

Harvard Council on Aging  
Board of Directors Meeting  
Tuesday, October 20, 2020  
Via Zoom Conference

Present: Beth Williams, Chet Hooper, Fran Maiore, Guy Oliva, Carl Sciple, Kim Schwarz, Cathy Walker, COA Director Debbie Thompson, recorder/alternate Connie Larrabee  
FCOA members Sharon Briggs, Barbara Cerva  
Prospective board member Nancy Webber, Harvard Press reporter Joan Eliyesil  
Absent: Lynne Musto-Pesa

The meeting was convened at 4 p.m.

The minutes of the September 15, 2020 board meeting were approved as written.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Account balances as of 09/28/2020 – per MUNIS report

COA Salary	\$135,669	(Annual Budget: \$161,432)
COA Expense	10,259	(Annual Budget: 10,547)
MART Salary	30,240	(Annual Budget: 35,108)
MART Expense	829	(Annual Budget 1,000)
Gift account	88,051	(\$7,000 reserved for kitchen)
Formula Grant	(816)*	
Revolving Funds	7,624	

\* The new grant amount has not been determined yet, but \$816 has been spent in anticipation of receiving funds later this year.

### **Director's Report – Debbie Thompson**

#### **Outreach:**

The Outreach Department is continuing to follow up with seniors, and worked with 67 people by phone, mail, or home visits. The department is concerned about evidence of increasing mental health issues as the pandemic continues.

## **Emergency Rental and Mortgage Assistance**

Voters at the Oct. 3 Town Meeting unanimously approved establishment of an emergency assistance program to help residents who are having trouble making rent or mortgage payments due to COVID-19-related expenses or job losses. Town Administrator Tim Bragan has assigned Debbie and Director of Community and Economic Development Chris Ryan to work with the Municipal Affordable Housing Trust to administer the program.

## **Housing bylaw changes**

The Planning Board withdrew its proposed senior housing bylaw from consideration at the Oct. Town Meeting, and plans to present it in the spring after doing more outreach. The purpose of the bylaw is to allow housing for seniors who want to stay in town in smaller, easy to maintain dwellings, or even assisted-living facilities.

## **Hildreth House upkeep**

Due to rain, United Way volunteers couldn't finish painting the back porch when they were here so worked inside instead, disinfecting surfaces and cleaning the oven. The front part of the porch did get painted, however.

## **COMING EVENTS** ( On Zoom unless otherwise noted)

- Wed., Oct. 21 Flu clinic at Hildreth House 11-1. All ages
- Wed., Oct 28 SHINE open enrollment presentation 10 a.m.
- Tues., Nov. 3 Election. COA van available for rides to the polls.
- Tues., Nov. 10 Vet Café 9 a.m. (may be a grab & go breakfast)
- Tues., Nov 10 Story Slam 1 p.m.
- Mon., Nov. 16 Holiday depression presentation, noon
- Thurs., Nov. 19 Meet your EMTs 6 p.m.

The COA is closed Wednesday, Nov. 11 for Veterans Day, and Nov. 26 and 27 for the Thanksgiving holiday.

On Wednesday, Nov. 25, with the help of the Girl Scouts, we'll be packing and delivering turkey dinners for homebound seniors who will be alone for the holiday. We're also working with Chef Paul on a grab & go holiday dinner in early December.

### **Buildings and Grounds**

Guy and Debbie have been discussing ways the COA could get more space for programs and activities in place of Phase 2, or in the interim before Phase 2 is finished. One option might be to enclose the porch for three-season or even year-round use. Guy thinks it wouldn't be hard to do, and suggested we might get a carpenter to volunteer to do the work, just as volunteers replaced all the windows at Hildreth House during the Phase 1 project. Guy didn't know how much it would cost or what restriction there might be on using gift account donations or FCOA money.

Another idea is to use the money we have to improve the kitchen and install better appliances.

One downside might be that if these improvements were made, it would undercut the argument that we need the additional space Phase 2 would provide.

Connie said it's too late this year to submit a capital request for funding in FY2022, so any request for this work would have to be made next year, for fiscal 2023, the same time we're trying to get Phase 2 approved.

### **Phase 2**

The Capital Planning and Investment Committee met with Debbie and COA board members Tuesday morning, Oct. 20, to discuss the revised capital request for Phase 2. The basic plan and the cost estimate are the same as they were last year.

CPIC members voiced a number of suggestions, the most positive of which was to put more emphasis on the new building as a community center, rather than a senior center expansion. Other remarks indicated a misconception that the existing building would have no useful function after the addition is built. In general, the CPIC consensus seemed to be that the COA should keep looking for a better, cheaper alternative to the current Phase 2 proposal.

Along those lines, CPIC members seemed pleased that Beth, Guy, and Carl had toured the facilities at Friendly Crossways on Littleton County Road to assess its suitability as a senior center. The subject of moving the COA to Friendly Crossways, rather than pursuing Hildreth House expansion, came up at the June Town Meeting and the property's owners seem anxious to work out a deal with the town.

Beth reported the group's findings to the COA board and also to CPIC. Given the need for extensive ADA improvements and ongoing maintenance of the building and grounds, the group concluded that the Friendly Crossways option would be no less expensive than the cost to build Phase 2 as designed.

Several CPIC members suggested other sites, such as Bromfield House, or the possibility of finding a flat, ledge-free piece of land to build on elsewhere in town. Beth expressed doubt that suitable ledge-free land existed anywhere in Harvard.

At the COA board meeting, Guy and others pointed out that building a new senior center elsewhere in town, with enough space for COA programs and community activities, is likely to cost much more than \$4.3 M, the most recently estimated cost of Phase 2.

#### **FCOA – Sharon Briggs**

Sharon reported a balance of \$135,000 in FCOA accounts due to fundraising activities and donations.

Carl, Beth, Heidi Siegrist, and Barbara Cerva have begun strategizing about approaching Devens businesses for Phase 2 donations. Carl is hopeful that Bristol Myers Squibb might be willing to help with a community project like the Phase 2 addition.

#### **New Business**

FY2022 Budget: Due to a predicted drop in state aid in the next fiscal year, all town departments have been asked to submit a level-funded budget - that is, a plan for spending no more than was budgeted this fiscal year (FY2021). Boards must also submit a budget reflecting a 5 % decrease in spending in case town revenues drop even more than seems likely now. Debbie is working with Cathy to put together the proposed COA budget, which must be submitted by Dec.1.

#### **New board member**

Nancy Webber, an artist who has taught COA yoga classes in town for many years, bought a house in Harvard this fall and is interested in joining the board. Nancy said she wants to participate in developing strategies to help people age in place. Board members voted unanimously to recommend Nancy to the Select Board. Her appointment will fill the one remaining opening on the COA board.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:14 p.m.

The next COA Board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, November 17 at 4 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Connie Larrabee, recorder

\*\*\*\*\*