Meeting minutes of Belmont Council on aging

Jan. 6, 2014, 7:30 pm

Attending: Penny Schafer (chair), Judy Singler, MaryAnn Scali, Mike Cahalane, Matthew Dumont, James Stanton, Chao-Qiang Lai, Ethel Hamann, Ted Dukas, Joel Semuels, Ann Lougee (Guest).

Absent: Tommasina Olson

By Chao-Qiang Lai

1. Meeting was called to order at 7:40 pm by Penny
2. Reviewed the meeting minutes by MaryAnn and made corrections:

Correction 1: “Penny asked if Nava could work with the Town to solve some concerns for seniors who might be tax exempt, “tax” was removed from this sentence.

Correction 2: corrected Mike Cahalane’s name in three places.

Correction 3: 5. Friends of the COA-J. Semuels – Crafts show will be in next month in newsletter. Insert “results” after Crafts.

Correction 4: At-large for Belmont is Judy Singler. “for Belmont” is removed.

The meeting minutes was accepted.

1. Nava (Director)’s report
2. Town IT Department upgraded all computers at Beech Street Center to Windows 2010. This may cause a decrease in efficiency as the Town IT Department has no resources to train every employee. It will take staff several weeks to get over the learning curve.

The Rotary Club activity that used to be in the library will be in this meeting room.

1. We had three incidents of pipes burst at Beech Street Center because of severe cold weather: Friday (Jan. 3) when the center was closed: the office area. Saturday (Jan. 4): the craft room; Nava happened to be in the building when it happened; a sport program was going on at the time. Sunday (Jan.5): the multiple-purpose (MP) room, around 6:30 am. A leak occurred today (Jan 6) at 1:00 pm; the building had to be evacuated. Firemen came and evaluated the situation.
2. Damage: minimal

Friday’s incident was at the office area, the only damage was to the color laser printer (owned by the center, six years old), which needs to be replaced. IT will order a new one to replace it without any cost to COA. The printing is now done at Town Hall. The wet carpet may grow mold. To save the carpet, it was suggested that a fan with heat on and increased heating at the center should be used to dry the carpet.

1. Cause: severe cold
2. COA activities at the center were affected: meeting in the Craft Room will be moved to this meeting room. The game room is off limits. The game room will be fixed in two weeks. All the activities can be accommodated.
3. To prevent future incidents, Joel suggested that the incident may be diagnosed better if video recording was used.
4. Why did the pipe burst happen this year, not before?

Keeping the building a bit warmer is the best strategy. These incidents will not affect the COA budget or personnel. If sprinklers do not work, there are fire extinguishers around in case of fire events. The building is currently safe to be in.

1. Ongoing program/class: Fitness room attendance increased up to 252 this month (61 users).
2. Nava wanted to make a pitch for coming program: Getting your offspring off, out, and running –for parents and grandparents to help young adult development program. The presentation will be at the center, Jan. 14, 5:30pm, Free.
3. Joel reported on Friends of COA meeting.
4. Joel is now the president of Friends of COA, succeeding James Stanton. The next board meeting is on Jan 9, Thursday 7:00 pm. Ann is the treasurer.
5. Ann is working on the Newsletter of Friends of COA, which is coming along. The purpose is to seek the new membership of Friends of COA. Ann is collecting articles.
6. Joel will meet with Al Natale for lunch to prepare for Orchestra concert in Sept., a fund raising activity sponsored by Friends. Second or third Thursday night of Sept is preferred. Al Natale is 93.
7. Joel asked if there is any need for Friends of COA to budget for a particular need, which is currently not accommodated by the COA’s budget. Nava mentioned the center needs more chairs before. Nava said for now there are enough chairs.
8. “Senior Services Directory” (supported by the Friends of COA) is available and looks great.
9. Judy reported on Springwell: nothing to report as there was no meeting.

Maryann asked who decides on catering for senior lunch at COA. Nava clarified different caters bid on it and the nutrition staff tastes the food before selecting the caterer. Nava said the food is getting better based on the responses from seniors. Boxed lunch was not so good as it is hard for seniors to open it. But boxed lunches are rare (only occasionally).

1. Mike (chair of CPA committee) reported on the elevator project.
2. CPA committee (Mike, Joel, Chao, Ted, Ethel, and Sher Thapa) met with the building manager Mike Colin and toured the apartment buildings on Dec. 3. In the meeting, CPA committee assigned tasks and followed with detailed info. But the whole project was put on hold recently because Joel talked to Donna Hamilton, who indicated that CPA fund is not allowed to be used for the elevator project, re-habitation, under the CPA law based on DHCD.

The CPA committee for the elevator project is still on. The consensus is that

Mike (or Joel, Ethel may go too) will attend the next meeting of Housing Authority to find out the priority of the Housing Authority. Next meeting of the Housing Authority is on Jan. 27 and 29. We should address to the Housing Authority on the subject; if Belmont Town cannot fund the elevator project, should we ask the state and approach the state house representative (David Roger). Then we can find out if there is funding available in the state fund.

1. The date for the COA staff appreciation lunch changed to March 14, noon, 2014. Mike collected $10 from each member for the lunch. Next meeting everyone should sign up on a sheet for different types of food to bring.
2. Nava reported on the budget of FY2014.
3. In the budget meeting Nava had with the Town Administration’s budget team it was decided that it is prudent for Nava to ask to increase the revolving account from $80,000 to $100,000. This is because so many activities are going on at the center. More classes, more trips, and so on. The usage of COA has increased 8.2%. Funds are coming in and funds are paid out from the accounts. Penny said we should be prepared to discuss the revolving accounts.

Currently four revolving accounts:

Classes: $32,000

Trips: $7000

Other (small donations <$100, transportation assistance donation, like $2-3):

Fitness room: $10,000

For “Other”: only small donations go to this revolving account. Typical donations go to the Gift account, not to the revolving accounts.

The main use for the “Other” account is for things which are not on the COA budget. Other: computing supplies - we need to pay the annual upgrade fee $990 for MySeniorCenter –the database program which is not in the COA budget. The Town did not pay for this.

Nava requested more custodian time (15 hours) has been addressed by the town.

B. Budget narrative

Nava handed out and talked about budget narrative of FY2014.

The budget is in one table and the narrative is separated from the table.

Anyone has questions or suggestions can contact Nava directly. Penny pointed out those who will meet with Warrant Committee together with Nava should get familiar with the budget.

Note:

1. The budget was created with last year’s budget used as an example.
2. $16,285 (6.5% increase) was added because the health insurance for one staff was missed last year and is now included this year.
3. Longevity is one type of union benefit. Three employees with two different unions are eligible for such benefits.
4. Joel reported on the Warrant Committee meeting

Joel went to the Warrant Committee meeting in the evening of Dec. 18. They (the Warrant Committee) were organizing their sub-working group, which is now called Human Services (known formally as CNR) includes: Elizabeth Grob (Chair), Elisabeth Allison, Robert McLaughlin, Greg Memnis. Question is who can go to future meetings.

1. Snow shoveling by-law

Penny pointed out that the objective of COA board in discussing the by-law at this meeting are: (1) what are the problems with implementing the by-law concerning seniors? (2) what can the board do to help with the process?

The by-law has not been approved by the state yet. The regulation (by-law) sent out by the Town has raised many questions. Nava said COA has done several sessions on understanding the by-law, and have been providing consulting on the issue to seniors. Penny mentioned Liberty snow shoveling service which is run by high school students.

Matt talked about his letter and asked if we should defer this discussion to another time. Joel disagreed respectfully. Joel said that less than 100 seniors are exempt and in addition they would need to apply each year according to the current version of the by-law. There are two types of exemptions: the 41C exemption for seniors of low-income and veteran with disability. Joel believes that the exemption is too narrow - the selectman has not met the requirement of the by-law to excuse seniors with low income or physical impairments from the by-law. That means almost every elderly person has to comply with the law. Is this fair to seniors? Should the exemption be expanded to other seniors?

Why was the COA board not consulted directly about such regulations? How should we help seniors who either cannot do it physically or cannot afford to have someone else do it because of financial hardships?

Judy asked if the selectmen have found out how other towns have implemented such by-laws and addressed seniors’ concerns. It is conceivable that the town might have already looked into how other towns had dealt with the snow shoveling issues of seniors and adapted the law from other towns.

Penny indicated that we have heard many problems with the by-law. But (1) we don’t know the extent of such problems; (2) What would be a reasonable solution to these problems?

How can we demonstrate that a senior is capable or not capable of shoveling? Low income limit/definition (less than $20,000/household) and physical ability or particular medical condition (a doctor’s letter?). 23% of the town population is over 60 year old.

We are concerned that seniors may feel emotionally stressed and may not able to do it physically. Is any assistance available from the COA for such seniors?

Nava mentioned that we have about 100 high school students who volunteer for community service to help seniors to shovel snow. But this may not relieve the burden of seniors for various reasons. The students can be contacted for the service by seniors who live within the area where the students live. But sometimes seniors don’t want to get help from the students, but from paid services. Joel mentioned that he has a neighbor who had someone do the shoveling for $75 per pot.

We should express our concerns on the issue to selectmen for seniors who are have cardiovascular conditions or are physically frail. A letter should be sent to selectmen to address these concerns.

Matt has drafted a letter to COA and he read his letter to the board. All members at the meeting agreed with the letter, except the part that refers to the by-law a mistake. In general, the board supports the sentiment of the by-law, which requires residents to clear up snow off sidewalks for the safety of senior and the public. The letter is to address concerns, alert to selectmen and engage for further dialogue with the selectmen, but at this stage it is not meant to offer a specific solution. The plan is that Matthew will modify his letter to reflect the points raised by the board and then send it to Penny. Penny will proofread the letter, send the letter to all board members and get approved before sending it to selectmen by Sunday.

1. The meeting was adjourned at 10:22 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Chao Qiang Lai