



## COUNCIL ON AGING and ADVISORY BOARD

### Meeting Minutes November 28, 2023

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

**Absent:** Mary Glendon, Ena Lorant, Maria Meyer, Susan Schlesinger, Allison Sharma, Laura Shaw, Dan Shaw, Tom Shoemaker

**Guests:** Lynne Abensohn, Lisa Monahan

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

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

Joan Belle Isle called the meeting to order at 7:32 PM. The minutes from the October 2023 meeting were approved.

Joan recognized John Pelletier's wife, Karen Wilfrid, who has just been published. Her young adult novel, *Just Lizzie*, was published by Clarion Books, a division of HarperCollins.

#### **NewCAL Update**

The Mayor has docketed an item for the Public Facilities and Finance Committees of the City Council meeting on December 11 at 7pm, for the purpose of requesting additional funds for NewCAL should there be a shortfall once the bids are open on December 7. The City Council previously approved \$20.5M. COA members are asked to attend the meeting.

#### **Programs and Activities for Older Adults in Newton**

Our new, expanded space when NewCAL is built will have implications for programming. Tonight's presenters will provide us with an overview of their current programming responsibilities.

*Presenters:* Nancy Scammon, Parks & Recreation Program Manager, Over 55 Programs; Ilana Seidmann, Program Coordinator, Department of Senior Services

Over 55 Programs are designed for people spanning several decades. The average age of participants is between 65 and 85. Nancy serves from 400-900 people per week. The higher figure represents "high season" participation, i.e., May 1-October 31. Programs are offered in-person, on Zoom, or are a hybrid. Pricing structure covers the cost of the teacher and overhead. Types of programs include indoor health and wellness, outdoor health and wellness/programs, special events (lunches, etc.), day trips, and, more recently, an outreach program in which Parks & Recreation "comes to you." An example of this is an art workshop offered at The Towers whose residents are primarily seniors; the workshop was very successful.

Nancy oversees more than 30 programs, and she pilots new programs regularly. She mails two newsletters a year, maintains two websites, and produces an e-newsletter. Her database includes over 2,000 individuals. Nancy also promotes her programs in the Senior Center e-newsletter.

While there is overlap between Over 55 Programs and Senior Services Programs, Nancy considers these to be sister programs. Examples of overlapping programs include day trips, although the Senior Center hasn't been in a position to offer them since pre-Covid, and line dancing, although the Senior Center line dancing program runs at a different pace. Program differences include: Nancy's program falls within a department of the city—she is one of nine Parks & Rec Managers. Ilana's position is a departmental oversight position. Nancy's programs are held all over the city; Senior Services programs will be housed in one location at NewCAL. Over 55 Programs does not offer Social Services; the Senior Center does. There are no data on overlapping clients.

Newton's Over 55 Programs position is unique. Newton has a Parks and Recreation Department, a Council on Aging, and a Department of Senior Services, while some smaller cities/towns have only one of these resources. Newton's size necessitates the three entities.

Mignonne Murray explained that Senior Center activities are integrated – exercise, events, etc., plus socialization and connection to the next level of support through Emily Kuhl, our Case Manager, who provides Social Services. Both program managers value the friendships developed among their participants.

Ilana Seidmann offered an overview of her programs, emphasizing that they could not run without the involvement of volunteers. The Senior Center has two technology programs – tech tutoring and tablet loans; 30 ongoing weekly or monthly programs—including support groups, affinity groups, clinics, games, music, and art; multi-class workshop series – drumming, mosaics, creating a life binder; and two special events per week. Ilana's responsibilities fall into five categories: planning, marketing, registration, implementation (and evaluation), problem-solving. The Senior Center's electronic newsletter goes out to 4,800 people. Volunteers help as program assistants, transportation helpers, poster designers, technology experts, and data enterers. With more resources, we could do more weekly events, e.g., theater or concerts, cooking classes, ping pong, author talks, poker, and intergenerational programs.

The Senior Center held a new intergenerational program with 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders from the Ward School this fall; Ilana's personal connection to the school ensured its success. Discussion ensued regarding the value of working with the schools. Wednesday afternoons are the best time to offer intergenerational programs in elementary schools and Tuesday afternoons after 2pm with Newton North, which was/will be right next to NewCAL. Traditionally, it is difficult to coordinate events with high schoolers. A few years ago, the Senior Center developed the Newton Talks Oral History Project with Newton South. Newton Talks may be found on the Newton Free Library's website.

The COA asked how they could support current programming efforts by Nancy and Ilana in anticipation of NewCAL. One suggestion was to ensure that NewCAL has a good piano to attract exceptionally talented musicians; a piano could be put on the list of furnishings needed at NewCAL. The Needs Assessment should also help. Attending current programs and bringing a buddy could also help to ensure program success while also addressing socialization.

### **“Are You OK?” Program Update**

Robert Pierson reported on the “Are You OK?” Program on behalf of the Isolation Task Force. “Are You OK?” is an automated system that is being implemented nationwide, most locally through the Norfolk County Sheriff’s Department. The program calls every senior each morning between 8-11am just as a daily check-in. Seniors who don’t answer receive a follow up call from a volunteer; if there is a problem, the volunteer contacts a nearby family member or neighbor to follow up; the next step is to contact the Police Department for a wellness check. The program is typically housed in a Police Department/Community Policing; however, Newton’s PD dispatch center has no room for “Are You OK?” currently. Eric Rosenbaum has been in contact with Robert about the program.

The question was posed as to whether or not there could be an “Are You OK?” dispatch center located in NewCAL. It was determined that housing the program within a Police Department would be most effective. The good news is that Newton’s PD dispatch center is scheduled for a capital project renovation and could potentially house “Are You OK?”. Conversations are beginning.

Oversight by a staff person would be minimal, perhaps one hour daily, and three volunteers, each with a 15 hr./week schedule, could manage the project, based on the experience of the Norfolk County Sheriff’s Department. The software is free.

The “Are You OK?” Program is on hold until we learn if the Newton Police Department can help.

Other ways to connect with seniors: our new program with Friendship Works provides medical escorts; Springwell’s Meals on Wheels offers a way to check in on seniors, as well. A suggestion was made to offer a program designed for seniors living on their own and advertised it as such.

### **Senior Services Update**

Mignonne Murray shared that NewMo has increased its coverage slightly during the last month, although there are still challenges. She is anticipating the results from December 7, the day the NewCAL bids are due. Mignonne’s other projects are reflected in all other reports.

### **Needs Assessment Project Update**

All initial one-on-one interviews with stakeholders have been completed with one exception. The next step is the survey instrument. The COA has been asked to review the draft survey; COA members are asked to email Joan Belle Isle and Mignonne Murray if they \*want\* to participate. The project will involve, most likely, a couple of heavy review weeks, given with a one-week notice. The survey review will take time and effort; it’s a process. Survey review is likely to be scheduled within the next one or two months. A group of five or six reviewers will be assembled; not all reviewers have to be from the COA.

The first focus group will be held on December 13; stakeholders (various representatives from City Departments) will be the participants; the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> focus groups will be for the Chinese and Russian speaking groups, respectively. Survey work will occur in between these focus groups, after which more focus groups will meet.

### **COA Ordinance and By-Laws Update**

There is no news yet from the Legal Department.

**Springwell Report**

Naomi Krasner reviewed Springwell's programs in brief, noting that Springwell is our Area Agency on Aging and that there is some overlap with Senior Center services. Springwell's director has been invited to participate in a Needs Assessment focus group. Like everywhere else, there is a waiting time before people can receive Springwell services. Volunteers are always needed.

Joan Belle Isle has asked Springwell for metrics on the Newton population. While Springwell collects data, they do not have the ability to produce reports that are city/town specific.

**Other Business**

The Hyde Center will be closed during the last week of December since the gym floor will be refinished during that time.

The meeting adjourned at 9:09 p.m.