

**SALEM COUNCIL ON AGING  
Minutes of Regular Meeting**

**Date and Time:** November 18, 2020 at 5:15 P.M.

**Meeting Location:** Via Zoom

**Members Present:** Lynda Coffill (LC, Chair), John Russell (JR, Vice-Chair), George Barbuzzi (GB), Alice Williams (AW), Donna Clifford (DC), Kristin Macek (KM), Patricia Small (PS), and Abigail Butt, (AB)

**Members Absent:** Julie Carver (JC)

**Also Present:** Teresa Arnold, (TA, Director of the COA)

**Clerk:** Kathleen Fitzgerald

**Meeting Called to Order**

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

LC stated that pursuant to Governor Baker's directive on 3/12/20 which supported certain provisions of Chapter 30A, Section 20, there are strict limitations regarding gatherings, so this meeting is being conducted via Zoom. The public and persons who would like to listen may do so by dialing in. All votes taken shall be by roll call.

Roll call was then taken.

A motion was made by JR to approve the October 2020 Minutes, seconded by PS, roll call was taken, and passed unanimously.

**Old Business:**

**Tax Bill Insert:** Permission was received to do this, and it will be done going forward. Information will be included about ADU's and tax benefits to seniors. Sharon Felton and Lynne Barrett will have input. Deb Jackson, City Assessor is on board as well.

**Senior Housing Forum:** LC advised that she and JR, Amanda Chiancola from the Planning Department, Andrew LaPointe, President of the Friends of the COA and TA

met, and it was suggested that a campaign be started. The way to start is to use SATV as the vehicle and to use real life stories of seniors.

TA related a conversation she had had with Sharon Felton concerning a woman receiving funds from the Bridge Program. She receives \$1,500.00 in social security benefits and \$350.00 from the grant which pays for her food. TA stated that the COA wanted to increase the grant to 2-3 years. She stated that if the Board decided to go forward on this, that this was the type of thing that should be highlighted.

AB advised that this person should get emergency assistance and SNAP benefits. LC advised that when Sharon Felton found out she got her all the benefits. AB stated the Board should piggy-back on this to get people all they need.

LC stated that the Board needed to advocate for senior housing. She stated that the woman referred to was still way below the poverty line. 79% of senior adults are living well below the poverty level and not living with family members. AB stated that they were probably single women living on low social security payments.

LC stated she was putting forth that the Board campaign in January, February and March one time a month on SATV and start building our case. AB asked if we could target the 79% of senior adults living below the poverty level and LC advised that there were no names attached to that percentage. JR stated that there were so many programs that people were not aware of. He said we need to target those seniors not living with family members and living below the poverty level and reach out to them.

AB suggested volunteers make calls and give them information. TA stated that there were talks ongoing and there was a plan to rally volunteers to do wellness checks and that could be an opportunity to impart information. AB advised that many seniors may not tell the volunteers that something was going on so she suggested that a script be provided.

JR asked if there was a way to find out from the senior population what their income level was. LC said first let's talk about what we can do as a Board which is different from the resources of the City. She stated that we do have to understand that the Board's capacity for social services is an absolute. She further stated that we should try to advocate for senior housing but use stories which would help build a platform for increasing services as well. AB stated that regarding data, we could use the assessor's data and look at low value, but LC stated that they may not own their home. LC further stated that TA has the housing needs assessment and asked TA if she could send it out to the Board for the December meeting.

LC asked if the Board wanted to move forward with this and all stated yes.

LC said the Friends already had a time scheduled for January on SATV and advised they would give the COA one-half of the allotted time.

TA stated that with Senior Focus on SATV, her intent was to engage people. It was also suggested that Board members could talk about housing and other COA sources.

There was a discussion concerning those people who did not have cable and TA advised that events, etc. were promoted via Facebook and in the Newsletter. KM asked how we could capture more people. AB suggested contacting larger landlord organizations, putting fliers at local cable stations

JR asked if there was a weekly programming guide and LC advised there was. JR suggested putting the guide in the monthly newsletter.

LC asked who would like to be on SATV in January. KM said she was interested. LC was interested and JR would be on with the Friends.

### **New Business:**

Sr. Covid Testing - LC received an email from the Salem Housing Authority wanting to know if our vans could be used to transport seniors for testing. TA advised she was trying to get a special time for seniors at Covid testing sites and to transport them there. She advised she had a Zoom call scheduled with David Greenbaum, the City Health Inspector, Dr. Kim Waller from Salem State University, and Annie O'Shea to see how this could work as seniors cannot wait in lines.

**Friends Update:** JR advised that we had passed the first phase for the Cummings Grant which is \$100,000.00 spread over four years having to do with nutritional programs. TA stated she assisted Fred Norton in writing the grant that would support nutrition outreach and education, healthy recipes, farmers' markets, etc. She stated her vision was to use food as medicine and to promote health. She said she worked very closely with Kerry Murphy from the Health Department, and Kelly Annese who the COA would like to keep on.

JR stated he spoke with Trish O'Brien and we were going forward with the kitchen ventilation fan. He advised he needed to deal with the building inspector on how to go about this.

JR noted that the Friends' Annual Appeal letter should be going out shortly. He further advised they were going to revamp their Facebook page concerning this. AB mentioned that the annual appeal letter in Lexington goes out with the tax bill. JR said the Annual Appeal letter should be sent out to everybody in Salem and it should note that every penny collected goes to seniors in need and there are no administrative costs. If there was a mailing to the entire city, the cost would be prohibitive. AB said if a second page with this was put in with the tax bill, it would not cost much. JR advised that between Facebook and the Annual Appeal, last year they made between \$15,000.00 - \$16,000.00 and that there were a lot of different things which could be done to double that amount. He also advised that he was going to add local businesses this year.

KM asked why the Annual Appeal letter wasn't sent out in December when everyone was thinking about contributions and taxes. AB said there is a big class of people thinking about taxes, and then another class who say they have no extra money in December. GB

said saying something like “if you don’t have it in December, send in January” is an idea and further said people might be feeling charitable during the holidays.

JR said they could try to send the Annual Appeal letter out a bit earlier and try to get people to share the link on Facebook and to make sure that people who have a big following like it and share it.

JR stated that Paul Tucker would be the moderator in January and then we would segway into LC and the COA.

### **Director’s Report:**

**Transportation:** The COA is providing trips to medical appointments, grocery stores and to the COA for social services appointments.

The School Department no longer requires our assistance to provide a driver for meal distribution throughout the City.

There is no word yet from Mass DOT regarding our grant request for a new van.

Some minor van repairs were paid with the van donation account. Trish O’Brien spoke with CFO Laurie Giardella regarding accessing more City funds to take care of future repairs this fiscal year. At the New Year we will begin a cycle of oil changes and some inspections. JR will contact the Salem High School Voc department to see if they can assist with minor repairs. AW heard back from Essex Tech who said they could not help right now.

The Farmers’ Market ended for the season. Our shuttle helped several people to access the market.

**Social Services:** The IT Department has a half dozen iPads that they are preparing for us to lend out to seniors. Trish O’Brien advised TA that the Mayor will likely set aside COVID funds to acquire tablets for seniors. We may want to administer a survey to determine interest, especially if it is going to be a long winter.

Lynne Barrett came back to work on 11/11 after arm surgery.

The social services team is busy with open enrollment with Medicare. Intern Alyssa Flynn has been a great help with fuel assistance applications, etc.

Sharon Felton has reported that the team constantly fields very challenging calls regarding housing, benefits, referrals for mental health counseling, etc. There has been a real uptick during the pandemic.

All the items for the COVID relief packages for low income seniors in housing have been received. COA staff will assemble and distribute these before the holidays. We received \$8,000.00 from CDBG for the items – i.e. pill boxes, masks, sanitizers, thermometer, etc.

\$2,250 was received from the Friends for 150 turkey dinners. Several City Councilors and others offered financial assistance to provide meals to another 100+ seniors. We have also received donations of food and gift cards to purchase food items and turkeys for those who want to prepare their own meals but lack the funds to purchase the ingredients.

**Nutrition:** The weekly pop-up Farmers’ Market ended. Approximately 75 people were served each week. We will be using Elder Services grant funds to continue to pay Kelley Annese to spearhead a Tuesday drive-through of healthy snacks and recipes as part of the nutritional education and outreach efforts.

**Programs:** We continue to offer programs on SATV four mornings a week. There are a few classes that have been held in the Great Room and we are following CDC guidelines.

The annual holiday luncheon will be outside this year via a drive-through on December 16<sup>th</sup>. Santa will be there as well as a musician playing holiday songs. This event is sponsored Mayor Driscoll.

Next Board Meeting: December 16, 2020 via Zoom at 5:15 P.M.

There being no further business:

A motion to adjourn was made by JR.

The meeting adjourned at 6:01 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kathleen Fitzgerald, Clerk