

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

May 1, 2024, 5:30 pm

Present: Jean Patel Bushnell, John Burrows, Richard Carroll, Phil Doiron, Barbara Flaherty, Gerald Johnson, Mary Jones, Joseph Marino, Marguerite Massey, Bill Neeb, John Pellegrino, Mary Riley.

Absent: Mike Rosa

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.

First order of business, Mary Riley stepped down as Board Chair, requesting 1st Vice Chair Richard Carroll run the May meeting.

Secretary Bill Neeb made a motion that the Board appoint Richard Carroll as Chair, S/Mary Riley / Motion passed.

The minutes of the April 10, 2024, meeting accepted as written. M/ Mary Riley. S/ Phil Doiron – All in favor other than Babara Flaherty who abstained as she was absent from the April meeting, Motion passed.

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

Partnering

FCOA: The 2024 Black tie Bingo event was a huge success, netting \$13,568.03, an increase of 5 % over last year, (\$12,916.67). The FCOA contributed \$2,050 to our needs for April bringing the total for 2024 to \$6,480.

IAGB: The event supported by the town of Billerica is now the "New England Seniors Expo & Cultural Exchange 2024". There are two main goals of the event, a) health, wellness, safety, financial information and more and b) a community cultural exchange.

BILLERICA PLANNING DEPT: On April 11th and 22nd our planning department hosted Q&A sessions in our lobby giving our patrons an opportunity to drop by and ask a range of questions pertaining to topics covered by our planning department.

Planning

NEW CENTER: As we evolve our thinking around a new Center I am happy to read about the new Dennis Center for Active Living (article attached) that has mirrored many elements of our core thinking as follows:

- o The branding drops anything to do with senior as the word does not reflect active, positive and productive aging that we are all engaged in.
- o The focus is on health and wellness although social care is at the core of the work bringing members together to gain knowledge, socialize, engage and connect.
- o The article speaks to the fact that we have entered the healthcare arena being asked to drive health promotions and morph into community care partners as patients are being discharged quicker and sicker from hospitals today.
- o It also addresses the fact that the younger cohort of 60–70-year-olds are coming forward to be at the new Center.

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- o There are two commercial kitchens here speaking to the need to address nutritional insecurity and highlighting the fact that dining together is a big part of social care that addresses disconnection and social engagement.
- o They have added a supportive day program, something we had discussed early on, as members who can no longer operate independently at 25 Concord Road often head to the Adult Day Program in Chelmsford utilizing our transportation. We also saw Adult Day in Andover.
- o **Note Dennis (2020 Census) has 7274 citizens aged 60 and over compared to Billerica at 10,115.**

More of this topic will be covered in the Board discussion section.

Operations

STAFF TRAINING: Staff participated in two team sessions on Monday April 22nd, *Workplace Conflict with Steven Bernstein* and Tuesday April 23rd, *Respectful Workplace with Lisa Maloney*. The Director established and shared the following goals for the training beforehand:

- Working well toward the same goals – enabling and empowering aging in place and supporting family caregivers
- fostering strong communications, empathy and mutual respect
- forging a cohesive unit
- solving together, winning together and having fun together
- Healthy conflict is essential. Group thinking kills innovation and creativity. We need diversity of thought where each of you feel safe to dissent
- Ensuring each of you feel you can speak up freely and raise issues of importance to our work
- Expressing empathy toward each other and covering for each other when one's power's out - that's power in itself. The two days revealed opportunities to build a stronger team and for the Director to formulate some strengthening action plans.

Programming

- **AARP TAX ASSISTANCE:** Our sincere gratitude is extended to this team led by David Petersante. Bill Neeb and Marguerite Massey continue to do tax prep, while we were able to add Board member Joe Marino to help with logistics this year. In past years Board member Jerry Johnson has helped with operations.
- o Working in limited space often with the lack of privacy created tremendous challenges for the team this year. Insufficient space in the building for these important partner programs requires a high level of tolerance and commitment to our seniors for them to continue to work with us.
- o *We are pleased to announce the successful completion of the AARP tax year 2023 at the Billerica COA. This year we completed 376 returns. In addition to the returns, we helped prepare responses to any letters that our taxpayers received from the IRS or MA Dept. of Revenue.*

Since our service is free, we are proud that we are saving our taxpayers filing fees. We've seen that private preparers often charge between \$400 to \$500 for a return. People who might use TurboTax find that it is minimum \$75 to file. If we take an average around \$200 that we are saving each taxpayer, we have saved the local community about \$75,000. A great savings!

In addition, 144 of our returns qualified for the Senior Circuit Breaker credit. This credit helps seniors whose income is low in relation to their rent or real estate tax. The maximum credit this year rose to \$2,590. Due to this increase, our seniors reaped a total of \$374,729. in extra credit from the MA DOR. That's an average of \$1695. per qualifying household. This money goes directly to the taxpayers who need it the most to help them afford their town taxes or rent.

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Through the support of our Friends organization, we will be thanking each team member appropriately.

- **2024-2025 Tax Work Off Program:** Applications were out April 1 and close June 14th. Currently, we have 66 seniors and 10 Veterans (76) apply. Last season, for the entire program we had a total of 77 participants broken down into 8 Veterans, 9 new participants, 4 volunteers going to the library and 7 to the schools that desperately wanted more volunteers. As we attract a wider range of capabilities from the elimination of the fiscal requirement, we will be able to offer many more town departments and the school system the skills and experience they need.

Quick reminders of this year's program:

Billerica seniors over the age of 60 (and honorably discharged veterans of any age) can receive up to a \$1,500 tax abatement in exchange for up to one hundred hours of volunteering for the Town of Billerica in a role matched by the program administrators. If you do not achieve the 100 hours of volunteering, you will be credited a pro-rated amount based on the number of hours you have volunteered (example: 50 volunteer hours = a \$750.00 abatement).

A major change this year is the removal of the "wait list" and financial requirements for the program resulting in a "first come/first serve" basis, where applications will be accepted from interested homeowners until the program's 125-person limit is reached.

- **AGESPAN CONTRACT RENEWAL submission:** On April 11th we submitted our contract renewal materials to AgeSpan for the EOEA Home Care Contract covering our Companion Program. The contract renewal period will be from Oct 1, 2024, to September 30, 2027. We currently employ 14 per diem companions who demonstrate compassion, patience and attention to detail. They are trained and managed by Carolyn Savio, our wellness Coordinator, as her key responsibility. Critical support areas for our clients are companionship, shopping and transportation to medical and non-medical appointments such as dining out. Over half of our clients come from the AgeSpan Case Management Program to help seniors remain in the community for as long as possible. With our Minuteman contract we now support seniors beyond Billerica in Tewksbury, Bedford, Burlington, Wilmington and Carlisle.

Board Discussions

New Center Update: Select Board Chair John Burrows led a discussion regarding matters surrounding the plans for a new Senior Center facility and Recreation Center including:

- Cider Mill location has advantages over a demo and rebuild project
 - Constructing a building on fresh ground versus demolition and building eliminates potential delays that may be caused should asbestos or other site issues require remediation.
 - Ground studies have already been conducted at that Cider Mill site by Sunrise corporation when they were planning to build 68 units on that land.
 - Addressing concerns about contamination at Cider mill, site study has already been conducted at that location when it was being considered for a high school. That project would have taken up considerably more space than the COA. Studies that found minor contamination but nothing concerning. Further studies of other parcels at this site were recommended.
- The location can accommodate a large single floor building for the COA which is advantageous to its patrons. It also would provide significant room for growth and expansion.

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- The town of Billerica there's also considering plans to build affordable housing at the Cider Mill location.

Support for upcoming town meeting warrant article for new facility

Member Jerry Johnson made a motion to support upcoming town meeting article #2 with the earmark for Cider Mill location. Seconded by Bill Neeb. Discussion led by Rich Carroll reported interest by the owner of the property abutting 25 Concord Rd. to sell that lot to the Town of Billerica, which would make room for expansion at the current location. With 3 votes in favor, 3 against, and 1 abstention, the motion did not pass.

In consideration of Mary Riley resigning as Chair, Chair Rich Carroll made a motion to elect Phil Doiron to 1st Vice, S/Mary Riley, M/passed.

Motion by Bill Neeb to elect Jerry Johnson 2nd Vice, S/Phil Doiron M/passed

Next Meeting Wednesday, June 12, 2024, 5:30 pm

Motion to Adjourn Jerry Johnson / S Mary Riley - Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 7:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted



William Neeb, Recording Secretary

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