

Ayer COA Board Monthly Meeting

Held Tuesday, July 13, 2021 at 11:00 a.m.

COA Center 18 Pond Street, Ayer MA 01432

Minutes compiled by Janine Nichipor

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TOWN OF AYER
TOWN CLERK

1:27pm
CZ

In Attendance:

Sister Paula, Chairperson

Janine Nichipor, Clerk

Carole Tillis, Board Member

Carolyn McCreary, Board Member

Robert Pontbriand, Town Manager

Carly Antonellis, Assistant to the Town Manager

Kevin Johnston, Town of Ayer HR

Agenda:

1. Call to Order
2. Approval of minutes from Meeting on June 30, 2021
3. COA Board reorganization
4. Update on search for COA director
5. Report on essential COA activities
6. Old Business
7. New Business

1. Meeting called to order by Chairperson Sister Paula

- Updated Agenda as above being used.
- Note there was a standard agenda in use last year.

2. Approval of Minutes

- Minutes from COA Meeting June 30 were approved.
- Per Carly we should bring to next meeting all minutes since January 2019, vote to approve, sign, to Town Clerk, get stamped, and will be scanned to web.
- The above procedure was not done and this will deal with the backlog.

3. COA Board Reorganization

- Sister Paula wishes to step down as COA Chairperson. Has served for 12 years. Cited health reasons for this request. Unanimously Board thanked Sister Paula for her service and recognize that she will stay as a board member.
- Sister Paula had handwritten notes on what duties the COA Chairperson takes care of.
- Janine and Carole nominated Carolyn new COA Chairperson. Moved, voted on, and accepted that Carolyn McCreary will serve as new COA Chairperson.
- Janine will not longer be Acting Secretary, will not be "Clerk" per other town boards.

4. Update on search for COA director

- Town has received 23 applications prior to the deadline.
- Packets will be sent to COA Board after July 15.

- Board to review and recommend by July 21.
- Board will meet July 21 to rank and recommend per criteria.
- July 21 will be a public meeting that will go into executive session.
- Week of Aug. 2 – Aug. 6 will interview candidates, 5 -7 okay.
- August 12 will the Interview Panel will recommend to the Town Manager 3-5 candidates for hire. He is interested in the top choices. Second interviews a possibility.
- August 17 looking to ratify with Town Select Board.
- Offer to candidate will follow.
- Time frame of 2-4 weeks.
- Interview Panel will be: Kevin Johnston Town of Ayer HR, Carly Antonellis Town of Ayer Assistant Town Manager, Janine Nichipor Town of Ayer COA Board Member/Clerk, Town Nurse, Director of Shirley COA.
- Possible September start date at best.
- Can do Zoom interview if necessary.
- Janine was concerned that the salary be comparable to other departments in the town and other local COAs.
- Kevin said that they looked at the salary recently when Karin came out of the Union.
- Robert said that we can be flexible on steps to reach the correct salary. He thinks the Grade is correct and competitive.
- Robert said that the non-union step review is due to be re-evaluated and the board will be part of process. Expect this next year.
- Carole asked why the position was not posted at Mass. COA? She didn't see it in Mass COA.
- Carly said it was added when this was noticed. It had been in the Mass Municipal site.
- Robert noted it was posted on several other sites as well.
- Carolyn is interested in the affirmative action piece which might require going beyond standard ways of advertising to reach into minority communities. We need to explore and cast a net to include more diverse candidates.
- Carly said that Mass Municipal is addressing this, including language in listings.
- Robert noted this is along overdue discussion on how to reach more diverse populations.
- Carolyn asked what is our current population of minorities in Ayer?
- Carly thinks perhaps 10-12% which can be verified.
- Carolyn said this means that town employees should reflect that percent. Currently we have two minority employees, so we are not reflecting the population of the town. She asks: 1-What can we do? 2-How are we going to implement a new approach? 3-We need training to hire and keep minority employees.
- Carly indicates training needs to include a safe space to discuss being inclusive.
- Robert reviewed that Harassment Officers for the Town are Keven and Carly. Robert is the ADA Coordinator and takes disability complaints. He addresses mental/physical issues/concerns and service dog needs, etc.
- Robert noted that the Town Hall Clerical Union will address with all COA staff except the director, quarterly, and have two hours sessions/graining for this.
- Robert offered training opportunities inn the realm of Mass COA offerings. There are funds for this. Suggestions?

- Janine mentioned the Mass COA Conference that we can look into. Not sure if will be held due to Covid.
- Carly said that the EAP (Employee Assistance Program) has a lot online for employees and board members for free.

5. Report on essential COA activities

- Kevin reported that Meals on Wheels are going out two days/week. Mart Van has kept going. He recommends these two services will continue as is until we can reopen the Center.
--We need protocols for visiting the Center.
--Sept. through Dec. plan, then long-range.
- Carly says that the space at current Center is problem for re-opening. One possibility would be a tent. Virtual classes possible. If people can't be in here (the Center) we can explore other places. Carly asked about the big room adjacent.
- Roberts says we can ask Ayer Housing to maximize the space, since it is theirs.
- Sister Paula said we have used the Housing Authority Room. It is an important space for activities such as large lunches and the exercise class. In the past Mr. Martin did make it available.
- Kevin said that Ken Martin, Director Housing Authority may be ready to work with him and will address scheduling the room.
- Janine mentioned that the Ayer Library and the COA were starting collaborations pre-Covid. They were mutually beneficial and increase awareness of the both the Library and the COA.
- Kevin said contact has been made with the Library Director.
- Carolyn told about an incident regarding a woman she found limping on the side of the road, trying to walk to the hospital. She turned around and went back for her and found out the woman was going to a doctor appointment. This woman said she had called the Mart Van and was told that they were not available for two weeks. Carolyn is concerned that there are checks and balances for the current employee and services.
- Janine questioned how Sam could be both driver and dispatcher? Cannot drive while at dispatch desk and should not be on phone while driving. We are in Emergency Mode now and a dispatcher is a good first step.
- Carly mentioned a Dispatching Program that is in place in four communities. It could be an equitable opportunity for clients. She was setting up a meeting about it "this week." She said it is through Mart and is a pilot program. It helps streamline the reporting and Kevin said it centralizes dispatching.
- Carly says that if there's a new phone number, we can put in a recording.
- Janine mentioned the Uber/Lyft Program at the Westford COA. It uses Grant Money which brings up another thing that we could be doing—Grants.
- Carolyn says many Grants could be utilized.
- Robert said after 16 months of lockdown and COA director leaving, the challenge of space/building. Need outreach, nutrition coordinator, backup, dispatching. There may be other needs: fitness, town nurse, wellness program. Robert suggested we invite Tamara, town nurse, to future meetings.

- Robert said, yes, we do need a new space. Need to re-group on strategy to make a new space, more space, new space. Challenges are 1—Where? 2—What want? He sees the process as get new director in, hire more staff, start programs back. Mentioned fall community event Oct. 2, new director hold workshops, attend an event with the police.
- Robert mentioned another survey regarding the new Center, that we can meet in October regarding the new Center, and Budget FY 23 is on the horizon.
- Janine brought up that we had a survey and unlikely to be very different results, but that survey has not yet been shared with the public. People have asked her what were the results of that survey.
- Janine was concerned that in Emergency Mode we are not delivering the 5 days of Meals on Wheels that we used to, we are not having the lunches in the Center that we used to, and the van is not doing as much as it used to. Many COA clients had their best meal all day from the Center. Janine asked if someone could be pulled from somewhere in the Town to work at the COA. It is important to have someone answer the phone, get back to people, help with people lonely since Covid.
- Robert acknowledged that we had requested Temp. help. Because there is a union involved, he needs to look into it.
- Robert indicated that the town is willing to spend money on the COA and the Select Board is committed to the new Center and to seniors.
- Carole indicated that she is glad to hear it.
- Carolyn said that the positions staying empty and not being filled indicates we are not important.
- Robert said delays were due to Covid and this period of transition. We will move forward, but he did not get a re-opening plan that he had asked for months ago.
- Carly mentioned the possibility of a senior from the Tax Work-Off program.
- Robert pledged someone to answer phones by next Wednesday.
- Sister Paula noted that the Center used to have a receptionist, phone person, and dispatcher.
- Janine suggested that if we can get a person or persons to answer the phones that we need to keep a log.
- Janine asked if we will keep the Newsletter going. Info on that:
 - Is in print and on web (via Cindy)
 - Karin did the cover, rest was a template
 Janine would like to have the next Newsletter include a message from the COA Board in the front, changes on staff, introduce ourselves and re-energize the new Center. We might need two pages for this, then template.
 - We might add photos, which brought up IDs that COA Board should probably have.
 - There is a COA Facebook page, need a COA Board page as all other town boards have a page on town website.
- We are still actively pursuing as 5th COA Board member. Procedure would be to email Robert, then to Select Board to approve.
- Carly said we could advertise for a new Board member.

- Robert said that process would be to put on town website, interview person, reach out to Carly, give info. to Robert, he presents to Select Board. If COA Board meets with this person, need to post as a meeting.

6./7. Old Business/New Business

- We need to retrieve the survey results on the new Center, make public and send to COA Board. Survey was on public input for what a new Center should have.
- We need to explore places for a new Center—what was on the Abacus list and also other possible sites such as Devens.
- Next meeting will be 21st of July at 10:00 a.m. at the COA Center on Pond St.
- Carolyn said we need more operations open.
- Janine said we need more of a presence in the community.
- Carolyn would like the Select Board to put us on the agenda.
- July 14 COA Board will attend Select Board meeting and Sister Paula will accept the certificate, flowers, and gift for Karin.
- August 17 Select Board meeting, Robert hopes COA will attend.
- Robert wrapped up by saying call Carly or Kevin with further questions, needs, ideas.

Adjournment at 12:50 pm.

Carolyn McCreary