

**Billerica Council on Aging  
25 Concord Road, Billerica MA  
Board Meeting Minutes**

March 20, 2024, 5:30 pm

**Present:** Jean Patel Bushnell, Kim Conway, Phil Doiron, Gerald Johnson, Mary Jones, Joseph Marino, Marguerite Massey, Bill Neeb, John Pellegrino, Mary Riley, and Mike Riley.

**Absent:** Richard Carroll, Barbara Flaherty

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM by Chair Mary Riley, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence for the sick and departed.

The minutes of the February 12, 2024, meeting accepted as written. M/ Phil Doiron. S/ John Pellegrino - Motion passed.

**COA Director Jean Bushnell reported on the following past activities and events and plans for upcoming months.**

**Partnering**

**DUTILE School Concert:** Huge win on Feb 2 at the COA

**MR. FIX-IT:** Dave Moccia is a great resource to our patrons fixing numerous items per month. They pay for parts and make a \$5 donation to the COA for each item fixed.

**FCOA:** has given us \$1800 for 6 meals during 2024 to help address the nutritional health of our members.

**Planning**

- The story of the new senior center and rec department continues with the latest outcome being a senior center at the current site and the Rec in the PHR vicinity. According to Asst Town Manager, Clancy Main yesterday - *The Select Board voted unanimously to add the COA and Rec to the Town Meeting warrant.*
- On December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the town's facilities master plan had the COA and REC as tier one for strategic study.
  - o A presentation to the Select Board on Monday evening 3/18<sup>th</sup> by David Eisen, Principal of Abacus, Architects and Planners, and others was not well packaged and led to many questions from the audience to include:
    - Why did we rule out Cider Mill, what would that have cost us overall versus the \$41 million current projected combined costs?
    - What is the increased capacity earned by these 2 new buildings and have we planned for growth given that the 60 and older population in Billerica will hit 14,000 by 2040.
    - There was a paucity of information presented on usability of the current library space we inhabit versus the planned building. We will need a well-crafted message and cohesive communications strategy for town meeting and my confidence is maximized by the leaders on this topic being able to deliver the same.
    - Somewhat worrisome is the 5,000 square feet space being proposed as one possible location to drive the BCOA agenda for 22 months as the new COA is being constructed. We are most grateful to Jerry Johnson, Site administrator, First Parish Church, for his efforts to secure space for us there to add to the spoke approach.

I have no doubt that the COA Board will play a vital role in working with the town manager's office and the Select Board to minimize the pain and frustration of staff, volunteers, and patrons during

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the 22 months. There is an allocation of \$1 million in the \$41 million for the new COA/REC to cover the cost of a reasonable interim housing plan for the COA.  
A few points the director focused on in her backing of the new state-of-the-art Active Adult Center were:

- Growing old is a normal and natural part of life.
- The new center represents a hub of active living and a state-of-the-art building that will offer a diverse range of programs and opportunities that foster personal growth, health, friendship, and independence for the 10,000 or so older adults in town. It will allow for innovative and creative programs.
- it will eradicate the negative stereotypes surrounding aging and empower older adults to step into this phase of their lives with a sense of pride and the determination that age will not define them or their abilities.
- as we have seen with other new centers it will spark tremendous growth in participation and membership

**I encourage the Board to continue to line up against ageism. Ageism tells us that growing old is undesirable and we should avoid it, that we no longer have value, and our life is over. *Through the lens of positive aging and the new center we must promulgate the changes that growing older brings and to feel better about the aging process.***

#### **Operations**

**BUDGET FY2025:** Pain free, successful meeting with the town manager's team on Jan 11<sup>th</sup>.  
**NEW MARKETING PIECE:** continues to educate key publics on our impact - distribute.

#### **Programming**

- **Jan 12<sup>th</sup>:** lunch and movie for Martin Luther King Junior went well.
- **Jan 16<sup>th</sup>:** we thank the Sunshine Gals for their free lunch on Jan 16<sup>th</sup>
- **Thanks to John Bartlett,** Vice President of the Friends Board and President of the Billerica Historic Society for presenting the Clara Sexton House to the Men's Group on Jan 18<sup>th</sup>. On Feb 15<sup>th</sup> **Marlies Henderson** presented Thoreau in Billerica to said group. We thank the Kay Johnson Foundation for covering the fees paid to presenters.
- **Ladies Pool** on Tuesdays at 2 PM has certainly picked up players – with some 12 on Tuesday March 19 from 5-6 joining months ago.
- **The Gift shop area** has been organized and streamlined for easy access to goods and a better location for the coordinator's office, Donna Robinson who needs to keep improving customer service at the front desk by catching training/retraining areas quickly.
- **While the transportation department** held off on trips in February given weather safety these are back in March and filling up fast – prices are affordable and the camaraderie and fun factor of these trips are unmatched.
- **Transportation** continues to help our patrons get to key appointments and enjoy life – facts and figures : January 23, 550 rides, January 24, 736 rides (*increase of 186 rides*), February 23, 442 rides, February 24, 552 rides (*increase of 110 rides*).  
FY23 7/1/22-2/28/23 : 5447    FY24: 7/1/23-2/29/24 :6472 (*increase of 1025 rides*)
- **Breakfasts:** average about 45 persons, largely 2x per month – we net about \$140 from each B/fast. More importantly we address the nutritional, connectivity and engagement needs of our patrons and their guests.
- **Companion Program:** we are onboarding 3 new companions to add capacity and flexibility to the program.
- **AARP TAX ASSISTANCE:** As of today 225, taxes completed with an intended amount of 350+. This year the Circuit Breaker was raised from \$1200 to \$2590. On 10/10/23 Governor Maura T. Healey and Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll visited the

Northborough Senior Center to celebrate the doubling of the Senior Circuit Breaker Tax Credit, aimed to help more than 100,000 in MA

- The Senior Circuit Breaker tax credit is based on the actual real estate taxes paid on the Massachusetts residential property you own or rent and occupy as your principal residence. Seniors 65 and older living in the Commonwealth obtain a calculated fraction of the \$2590 based on their income versus their Real Estate Tax amount. Some seniors have done very well getting good portions of the \$2590. A big shout out to Bill Neeb, one of the leaders of the program ably assisted by Joe Marino, Marguerite Massey, and Jerry Johnson. We juggle space a great deal weekly, but the program is an absolute win for our BCOA community.
- **2024-2025 Tax Work Off Program:** the director successfully presented before the Select Board to discard the financial piece for qualification for citizens in town 60 years and older who are homeowners and wish to participate. The first come first serve basis of the new program is again a pilot hopefully to attract takers for 125 slots to help town departments as opposed to 59 being taken in the 2023-2024 season. A new compendium of instructions has been produced by David Lamore, coordinator of the program with input from others on the team, the director, the coordinator of wellness and the Volunteer Services coordinator. We hope to have these volunteers in place beginning work on July 1.
- **Walking Group:** 12 new walkers joined the group in 2023. They make new friends and walking comes with a multitude of health benefits for both the body and the mind.
- **The Town will cohost a senior fair on April 28<sup>th</sup> (rain date May 5<sup>th</sup>) with IAGB, Indian Association of Greater Boston.** Leading the collaboration for the event is the director and Robert Maynard, Director of Administrative services for the town. The proposed format consists of vendor tables where senior citizens can stop by and gather useful info on a multitude of topics from health agencies, health Insurance companies, Nursing homes, Medical Devices and Equipment, Senior Day Care, Pain Management, Pharmacy service providers, Alternate Therapy, At-home support companies, financial support agencies etc. with health checks, fun activities and food vendors. More info to follow.

Discussion ensued as to what percentage of the senior population utilizes the COA Facility, with that being 20% to 40% given the year and programming. A higher percentage of senior activity can be obtained by extending operating hours to include evening and weekend programs. It was explained that although it appears that the planned Adult Activity Center fails to provide a significant increase in square footage, the additional and overall interior space will be designed for better utilization.

A question was raised regarding the utilization and impact on volunteers should the COA temporarily be housed in 5,000 sq feet of trailers. It is the intent of the Director to keep volunteers active in several alternative locations where programs will be held. Possible locations are the First Parish Church, BATV, and the Town Hall auditorium.

Discussion evolved to encourage the COA Board to build a united front in support of moving the COA project forward by informing the Billerica residents of the value of the COA ahead of a vote at Town Meeting.

A question was raised about how the town can justify spending money on capital projects when the school system in Billerica is running at a deficit. It was thoroughly explained that these two

items are not interrelated. The school committee settled on a Budget with the Town Manager, and it is up to the schools to work within that budget.

A recommendation was made for both the COA Board and the Friends of the COA Board to draft position statements to be presented at the Town Meeting. Inviting active seniors to speak at Town Meeting on behalf of the COA may be desirable.

Board member Joe Marino offered a PowerPoint presentation that he is building that could be used in the Town Meeting. The presentation can be a valuable resource in professionally educating the public on what the COA is doing for them and what is planning to offer given the proper resources.

Secretary Bill Neeb informed the Board that four of its members terms are expiring come June 30, 2024. Bill will supply these members with the application forms needed to submit to the Select Board in order to be considered for reappointment.

Next Meeting Wednesday, April 10, 2024 at 5:30 pm

Motion to Adjourn Bill Neeb / S Jerry Johnson - Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 6:50 pm.

Respectfully Submitted

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William J. Neeb". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

William Neeb, Recording Secretary