for service. Other money came from grants from the Town and private organizations as well as efforts of their development team. Ian said that while stable leadership is great because these people know lots of people who might contribute and think that they know every possible source, it can result in stagnant expansion. Bringing in new people can bring new ideas and avenues for more funding.

Yolanda then thanked Ian and Kathy Turner for coming and reiterated that perhaps a weekly group that met for 4 weeks to discuss these and other senior mental health issues would be a good start.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

- **Springwell Report** – Yolanda said that the new Spring Springwell Newsletter is out. This issue focuses on programs to support caregivers. She also said that the search for a replacement CEO that started in January is taking much longer than anticipated. They have hired a search firm to help.
- **Committees Report** – Yolanda said that a list of committees was handed out at a previous meeting. There have been some new members added, but there are still 2 committees that need more members. They are Recreation & Transportation. There will be a Recreation meeting on May 22nd @ 3 pm. The Transportation Committee met a few weeks ago and had a strong presence. In answer to a question, Ruthann said that anyone interested could attend as these are open meetings and that COA Board Membership was not required. Ruthann mentioned that the Redecorating Committee and their work have been temporarily put on hold due to funding.
- Yolanda urged everyone to pick up a packet of 30 recipes for April that was put out by the Department of Health for Public Health week.

Report from Select Board: Nancy Heller – Nancy said that in addition to all the pre-election and election work, the Select Board has also been working through public hearings for the 30 warrants. Some are routine and others are more complex. One warrant is for better lighting at crosswalks for seniors. She said that she would report on the warrants at the June COA meeting.

Nancy confirmed that the voters had spoken and the override voted against the funding for the bundled 9th elementary school. She said that bundling was a problem, but that another override would potentially be created for Driscoll School renovations alone. She reminded us that this renovation would not be enough as it would only add 10 classrooms. When asked why there had not been a dollar amount written into the override question, she said that it is not allowed in a straight override, but this had been bundled with the Debt Exclusion and therefore could have had a \$ amount. She said that Baldwin renovations were estimated at \$83 million and Driscoll @ \$110 million. One attendee said that it is not that residents don't want a new school, but that owners cannot afford the increase in taxes.

Nancy also said that there is no firm idea if Newbury College can be acquired. If it can be, it would need an additional override as there is no money to purchase it in the current budget unless enormous cuts to existing programs were made.

There is an elaborate proposal for a 10-12 story hotel and housing building to be built in Coolidge Corner. She reminded us that hotels are good as they do not use services or schools and they do pay taxes. When asked about the previously named Holiday Inn that appears to be changing, she said that they are just changing names and renovating, but not building up or selling at this time.

A meeting attendee asked how we could get potholes fixed as she had not gotten any response from several phone calls. Nancy said that she had experienced the same lack of response, but was told to file the complaint on-line not by phone. Another attendee concurred and said that they were much quicker to attend to issues if noted on line as they put the date of the complaint and how long the issue was on-line until fixed.

Report from School Committee: Barbara Scotto – Barbara added to Nancy’s discussion about the election. She said that the lack of passing the override and the loss of David Pollock, an architect who had worked on the School Building Commission for 10-12 years, were devastating. She said the override situation had sent the 9th school project back to square one from about 10 years ago. She added that there has been a 40% increase in children needing schools in Brookline over the last 10-12 years. While the School Committee was sympathetic to increased taxes for homeowners, the problem of where to fit the increasing number of students must be addressed. While an annual increase of 2 ½ % is allowed each year, costs are much higher. An attendee noted that her taxes and evaluations are going up more and more every year. Nancy said that real estate evaluations are done every three years. Brookline rates are lower than other towns, but our evaluations are higher. This is an advantage when selling.

Barbara also said that the State has mandated that Brookline must change the conditions for Special Needs students whose classrooms are currently undersized and inadequate. If we do not ‘find’ mandated classrooms for Special Ed, we will have to either rent space off campus or place these children ‘out of district’ at the Town’s expense. This will likely mean cutting the budget including the COA budget.

If all overrides passed, it could mean an increase in real estate taxes of 30%. We cannot increase taxes more than 2 ½ % without an override, but can increase evaluations.

She said that we have had some savings from the budgeted amount. We had forecast a conservative 5% interest on the bonds in the budget for BHS, but the actual was 2.97%. We also borrow as plans come up and not all at once at the beginning of the project, thus saving on interest costs.

When asked about city planning and who decides growth in Brookline, Nancy said that there are more and more families moving in with young school-age children. This is forcing seniors out. Why approve high income condos and not modestly priced units for elders?

Another attendee asked why for example a large home in South Brookline was assessed at a lower amount than a 1,000 square foot condo in Coolidge Corner. Nancy said that it depended on zoning, how homes could be divided and 40B units that are exempt from 2 ½ % increase.

Finally, Nancy was asked what the rate of voters was for this election. She said that it was between 25-29%, which is surprisingly higher than usual for Town elections.

Report from Director: Ruthann Dobek -

1. Transportation Update– Ruthann reported that there had been a positive 1st meeting with the Transportation Board. Uber & Lyft must pay \$.20 surcharge. \$.10 will go to the Town and \$.10 will go to the State. BSC has asked for some of these funds to expand transportation options for older adults including TRIPPS and/or subsidized ride share. This will go before the Advisory Committee and the Select Board with final vote in November @ Town meeting.
2. Update on Senior Tax Aid Program – This fund set up to assist people who are having difficulty paying their RE taxes consisted of \$5,000 the first year. A number of people have applied. Applications are in process of being reviewed.
3. Review of Scooter Meeting, May 6th – Heather Hamilton from the Select Board attended the meeting. She is a proponent of the scooters. It was noted that neither the police nor transportation attended the meeting and that the police are not enforcing the age and helmet rules. There will be another meeting in June. All were urged to put complaints and photos in the email provided. It was further stated that the State rules about scooters are really about mopeds and that we need more definitive rules for e-scooters. The police do not want to support them and say that they were not asked to be involved in the pilot. They feel that the enforcement is costly. We were all shocked to learn that the State does not require helmets for any bicycle rider over 16. One attendee said that the scooters ARE being ridden on the sidewalk. Since we have spent millions for bike lanes, they should be using them!
4. Recreation Update – Ruthann was happy to report that the Recreation Department has agreed to add an Older Active Adult section to their quarterly catalog of events. They will be adding more in the summer catalog. Ruthann will let us know when she gets the list.
 - a. Subcommittee on Recreation meeting is scheduled for **Wednesday, May 22nd @ 3:00 pm**
5. Review of John Leland – Patricia read the quotes from John Leland
“Thanks, Ruthann. It was an exhilarating group. You must be doing something right! For all the stresses of modern traffic, it really was a moving event, with a great group of people. What characters! I could start the series anew with people at the Senior Center that evening.”
6. Program Updates – Ruthann urged everyone to take and read the monthly Newsletter.
 - a. Health Literacy presentation ,**Thursday, May 16th @ 6:00 pm**
 - b. Telling Your Story Annual Reading, **Wednesday, May 22nd @ 10:15 am**
 - c. Estate Planning presentation, **Wednesday, May 29th @ 1:00 pm**
 - d. June Shredding event – **June 3rd**
7. Review of Candidates Afternoon and Election – Thanks for voting and acting politically!
8. House Worker Position Update - This position is for the assistant custodian, Sergio who is currently being paid from grants. The Advisory Committee voted 17 to 0 in favor of having this position under the Town budget. The hours can be increased to cover our numerous after hours and weekend activities as needed. The Town Administrator recommended that the position be funded.
9. Volunteer Survey Results –Highlights were given at the Volunteer Luncheon. More comprehensive results are posted on our webpage and are available as handouts today.
10. Home Modification Loan Program – (available as handouts)
11. Paula Span Article – (available as handouts)
12. Pride Month Celebration & Happy Mother’s Day –
 - a. Pride Month – many activities here at the BSC and at other venues such as the Tea Dance @ the old Holiday Inn. BSC is a sponsor of this event and we have a few tickets. Another event is Stonewall History.

- b. Sunday, Mother's Day – Ruthann gave warm greetings and thanks for our mothers who have taught us so many things including being involved in our community.
- c. May 29th @ 10 am – 50th Anniversary of the JFK house being acquired by the National Park Service.

Handouts- Articles

- a. Volunteer Survey results
- b. Wall St. Journal's "The Case Against Early Retirement"
- c. Home Modification Loan flyer
- d. LGBTQ+ Resources Packet
- e. Paula Span's Ageism Article
- f. Health Week Recipe Packet

OUR NEXT MEETING: Wednesday, June 12th, 2019 with guest speaker Maria Foster from TRIPPS

Yolanda asked for a motion for the meeting to be adjourned at 2:26. It was so moved and seconded.

Respectfully submitted by Patricia Burns