



Robert McCarthy
ACTING MAYOR

Tricia O'Brien
SUPERINTENDENT

CITY OF SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

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SALEM COUNCIL ON AGING REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES

Date and Time: February 8, 2023 at 5:15 P.M.

Meeting Location: ZOOM

Members Present: Lynda Coffill (LC, Chair), John Russell (JR, Vice-Chair), Kristin Macek (KM, Secretary), Eliud Alcala (EA), George Barbuzzi (GB), Michelle Bettencourt (MB), Michele McHugh (MM) and Patricia Small (PS)

Also Present: Teresa Arnold, (TA, Director of the COA) and Councillor Alice Merkl (AM)

Guest Present: Patricia Zaido from Salem for All Ages and Nathan Thomas from SATV

Absent: Abigail Butt, Treasurer

Clerk: Joanne M. Roomey

I. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

LC called the meeting to order at 5:15 P.M.

LC stated that notice is hereby given that a meeting of the Council on Aging is held via remote participation in accordance with a Chapter 107 of the Act of 2022.

Roll call was then done.

II. APPROVAL OF THE JANUARY 2023 REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

A motion was made by JR to approve the January 18, 2023 Regular Meeting Minutes. Seconded by PS. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion carried unanimously.

III. OLD BUSINESS:

a. Salem for All Ages

LC, MM and MB will put together a letter to outline the Board's concerns and state their authority and position to the Co-chairs of Salem for All Ages.

Patricia Zaido wanted to address the Board and gave a background of Salem for All Ages. She said it was founded in 2016 and they had a five-year action plan that was completed in 2021. She also said she met with Mayor Driscoll and Dominick Pangallo in the past and the mayor signed the contract for a new COA website. Funds from SFAA would pay the website developer, Sperling Interactive. Ms. Zaido said there was no communication with the COA Board.

JR said we put this board together and we need to protect our venue. We applaud Patricia's input, but the Salem for All Ages Committee does not override our Board. We are an appointed board and must protect our initiatives.

LC said that Ms. Zaido reported at the January CLC Engagement Committee meeting that they want to use part of the \$100,000 donation that the City received from the hospital and designated for SFAA to put a sound system in and it is her understanding there was never a conversation with Ms. Zaido and that these decisions have been made without any oversight.

A motion was made by JR to write a letter to the Co-chairs of SFAA and state the Board's concerns. Seconded by GB. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion carried unanimously.

b. Letter Regarding Lee Fort Terrace

KM said she will send the letter out to the Salem Housing Authority Board, Affordable Housing Board, City Council and to the Editor of the Salem News regarding the redevelopment plans for Lee Fort Terrace.

A motion was made by KM to send the letter out regarding Lee Fort Terrace. Seconded by JR. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion carried unanimously.

IV. NEW BUSINESS:

a. Friends of the COA Update

JR said there was not much to update since they do not meet until next week. He did say the annual appeal letter went out last week. He also said the Friends approved \$4500 for Easter meals to homebound seniors. JR is still looking for new ideas for fundraising.

b. Director's Report, Teresa Arnold

Dining Services:

We are appreciative to Fred Norton from The Salem Food Pantry for always thinking of our older adults by leaving surplus items for us to give away during the month and build congregate meals.

From what we have on hand, Fred's items, two donated turkeys and minor expenditures, we will be able to reinstate the very popular monthly self-cook meal for the last quarter of FY 2023.

This month, we have both Latino and Asian dishes on our menu.

Transportation:

Currently, transportation services remain consistent in all areas. The daily schedule offerings have not changed, nor staffing. Vans continue to receive state inspections, repairs and maintenance on schedule.

We are in the season of recertifications for drivers to meet state requirements. We completed defensive driving and securement classes in the fall. Annie O'Shea is putting a schedule together for the drivers to complete additional on-line requirements and pairing with Kathy McCarthy (and the YMCA) for CPR and first aid class. We should have completed all requirements for the year by June.

Social Services:

Social Services is seeing an increase in complex situations with angry/agitated individuals. We are finding it more difficult to assist clients with long hold times on the phone at other agencies waiting for representatives to answer only to have some reps not fully trained.

We met with Senator Lovely who is going to see if she can connect us with a representative from various agencies so we can get through quicker and receive accurate information.

Social Services continues to meet via Zoom every other week with a contact person at Salem Housing to help those confirm they are on wait lists and to make sure all proper paperwork is in for emergency situations.

Example #1: Client told Social Worker Sharon Felton that he applied four years ago for standard senior housing. Sharon knew this seemed too long and offered to check his status. When Sharon inquired at the next meeting with the SHA contact person, she informed Sharon that he was removed two years ago for mail being returned to their office.

When Sharon called this client to inform him that he needs to reapply, he was upset that the Post Office didn't forward his mail. Sharon explained he needed to update his residential and mailing address with everyone involved (banks, doctors, insurance companies, etc.) because the Post Office only forwards for so long. This is not housing's fault nor the Post Office. It was the client's responsibility to update his address to ensure he didn't miss any mail.

Example #2. A client came to the top of the emergency wait list and submitted all documentation housing was requesting except for her birth certificate from the Philippines. The Salem Housing stated they would not be able to complete a CORI background check without her birth certificate.

Sharon asked housing why they need it because other agencies only require Mass ID and a Social Security number, but they stated it was their rule and she needed the birth certificate to move forward.

Sharon began researching and found there is a Philippine consulate only in NY and we were not able to get a live rep to assist so Sharon sent her to Senator Lovely and Congressman Moulton for

their assistance. Congressman Moulton's office called the CORI board, who in writing, sent how one only needs a valid US government ID to have a CORI completed.

****Because of Sharon Felton following through, the Salem Housing Authority has now changed the policy so it will be easier for those who do not have a birth certificate nor can obtain one.**

SNAP Covid relief ending in March has increased the calls on food insecurities. Folks were receiving the maximum benefit amount based on family size regardless of what they were eligible for. We are making sure clients are reporting all of their medical expenses as this helps increase one's benefits. We are informing clients of the food pantries; those we believe, will see an increase in participation.

Programs:

The Valentine's Day Party and Vow Renewal will be held on Valentine's Day, February 14th. This year, several couples will be renewing their vows at this annual celebration. As always, the event will include live music, dancing and lunch.

Movie and Brunch this month will be held on February 27th. We will be showing the new *Father of the Bride* movie.

The Art program, funded by CDBG, is back holding classes twice a month. This is a free program to seniors. Seniors enjoy working with watercolor painting and acrylic on canvas.

Tax Preparation via AARP begins this month. Aides will be in the building on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

HIGHLIGHTS WORTHY OF MENTION

Heart and Soul Conversation Series:

For several months, we've engaged Rev. James Ashton, an interfaith minister, to guide seniors in once-a-month group sessions to help connect on life's deeper spiritual meaning. The monthly series is a huge hit and we'd like to continue this well into 2023.

Budget/New Requests:

The budget was submitted at the end of January. TA has requested two new part-time positions. The positions must be approved.

One is a Dining Services Assistant so that as Dining Services expands, Erica Blumberg will have help in addition to the volunteers. The other request is for a part-time Transportation Assistant; a flexible position to assist with dispatching, scheduling and driving. Both are part-time at 19 hours a week.

c. Candidate's Forum

The Board discussed having a candidate night to get support for the COA. Perhaps the Friends can fund it. The Board would like to hold a candidate night before the primaries on March 28, 2023 with the four candidates that have already pulled papers. JR and GB will coordinate.

V. OTHER BUSINESS:

KM said she heard Emergency SNAP benefits are expiring. LC wanted to make the Board and the social workers aware of the RAFT program. She also spoke about the Northeast Independent Living Center which is a non-profit program. LC and TA were at a meeting last week with staff from this organization. We hope to collaborate so that seniors are aware of these support services, particularly those related to mental health.

VI. NEXT BOARD MEETING: Wednesday, March 15, 2023 via ZOOM

There being no further business to come before the Council on Aging this evening, JR moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by KM. A roll call vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at **6:05 p.m.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Joanne M. Roomey
Board Clerk

Know Your Rights under the Open Meeting Law M.G.L. Chapter 30A ss. 18-25 and City Ordinance
Sections 2-2028 through 2-2033.