

Ayer Council on Aging Board Monthly Meeting Minutes

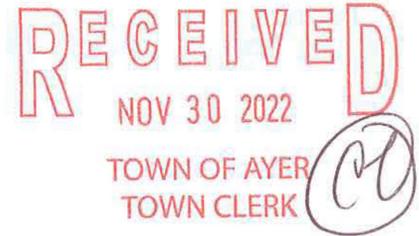
Tuesday, May 10, 2022 at 2:00 PM

Meeting in Person at Senior Center, Pond Street, Ayer

Minutes compiled by Janine Nichipor, Clerk

In Attendance:

COA Director Katie Petrossi
Carolyn McCreary, COA Board Chairperson
Janine Nichipor, COA Board Clerk (attended via Zoom)
Dennis Curran, COA Board Member
Carole Tillis, COA Board Member
Kevin Johnston, Ayer HR
Christine Anderson, Visitor



Agenda for May Meeting

1. Call to Order
2. Public input
3. Senior Work-off Program – Kevin Johnston
4. Staffing concerns
5. Approve Minutes – April 12
6. Director’s report
7. Update from building committee
8. Health Fair – May 21
9. New center advocacy
 - a. Strategy
 - b. Talking points
10. Suggestions for spending COA donations
11. Forming Friends of the COA
12. Old business
 - a. Mission Statement Sister Paula
13. New Business
14. Adjourn

1. **Call to Order**—Meeting called to order by Chairperson Carolyn McCreary.
2. **Public input**—Christine Anderson is visiting today. We appreciate the interest.
3. **Senior Work-off Program – Kevin Johnston**

Kevin talked about the Senior Tax Work Off Program, reviewing some of the important points which are listed below. He mentioned the information is at the Town’s website. For an application and information sheet see: [Senior Citizen Property Tax Work-Off Program | Town of Ayer MA](#)

- Reimbursement rate is based on the Minimum Wage.

- About 100 hours equals the maximum household reimbursement amount of \$1,500.
- It is not taxable income for Massachusetts, but is for Federal income tax.
- Most are returnees in several different departments in the town.
- There are still funds for others to apply. The total amount is not used up yet. Right now, about 6 or 7 participate. Shirley had 20 or 25 when Kevin worked there.
- There is no payment check issued. The amount is deducted from the property tax due in the 3rd Quarter bill. Those working now will close out in November.
- Carolyn thought there could be unintended consequences, by discriminating against those who were renters and not homeowners. She is concerned about inequities.
- Dennis asked if there was an alternative for low-income people who don't own a home.
- Katie asked if there was a way for the non-homeowners to find out what portion of their rent is property tax to work off. A person came in who was renting and they found a way to get fuel assistance. Maybe we can calculate the part of rent that goes toward the landowner's property taxes to be able to work off.
- Kevin explained that the program was put in place at the state level about 20 years ago to help seniors on a fixed income to stay in their home.
- Janine thought it was a great program as the town gets valuable work at minimum wage with no benefits, and seniors get some help on their tax bill. Katie said it helps the departments and the seniors.
- There is some flexibility in funds to have a Work-Off person to have a substitute temporarily. Sometimes there is a more than one, such as the people who water the flowers on Main St. They can cover each other for days off or vacations.
- Katie asked if the town allows for a Proxy—a person who can do the work for an aging person and the senior gets the credit on their tax bill. Kevin thought that the state documents in 2021 had details on this and he believes that Ayer allows this, though no one is doing this now in Ayer. He said he could check on this.
- Janine asked how does one get in? Kevin said it is not exactly like a job application. There is a process that is described on the information page. [See link above.]
- Katie says she is looking for relevant skills such as instructors for activities/programs, receptionists that can add up to full-time coverage, an AARP receptionist for tax time when clients have to sign in, and administrative help. Meals on Wheels might be able to transition from a stipend to Tax Work Off.
- Kevin noted we could advocate the program to clients.
- Carolyn said this information might go in the Newsletter.
- Janine asked about the budget. Katie says there is not a cap on departments for the Work-Off Program. The Program is paid for in the Overlay Account of the Board of Assessors.
- Kevin said there are ongoing projects: Library, Main St. plant watering, Town Clerk and others.

4. Staffing concerns

- Katie talked about the Nutrition Coordinator position that is posted and she will be interviewing a person in the near future. It is up to 30 hours, but may be less at times. There is some flexibility. This person will help serve meals, and since we cannot cook meals due to kitchen

restrictions, will help research where we can get meals and how to schedule. Some clients come in the same day each week, so we may want to rotate when we have a particular caterer so that the clients don't get the same thing every week. Katie will interview since this is not a department head position. Carole and Carolyn may want to be involved in the interview. Person in position cannot start until July 1.

- Dennis asked to review the process for hiring the Social Worker. Katie said the Police and Fire Chiefs and Katie will meet regarding the position. Janine asked if one person can cover all of the different needs of the departments. Katie said they are looking for this in the hiring process—someone with varied experience. There is some overlap in what a social worker would do for the different departments, but some that are unique to each department. SW will start in July as well.

5. Approve Minutes – April 12—Revised Minutes were approved.

6. Director's report

Katie was sorry that the Director's Report did not go out to all yet. She has been by herself at the Center and swamped. She will send it soon. Main points are:

- Activities are up. Total numbers in the Center went down. Katie thinks this is because the AARP tax help brings in extra people and when it ends they don't come back.
- Dennis suggests we offer more of this type of help to get people who don't usually come in.
- Katie said there are different "seniors." Some need sociability, or exercise, meals, tax help, health form help. She wants to address as many as we can.
- Budget is spent through the end of this fiscal year. The Wages Line may need updating as Deb's Leave of Absence is not all paid, so Katie expects there will be money left over from that.
- These funds may be used to help create a social worker work area. We also need a computer station for employees, such as the van driver or kitchen worker, to check their email. Office furniture is expensive and the funds will help.

7. Update from building committee

The biggest news is that the Request for Proposal (RFP) went out this week to a broad range of distribution channels to reach real estate agents and property owners. It included Mass. Development at Devens as there is property in the old "footprint of Ayer" that could be considered. It was reported that Mass. Dev. Is understaffed right now. The cutoff date for RFP is June 10, at which time the results will be compiled and the building committee will discuss.

Other points were:

- Joe McLaughlin from the BETA Group reviewed the W. Main St. site, confirming contamination and talked about possible remediation.
- Katie said he talked about remediation of contaminated indoor air similar to radon systems.
- Katie and Janine mentioned that the problem of the contamination in the water is serious. It is encroaching on a public well that is owned by Devens.

- Janine thinks that the site needs to be cleaned up, but should not be piggybacked onto our Senior Center project.
- Dennis said the W. Main St. site would be a “tough sell” at Town Meeting.
- Carole said it would be “an awful sell.”
- Dennis reiterated a thought that has been stated at meetings that if the W. Main parcel is kept in private hands, they pay to remediate it, then develop it, it will be revenue for the town in the increased property taxes.
- We all agree we have responsibility to staff and users of the Center, should it be built there.
- Sister Paula asked how many years would it take to build at W. Main St.? Dennis thought it was about 3 years.

We talked about other sites:

- Sister Paula thought that the school site was a good choice. As Katie had to step away, Janine recalled that it was the 10-year wait for the school site that Katie and others didn’t want.
- There is property behind the schools that the town owns, but may be too steep or have ledge.
- Sister Paula also remembered a proposal a long time ago utilizing the land near the current center, building into the hill. Janine recalled that parking was part of the problem there, but said that it might be good to circle around to some of the earlier ideas.
- Dennis talked about Pirone Park as a possibility. Maybe we could use a land swap between town departments.
- Carolyn thinks it is very important that the site should be easy to get to.
- Other properties have been discussed such as on Route 2A and near Tiny’s restaurant.
- Problems have been that the parcel is too small, the property owner doesn’t want to sell, there are accessibility issues to a particular site, or possible contamination.
- We can consider putting two lots together and tear-downs.
- Dennis said that we may have to re-consider utilizing a two-story building as that could be done on a smaller parcel.

8. Health Fair – May 21 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

We want representation at this fair. Katie will be there the whole time and others can join as we can. Carolyn is drawing up a schedule for the COA Board to attend. Katie is ordering a banner for the table, but doesn’t have much time available for creating and ordering it as we are so short staffed and the time is short until the fair.

9. New center advocacy

a. Strategy

- We will be having informational meetings starting with the one May 17 at Pond Street Senior Center. This is listed in the May Newsletter. We will distribute what information we have, rebuilding public interest. Dennis coined a phrase about the meetings crescendoing with the Town Meeting at end of year. Janine wanted to confirm with Katie that Abacus has been invited.

- Carolyn thought this might be premature. Janine said that the committee wanted to get started sharing “what we know” at this time, give the results of the meeting at the high school that have not been shared widely to the public, and re-generate interest.
- Dennis said that we will know more about what site, the budget, the plans, etc. which can be shared, hopefully after June 10 when the RFP results will be in.
- Janine mentioned that a postcard mailing about the Senior Center had been discussed with the Building Committee. If they don’t want to do that, that is something we may want to do at some point. Alan Manoian had said that postcards often make effective mailings because they are brief, don’t need to be opened, and they are cheaper than first class mail. She had written a cover letter for the RFP and that may be edited for this.

b. Talking points

- Janine wrote an Information Sheet draft about the new Senior Center and submitted it to Katie. Carolyn thanked Janine for writing it up. The sheet included points that came up in discussion and facts about the town and information from the Abacus Feasibility Study and online. Katie and Janine edited it a few times and it was distributed to the Building Committee for any further edits. We included why the current center is inadequate and what we need in a center to serve our clients. It will be updated as information changes. Katie will be in charge of it going forward. Janine will help as needed.
- The Information Sheet will be utilized going forward so that we all have the same information. The plan is that the COA Board members should make themselves familiar with the talking points on this sheet and that we not contradict ourselves on the facts.

10. Suggestions for spending COA donations

- Carolyn said that in the short term, Katie will be ordering some COA “swag.”
- Additional purchases will be discussed at a later time.
- We have about \$6,000 in donation accounts.

11. Forming Friends of the COA

We need someone to step in and create the Friends. It cannot be the Director nor a current COA Board member. Either a Board member moves into the Friends, vacating their COA Board position or we get a new person interested in it.

12. Old business

a. Mission Statement Sister Paula

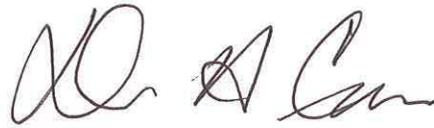
- Sister Paula said that it is okay to add or subtract to the original that she submitted.
- Janine recalled that Sister Paul had made the point at an earlier time that the Mission Statement should be what we do, not how we do it, and that is a valid point.
- Janine mentioned that the longer version put in the Annual Report included some items that Katie wanted in the Annual Report, but didn’t have to become a permanent part of the Mission Statement.

13. New Business

Carolyn said that the Safety and Security at the COA that Janine wrote up should be discussed when Katie is here. This was tabled.

14. Adjourned at 3:45 PM.

Next meeting planned for Tuesday, June 28 at 2:00 PM at the Pond Street Senior Center.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. A. C.", is centered on the page.