

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

April 9, 2025, 5:30 pm

**Present:** Richard Carroll, Phil Doiron, Barbara Flaherty, Mary Jones, Marguerite Massey, Joseph Marino, Bill Neeb, John Pellegrino, Mary Riley, Mike Rosa, Hemali Shah.

**Absent:** Dan Burns, John Burrows

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

The minutes of the March 12<sup>th</sup> 2025, meeting was accepted as written M/Phil Doiron. S/ Mary Riley Motion passed.

**Director's update**

**COA Director Hemali Shah** requested input from the board as to what they would like to see in the directors' update. It was recommended that she include higher level updates and statistics prompting detailed discussion.

COA to participate in the Billerica Health and Wellness Fair scheduled for Saturday April 12 from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm.

Held discussions with the facilities director regarding the installation of surveillance cameras in the building. We find that items are missing from the building. If people in the building know they are on cameras, it should deter them from taking things. Cameras also add a level of safety helping to see patrons who may have fallen or suffered a medical emergency.

Hemali feels that she and the staff are settling in and working well together.

In addition to the Directors comment, John Pellegrino requested she add staff and program achievements such as the success of black tie bingo, the success of the tax work off program under David Lamore, the volunteer dinner coming up on May 19th with the staff serving the meal, Riley Pratt stepping up in her role to take on editing the Outlook newsletter, success of the gift shop and the front and desk how it's improved, appreciation to the Friend's board for the funds they gave us to purchase a new freezer, and the success of the AARP income tax program that just ended today. They prepared over 350 returns for our seniors free of charge.

**Board Discussion**

**Cancellation of January and February Board meetings.** In response to questions raised at the last meeting, Bill provided a detailed timeline of discussions and decisions made by the Officers between the November 2024 and March 2025 COA Board meetings. This included the Board vote in November to hold it's next meeting in January to facilitate the transition from the outgoing and incoming directors. The earlier than expected departure of Jean and later than anticipated start date of the new director. Following that, there were miscommunications in rescheduling the February meeting which led to the Director not being available to attend. The Officers agreed that we would forgo the February meeting and return to our regular schedule in March.

**Review of BCOA By-laws** A discussion ensued regarding clarification of certain sections of the BCOA By-laws including Article I, Purpose. It was suggested that wording could be added to address the Board's role regarding the COA mission.

Further discussion ensued regarding Article V, which addresses the role of the Chair as to providing direction to the staff in the absence of the Director. It was noted that by the Chair that a lack of connection between the Board and the Town Manager left us in the dark as to what had transpired at the COA in relation to its management. This led into the failure of Town Manager to include this Board in the hiring process of the new Director. What we do know is that the Town Manager did put in place an interim director to cover the gap. Selectman Mike Rosa offered to review this Article with Town Management to see if it is up to them to fill a temporary vacancy. Members of the Board made it clear that they want better communication with Town management.

Other minor changes suggested were to include e-mail as a valid voting method as addressed per Article III, paragraph four. And to change wording Article V from Town Administrator to Town Manager. The Secretary requested that each member review the entire document and be prepared to discuss and vote on amendments during the May meeting.

**COA Board Responsibilities** Director Shah inquired as to what the members or the Board can do to support the goals of the COA. In response, Board members have made their services available at many COA functions, used their influence to provide funding for COA activities and dinners, represented the COA at various Select Board meetings, and network with members to get their feedback on COA programs. Hemali's vision is that the Board will take the lead in developing new projects, researching other towns with similar programs bringing the project to the Select board, and help implement them.

**Member terms expiring in June 2025** With two members term ending this June, a discussion ensued as to the application process for Board appointments. Clarification was made as to the process that an Alternate must apply to be considered for a full membership position. The two members whose terms are ending must reapply. If there are more candidates than open positions, the Select Board will conduct interviews of the applicants before making their final decision on appointments.

#### **Update on COA Building plans**

Mike Rosa discussed the fact that the loss of the Town Manager negatively impacted the progress of the COA Building progress. Mentioned were the potential locations for a new senior center, including the Cider Mill and Pollard Park properties. He also highlighted the financial challenges facing the town, including the cost of a new school and the need for sewer system infrastructure improvements. He proposed a two-track plan for the senior center, involving both maintenance of the current facility and efforts to secure funding for a new building. Also discussed was the need for a joint meeting with the school committee to discuss town priorities. Also mentioned was the potential impact of federal funding cuts on the town's services.

**Presentation of gift to retired COA Director Jean Patel Bushnell**

The meeting also recognizes Jean Patel Bushnell's 8.5-year tenure as director, during which she emphasizes the importance of building strategic relationships with community partners to enhance the center's services and impact. Hemali, the new director, is encouraged to continue these efforts while balancing administrative duties.

Jean advised that the Director be available to your staff members and listen to their needs. They are in a human resources positions and they need your leadership and guidance. The admin staff can provide the data you need to identify your financial goals and what programs need to be supported.

Specifically Jean's parting comments for her successor included that a COA director needs quality staff support to run the day-to-day so he/she can focus on maintaining and building strategic relationships such as the Marketing director at BrightView, the regional manager for community benefits at Leahy hospital, the Lions Club, the CEO of the LRTA, the Billerica police and fire chiefs, the directors of other Massachusetts COA's, the executive office of elder affairs/Age Span, the Boys and Girls Club, Scout troops for eagle projects, the Facilities manager at the town hall, the town's IT manager, Veterans affairs manager, the Recreation department, and the Library.

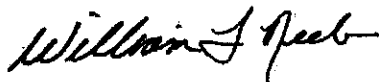
The Board thanked Jean for her comments, and wish her well in her retirement.

Next meeting date May 14, 2025. M/Phil Doiron S/Bill Neeb / Motion passed.

Motion to adjourn made by Phil Doiron S/John Pellegrino / Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 7:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William Neeb", written in a cursive style.

William Neeb, Recording Secretary