

**Minutes for COUNCIL ON AGING REMOTE MEETING  
MAY 12, 2021 - 1:00 PM via ZoomGov**

**PRESENT: COA Members:** Yolanda Rodriguez, Judith Chasin, Jean Doherty, Doris Toby Axlerod, Fran Perler, Helen Lew, John Mulhane, Barbara Kean, Rosaline Lowe, William Wong, Saul Feldman, Martha Schieve, Pat Ahlin, Sherry Lee, Clara Chin **Public:** Michael Alperin (guest speaker), Rina Jacobson, Ellen Zellner, Monique Richardson, John Harris, and other members of the public **Staff:** Ruthann Dobek, Julie Washburn, Jamie Jensen, Jessica Milley-Gee

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

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

Jessica Milley-Gee read through the names of those in attendance as of 1:03 PM (see above list of attendees)

**ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES OF THE APRIL 14th, 2021 REMOTE MEETING:** A motion was passed to accept the minutes of the April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021 remote meeting with the addition of Helen Lew to the list of members present at the April meeting. It was unanimously voted to accept these minutes with the aforementioned edit.

**INTRODUCTION:** Yolanda introduced the guest speaker, Executive Director at Brookline Housing Authority Michael Alperin.

**TOPIC:** Meet the Executive Director/ Updates from Brookline Housing Authority (BHA)

Michael Alperin thanked the COA for allowing the opportunity to speak. Michael gave a brief personal introduction as a Brookline resident and former Town Meeting Member, and described the role of Executive Director at BHA as focusing on building, preserving, and enhancing affordable housing in Brookline. Michael entered into this role in August 2020.

Michael shared a map of the Coolidge Corner area (see Attachment A) that indicated all BHA family housing developments (orange), as well as BHA housing developments for seniors and Disabled Individuals (purple), revealing that the BHA currently manages 966 units across all developments. Michael reported that:

- 160 households within BHA family housing have older adult members (65+) who have aged-in-place as residents in BHA family housing
- There are currently 492 residents housed in BHA housing for seniors and Disabled Individuals. These housing developments include Kickham Apartments at 149 Harvard Street, 150 Amory Street, Morse Apartments at 90 Longwood, O’Shea House at 61 Park Street, Sussman House at 50 Pleasant Street, Col. Floyd apartments at 32 Marion Street, and a subset of townhouse units for seniors located at 24 Walnut Street
- 20% of the aforementioned BHA units are designated for Disabled Individuals and 80% are age-restricted apartments for individuals 62+
- BHA engages Springwell as a third-party service provider to provide community engagement activities and one-on-one services such as wellness checks, counseling, and Meals on Wheels to residents.
- BHA additionally provides Section 8 and rental vouchers to low-income households that qualify as below 50% median income

-any individual accessing Section 8 or rental vouchers pays 30% of their income, and federal and state programs pay the remainder.

Michael described the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) government program that was created in order to give public housing authorities (PHAs) a powerful tool to preserve and improve public housing properties and address the \$26 billion dollar nationwide backlog of deferred maintenance. RAD also gives owners of three HUD "legacy" programs (Rent Supplement, Rental Assistance Payment, and Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation) the opportunity to enter into long-term contracts that facilitate the financing of improvements.

Michael described BHA development plans to provide major renovations to all current BHA housing, as well as plans to enhance resident services (see Attachment B for accompanying slides) including:

- The complete “gutting” and renovation of 61 Park Street and 90 Longwood locations to provide better ADA compliance and enhanced amenities for residents (including communal kitchens, new furniture, and central air and heat).
- A \$270k+ renovation cost per housing unit
- The Col. Floyd Redevelopment Project which will see the demolition and redevelopment of the currently defunct Col. Floyd apartments. This two-phase project will include:
  - a \$6.5million inclusionary development commitment from the Town of Brookline
  - 115 units of permanent affordable housing exclusively for elderly and Disabled Individuals
  - 60 renovated and 55 new units
  - Modern apartments with improved common spaces and on-site services (including fitness center, doctor’s offices, and library)
  - a front drop-off area and parking in the rear

Michael reported that parallel to the Col. Floyd redevelopment project, BHA will be undertaking major renovations of Sussman House over the next 2-3 years.

Michael welcomed participant questions:

*Ruthann Dobek requested additional information on BHA, broadband internet service, and other new technological methods of connecting families and seniors, as BHA and COA are working on this issue.*

Michael reiterated the commonly-voiced opinion that access to affordable, high-quality internet is now a necessity for residents across the age spectrum. Michael reported that any Brookline resident who qualifies has access to a monthly \$50 subsidy for internet connection via The Federal Communications Commission’s subsidy program, the Emergency Broadband Benefit. The program also allows for a one-time \$100 subsidy for a laptop or tablet. See the following link for more information and qualifications:

<https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit>.

Michael reported that BHA is in the process of working with internet provider Starry to provide a higher quality, low-cost internet alternative to residents. Residents would pay \$15/month for access to this specific connection.

*John Harris: What percentage of subsidies for all BHA programs comes from federal government, state government, and local property taxes?*

Michael reported that BHA has a mix of federal and state public housing units. Of the total number of BHA

units, 394 are state public housing, and the remainder is federal or financed through the federal Section 8 program. No public housing money comes from the Town of Brookline, though the Town provides support in the way of 0% interest predevelopment cost loans up to \$400k, and in waiving various permit fees. Additionally, BHA pays a lower real estate tax rate than other private owners. Of the total BHA budget of \$36 million, approximately \$3.9 million comes from state government and the remainder comes from the federal government.

*Pat Ahlin: What is the eligibility for BHA housing residents? Are Brookline residents prioritized? What do the terms 'all-affordable', 'subsidized', and 'market-rate' mean? What do prospective applicants need to know?*

Michael stated that BHA developments contain 100% affordable units. Those eligible for “affordable” housing must be certified as making less than 80% of the median income. Once in BHA housing, individuals will pay 30% of their certified income in rent, up to market cost. Certain types of BHA housing vouchers target individuals qualifying below 30% of median income in Brookline.

*Martha Schieve: Will the inclusion of new and expanded community rooms be incorporated into other BHA buildings such as Sussman House?*

Michael explained that restrictive local zoning laws prohibit expansion on other sites such as Sussman. BHA must not reduce the number of current units on each building site, posing an issue relative to expansion.

Michael expressed enthusiasm and support for the potential Senior Center expansion project in partnership with Hebrew SeniorLife (HSL) at 108 Centre Street, revealing that he is on the HSL Board.

**OPEN DISCUSSION:** Yolanda opened the meeting to participant discussion and topics not included on the agenda. No additional remarks or topics were offered.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

No Nominating, Redesign, Select Board, or School Committee reports today.

**Recreation Report**—Fran Perler reported that the Senior Center is exploring the possibility of hosting outdoor ping pong. A proposal will be drafted and presented to the Brookline Health Department for review. Fran expressed hope that use of the BSC fitness center will continue to expand with the scaling up of Senior Center operations in the coming months.

Yolanda reported that Josh Cooke from the Town’s Recreation Department has returned and will be working with the COA to develop and promote future programs.

**Springwell Report**— Yolanda reported that the \$90,000 grant that Springwell received from MassDevelopment, needs to be used before the October deadline. With the financial support of this grant, Springwell has partnered with Alternative Transportation Systems to create a no-cost transportation resource for individuals age 60 and older who live in Springwell’s eight town service area (of which Brookline is a part). This service covers both medical and non-medical transportation needs. For more information or to book a ride, visit <https://alt-trans.com/springwell>, call 617-926-4100, or 857-364-6570.

Yolanda reported that Springwell is holding a (virtual) caregiver workshop with Mary Crowe, LICSW, ACHP-SW of Care Dimensions on Tuesday, May 18<sup>th</sup> from 3-4:00PM entitled “Taking the Mystery Out of Hospice and Palliative Care.” Mary will discuss the common myths and misconceptions of hospice care and provide an

overview of the benefits of hospice and palliative care services. An earlier iteration of this same presentation can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WI7G3Z67ZkM>

## **Report from the Director— Ruthann Dobek**

### **UPDATE ON TOWN ELECTION**

Ruthann reported that as a result of the May 4<sup>th</sup> Town Election, Nancy Heller will no longer serve as Select Board liaison to the COA. Ruthann reiterated that Barbara Scotto chose not to run for a School Committee seat, and as such will no longer serve as Committee liaison to the COA. At the Select Board meeting on Tuesday, May 11<sup>th</sup>, Heather Hamilton was elected Chair, and Hamilton will be assigning Select Board members to town committees in the coming weeks.

### **COVID-19 UPDATE**

Ruthann reported that public gathering within the Senior Center must remain limited in compliance with state and local board of health requirements for physical distancing. Additionally, the COA has continued to work closely with the Town in its vaccine efforts, with a special emphasis on offering vaccine to home-bound residents. The Health Department is still accepting referrals for its home-bound vaccination program—residents can call 617-879-5636 or email [vaccine@brooklinema.gov](mailto:vaccine@brooklinema.gov) with questions or for more information. Ruthann encouraged all to become vaccinated, noting that many pharmacies are now offering COVID-19 vaccines on a walk-in or appointment basis.

### **TRANSPORTATION UPDATE**

Ruthann reiterated the current availability of no-cost transportation to older adults via Springwell and the Council on Aging's TRIPPS program. Those with transportation needs are encouraged to reach out to Community Outreach Specialist Maria Foster at 617-730-2644 or [mfoster@brooklinema.gov](mailto:mfoster@brooklinema.gov).

It was reported that on May 11<sup>th</sup> the Select Board approved Community Development Block Grant funding for the TRIPPS subsidy program in the amount of \$30k. Ruthann reiterated the importance of sustaining pressure to provide funding for TRIPPS as an essential transportation program.

### **BROOKLINE RESTAURANT GRANT FROM SENATOR CYNTHIA CREEM**

Ruthann reported that the current Brookline Restaurant Program funded by a budgetary earmark by Senator Cynthia Creem ended May 12<sup>th</sup>, with hopes to continue the program via private fundraising and a potential grant through Brookline Community Foundation. This highly successful program allowed 11 local restaurants to be paid via the state to provide weekly meals to the Brookline Food Pantry and 50 weekly meals to Brookline Senior Center serving 130 different Senior Center participants. The fundraising campaign to continue the program will be advertised in the Brookline TAB, among other places. More information can be found here: <https://www.brooklinefoodpantry.org/fundraiser---restaurant-program.html>

### **BROOKLINE BAZAAR**

The Senior Center's online gift shop—Brookline Bazaar—continues to do well, and has sold over 60 items, raising over \$2400 in revenue to directly support programming at the Senior Center. To visit the shop, go to: <https://www.etsy.com/shop/BrooklineBazaar> If you are interested in making a donation to the shop, please contact [jmilleygee@brooklinema.gov](mailto:jmilleygee@brooklinema.gov)

### **UPDATE ON PROGRAMS**

Program Manager Jamie Jensen reported on the following programs. Those interested in any of the following should contact Jamie at [jjensen@brooklinema.gov](mailto:jjensen@brooklinema.gov) or 617-730-2753:

- a. **May 13<sup>th</sup>** Q&A on virtual Piatagorsky concert (available via pre-recorded YouTube link)
- b. **May 19<sup>th</sup>** virtual presentation on Prescription Advantage

- c. **May 25<sup>th</sup>** virtual Mandala Workshop sponsored by Goddard House
- d. **Last Thursday of each month:** MetroWest free legal services clinic. Half-hour time slots from 12 4PM
- e. **June 14<sup>th</sup>** 1PM , Nancy Schön, Make Way for Ducklings sculptor will present on new book, “Ducks on Parade” (available on her website: <https://nancyschonsculpture.wixsite.com>) and other works.
- f. **June 29<sup>th</sup> at 3PM** via Zoom, Respected author and New York Times journalist **Paula Span** will give a virtual presentation on new Audible audiobook, *The Bubbe Diaries: True Tales of Grandparenting*.

### **BIG- Steps to Success Intergenerational Program**

A project between Brookline Interactive Group (BIG), Steps to Success, and the Brookline Senior Center is now available for viewing. Four students interviewed four active Council on Aging participants, and their engaging and inspirational stories can be found here: [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL\\_kXbXA0-Qd7Y2r28byeMX9RBCYdQ1uEG](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_kXbXA0-Qd7Y2r28byeMX9RBCYdQ1uEG) This is an ongoing project and is actively recruiting new participants for the next session in July. If you would like to be involved, contact Jamie Jensen at [jjensen@brooklinema.gov](mailto:jjensen@brooklinema.gov) or 617-730-2753.

### **UPDATE ON GRANT PROPOSALS**

Ruthann reported that the COA was recently awarded a grant through Massachusetts Councils on Aging (MCOA) for a pilot program that will provide a year of internet access and/ or a tablet to interested residents, as well as the training and support needed to utilize this technology. A fundraising campaign to sustain this program beyond the pilot is planned. Interested individuals and referrals to this program should be directed to Community Outreach Specialist Maria Foster at 617-730-2644 or [mfoster@brooklinema.gov](mailto:mfoster@brooklinema.gov).

Additionally, the COA is also working with Brookline Emergency Services on a similar “tech-buddy” program to provide internet access and tablets to those in need.

### **STAFF UPDATES**

Ruthann reiterated the promotion of Jamie Jensen to Program Manager and Julie Washburn to Supervisor of Services and Operations at the COA/ Senior Center. An offer to fill the position of Homecare Coordinator has been extended to Katie McClean, LICSW. Katie was a former student intern at the COA. The COA intends to fill all open positions by the end of the current fiscal year.

**NEXT REMOTE MEETING** will be held **JUNE 9, 2021** at **1 PM** via ZoomGov. To join, go to <https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/j/1619578459> and enter Meeting ID: 161 957 8459 or toll call 1-646-828-7666 and enter Meeting ID.

A motion was made for the meeting to be adjourned at 2:09 PM. It was so moved and seconded.

Respectfully submitted by Jessica Milley-Gee

**Attachment A.**

