

Bedford Council on Aging Board

Minutes

3/8/22

10:30am

via Zoom

Board members present: Sandra Hackman--Chair, Richard Rosen, Gene Kalb, Lew Putney via phone, Cindy Tulumieri, Tom Kinzer, Marilou Barsam, Bobbie Ennis

Board members absent: Alan Morgan

Other participants: Alison Cservenschi, COA director; Bill Moonan, Select Board liaison; Susan Schwartz, Board of Health liaison

Call to order/welcome and chair's remarks

Chair Hackman called the meeting to order at 10:33 and read a statement authorizing remote participation per the governor. Alison Cservenschi recorded the meeting.

Ms. Hackman proposed changing the date of the May meeting to May 17 because of a scheduling conflict, to which the board agreed.

She noted that the COA Board had previously voted to ask Town Meeting to authorize adding \$10,000 to the COA's budget to expand an existing part-time position to fulltime program coordinator, which the Select Board had not approved. However, after further investigation, she feels the problem is larger than the COA request: it reflects the low 2.5 percent Finance Committee guideline for increases in the Select Board budget. Singling out the COA on town meeting floor might alienate other departments, all of which have pressing unfunded needs.

She further noted that the 25 such unfunded requests together total about \$250,000. Given the 5700 households in Bedford, funding all of them would cost households an average of \$43. Ms. Hackman also pointed out that the town has \$8 million in unused tax levy— one of the highest in the state, and a very large sum historically for Bedford. Given that the cost per household is so modest, she is now suggesting asking the Select Board and Fincom to bring a proposal to Special Town Meeting to fund all the requests.

Mr. Moonan noted that the Select Board voted to exceed the 2.5 percent Fincom guideline when it added funding for a sustainability manager. He said the Select Board is looking to be very conservative in unpredictable times.

Mr. Rosen moved to no longer request an extra \$10,000 at ATM, but instead to place a hold on the COA's budget and ask the Select Board and Finance Committee to bring a request to Special Town Meeting to fund all requested but unfunded needs. Mr. Kinzer seconded.

Vote of the board

8-0

Approval of minutes from the February meeting

Mr. Putney moved to approve the minutes with a minor change requested by Mr. Rosen, who seconded.

Vote of the board

6-0-2

(Ms. Ennis and Ms. Tulumieri abstained because they were absent from that meeting)

Director's remarks

Ms. Cservenschi reported that in-person attendance in COA programs has continued to rise ever since the mask mandate was lifted. Hybrid attendance continues to be popular.

The COA is sponsoring a training session offered by the MBTA in using public transportation, including the 62 bus, which provides service between the Bedford VA Hospital and Alewife station. The MBTA will eventually offer such training to adults and children with disabilities in the community, but there is no plan yet for that.

Mr. Rosen commented on how he liked the MBTA travel training for seniors. Ms. Hackman added that she will let the Transportation Committee know about the training, and follow up to ask that committee to ensure that bus stops are accessible and visible.

Ms. Cservenschi updated the board on progress under a Know Your COA grant from the Massachusetts Councils on Aging. The work includes creating a new logo, which she shared with the board, which expressed appreciation for the design. The social work interns have also been creating new COA brochures and a poster presentation. Mr. Moonan recommended putting the new logo on the Bedford Local Transit van and on the sign at the senior center. Mr. Kalb suggested adding a QR code to all signs so people can easily access the COA website.

Mr. Rosen moved to approve the new COA logo, and Ms. Ennis seconded.

Vote of the board

8-0

Mr. Rosen also commented that, given the substantial number of home visits cited in the director's monthly report, he continues to underestimate the needs of the senior community. He asked whether Ms. Cservenschi had received an estimate of the cost of setting up a home-share program in Bedford from Noelle of Nesterly, who presented to the board at its February meeting. Ms. Hackman reported that she followed up with Ms. Marcus, but that she has not yet sent a quote.

Ms. Cservenschi expressed special thanks to Susan Schwartz for purchasing an ad in the COA newsletter from her family, which she hopes will encourage others to do the same.

National certification of the COA and director

A goal of the Bedford COA is to apply for national certification. Mr. Rosen has investigated the criteria, and feels it would serve the COA well to meet such standards. The COA has already fulfilled many of the requirements, but following through on all of them will ensure that the department is using best practices.

Ms. Cservenschi stated that she intends to complete the state and national certification process for COA directors. Once she does, the Bedford COA will receive visits from state and national officials to review compliance with the standards. She plans to complete the trainings in the spring after obtaining a mentor to assist her, and thinks this is a great next step.

Mr. Rosen observed that Massachusetts has been part of the AARP's network of age-friendly states since 2018. Ms. Hackman noted that Bedford is also a member of the AARP age-friendly network for cities and towns. Becoming certified as an age-friendly community would entail completing a specific town-wide project. She suggested meeting with the Disability Committee at next month's meeting and possibly collaborating on a project.

Liaison reports

Ms. Balsam announced that Bedford Embraces Diversity has agreed to cohost the COA's planned LGBTQ cafe in June. Several members of the BED and COA boards got together to discuss how to make the event successful. Understanding that many older people in the LGBTQ community are still not comfortable being open in front of their peers, the group decided to open the first such event to all ages (given that young people are more comfortable with their identities) as well as allies in the straight community. The café will include food, entertainment, and presentations. Mr. Kalb agreed to write an article for the Citizen to promote the event. The BED Board will also help promote the event, such as by creating flyers.

Ms. Balsam also reported that BED is relaunching Faces of Bedford, a project first created a decade ago showcasing a diverse array of Bedford families. The updated version will include live videos as well as photography.

Mr. Rosen reported that developer Brian Devellis recently presented an updated proposal for his Northside project to the Planning Board. The project is proposed to include a mix of homes that respond to needs identified in the Town's Housing Study, including a three-story apartment building dedicated to seniors with an elevator and affordable units. The Planning Board also recently debated a bylaw change that would loosen restrictions on two-family dwellings, a bylaw to establish "village center" zoning, and the state's new rules requiring by-right zoning for multifamily housing along MBTA service routes.

In Mr. Morgan's absence, Ms. Hackman reported that on March 23 at 2pm the director of Minuteman Senior Services will offer a workshop on the extensive array of services provided by the organization, and encouraged board members to attend.

Ms. Ennis reported that the Friends of the Bedford COA is hosting two fundraisers this year, one on April 11 at Red Heat, and the other on October 6 at Flatbread. A portion of the sales those days will benefit the FBCOA. The organization has been providing pre-packaged snacks at the senior center, and continues to fund online exercise programs.

Susan Schwartz reported that the Board of Health rescinded the Town's indoor mask mandate as of February 28. However, the department issued an advisory urging each individual consider their own risk and that of the people around them. She also reported that the number of users of the Food Bank continues to grow, and that the department has received an application to provide food service from The Residence—the planned assisted living facility on South Rd--even though construction has not yet begun. She encouraged people to vote in the Town election.

Mr. Moonan announced that the Town has named Kenneth Fong as interim police chief, with a contract until August. The Police Department is short seven officers, and the Fire Department one firefighter, because of labor shortages.

The Select Board has been working on online presentations for Annual Town Meeting, and considering whether to require that participants wear masks. The Select Board is supporting the purchase of 139 Great Rd. as the site for a new fire station. However, such construction would require demolishing a historical building. The Select Board is also considering issues around removing 100-150 trees, including 6 trees over 250 years old, to construct the sidewalk planned for the Chelmsford/North Rd. intersection.

Mr. Moonan acknowledged that this is his last meeting as Select Board liaison. Ms. Hackman thanked him for his service on behalf of the entire COA Board and community.

Next meeting and adjourn

The next meeting will be on April 12. Mr. Rosen moved to adjourn, and Ms. Ennis seconded.

Vote of the board

8-0

The meeting adjourned at 12:14 pm.

Documents for the meeting

Minutes from the February meeting

Director's monthly report

Monthly budget report