



## COUNCIL ON AGING and ADVISORY BOARD

### Meeting Minutes September 26, 2023

**Present:** Joan Belle Isle, Sandra Davidow, Naomi Krasner, Julie Norstrand, Robert Pierson, Ellen Penso, Sue Rasala, Eric Rosenbaum, Nancy Scammon, Laura Shaw, Dan Shaw

**Absent:** Mary Glendon, Ena Lorant, Maria Meyer, John Pelletier, Susan Schlesinger, Allison Sharma, Tom Shoemaker

**Staff:** Mignonne Murray, Liz O'Connell

**Guest:** Josh Morse, Commissioner of Public Buildings, City of Newton

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#### **Call to Order/Welcome/Vote on Minutes**

Joan Belle Isle called the meeting to order at 7:35 PM. The minutes from the June 2023 meeting were approved.

#### **NewCAL Update – Josh Morse**

There will be a three-month delay in the NewCAL project due to having received one bid on our first round that was \$9.5 million more than our cost estimates. The City decided to put the project out to bid for a second time. This time around, Josh is cautiously optimistic and expects to receive several bids from general contractors. Labor shortages are the largest factor affecting contracting, and there is heavy competition for general contractors due to this factor. Josh is hoping to receive several bids that are tight, i.e., within the same dollar range. Unless there are no bids, the City won't go out to bid a third time, since such a move could only make our project cost more. Construction makes up a good 75% of the budget, with interior needs, e.g., furniture, representing the remaining 25%. The existing structure at 345 Walnut Street will not be demolished until a bid has been accepted, since demolition is included in the bid.

#### **Needs Assessment Project Launch**

Joan Belle Isle sent COA members our Needs Assessment Timeline for 2023-2024 (see attachment). Joan and Mignonne Murray have identified and invited key players/influencers to participate in the project, e.g., Newton's Chief of Police, Chief of the Newton Fire Department and Newton's Commissioner of the Planning Department. In October, the COA must identify focus group participants and prepare the survey. Ideas for focus groups from those present included caregivers, early retirees, older adults who live alone, and Newton's black and brown seniors. Joan asked COA members to email her and Mignonne with more thoughts and ideas for focus groups as well as individuals that we could consider as participants. The survey will be drafted by the COA and the key influencers. Focus groups represent a different data point than the survey and provide a way to drill down deeply into issues to gather more information.

### **Housing Suitable for Older Adults in Newton Zoning Plans**

Dan Shaw, Lisa Monahan, Alice Ingerson, and Joan Belle Isle met to discuss age-friendly zoning recommendations. The summary of that meeting was shared with COA members. The COA needs to make a statement on the needs of seniors as related to the zoning talks that are occurring in the City, which are driven by the MBTA communities law. While the COA supports the zoning plans being discussed, we want to identify and share aspects of potential new buildings that would be suitable for older adults as well as others. Issues surrounding this statement include the erasure of the stigma previously associated with “living above the shop,” safety issues especially for seniors living alone, and referring to new structures as “places to live” instead of housing. A formal vote was taken regarding the COA making a statement based on the summary notes of the meeting described above. There were no objections and members were asked to email any comments to Joan Belle Isle within the next couple of days. Joan will send the statement to the Zoning and Planning Committee members as well as all other City Council members.

### **Senior Services Update**

Mignonne Murray reported that Joan Belle Isle will be moderating the Senior Center panel on Aging in Place taking place on Thursday, September 28. On October 1, the Senior Center will hold the Alzheimer’s Walk, leaving from the Brigham House at 10a.m. Mayor Fuller will be present.

NewMo changed to the SeniorPlus model this month, reducing the number of riders. There will be fewer NewMo cars on the road as well, reflecting this change. Now 69% of rides are senior rides; when commuters were included, only 39% of rides were senior rides. The current percentages are in line with the City’s NewMo budget. The shared ride service will go out to bid again within the next two months. Seniors should expect no change to or decrease in service; the Mayor’s Office prioritizes senior transportation.

### **Restructuring the COA/Advisory Committee**

Joan Belle Isle announced that the restructuring the COA/Advisory Committee model of governance is underway. To our knowledge, Newton is the only city/town in the Commonwealth to have both a Council on Aging and an Advisory Board. As we undergo our major transitions, now is a good time to combine the two entities resulting in a headcount that is reasonable and workable. Joan hopes to resolve the issue within the coming year.

The meeting adjourned at 9 p.m.