



OFFICE OF THE COUNCIL ON AGING

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Board Minutes for June 10, 2014

Present: Penny Schafer (Chair), Michael Cahalane, Ted Dukas, Matt Dumont, Chao-Qiang Lai, Tomi Olson, Joel Semuels, Judith Singler (liaison to Springwell), Nava Niv-Vogel (Director). Also attending: Leo Saidnawey (liaison from the Belmont Housing Authority)

Absent: Mary Ann Scali, Ethel Hamann

Meeting called to order- 7:30 pm

1. Senior citizens concerns: Chao-Qiang Lai reported that Chinese seniors are experiencing difficulty using the Senior Center due to a language barrier. He sent a link to Nava that will access information re English classes and other activities at the Center. The IT dept. has installed the link on computers in the lab. There was a discussion of translation for those seniors in need of this service. Nava Niv-Vogel noted that a daughter of one of the Chinese seniors has a translation program which the Center might be able to use. Chao wondered if stronger students in the ESL classes might be able to translate bulletins and other materials for those having difficulty. There are currently 22 Chinese seniors taking the ESL class at the Center. Penny Schaefer pointed out that there has been a growing Asian population in town. Joel Semuels added that it cost \$900.00 to translate the Senior Citizens Directory into Mandarin. He also noted that there were groups in town that might be available to help with getting taxes done for those in need of this service.
2. COA/Housing Authority collaboration: Mike Cahalane reported on a BHA meeting he attended where this possible collaboration was discussed. He said that the BHA asked if there was any possible housing space for seniors at the Center. Mike explained to them that, given the present space, this was not an option. He mentioned that the COA had considered elevators for the Waverly Woods units. Leo Saidnawey stated that this subject had been studied extensively in the past; however, there was no state money available for installation or maintenance, town housing complexes are not handicapped accessible (so elevators would not be useful), and that when apartment occupants become wheelchair bound they have to move.

The discussion then focused on the area between the Waverly complex and Shaw's. The sidewalk there is not maintained and BHA is not responsible for this but, according to Leo, the Trapelo Road Corridor Project is scheduled to deal with this issue. Tomi Olson mentioned one proposal for the Community Path Project which would call for taking some of the land between the complex and Shaw's for part of the path. If this were to happen the land could be graded. She added that an engineering study would be required to evaluate this possibility.

In response to a question from Joel as to how previous Community Preservation Act(CPA) funds had been spent, Leo explained that significant amounts had been used to repair roofing and upgrade wiring. Joel noted a complaint heard at Town Meeting regarding maintenance for these apartments, which was reported to be the State's responsibility. Leo explained that limited State funds were awarded based on the number of units in each town. There was a suggestion to hire a social worker for the senior housing complexes. This would involve salary consideration and the number of hours it would be possible to offer assistance. Leo reminded the Board that, funded by a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Springwell had supplied a social worker ten years ago; however the funds were not on an ongoing basis, although the Springwell person who

held this position might still be available for rehire. Penny reminded everyone that hiring an additional staff person would involve additional funding to the current budget. She and Nava discussed whether this social worker might be an LCSW or an LICSW (as current outreach workers are). Penny asked if (CPA) funds could be used to modify apartments, pointing out that for collaboration purposes a capital project might be easier to accomplish.

Discussing the occupants of the housing complexes, Judith Singler stated there was a total of 70 units: 26 at Sherman Gardens and 44 at Waverly Woods. This housing was designated for qualified couples, people with disabilities, and seniors.

In dealing with the state, Matt Dumont suggested that two agencies (BHA & COA) approaching the state for funding for elevators might have a greater chance of success. Leo explained that the housing units were not connected, which might make an elevator request impractical. He thought there might be a better chance for funding if the application was for making the apartments handicapped accessible, adding that the State had provided funds in the past to upgrade the emergency alarm systems at both Waverly and Sherman. Leo committed to following up on the topic of possible State funds for upgrading. As to the process of selecting apartments for repairs, he explained that they are made, as needed, when apartments turn over.

3. The minutes of the April 7, 2014 meeting were reviewed. On page 4 "Belmont Senior Agency" was changed to "Belmont Veterans Agent." There was discussion about having the agent for veterans report to the Senior Center Director rather than the Belmont Health Department (BHD). The minutes were then adopted as submitted.
4. Director's Report Updates: Nava announced a \$3,000 award from Mt. Auburn Hospital designated for transportation and now deposited into the Senior Center gift account and a Latino senior offering Spanish lessons for beginners Thursday mornings. Nava's program "Conversations Across Generations," demonstrated that seniors have definite ideas about Boomers and Millennials. The program would have been more successful if there had been a greater number of representatives from these two groups.

Further announcements included an IT report that the Senior Center computers are old and are slated to be replaced with new desktops (included in the FY '15 budget). There will be changes in the Town website: members of boards will be listed, with town email addresses, but personal email addresses will be hidden. People will be able to contact individual board members through the Town website; however, board member responses will indicate personal email addresses unless the board respondent changes the return address. Lou Wolf, CEO of Hebrew Life, will visit the Belmont Senior Center. Ginny Falvey, former Board member has passed away. The budget for the Senior Center, COA, and the increased revolving fund account passed at Belmont Town Meeting.

4. Memorial Day Parade: Tomi felt that using the Belderbus was a good idea, but it was not well-advertised and only three people showed up to use it. Nava concurred, explaining that there had been a problem finding a driver, which got worked out at the last minute.
5. Friends: Joel reported that a Friends meeting would follow the Volunteer Appreciation Dinner, Thursday, June 19, 2014, 5:00-7:00 pm. Sponsors are needed for the Al Natale concert, set for September 18, 2014. There will be a craft fair over the coming Thanksgiving holiday weekend.

Friends are looking for donations to purchase a tent with COA lettering for use at various events such as Town Day.

6. Springwell: Judith Singler reported that as Boston College Legal Services will no longer be working with Springwell, they are currently looking for a new partner. The organization ended the year with a budget surplus, to be allocated across programs and projects. Springwell has a staff of 135 and a budget of \$30 M. The new director, promoted from within, has been with the organization for ten years and has reviewed every program since assuming her position.
7. Bocce court: the Senior Center staff will review boundary lines. The summer sports program may or may not have started. Other summer events include: a presentation on Israel, July 8, the Second Annual Senior Center Talent Show, which will take place in August, and the Ice Cream Social, the Tuesday before Labor Day.

Next board meeting: July 14 (there will not be an August board meeting).
Meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Ted Dukas
Acting recording secretary

