



CITY OF SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

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Robert McCarthy
ACTING MAYOR

Tricia O'Brien
SUPERINTENDENT

SALEM COUNCIL ON AGING REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES

Date and Time: March 15, 2023 at 5:15 P.M.
Meeting Location: ZOOM
Members Present: Lynda Coffill (LC, Chair), John Russell (JR, Vice-Chair), Kristin Macek (KM, Secretary), Abigail Butt (AB, Treasurer), Eliud Alcala (EA), George Barbuzzi (GB), Michele McHugh (MM) and Patricia Small (PS)
Also Present: Teresa Arnold, (TA, Director of the COA) and Councillor Alice Merkl (AM)
Absent: Michelle Bettencourt
Clerk: Joanne M. Roomey

I. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

LC called the meeting to order at 5:15 P.M.

LC stated that notice is hereby given that a meeting of the Council on Aging is held via remote participation in accordance with Chapter 107 of the Act of 2022.

Roll call was then done.

II. APPROVAL OF THE FEBRUARY 2023 REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

A motion was made by PS to approve the February 8, 2023 Regular Meeting Minutes. Seconded by MM. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion carried unanimously.

III. OLD BUSINESS:

a. Lee Fort Terrace UPDATE– Beacon Communities, Greg Ford and Annette DeFrancisco

Mr. Ford and Ms. DeFrancisco, from Beacon Communities, are working with Lee Fort Terrace regarding the redevelopment plans to help current and future residents put together resources. Two weeks ago, they had a conversation with Salem State University regarding having alumni apply for the position of Resident Service Coordinator.

The Board's main concerns are: (a) we want more than 51 subsidized units designated to seniors; (b) to make sure that the AMI is 30% of seniors' income and (c) heat and electricity are included.

Mr. Ford and Ms. DeFrancisco will look into the Board's concerns and will let them know by the next meeting. Also, they are planning on stopping by the COA to introduce themselves, possibly on March 24th.

b. Farmer's Market Vouchers Update – A. Butt

AB had great news regarding the value of coupon books. She said originally, the \$25 booklet value has been stagnating with no increases for decades. Increasing the value of the booklets has been impossible because of budget funding constraints. The only way to increase the booklet value past \$25 would have been to reduce the number of booklets distributed in order to increase the amount per voucher. She said fewer booklets was agreed not to be an acceptable solution because fewer households would have access to the benefit. The Lincoln COA wrote letters to advocate for change. The Mass Council on Aging Nutrition Legislative Task Force was formed and both TA and AB joined.

Though funded federally, on the Massachusetts side, MA Department of Agriculture (MDAR) secured a 1.4 million dollar budget increase. The plan is to increase the \$25 coupon books to \$50 maximum allowed (federal guideline) and print more booklets as well so more households can participate. This will give folks a chance to choose the foods they want to eat, improve socialization and engagement, and support local agriculture and economy. The next step is to contact the Legislative Task Force and advocate at the National Level to make the funding change permanent and increase the booklet value cap.

LC spoke with Senator Lovely regarding increasing the vouchers. AB will keep the Board up to date with any more information she receives.

c. Kitchen Update - John Russell and Teresa Arnold

JR said he and TA were in a meeting with the designers last week. He stated that they work for us, we do not work for them. The biggest issues are the installation of hood/vent and updating the plumbing. After the designers do that, then the COA can take over. He believes the project should start in October; the reason why it is so late is because it is going to take time to order equipment and appliances are backlogged. The COA does not have to put this out to bid as long as the vendor is on the city's accepted list.

d. Salem for All Ages

LC found out that the \$100,000 5-year grant is administered through the mayor's office. She wants to know who is in charge of the money and its disbursement. Councillor Merkl will follow up with the mayor's office to see who the contact person is for the disbursements of funds. LC asked if they could use some money out of the Salem for All Ages fund for the updates to the kitchen.

The Board wants to make sure that TA is involved and has a seat at the table and a say in the decision making, especially with her skills and expertise. TA said that the COA staff has been active with SFAA through the five-year plan and beyond.

MM is concerned that the former Mayor, Kimberley Driscoll, and one of the Co-Chairs, Dominick Pangallo, no longer work for the City of Salem. AB noted the importance possessing training in Aging Services of SFAA member who may be in the position decisions that affect Salem seniors and the COA.

AB made a motion for LC to speak for the Board requesting money from the SFAA budget to be put towards the CLC's kitchen. Seconded by PS. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion carried unanimously.

IV. NEW BUSINESS:

a. Friends of the COA Update

JR said the Friends had their annual election and Andrew LaPointe has been reelected as the President. They want to conduct a mayoral forum and asked TA if they can get a date when the CLC might be available. They want to get a moderator and come up with questions from the seniors regarding senior issues. TA said Mr. LaPointe already reached out to her and they decided on the first week in May. They want to plan a nice lunch for the seniors and make sure the forum does not go more than an hour. The Friends will also try to coordinate a transportation schedule. The Friends of the COA will fund a bigger lunch so more folks will come.

The Friends have also approved funds for the Heart & Soul Conversation Series facilitated by James Ashton, interfaith minister and life coach. They will pay \$150/month for six months with the possibility to extend. This is a great benefit for seniors and money well spent.

LC said Mr. LaPointe sent her an email to post a link on Facebook for the Friends of the COA to encourage people to donate and to grow the network.

b. Director's Report, Teresa Arnold

Dining Services:

On a regular day, we have about 49 reservations for lunch.

We have a roster of 17 regularly scheduled volunteers who help during the week.

Our 2023 YTD coffee donation revenue increased by 47.7% over 2022 (2022: \$157.82) (2023 \$330.42) and our expenses are unchanged.

The day of inclement weather two weeks ago, AgeSpan canceled meals. Erica created our very first a la carte lunch to 13 very happy impromptu lunch attendees and printed a menu for them to order from.

Social Services:

Social Services is seeing an increase in complicated housing crises involving eviction, unrealistic rental increases, court cases, etc. February has shown a very noticeable increase in the number of seniors in Salem facing no-fault evictions.

We are lucky to have resources such as Lori Stewart, the city's new Neighborhood Stability Coordinator as well as Lori Fonseca of Essex County Bar Association to assist folks with the legal side of these housing matters that are out of social services expertise.

Social Services' ongoing partnership with Salem Housing Authority continues as we meet with Lilly Rojas of SHA every other week to track clients through the *Common Housing Application for Massachusetts Programs* (CHAMP) process to ensure no one falls through the cracks. We are grateful to have this collaboration with Lilly Rojas and SHA.

Transportation:

We have extended our per day ride maximum from 2-3 /day when we have the capacity to do so. The total number of rides for the month of February was 1,012 one-way trips.

The transportation department has been encouraging folks to wear a mask while on the van during cold and flu season for their protection as well as others on the van and the driver (with the understanding there is no mandate). As spring approaches, Annie O'Shea has discussed with the van drivers whether or not to continue to encourage seniors to wear a mask. At this time the feedback received is drivers would like to have mask usage encouraged while folks are on the van.

Regular maintenance and repairs continue. There are no staff changes.

Programs/Activities:

The St. Patrick's Day luncheon is this Thursday, March 16th with entertainment and dance. We have 90 reservations.

We continue to host a representative on Thursdays from the Mass Association of the Blind and Vision-Impaired. The representative has office hours at the Community Life Center and individuals make appointments to learn about technology that can enhance their lives.

The AARP Tax-aide program volunteers are here Tuesdays and Thursdays through tax season. The new Strengthen Your Balance class seems to be a hit.

Memory Café and Caregiver Retreat:

The monthly Memory Café continues although we had to cancel two in recent months; one due to the weather and another due to the instructor testing positive for Covid.

The monthly caregiver support group continues to be successful with several regular attendees.

The Caregiver Retreat will be held this Saturday, Mach 18th at Winter Island. Seventeen caregivers will experience Reiki treatments, a guided relaxation, a caregiver support session, making a craft with essential oils and a healthy meal catered by Root North Shore.

Board member Michele McHugh wrote and submitted a grant application to AARP to help with funding for the Memory Café project and Kelley Annese is working on a CDBG application. Kelley and TA met with staff from AgeSpan who run virtual Memory Cafés and we were able to share our resources.

Budget FY'24

The *proposed* operating budget for items like Food and Kitchen Supplies, Contracted Services, Building Repair and Maintenance, Vehicle Parts and Accessories, Office Supplies, Recreational Activity, Printing, In-state travel/Meetings, Dues and Subscriptions and Telephone total \$161,850 up from \$105,500 last year, mainly due to an increase for Food Operations once Dining Services and the kitchen operations are more robust.

The *proposed* full-time personnel budget is \$478,402 and the *proposed* part-time personnel budget is \$100,111, up from \$42,000 last year due to the request for three new part-time positions at nearly \$20,000 each (pending approval). Please bear in mind the COA budget shares the expense of the receptionist position and Program Manager.

V. OTHER BUSINESS:

LC wants to strategize with the Board to raise the director's salary. She also suggested that the COA should be a stand-alone department and report directly to the Mayor's office. MM, and JR will work together with LC on this effort.

VI. NEXT BOARD MEETING: Wednesday, April 19, 2023

There being no further business to come before the Council on Aging Board this evening, JR moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by KM. A roll call vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at **6:30 p.m.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Joanne M. Roomey
Board Clerk

Know Your Rights under the Open Meeting Law M.G.L. Chapter 30A ss. 18-25 and City Ordinance Sections 2-2028 through 2-2033.