

Minutes for COUNCIL ON AGING Hybrid Meeting

MAY 10, 2023 - 1:00 PM

via Zoom and in-person at Senior Center Room 304

PRESENT: ZOOM: COA Members: Jean Doherty, Sigalle Reiss, Soo Moy, Clara Chin, John VanScoyoc

Staff: Jessica Milley-Gee **Public:** Murray Kiok, Perry Grossman, and others

SENIOR CENTER ROOM 304: COA Members: Yolanda Rodriguez, Joanne Katz, Sherry Lee, Marsha Goldstein, Enid Lieber, Judy Chasin, John Mulhane, Helen Lew, Monique Richardson, Fran Perler, Rosaline Lowe, Joyce Wishnick **Staff:** Ruthann Dobek, Jamie Jensen, Freddi Langenthal, Sharon Sandalow, Olga Sliwa, Barbara Rabinovitz, Kristine Farley, **Public:** Claire Weston, Helen Liu, Lydia Kaufman

WELCOME: Yolanda Rodriguez, COA Chair, welcomed all remote and in-person participants, and expressed thanks to all for attending the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER: Yolanda called the meeting to order at 1:03 PM

ROLL CALL OF ATTENDEES: Jamie Jensen read the names of those in attendance as of 1:03 PM (see above list of attendees)

OPEN DISCUSSION: Yolanda opened the meeting to participant discussion and topics not included on the agenda. No topics were introduced for discussion.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES: A motion passed to accept the minutes of the January 11, 2023 and March 8, 2023 hybrid meetings. Minutes were accepted by unanimous vote with the addition of participant Helen Lew to minutes from January 11, 2023. April 19, 2023 did not require a vote, as these were notes from the Volunteer Appreciation Event.

INTRODUCTION TO GUEST SPEAKER: Yolanda welcomed and introduced Jody Kelley, Lead Organizer for Older Adult Housing Stability Campaign at MA Coalition for the Homeless

TOPIC: Support for the Adoption of an Upstream Homelessness Prevention Initiative for Low-Income Older Adult Renters

Jody thanked the Council for the invitation to speak and provided a brief personal background. Main presentation points included:

- The mission of the MA Coalition for the Homeless, which believes that homelessness can be resolved by supplying safe, affordable, permanent housing for the lowest income households and providing opportunities for families, individuals, and youth to build economic stability. To achieve these goals, the Coalition and its members undertake campaigns in support of affordable housing, homelessness prevention, income and benefit programs, and access to education.
- The Older Adult Housing Stability Campaign at MA Coalition for the Homeless has been working for a year on a “democratic bridge subsidy” for individuals that are on the waitlist for state or federally funded public housing.
- Homelessness among older adults is expected to nearly triple by 2030.
- Over the next 16 years, households in their 80s will be the fastest-growing age group.
- The number of retirement-age households facing cost burdens has reached an all-time high.
- Older households with very low incomes are expected to climb sharply as the population ages.

- 61.7% of the Commonwealth’s residents older than 65 who live alone do not have enough income to cover basic expenses such as housing, food, and health care. It is even more dire for older adults of color: 91% of Latinx, 78% of Asian American, and 72% of African American older adults living alone cannot cover their basic expenses.

The proposed solution(s) by the Older Adult Housing Stability Campaign are:

- Embed a housing stability screening tool into the Common Housing Application for Massachusetts Programs (CHAMP) that would be taken at the time an older adult applies for state-funded senior housing through the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).
- Create a bridge subsidy to offset rent costs and allow older adult renters to be stably housed, targeting low-income older adults who without this housing assistance likely would become unsheltered before their name comes up on a state-funded senior housing waiting list. The ask is for \$10 million for 1,000 subsidies.
- Provide funding through the Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA) to contract with a nonprofit agency (or agencies) that would take on the task of reviewing the housing stability screenings, as well as offer older adults legal aid assistance and access to Housing Advocates to ensure that at-risk older adults receive ongoing housing stabilization assistance until they move into state-funded senior housing or other safe, permanent housing.
- The Coalition can help facilitate meetings between constituents and legislators like Senator Cynthia Creem
- To get involved or to support this initiative, contact Robyn Frost, Executive Director, at 781-595-7570 x12 or robyn@mahomeless.org , or go to www.mahomeless.org/advocacy to learn more.

Jody Kelley (she/her/hers), Lead Organizer for Older Adult Housing Stability Campaign MA Coalition for the Homeless
 Office: 781-595-7570 x19
jody@mahomeless.org

Jody welcomed participant questions and comments, including:

- *How would the 1,000 bridge subsidies be distributed?*
 A: While the coalition does not have control over the distribution of vouchers, they will advocate for geographic equity in distribution.
- *Are there any lead senators who have already signed on to the bill?*
 A: The Coalition has been working closely with Senator Jalen and other representatives who are supportive of the bridge subsidy.
- *Suggestion to contact MA State Representative Tommy Vitolo*
- *Suggestion to use volunteers (social workers or community members) to help with outreach*

Ruthann urged those interested in advocacy and in contacting legislators around important issues to reach out to Ruthann or Yolanda about joining a committee for such activities.

Yolanda and Ruthann thanked Jody for an informative presentation.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

A. Nominating Report—Yolanda Rodriguez

Yolanda made a call for nominations to the Council on Aging Board that will be reviewed and submitted to

the Select Board in August 2023 for approval. All those interested, or those with individuals to suggest should contact Yolanda or Ruthann.

B. Springwell Report- Judith Chasin

Judy Chasin reported that Springwell is still seeking volunteers to help with a variety of activities including serving hot meals/ delivering meals, answering phones, and grocery shopping for homebound persons.

Springwell just received the grant funding for their program in partnership with Newton-Wellesley Hospital that will help those who wish to go home directly after being in the hospital rather than having to go to a facility for recuperation.

C. Recreation Report

Fran Perler urged those interested to sign up for pickleball, and to attend the hybrid meeting this evening, May 10, at Town Hall from 6-8PM, and to attend Brookline's second-annual Spring Fest on Saturday, May 20th at Olmsted Park, Allerton Overlook from 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM.

Ruthann reported that Josh Cooke has taken on a new role within the Recreation Department, and will be training the new liaison to the COA from the department.

Jamie Jensen reported on an upcoming meeting on Tuesday, May 16 at 11:00 AM for those interested in organizing an active walking group at the Senior Center.

D. Redesign Report—Yolanda Rodriguez

Yolanda reported on the new chairs throughout the Senior Center, and electronic board at the entryway of the Center. The board will display the daily schedule, photos, and any other information the Center would like to highlight for participants.

Ruthann report on a forthcoming painting by an artist contracted with Eversource to beautify the utility box in front of the Senior Center building, and thanked those volunteers that care for the outdoor plants and flowers.

REPORT FROM SELECT BOARD – John VanScoyoc

John reported on the following:

- The Town of Brookline swore in new Police Chief, Jen Paster. Chief Paster is the first female Police Chief to serve the Town of Brookline.
- The Pierce School Debt Exclusion was approved by voters at the May 3 Town Election.
- The Select Board is working to finalize the Town budget for FY24, which may include additional funding for the Senior Center, as well as the addition of making one of the COA part-time clinical social work positions a full-time position.
- During the budget process, the Advisory Committee took a strong advocacy position on behalf of providing additional funding for the Council on Aging.
- John was reelected as Vice-Chair of the Select Board. Bernard Greene was reelected as Chair of the Select Board. Paul Warren was elected as new member of the Select Board.

John praised the Senior Center's Candidate's Afternoon pre-election event, noting its importance in keeping constituents informed.

REPORT FROM THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE –Nancy Rhei Gorer

No report today- Nancy not present at meeting.

REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR – Ruthann Dobek

Ruthann reported on the following:

- **Update on Town Election**

Paul Warren was elected to serve on the Select Board as a new member, and COA member Fran Perler was elected Town Meeting Member. The Council on Aging is grateful and appreciative of new Brookline Police Chief Jen Paster, who will be featured in an interview in the Around Town section of June's Brookline Beacon.

- **Freddi Langenthal's Retirement**

-Longtime Council on Aging clinical social worker Freddi Langenthal will retire effective June 30, 2023. Freddi has been a valuable member of the COA social work team, and has gone above and beyond in advocating for hundreds of older adult clients through the years. The Council on Aging wishes Freddi all the best in retirement.

-Yolanda read a tribute to Freddi from one of Freddi's former clients—a 97 year old Brookline resident.

-The COA will be seeking to hire a new social work staff following Freddi's retirement.

- **Sophia's Letter**

Yolanda read a letter of gratitude from former COA social work student intern Sophia, who attends the Simmons School of Social Work.

- **Older American's Month**

May is Older Americans Month, and the theme for 2023 is Aging Unbound. This year's theme offers an opportunity to explore diverse aging experiences and discuss how communities can combat stereotypes.

- **AAPI Heritage Month/ AAPI Day**

Brookline's Asian-American and Pacific Islander Day celebration is May 20, 10:00 AM-3:30 PM. The AAPI Heritage Day event is the result of a Resolution passed unanimously by Brookline Town Meeting, co-sponsored by BAAFN, designating May as AAPI Heritage Month and establishing an official Town celebration.

- **FY24 Budget Process Update**

-Town Meeting will vote on the COA budget. The Advisory Committee has supported funding a 10-year Strategic Plan for the COA. This Strategic Plan would ensure that the needs of a shifting demographic are taken into account in planning the next 10 years of programs and services for older adults, and allow the COA to cope, strategize, and come up with solutions.

- Other budget-related asks include funding for a full-time clinical social work position, and funding for subsidized transportation.

- **Tech Buddies Program**

The COA received \$20k award from Brookline Community Foundation to distribute tablets to low-income older adults. More tablets are available, and the eligibility for this program has been broadened.

Annie Braudy is directing the program- those interested should reach out for more information at abraudy@brooklinema.gov or 617-383-7525

- **Update on Various Projects**
 - a. Etsy update: \$8620 in revenue from 179 orders since start of shop
 - b. Glass Display- 1st floor display currently showing items from the Brookline Bazaar Etsy shop. If anyone has a collection to display, see Jamie.
 - c. Stop and Shop continues to send the COA donations from its *Bloomin' 4 Good* program. Whenever a *Bloomin' 4 Good* reusable bag or floral bouquet is purchased at the Stop & Shop location during the designated period, the Senior Center receives a portion of the proceeds.

- **Program Updates**
 - COVID Vaccine Clinic (run by Brookline Department of Public Health) June 5 from 10:00AM-12:00 PM
 - June 15: Senior Center Yard Sale

- **Recycling Updates**
 - a. Restart of the Hazardous Waste Program, now known as Universal Waste Program from May-October
 - b. Textile drive brought in over 3,000 lbs of textiles to be recycled
 - c. Shredding event will be June 8 from 12:00-3:00 PM

NEXT HYBRID MEETING- WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14 at 1:00 PM

Ruthann and Yolanda wished all a Happy Mother's Day, highlighting the importance of grandparents in helping raise and inform future generations.

Yolanda motioned to adjourn the meeting at 2:04 PM. It was so moved and seconded.

Respectfully submitted by Jessica Milley-Gee.