

COUNCIL ON AGING—MARCH 7, 2023

Present: Joan Belle Isle, Sandra Davidow, Naomi Krasner, Julie Norstrand, John Pelletier, Ellen Penso, Robert Pierson, Sue Rasala, Nancy Scammon, Allison Sharma, Laura Shaw, Dan Shaw

Absent: Mary Glendon, Ena Lorant, Maria Meyer, Eric Rosenbaum, Susan Schlesinger, Tom Shoemaker

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

Staff: Mignonne Murray, Liz O'Connell

Welcome/Call to Order/Vote on Minutes

Joan Belle Isle called the meeting to order at 7:40 PM. The minutes of the January 2023 meeting were approved.

NewCAL

- *Project Update – Joan Belle Isle*

There is a Design Review Committee meeting on March 15, and a Community Meeting on March 16. They are working on construction documents now. In May, the Design Review Committee will review and give their blessing on the documents. The project will go out to bid in June, and a contractor is expected to be selected in July. Action on the current building at 345 Walnut Street will commence in September and the old building will come down in the beginning of October.

- *Planning Programming & Observations from other Senior Center site visits – Mignonne Murray*

Mignonne and Ilana Seidmann are determining now the new equipment that will be needed for programs that are already in place. They have been talking with other groups and visiting other senior centers to learn more. Among the other senior centers visited are those in Needham and Ludlow, also Falmouth and Randolph, which were both designed by our architect. Different centers have different feels. Mignonne felt that the Falmouth center was particularly nice—contemporary, with an adult feeling. COA members were invited to visit senior centers either on their own or with Mignonne. Robert Pierson noted that Walpole and Wellesley were very similar and very nice.

- *Questions/Answers Discussion*

NewCAL will not replace one's gym fully, depending on what the person does. There is, for example, no need currently recognized for treadmills in NewCAL.

Mignonne is focusing now on current and future space and staffing needs. The override vote, of course, will affect staffing.

There are many different senior center models regarding intergenerational/multiple purpose uses. For example, Natick was a senior center first and then added parks and recreation and other programs. In Weston, the reverse was true: parks and recreation oversaw the space of which the senior center had a small portion. The NewCAL space will be for seniors first. Some parks and recreation programs will be complementary and held in our space. Nancy Scammon and Mignonne have spoken; Ilana and Nicole Banks will be involved soon. Mignonne has not felt any pressure from other departments or groups to use the space. Julie Norstrand wondered if we should put out language to the effect that the senior center will be the priority group in NewCAL since there has been talk on NextDoor of younger groups taking over the new center. Mignonne noted that such a narrative will be coming later. Joan Belle Isle recognized that NewCAL is a city asset, and there will be times when the senior center won't need the space; other city departments may be given permission by the senior center to use NewCAL space.

Mignonne is hoping that NewCAL will not have segregated hours for use by seniors versus other groups. Currently there are fewer seniors who use the Center regularly for social reasons; COVID frightened some people. Now is also a difficult time to judge the need for regular visitors since our space is so much smaller and our programs are not in one place. Sandra noted that outside groups using NewCAL may pay a rental stipend which would help with the new budget. She is hoping the feel of the new Center will be like the city clubs, e.g., the Algonquin Club. John P. inquired as to whether the new center will have automated counters on the doors, which can help count the numbers of users and identify the busiest times of the day; Mignonne will bring this idea to the planning group. John also wondered how we can attract older residents of means who might participate in more exclusive programs as the Salem Senior Center has done. COA members were encouraged to visit other senior centers and take note of what areas are being used and what aren't.

Update on Newton Senior Services

Mignonne reported that she and the staff are doing well. The Senior Fund bought fleece zip-up jackets with the NewCAL logo, which contribute to building teamwork. All at the Hyde is going well, as is Elizabeth Lund (and SHINE and taxes) who is located at the Newton Free Library. Emily is busy as ever. Our administrative volunteers, or customer service representatives, are also in place. Staff meetings will begin this week.

COA/Advisory Committee Priorities for the Year

There was a brief discussion on how the COA and Advisory Committee as a group would handle whatever new priorities they identify. An in-depth discussion of priorities will be postponed until the next meeting.

Our approach will be to develop an action plan regarding priorities we set, which we will give to Mignonne to determine if any action can be taken at that time. Ideas generated:

- Advisory Committee members present on topics they have researched
- For the short-term, perhaps we could have a workshop on the use of personal pronouns
- Follow up with the Are You OK? Program identified by the isolation task force. Robert P. noted that this program could be implemented remotely at a reasonable cost, although we will have to see what happens with the override.
- Identify the types of programs we can offer to Mignonne that will be supportive of Mignonne and the work of the Senior Center
- There may be short and long-term projects identified. Some may need staffing, others not.
- Advisory Committee needs to gather the information relevant to a proposed new idea...to gather more substance in order to take next steps

Each member can identify an issue within things that affect older adults and to which he/she is personally committed. The end goal is to arrive at something that addresses the issue. Mignonne noted that the purpose of the Board is to identify work that can be done to advocate, promote, and gather information on/for issues supporting seniors. The dilemma is that while Board members can identify their passions, they need some direction from the Executive Committee or Senior Services regarding their approach to and the viability of a project.

Joan Belle Isle noted that until now, we have used the Age-Friendly Guidelines to decide our priorities. Now we are being asked to go further...and so what? It will be hard to identify an issue that wouldn't meet the Age-Friendly Guidelines. Joan noted that the COA advocates for seniors. The COA goes to Mignonne to determine what might be most helpful to pursue.

Override Voting Schedule

The last day of early voting was today, March 7. The regular voting day is Tuesday, March 14. On March 14, mail-in ballots must get in the City Hall dropbox by 8pm. Alternatively, on March 14, someone possessing a mail-in ballot may speak with the staff at their voting site who are able void the mail-in ballot and give the voter a new, regular ballot.

Other Updates

John Pelletier has been appointed by the Mayor to work with Josh Ostroff and Donna Murphy on Newton's bicycle and pedestrian plan. John will invite Josh Ostroff to a COA meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:04 pm.

