

COUNCIL ON AGING—MARCH 22, 2022

Present: Joan Belle Isle, Sandra Davidow, Mary Glendon, Naomi Krasner, Maria Meyer, Julie Norstrand, John Pelletier, Joyce Picard, Sue Rasala, Eric Rosenbaum, Nancy Scammon, Susan Schlesinger, Laura Shaw, Dan Shaw, Gordon Szerlip

Absent: Beth Dugan, Tyrone Hooks, Ena Lorant, Robert Pierson, Lisa Samelson, Allison Sharma, Tom Shoemaker

Staff: Jayne Colino, Emily Kuhl, Liz O’Connell

Call to Order/Review/Vote on Minutes

The meeting was held by Zoom Videoconference and was called to order by Joan Belle Isle at 7:35 PM. Laura Shaw moved that the minutes of the February meeting be approved; Naomi Krasner seconded. The minutes were approved.

Introductions- Guests and Staff

Guests and staff were invited to introduce themselves when they spoke.

Presentation by Taylor Bearden, Civico Development

Taylor Bearden, a partner at Civico Development, presented on the redevelopment of the West Newton Armory into 100% affordable housing. Civico, a community-focused real estate development organization, is partnering with Metro West Collaborative Development on this project as a result of being awarded the project by the City of Newton. Civico presented to the COA this evening to ask for a letter of support from the COA before it goes before the Community Preservation Commission on April 12; in addition, the developers wanted to solicit feedback from the COA, as they are doing with several City institutions.

The West Newton Armory will offer 43 units of affordable housing. The Armory will be publicly accessible and address historic preservation issues. The housing is described as intergenerational family housing, open to all ages. There will be open space as well. The units will be “passive houses,” that is, they will have an energy efficient designation.

COA members discussed various aspects of the development. The following points resulted from the discussion:

- The project is supported by the City although it has many public process steps to take.

- The City of Newton owns the land; Civico leases the land.
- There is only rental housing. The lowest 1BR will go for \$750/mo; a 3BR will be under \$2,000/mo.
- Parking will be 100% underground; there are 28 spaces. Additional parking is on Armory St. and the expectation is that some people will be sharing cars.
- MetroWest Community Development will have its headquarters at the Armory; there will be a Resident Director on site who will be connected to Emily Kuhl and other city social workers for seamless community support.
- Civico has developed and managed other properties in Newton.

COA members gave Taylor age-friendly design suggestions. Jayne invited Taylor to the April COA meeting at which Jennifer Molinsky from Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies will be presenting. The COA was both impressed by and happy that Civico came to them for feedback on the project.

NewCAL Update

The Historic Commission Meeting is on Thursday, March 24. At this time, the Commission will decide whether to move forward in securing historic documentation for the current building at 345 Walnut Street. All COA members were encouraged to go to the meeting to show our support of a new building. Questions from the audience will not be taken during the meeting.

Hopefully, the Historic Commission will vote to decline the application to make 345 Walnut Street an historic landmark and NewCAL can proceed. Another hurdle may be related to a grant the Senior Center applied to years ago for "a park project." There are restrictions on Newton parklands; however, the Senior Center grounds are not designated as such.

In summary: On Thursday, March 24, the Newton Historic Commission will be voting on whether to move the nomination forward to landmark 345 Walnut St. We need four votes to decline. In preparation for this moment, we have written letters and created a petition with over 1,100 signatures. Newton at Home helped us in this effort. Our postcard project also had a good response. Four to five hundred letters have been sent to the members of the Historic Commission, pro and con. Josh Morse will present to the Commission on Thursday, including reviewing the things that will be preserved, such as the stained-glass windows and the chandeliers.

By-Laws Update

There is no update on the by-laws this month. Suggested changes/edits are in Joan's and Jayne's hands.

Membership

Mayor Fuller officially appointed Robert Pierson as a Newton Senior Center Advisory Board member. Congratulations, Robert! The first steps with Ellen Penso have been taken; an interview has been held.

Nominations for Age Friendly Awards or Acknowledgement of Age-Friendly Acts

Jayne explained that Newton could have annual Age-Friendly Awards as well as regular Acknowledgement of Age-Friendly Acts. Acts could be recognized in the Senior Center newsletters, on social media, as well as in the City's media (*Newton Tab, Newton Patch*). The first Act to be submitted will be from Sue Rasala on how the library made it easier for her and others to reach books on the bottom shelf.

Laura Shaw proposed that we institute an educational program for agencies, businesses, and restaurants on the needs of older adults. Jayne agreed yet noted that the Senior Center has no bandwidth to spearhead the project. Laura wondered if the COA could start a volunteer committee to acknowledge this need (the committee's work potentially could be part of PLAAN). Dan Shaw seconded. Jayne asked COA members to consider being on the proposed committee.

Other suggestions included the following:

- Age Friendly Honor Roll
- Encourage people to write an email, whether they were helped themselves or witnessed someone being helped
- Invite the Brookline COA to come to a meeting to discuss their program, which is done through their version of Newton at Home

Business Issues

Joan Belle Isle put forth the question of writing a letter of support for Civico for the Armory project. After discussion, it was determined that the Executive Committee would write a letter of support that would include ideas given by the group.

The COA decided to table the idea of Joan writing a second letter of support for NewCAL at this time.

Updates

- John Pelletier reported there are big changes coming to Commonwealth Avenue on the stretch from BC to Auburndale, with legalized two-way bike traffic. The change should make Comm Ave more friendly to seniors. The activity will start this spring. On Ablemarle Road, there will be improvements creating a connection from Ablemarle to the parks. Finally, there may be a roundabout coming at the intersection of Auburn St. and Commonwealth Ave.
- The *All the Lonely People* documentary will be shown at Newton North High School on Wednesday, June 15, in the evening. Sponsorship is growing. Jayne will be in touch with Dan, Laura, Naomi, and Sandra about this project.
- In April/May we will have housing presentations from:
 - former Chief Planner for Long Range Planning in Newton's Planning Department and current Project Director, Housing an Aging Society Program at the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, Jennifer Molinsky; and
 - Mark Development on the new center on Crafts Street behind the Whole Foods.
- The June Annual Meeting will be held outdoors at the Senior Center.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:43pm.