

**Town of Natick
Council on Aging Board Committee
Monday, June 12, 2023**

Minutes

(Note: this meeting was hybrid, with some members attending in person at the Community-Senior Center (CSC) and others attending remotely.)

Board Members in Attendance (8): Saul Beaumont; Elaina Danahy; Andrew Eschtruth; Harriet Merkowitz; Karen Oakley; Sue Peters; Judy Sabol; and Mal Sockol

Board Members Absent (2): Connie Pitt; Rick Subber

Associate Members Present (2): Linda Jaffe; Sal Pandolfo

Guest Speaker: Susan Ramsey, Director, Community Services Department, Town of Natick

COA Staff: Lorraine McNally, Deputy Director, Council on Aging and Human Services

Chair Judy Sabol opened the meeting at 7:07 pm and welcomed board members, staff, and members of the public.

- 1) **Public Concerns**— none
- 2) **Guest Speaker** – Susan Ramsey
 - a) The Community Services Department is undergoing a thorough assessment to reformulate how it handles its many functions, a process that includes better integrating Department services through streamlining people, buildings, and programs; and reviewing staff job descriptions.
 - b) As part of this effort, Community Services is launching a human services needs assessment with help from outside consultants from the Collins Center at UMass-Boston and from the University of New Hampshire. The intent is to “help people growing up and growing old.” It involves taking the pulse of the community through holding surveys and focus groups and preparing case studies of other towns and outside service organizations to improve operational efficiency and eliminate duplication. This initiative is scheduled to kick off next month. The time is ripe for such a sweeping assessment as the department is in a transition period, with some staff recently departing and Ms. Ramsey taking on the role of director, a slot that has been vacant for several years.
 - c) As an example of the synergies the department is pursuing, the Skyline program – which provides adaptive and inclusive programs for individuals with special needs and has struggled to find a home – will now be housed at the CSC. This transition will work well as activities can be scheduled to take place during the CSC’s midday lull.
 - d) Another initiative being considered is to have the CSC host after-school activities, which would probably aim for elementary-age kids.

- e) If the computer lab had better furniture, this space could also be used for different activities.
- f) The Recreation staff will be responsible for running recreation programs that are held in the CSC.
- g) Paula Panchuk, a member of the public, asked Ms. Ramsey about whether Natick would pursue an “age-friendly community” designation, which requires a community to do well on eight dimensions (e.g., better intersections for pedestrians). Ms. Ramsey replied that Natick is not currently a leader in this area, but that pursuing such a designation might be a recommendation that would come out of the needs assessment.
- h) Judy Sabol thanked Ms. Ramsey and said that the COA Board looks forward to providing input during this process, a prospect that Ms. Ramsey welcomed.

3) **Chair’s Report-** Judy Sabol

- a) COA Board Vacancies – Linda Jaffee, currently an Associate COA Board Member, has applied for the current vacancy for a full Member. The Board will also have two additional open slots as Rick Subber will not renew his term after June of this year; and Andrew Eschtruth is finishing his second term in June. On behalf of the Board, Judy thanked them for their service. Board members are encouraged to reach out to anyone that they think might be interested in joining the Board.
- b) As usual, the Board will not meet in July.
- c) Other – The Planning Board will be continuing a public hearing regarding the site plan for the previously approved independent senior living community on Union Street. Other COA Board members noted that this process has been going on for several years.

4) Other – **Deputy Director’s Report** – Lorraine McNally

- a) Staff Updates – Good news on the hiring front: the COA has filled two key open slots: 1) Program Manager, Volunteer Services (Grace O’Donnell, who previously directed the Callahan Center, is taking this slot); and 2) Assistant Director, Programs (Rose McDermott, a veteran of the Natick Public Schools’ administrative team who speaks both Spanish and Portuguese, has accepted this position). Interviews for new receptionists are ongoing. And the COA has just posted the Case Manager slot.
- b) Programs & Services Updates – The COA is working with the Recreation Department and the Farm on cross-coordination. Demand for in-person programs has been strong and growing. COA has added a second chair yoga session. The new hiking program has been very popular. The Memory café, which has had consistent attendance of about 10 people, is jumping to 20 people for the next meeting. Finally, the COA is also looking to build up its evening programs.

5) **Subcommittee and Work Group update**

- a) Housing Subcommittee Update – Sue Peters – They are working on their final report.
- b) Pickleball Workgroup – Mal Sockol – The introductory pickle ball class has been a great success, attracting 16-18 people for its weekly Friday sessions.
- c) Nominating Subcommittee Update – Elaina Danahy – They will have a slate of candidates to recommend at the August meeting, which will be followed by a vote in September. Anyone who is interested in being considered should contact Elaina.

6) **Liaison Reports**

- a) Friends of the Natick Senior Center—Karen Oakley – Friends met on May 9, with the next meeting to take place on June 13. There will be no bingo on July 10. The Friends discussed raising the cost of participating in lunches, but chose not to do so. They are considering a September trip, perhaps a Boston Harbor cruise. The Friends’ annual meeting is September 12 and they have some Board vacancies.
 - b) Springwell Elder Services—Harriet Merkowitz, Sue Peters – Ms. Merkowitz noted that at the upcoming June 28 board meeting, a budget for the two facilities will be presented. They are looking for more staff and have added 12 positions; but the labor market is tight. Mal Sockol said that the Meals on Wheels program has been terrific lately.
 - c) Disability Commission – Sue Peters – No report.
- 7) **Board Concerns**— Sal Pandolfo asked why the Friends of the Natick Senior Center continue to plan and fund their own programs and luncheons, rather than finding and supporting COA programs. A brief discussion ensued, in which Judy Sabol noted that the Friends do not seem to be following their own bylaws, but it is up to their Board to follow their own guidelines.
- 8) **Deputy Director Concerns** – None
- 9) **Secretary’s Report**—Minutes of the April and May meetings were on the table. The April meetings included an edit. Ms. Merkowitz moved to accept the April minutes as amended and Ms. Oakley seconded. The motion passed (8-0-0). Mr. Sockol requested an edit to the May meeting minutes regarding the Memory Café. Ms. Merkowitz moved to accept the May minutes with the requested edit and Mr. Sockol seconded. The motion passed (8-0-0).
- 10) Ms. Merkowitz moved to adjourn the meeting; Ms. Peters seconded. The motion carried (8-0-0). Chair Judy Sabol declared the meeting adjourned at approximately 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Andrew Eschtruth (substituting for Connie Pitt)