

**Town of Ayer
Council On Aging Board Meeting
Tuesday, October 10, 2023 at 2:00P.M.
Ayer Senior Center, 18 Pond Street Rear, Ayer, MA 01432**

mpw

In Attendance

COA Director Katie Petrossi
Dennis Curran, COA Board Chairperson
Bobby Gardner , COA Board Member
Janine Nichipor, COA Board Member
Marge Withee, COA Board Secretary
9 members of the public

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Meeting filmed by Ayer APAC and M. Nichipor

Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. Approve /amend agenda
3. Approve Minutes
4. Discussion with Trevor Dillman from APAC
5. Director's monthly report (please review prior to meeting)
6. Senior Center Site Selection/Bldg Committee Update
7. Update on By-Law review
8. Public Input
9. Adjourn

1. Call to Order

Meeting called to order by Dennis Curran at 2:07 P.M.

2. Approve/Amend agenda

J.Nichipor made a motion to "move public input to #3 on the agenda, and to move to approve minutes to # 8 on the agenda." B.Gardner seconded, and all voted yes to approve the motion.

3. Public Input

- a) Nancy Jackvony (resident) stated she believes public input is not wanted , but she is going to continue to give her input. She was encouraged to do so.
- b) J.Nichipor read a statement: ending with a motion:

"I would like to respond to Public Input from the last COA Board meeting in September. I've learned that a similar incident happened the month before in August when I was absent.

"In September's meeting when I was here, I was appalled by the behavior of Chairperson Dennis Curran's friend, Carolyn McCreary. She ambushed me during the Public Input and also interjected comments disrupting the meeting. Carolyn made the angry assertion that "a COA Board member" which everyone knew was me, didn't follow the democratic process, created a Facebook Group, and should resign from the COA. She was scowling at me with such vehemence she could have won an Academy Award.

I object to Carolyn's behavior on several different levels:

Most importantly her behavior violated the basic premise that the COA should be a safe space for seniors. Many of us in this age group have suffered loss of friends and family, have medical issues, and are more subject to the loneliness that pervades much of America. A basic need of seniors is an accepting, safe and respectful environment. I object that Carolyn brought a toxic atmosphere to our Center.

I also object that she misused Public Input time for a personal vendetta instead of addressing COA business

Her assertion is completely wrong that I didn't follow the democratic process. In a democracy the Majority vote wins the day, but the Minority still has a voice. Otherwise, we slip back into the tyranny from which our Founding Fathers had escaped. Since the 1700s this has been clearly documented. Just Google It, and you'll find lots of information.

By the way, Carolyn invited me to join her Group's Facebook page a while back: "Neighbors for the Conservation of Stratton Hill." I don't see why her Group is ok, but a similar group is a problem.

I was upset to hear a call that I should resign. I didn't do anything wrong, and in fact have worked for almost 5 years for the COA toward building a new Senior Center, spending hundreds of hours of my own time looking at land, studying maps, attending meetings, and doing research. We have had other sites fall through, so I know how disappointing that is. I never heard anyone called on to resign.

I've heard, "you're against the Senior Center" which is not true. What put an end to the Proposal to Build on Pirone Park, was the protective law which required the Park Commission's approval. When they rescinded, that was the end of the process. I tried to tell the COA about the laws and wouldn't listen. I resent being the scapegoat. It seems to me that Carolyn and others are upset—not that I was wrong, but that I was right.

For the record, earlier this year I voted against the Proposal to Build on Pirone Park at the Site Selection Working Group, and at the COA Board because I didn't think it was the best option for the Park, for Ayer, or the COA. I resigned from the Site Selection Group in protest for the way they pushed the Pirone Park Proposal ahead, dropping all other options. And there were other options. At the COA vote I stated I could be persuaded as I learned more.

When I went out in the Community and talked with people, I was NOT persuaded to support building on Pirone Park. As I asked people what they thought, I found out that they were shocked and infuriated that they were not notified about this project, had no say in it, and that our beautiful town park would be the site of a 25,000 sq. ft. building plus parking, that would dominate the remaining open space, at an approximate cost of \$25 million..

People wanted to know when there would be a meeting. On March 14 there was going to be a meeting here at the Senior Center. I assumed that this was for everyone and invited stakeholders I met in conversation. It wasn't until later I found out they were not invited. Then where were they supposed to go for information and to have their voice heard?

This brings me to address Friends of Pirone Park, the Facebook Group that I started, with the help of several others. Our mission is to protect the park and to share information. The Town had not notified stakeholders about the Proposal, as it should have; such as abutters, baseball organizers, dog walkers, and others. Our Group was the place they could turn to for facts and connect with others who valued our park.

We gathered documents, such as a copy of the Deed to Pirone Park, which stated in 1910 that the land was "for a park." We included photos of kids playing in the park and memories people shared. Did you know that Rita Briggs played in the park? She was a woman baseball player from Ayer who ended up playing in the league in the movie, *A League of Their Own*. We have a photo of Rita and her Mom, and other historic photos.

The focus of the FB Group was to share, learn, and protect our park. Which we did. It was never an anti-Senior Center Group as some have depicted.

At this point: the Park Commission has voted to rescind their initial support to build on Pirone Park and the Town Manager stated that the Proposal to build on Pirone Park is off the table. This is an opportunity for COA Board members, and those still angry about the outcome, to learn a lesson and move on.

The *Lesson* is to complete Due Diligence, including laws and restrictions, before presenting a formal proposal; and to share information with all stakeholders. It's good news that the new Building Committee will be holding public meetings.

To *Move On*, I think the COA Board needs to rescind our initial vote from earlier this year, as the Park Commission did. It's been an emotional ride for all, and going forward we need to be on the same page to work together. I hope this will help bring COA meetings "down a notch" so that other COA business can be addressed more calmly as well.

Toward that end, I would like to make a motion:

I make a motion that the COA Board rescind their initial support for the Proposal to Build a Senior Center/Community Center on Pirone Park, as the Park Commission did on August 10. This will affirm that we are all on the same page, and enable the new Building Committee to

move forward unencumbered by any remaining misunderstandings, to pursue other sites for a new Ayer Senior Center.' ”

J. Nichipor voted yes, B. Gardner, no, D. Curran, no, and M. Withee, no. The motion did not pass, 3-1.

4. Discussion with Trevor Dillman from APAC

- a) Trevor is the local video production teacher at Ayer High School
- b) APAC offers local government and educational programs
- c) Programs accessible also at Ayerpublicaccess.org on YouTube
- d) APAC is amenable to public request for an on-screen schedule of APAC programs

5. Director's Monthly Report

- a) Pleasant Street Park Picnic was a hit, and will be an annual event
- b) Grant to state hybrid programs for seniors, and if anyone is home sick, may participate too.
- c) Ayer police will be at the Center for Halloween Party
- d) Oct. foliage trip filling up well

6. Senior Center /Bldg Committee Update

- a) New committee formed on 10/3
- b) No schedule yet for meetings, but tasks for the committee are listed on the Town website

7. Update on Bylaw Review: Deferred until November

8. Approve Minutes

Revise July

9. Adjourn 3:31 P.M.

M. Withee made a motion to adjourn, B. Gardner seconded.

All voted yes. Motion passed, and we adjourned with 4 votes

Documents referenced: statement read by J. Nichipor, and Director's Monthly Report.