



## **OAKHAM COUNCIL ON AGING**

**MINUTES:** for regular meeting of February 9, 2024 at 12 pm at Town Hall

**ATTENDING:** Barbara Wreschinsky, Janice Handrahan, Clare Hendra, Rick Hendra, Priscilla McGlynn

**Also attending:** Melanie Silva, Becky Austin, Pauline Dwelly, Paul Rochette, Judy Menard, Lucy Tessnau

**Special circumstances for this meeting:**

- Rick apologized to the Council and those present for being late posting the agenda. He thought it had been saved and closed, and didn't discover otherwise till 1:42 on Wednesday.
  - Aaron Langlois has advised us that any decisions we made before the required 48 hours prior notice of the meeting could be challenged.
  - We tried to reschedule for next week but kept losing people.
  - So we agreed to start the meeting at 12:00, share reports, but take no actions, make no decisions, till 1:45.
  - Asked if anyone wanted to challenge that decision, none did. And the meeting was called to order.
- Rick said he had no quarrel with the Selectboard enforcing the online posting rules. That's how you do it. And he promised it wouldn't happen again.

**Call to order:** 12:10 pm

**Approval of Minutes of Jan. 12, 2024:** moved by Jan, seconded by Becky, approved unanimously. \*

\* an asterisk indicates a decision made after 1:45 pm that is recorded within the context of the discussion that preceded it.

## **Reports:**

### **○ Chair's report (Barbara)**

- **Electrical work is getting done today, by Dean Moran Electrical as a donation to the Town.**
- **Barbara contacted Pathfinder Voc. Tech. about making signage for the Senior Center**
  - **They put us on their Work Order list, which means they'll contact us when they get to review our request.**
  - **Our expectation, if they approve us is that we pay for materials, the kids do the design and construction.**
- **Barbara's volunteered to lead a Walking Eccentrics exercise group downstairs on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 12:30/1:00, beginning in March.**
  - **This involves walking and movement in place, so there should be more than enough space.**
  - **The Tuesday/Thursday schedule would fill in between Melanie's Monday/Friday classes.**
  - **Clare moved that we approve the Walking program. Barbara seconded, approved unanimously. \***
- **More Lunch Events!**
  - **Jonathan spoke with Barbara about doing a fish lunch for seniors. Also, about a pizza lunch.**
  - **Just in the discussion stages now...**
  - **Barbara noted that the chili cook-off had gone over well, and it might be nice to have more events like that or even just potluck.**
  - **Clare moved and Barbara seconded that we hold a Fish Fry Lunch with Jonathan's help, perhaps at the end of March. \***
- **Liability issue:**
  - **Barbara reported on the recent meeting of the Board of Selectpersons, where the liability issues of our Outreach efforts were discussed.**
  - **The Selectboard review the sample waivers Melanie had assembled for medical equipment loans, and they then passed them on to Town counsel for their review of the waivers and policies.**

- Barbara asked if Paul Rochette had anything to add, as he's been raising the issue
- Paul spoke about the risks of liability suits, especially for anything related to health issues.
  - It puts the whole Town at risk.
  - Talking with nurses and other people involved with seniors, he hasn't heard anyone who advocates for transporting senior or for home health visits
  - While the BoS is interested in coming up with a policy, they'd prefer that the COA first draft and approve a policy recommendation for their review.
  - Clare relayed what the coordinator from the Rutland Senior Center told us, that they do only phone visits, and then only for friendly conversation, not for counseling advice.
  - They also provide training to their folks who make these calls.
  - Priscilla asked if our personal insurance wouldn't cover us for any liability we might incur?
  - Paul and Barbara agreed: it might cover you but not the Town.
    - The fact is, once you're on the COA, you're an agent of the Town and they're liable for you.
    - Liability lawyers will sue everyone to see what sticks, and that puts the Town at risk.
    - And some of these suits are for phenomenal amounts.
    - So he brought two policy recommendations to the Board, on transport and on home health visits
    - But the Board was very reluctant to act on that without a determination of need or request from the Council on Aging
    - They're looking for a vote from the Council to request that the Selectboard devise a policy.
    - Paul said he didn't mean to make up anyone's mind for them; the Council can vote as it will.

- But the risks of liability are so great, he thinks it far outweighs any benefit that might be gained by a visit.
- Judy shared her experience as a visiting nurse who used to do home visits.
  - She had a whole lot of intake info and prep from her agency when she visited. We don't have that.
  - She agreed on the inadvisability of our doing home visits.
  - What we do have is a very good list of numbers for referral to appropriate services
- Rick asked about the podiatrist, and if we're liable for any infected toes.
  - The answer was that she's covered by her agency (like Judy was).
  - We're just providing a space, not providing the service.
- Clare noted that the coordinator from the Rutland Senior Center, when she visited us, said they don't do home visits.
  - They don't lend out medical equipment either.
  - But what they do is phone visits for those seniors who aren't ambulatory.
  - And they're planning a training session for those who make these calls, so they don't become counselors.
  - The purpose is to provide human contact and make referrals to services if asked.
  - Barbara suggested we might want to get in on that training.
  - Clare reminded us too that the Rutland coordinator had suggested, if ever get a new senior center, that we plan in an office for Outreach, where phone calls can be private. If we ever...
- Becky pointed out that the policy makes sense.
  - If you give out advice from the COA, people assume you know what you're talking about.
  - And in any instance in which we don't and we give bad advice, you can understand a family being upset.

- Barbara asked Lucy about our blood pressure nurse, as she's a volunteer. Do we supervise her? Are we qualified to? And
    - Lucy explained that we just oversee her hours and her scheduling.
    - Results are confidential; referrals may be made by the nurse.
    - But there is no info shared with the COA.
    - Other towns have nurses coming in to take blood pressure.
  - Clare noted that Rutland considered providing a physical therapist's services, but they need to be supervised by a doctor, so they decided against it.
  - Paul put in a final pitch for everyone to read the Outreach Manual. There's really a lot of useful and important info in there.
- Requests:
- Barbara and Jan P have discussed buying new table cloths for the dining area. The ones we have are old and ratty.
    - No one argued. We've seen them.
    - We'll approve an amount to cover for this item when we know how many cloths and how much they cost.
  - Barbara also had a request for the gift cards: to keep them for families that really need assistance. We only have 3 left.
    - There was a question as to whether we had delivered the cards to one couple; turned out we had.
    - Becky reminded us that those cards had to be used for seniors over 75. Barbara understood that.
    - There was some discussion as to why we had 3 cards left over – people died, moved without a forwarding address, etc.
    - Barbara was commended for all the work she'd done to track these folks down.
    - Jan moved and Clare seconded that we hold the gift cards and use them for families facing food insecurity. Voted unanimously. \*
  - Barbara also fielded a request to take down the ugly signs in the bathrooms here at Town Hall and replace them with nicer, newly printed signs.
    - Now, they say "men's" and "ladies"

- There are more creative approaches: lions and lionesses, Mail and Fe-Mail, etc.
  - Melanie will work up some better signage
  - Moved by Jan, seconded by Becky: that we upgrade the signs on the lavatory doors. Approved unanimously. \*
- Judy asked if we had a wheelchair accessible bathroom, as indicated
  - Melanie suggested we get a wheelchair from the storage unit and check it out.
  - But the rooms we have aren't easily accessible by wheelchair from upstairs.
  - And the doors from the basement are not an easy open for wheelchair folks or even fragile seniors.
  - Barbara said we're in compliance with the accessibility law until we attempt a major renovation – then, Clare said, the State will come in and insist on an elevator and full accessibility.
  - Melanie and Judy will follow through on the access question soon as they can obtain a wheelchair. And a nice day.
- Barbara also reported on the Town-use bulletin board at the Post Office.
  - Paul had pointed out how out of date some of the postings were outside.
  - Barbara took the long-expired stuff down, replaced the construction paper, and put up the front and calendar pages of the Herald.
  - Why not? With agendas going online, the outside board should be available for other Town communications.
- The report from the Chair was accepted along with the other reports by consensus. \*
- Outreach report (Janice)
  - The new refrigerator magnets have been received and are ready for distribution.
    - Pauline was concerned that the meal site phone # wasn't on there.
    - But it wasn't on the previous cards either. Melanie just took the old cards, added the Town logo and updated what was on there.

- But Pauline cautioned, we're going to get more calls, not meals.
- Most of Jan's time just now is working on the Health Fair, and that's proceeding apace.
  - We'll be at the Church.
  - We're hoping the anticipated snow will pass us by.
  - We'll cancel if school cancels.
- Jan picked up some food for the event and will pick up some final items Tuesday with her senior discount.
- The Outreach Report was accepted unanimously. \*
- **Treasurer's Report (Clare)**
  - Clare passed out our Account Balances as of 1/31/24 and a copy of our budget request to the FinCom and BoS (attached).
  - And she noted the difficulty of working with the Town's accounting software.
  - We're still waiting for the second payment from the Formula Grant, so income figures aren't final.
  - And we'll want to roll over some of those grant monies so we'll have something to work with in the new year till the first half of the new grant comes in around December
  - Clare also verified that we can roll over funds from the Formula Grant to the next fiscal year. They're not deducted from the next year's grant.
  - The Formula Grant pays for MITEL (until July 1), the podiatrist and nurse, Verizon, my Senior Center, Zumba, etc.
  - As far as actual spending from our Town budget, we have funds to spend, including \$200 for transportation and \$1500 for recreation.
  - The budget submitted requests funds for our annual dues to the MCOA, and those have gone up as we are now just over 500 seniors over 65, putting us in the next higher category.
  - The Outreach budget was raised by \$400 as Jan expects to even more next year.
  - The budget also requests \$450 to cover ink, cartridges, and paper for our new printer – we go through those supplies, mostly to print the Herald for limited distribution.
- **Secretary's Report (Rick)**
  - Rick talked about the Town's new Social Media Policy.

- All Board members need to sign a copy, showing that they've read it
- And do pay attention to the rules laid out in the Policy because it applies to your personal social media pages as well as our official town website so long as you're on the COA.
- Rick said he'd email the policy out to everyone.
- Rick also introduced the subject of Zooming our meetings
  - That would allow those who aren't ambulatory or aren't available when we meet to join us.
  - Lucy noted that the Selectboard and Zoning Board of Appeals are Zooming already, and the Planning Board will also be Zooming soon.
    - It means our every meeting will not only be broadcast, but recorded and available online forever.
    - We need to be careful what we say once we start Zooming – that's covered by the Social Media Policy too.
    - Becky pointed out that the policy applies also to any deliberations we might do via email online.
    - You can't be making decisions or even deliberating a decision unless you're at a publicly posted meeting.
    - He proposed we start Zooming at the next meeting.
    - BUT this was one motion we didn't get back to after 1:42. So we'll need to let everyone know at the start of next meeting that we'll be Zooming, unless anyone objects.
    - Barbara testified to her satisfaction with the Zoom recordings of the Selectboard's meetings when she's unable to attend in person.
- Coordinator's Report:
  - Melanie noted we'll be going to Hardwick Crossing for Lunch
  - Looking to do more food events on the last Friday of each month – maybe the Fish Fry in March.
  - Geeky Mel has only had a couple inquiries so far, but she'll stick with it.
  - In the planning: an ElderBus to a Brown Bag Concert at Mechanics Hall.
  - Dena Hengst will come in April to talk about stress relief, Reiki, etc.
  - Planning to show cartoons before the movies
  - And maybe take a trip to NH to see the sand sculptures



## **Old Business:**

- **Report from team reviewing what forms and information we'll need for logging Outreach activities and for lending equipment. (Jan)**
- **Jan said the team hadn't met yet, as Jan was waiting to hear the Selectboard's decision on the policy proposals on transport and visitations that Paul had submitted.**
- **Clare suggested we do an inventory of our equipment while we wait, using inventory numbers to track our items.**
- **We might be able to track items on MySeniorCenter. We'll see.**
- **And that way we could also track if we received a waiver when we've lent something out. If we decide to keep lending things out.**
- **We may be able to weed out some damaged or questionable equipment at the same time.**
- **Moved by Priscilla, seconded by Clare: that we postpone the decision on inventorying our health aids until we receive word back from the BOS on the waiver forms, and that we'll then form a policy on what our Outreach effort should look like.**
- **There will be a medical equipment company at the Health Fair, Jan pointed out; we might get some advice on waiver forms from them.**
- **We all agreed to neither accept nor lend out commodes for sanitary reasons. No adult diapers, either, Judy added. The stuff we had that was still usable has already gone over to the Abbey.**
- **Barbara noted her appreciation of the frame with hooks Paul erected within the storage unit so we could hang items and get them off the floor.**
- **Paul brought to our attention the value of a Release of Information form, for when we may convey information about a senior to any agency we may refer them to for a problem.**
- **There's also a mandated reporter clause. There's a lot of responsibility and paperwork involved, Paul said.**
- **Clare pointed out that we're a small group and there's only so much that Jan or the rest of us can do.**
- **Rick asked Jan what she thought about home visits.**
  - **Jan has suspended home visits, though she does some through Church**

- and may do any future visits under the auspices of her Church
- She likes the idea of phone visitations.
- Working though the Church has the advantage that the visits are more clearly for spiritual help, not medical advice or transportation.
- Rick and Barbara agreed to update our list agency referrals to leave by the phone for when we need it.

**New Business:**

- Setting goals for next year (Barbara):
  - We were running late, so Barbara asked that we think about for next time.
  - She did volunteer one goal, perhaps, for next year: more ice cream socials! The one we had last year was very popular.

**The meeting was adjourned at 2:05 pm.**