

COUNCIL ON AGING—JANUARY 24, 2023

Present: Joan Belle Isle, Sandra Davidow, Mary Glendon, Lt. Amanda Henrickson (for Eric Rosenbaum), Naomi Krasner, Ena Lorant, Julie Norstrand, John Pelletier, Robert Pierson, Sue Rasala, Nancy Scammon, Susan Schlesinger, Allison Sharma, Laura Shaw, Dan Shaw

Absent: Maria Meyer, Tom Shoemaker

Guest Presenters: Mayor Ruthanne Fuller; Josh Morse, Commissioner of Public Buildings

Staff: Mignonne Murray, Liz O'Connell

Call to Order/Review/Vote on Minutes

Joan Belle Isle called the meeting to order at 7:31 PM. The minutes of the December 2022 meeting were approved.

Welcome and Introduction of New Director

Joan Belle Isle welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced our new Director Mignonne Murray who spoke of her happiness about being back in Newton. Mignonne had worked at the Newton Housing Authority early in her career.

Override Discussion with Mayor Fuller and Josh Morse

The Mayor noted that Newton has proposed an override approximately every ten years during the last three decades. Voting for this year's override proposals will be on March 14. Early voting is available. Three override proposals will be on the ballot, including funding for roads and schools, as well as new areas that have never been part of an override before, as follows: parks, playgrounds, fields, trees, and senior services.

The proposed \$500K override for senior programs and services will be a blessing with voter support. NewCAL is a great way to round out services—an intergenerational center with a primary focus on seniors. There will be more and better space and the Center will be open for longer hours. The new funding will be used flexibly for staff, transportation, and building maintenance.

Josh Morse reviewed how the override and NewCAL tie together, beginning with a NewCAL update.

All is going along well with NewCAL; the focus now is on the lobby and reception desk. Full demolition of 345 Walnut St will occur in summer 2023 after the special artifacts have been removed. The new center will be full of vibrant colors and artwork. The reception desk will have good sight lines and varied heights. There will be a lounge near the lobby, and the staircase will be broken up so that visitors can climb one floor at a time. From the lobby, there are good sight lines into the dining space. The Connick windows will be on the first floor on windows facing Walnut Street; there will be interior and exterior views, with excellent lighting, at eye level. Second floor highlights include an art room with kilns, fitness area, and offices. The third floor deck will be overlooking Newtonville. On this level, there will be a fitness area, including two pickleball courts and a walking track, which has been widened a bit to accommodate a passing lane. NewCAL is the product of five years of planning and more than 400 meetings.

The tie to the override is the numbers of people who are interested in this Center. The NewCAL listserv has over a thousand people on it, which represents huge interest among Newton's residents. The new space will serve more people. New and higher operating costs will allow us to meet the building's potential. NewCAL will help isolation issues among seniors, of which there are 30,000 in Newton. The building is designed to last 100 years. Without the override, it will be much harder for us to reach NewCAL's full potential.

Both the Mayor and Josh thanked Newton seniors who are a powerhouse!

Discussion following the presentation included a question as to why ARPA funds didn't affect NewCAL expenses. The City received \$63 million, which was a critical infusion first and primarily used for pandemic response and recovery. ARPA funds were also used to help the City's budget for roads and schools, as well as for the new children's room in the library. There is just a small amount left. For more information, residents can visit the Mayor's page on the City website to view ARPA allocations. COA members and the Mayor gave kudos to Josh for his work on NewCAL, citing that Josh uses his head and his heart, and he can see the forest and the trees. Josh genuinely cares about people and about Newton residents in particular. Finally, COA members felt it was important to educate the community about how property taxes work in Newton, with the goal of gaining support for the override.

Joan Belle Isle encouraged all COA members to reach out and generate support for the override.

The three names for the new building that were most popular among COA members were: Cooper Center for Active Living, NewCAL, and Newton Center for Active Living. Joan will pass these names along to the Mayor who has the ultimate decision-making power regarding the building name. Everyone agreed.

Needs Assessment Revisited

Mignonne and Joan met with the UMass Gerontology Institute this week to begin the process of updating our needs assessment. Ideas concerning the update included the following:

- Ensure transportation and housing are in the needs assessment
- Review what we have accomplished, what is outstanding, what new issues have arisen. What did and didn't work?
- Focus on opportunities for improvement in needed areas rather than refreshing the data completely if we have to make a choice
- Consider refreshing mental health changes in the elderly, post-pandemic
- Look at caregivers' needs
- Consider: With the generational shift, there may be different expectations on what it means to age. What attention will be necessary? Caregivers (children) can't afford to stay in Newton
- Isolation needs will become greater as caregiver networks collapse (fewer kids, not in the area)

Newton currently does more for its senior population than many cities due to the COA, the Senior Center staff, and volunteers. It is still difficult, however, to find transportation for people covering longer distances, e.g., into Boston for medical appointments. Robert Pierson directs the AmeriCorps Seniors Program, and his organization can recruit volunteers to transport people into Boston/longer distances and provide insurance coverage for them as well. The City/Senior Center would have to manage the dispatch.

A small working group will be needed to work on the needs assessment project. Joan Belle Isle asked all COA members to stay tuned. Mignonne is ready to dig in.

Reception for Jayne

The reception for Jayne Colino will be held on January 30 from 4-6 pm in the Druker Auditorium of the Newton Free Library. All are welcome.

Other Updates

Springwell

Laura Shaw met with the CEO of Springwell and reported that some unexpected, but manageable, issues are arising with the merger of Baypath and Springwell, e.g., merging the phone systems. A merger takes about three years to complete. While the AAA funds have not yet been merged, representatives of Baypath and Springwell are meeting as a merged group. They continue to discuss

how to simplify the application process for AAA funds. Waltham is the only city that has done well as far as securing grants funded by the AAA.

The Healthy Living Center of Excellence through the Merrimack Valley COA has online workshops on fitness, dealing with chronic health issues, healthy eating for older adults, and controlling diabetes in a few different languages.

Dan Shaw noted that workshops on mental health, e.g., managing depression, are also needed. Laura and Dan Shaw see the need for the Senior Center to receive a grant around isolation and mental health issues. With a number of very accomplished residents making Newton their home, Dan wondered if a Senior Center participant could do this. Joan Belle Isle asked Dan to prepare a proposal to start this project.

Senior Services

Mignonne is currently focused on NewCAL building tweaks and staffing. She highlighted the new newsletter, thanking staff. Mignonne invited COA members to meet individually with her so she can get to know them. COA members can give Mignonne a call anytime.

Something that is on COA members' minds is appointing more people to the COA Board, outlining the purpose of their roles.

The meeting adjourned at 8:51 pm.