

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

September 10, 2025, 5:30 pm

Present: Dan Burns, Richard Carroll, Phil Doiron, Mary Jones, Marguerite Massey, Bill Neeb, John Pellegrino, Mary Riley, Mike Rosa, Hemali Shah.

Absent: John Burrows, Barbara Flaherty, Joseph Marino

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.

Acceptance of the minutes of the June 11th 2025, meeting.

M/Phil Doiron. S/ John Pellegrino A roll call was taken, with all in favor the Motion passed.

Director's Report

FY2026 Budget Overview from State

The following was shared by Massachusetts Council on Aging in early July: " Governor Healey signed the FY2026 Budget on July 4th, which includes a **\$16.00 per older adult** allocation for the Formula Grants. We want to extend our thanks to the Governor and all legislators for their continued support of older adults, especially during these difficult economic times.

- Billerica has over 10,000 older adults

The administration has also announced a delay in paying approximately **\$125 million of earmarks** until at least the fall. According to Administration and Finance Secretary Matthew Gorzkowicz, these earmarks could be canceled if the state's fiscal position remains precarious. Furthermore, Governor Healey has requested new authority to make unilateral spending cuts across the state budget for a limited time. We will share any new information on these developments as it becomes available."

Program and Financial Updates

Financial Performance: I've reviewed the last three years of income and loss for all exercise classes. Despite a slow increase in participation, we're currently generating only half, or less, of the revenue needed to cover our instructor fees. Last year, our exercise program as a whole incurred a **loss of \$12,850**. Seven of our nine paid exercise classes are operating at a loss.

Non-Profit Model: Our goal is to have programs be **self-sustaining**, not profitable. However, our current model is consistently running a deficit.

Program Offerings: We offer 12 exercise classes, nearly double the average of six offered by our peers. Even with the planned cancellation of Tai Chi, Barre Fusion, and Friday Zumba, we'll still provide nine classes, ensuring our patrons have a wide range of options focused on flexibility, strength, balance, and cardiovascular health.

- An unnamed donor has funded Tai Chi through December
- This past Tuesday, on the first day of registration, we processed 320 transactions for 115 patrons.

Grant Allocation: Most Councils on Aging (COAs) use their formula grant to subsidize programs, which allows them to safely absorb losses. Our formula grant is fully allocated to companion and staff salaries, and we anticipate a deficit in this area in FY27. This means we cannot use it to cover program losses. Which forces us to closely monitor program income and losses to prevent future cancellation of other classes.

- A question was raised by a board member to receive more detailed information on how the funds used from the grant is utilized against money coming in from the users of the companion program.

Monthly Registration: Implementing a monthly registration system would help ensure patron commitment, provide accurate attendance numbers for class setup, and give us a way to notify patrons about cancellations. The registration process has shifted to a monthly payment model instead of the previous drop-in system. To ensure this change does not cause financial hardship, we will offer support to those in need, using funds from our healthy gifts and donation account.

- Cash donations are turned over to the town Treasurer. If they were donated for some specific class or event, that will be noted as such and the town will disperse those funds upon request.

Future Planning: We are currently working on adding a one-on-one personal training class as well as reaching out to instructors with lower costs to offer more variety of classes. I will continue to research grants to support our financial needs.

Successful Summer Programs

- **Lahey Produce:** Started on June 17th and we've seen about 64 patrons attend weekly
- **National Older Adults Month:** We celebrated in August with a coffee and donut event.
- **Slice and Step:** This program continues to be very successful.
- **Trips:** 435 participants attended trips between June through August.
 - **LRTA** is offering free rides through June 30 of 2026. From July to September 2024, 455 riders took advantage of that program. During the same time period this year that number increased to 778.
- **Firefighter's BBQ** – July 18th was a great success with 80 patrons participating
- **Artwork-** Call for artist was successful, as we had three artists donate their work to be displayed on our walls

Upcoming Programs

- **Caregiver Support Group:** A new group will begin in October and will take place on the first Monday of every month from 10-11 a.m., with support from Christina Hess (LCSW) of Tewksbury COA.
- **Senior Prom:** Scheduled for September 29th from 4-6pm

- **Yankee Doodle:** Scheduled for September 20th from 11am – 4pm. Looking for COA Board volunteers to cover 1-2 hours shifts.

The Chairperson opened the floor to take questions and comments from members of the public in attendance. Some of these were:

- Recommendation is that the Director requests that the Town includes the staff salaries that this grant covers in their budget.
- A W9 is required by the town to get a refund. There was some discussion as to whether this results in taxable income
- A question was raised as to the potential for the COA to take credit card payments. The director would like to see that, but it must be studied further to see how the fees for processing credit cards will affect program costs.
- A discussion ensued about paying for classes in advance, although the patron may not be able to make it to all the classes they signed up for. They find their option is to go to a Senior Center in one of the surrounding towns to take a class for free. The Billerica COA is implementing a plan so patrons payments go into their wallet and you use those funds as you take your classes. Billerica COA cannot offer classes for free as they are not funded by the town.
- Discussion ensued about the desire for more programs that encourage physical fitness. One problem is that the COA is limited in space making it difficult to add more programs of that nature. More programs are needed for patrons who cannot participate in exercise programs. We need space for them to provide programs geared towards social interaction.
- A request was made for the Director to publish the cancellation policy in the next newsletter.
- A request was made to conduct a survey of the 10,000 seniors in Billerica to see what they want for programs.
- A discussion ensued on the use of grants. The director assured patrons that she applies for grants as they become available. But most are only dedicated for a limited time or a specific program.
- Discussion ensued on requesting the Town provide more money for COA programs at Town Meeting. Selectman Mike Rosa clarifies that the funds must be requested in the budget before Town Meeting, because at Town Meeting you can cut things from the budget but you cannot add anything to it.
- The Chair of the Friends of the COA Board stated that their mission provides funds to the COA to make up for all the funds they can't get from the town. The Friends Board relies on fundraisers to reach those goals. The Friends provide the COA with over \$20,000 a year to use for meals and programs.
- The COA Chair requests that more financial information be provided to see if profitable programs can be used to offset those that are in demand that are less than profitable.
- A member of the Friend's Board spoke up to let people know that they need their help with their fundraising campaigns.
- It was also mentioned that we need the support of the seniors to speak out in favor of funding a new Senior Center.

BCOA Meeting Hours

A Board member is requesting that our meetings be changed to daytime hours instead of evening hours. Doing so may be helpful to bring more patrons to our meetings, so they can meet with the Board, ask questions, and learn what the Board and the Director are currently working on. The general consensus is that the meetings should be held after 2:00 PM so as not to interfere with morning programs.

Participation with Friends of the COA Board

The COA Chair would like understanding of how the Financial Assistance program is working between the two boards. Per the Chair of the Friends Board a check is made out to the recipient's vendor after proper vetting by the COA, then given to the COA Director for distribution. The COA Director utilizes a financial assistance application form which provides a picture of recipient's financial status. It was also mentioned that Saint Vincent de Paul has a similar program that seniors can take advantage of.

Further discussion went on to describe ways to help the Friends, including becoming a member of the organization and of the Board. Information on meetings is provided in the COA Outlook newsletter.

There is further discussion on whether the two Boards can combine their meetings at least once every quarter. Care would have to be taken to ensure that all discussion items are printed on the agenda.

Next meeting date October 8, 2025. M/Phil Doiron S/John Pellegrino / A roll call was taken, with all in favor the Motion passed.

Motion to adjourn made by Phil Doiron S/ John Pellegrino / A roll call was taken, with all in favor the Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 7:05 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