

**Northampton Council on Aging
Meeting Minutes DRAFT
November 14, 2019**

Northampton Senior Center, 67 Conz Street, Northampton, MA 01060

Present: Gerriann Butler, Robert Dionne, Michael Ford, Casey Fowler, Jeanne Henry Hoose, Deborah Epstein, Cynthia Langley, Kathy Pekala Service, Marie Westburg, Jae Casella

Excused: Dennis Helmus

Call to Order

- Gerriann Butler called the meeting to order at 3:35 PM.

Public Session – There were 57 members of the public in attendance. Prior to the commencement of the public session, Jeanne Henry Hoose explained that the NCOA is a municipal advisory board without governing powers. At the outset of the public session Gerriann Butler requested that members of the public who wished to speak, print their name on the sign in sheet which was being passed around the room. Sixteen members of public signed up to speak. Gerriann thanked members of the public and advised protocol for the public session:

- Each member of the public was allotted three minutes to speak.
- The Council would listen, take notes, and take under advisement all questions, concerns and comments but would not respond during this session.

The public session lasted approximately 35 minutes after which most of the public vacated the room.

Following is a list of speakers and summary of their comments:

Nancy Duseau 30 Rockland Heights Rd. Northampton, MA 01060

Has a vested interest in the Senior Center and feels that it is no longer a happy place. Nancy believes this is due to non-communication from the director. She also inquired into the role of the board of directors and what the Council on Aging does to take care of concerns.

Marlene Marrocco, 46 Avis Circle, Florence, MA 01062

Marlene stated that the director reports to the mayor, advisory board and that policy changes go through a process. She asked for a copy of policies of the Senior Center.

Elaine Williams, 286 Rocky Hill Rd. Florence, MA 01062

Elaine stated that patrons are no longer able to make copies at the Senior Center and that candy and snacks are no longer sold in the coffee shop.

Pat Doppmann, 84 Chesterfield Rd. Leeds, MA 01053

Pat stated that the Senior Center is no longer a warm atmosphere, a lively hub, sense of community and that employees have quit or been fired and volunteers have quit in droves.

Lorraine Zalesky, 43 Wilson Ave. Northampton MA 01060

Stated that she was not here to insult or be angry, that the cost of low impact class monthly fee and drop in fee is too high.

Rita Bouthillette, 9 Pinebrook Curve, Northampton, MA 01060

Rita stated that she is a former volunteer who was fired due to disrespectful behavior. She had been given a thank you letter and standing ovation lead by another volunteer who was taken out of their position as well. Rita expressed desire to be reinstated and wants to know why volunteers are leaving.

Stanley Maron 8 Butternut Lane, Northampton, MA 01060

Stanley stated that he understood from other comments that there seems to be an issue with communication but that nobody is stating the actual problem. Stanley referred to the AFSME process regarding working staff and management. He also stated that he would like to see more inter-racial and cultural programs but that overall he is quite satisfied with what is currently being offered.

Peter Jones, 105 Briarwood Dr. Florence, MA 01062

Peter stated that he hears every day about likes and dislikes about the Senior Center. He stated that people like what's going on but don't feel they have a voice on decisions. He stated that the Board of Directors is the Mayor and that the COA has a duty to advise the Mayor about what the senior population. He wants to know how to contact the COA and asked for the Mayor for a public meeting.

Carol Meunier P.O. Box 101, Leeds, MA 01053

Carol stated that she has been frequenting the Senior Center for 12 years, enjoys the fitness center and coffee shop. She stated that Mary's shop and the book sale is gone. She does not have access to anyone for the fitness center and feels it is closed environment.

Ann Howell, 23 Randolph Place Unit 4, Northampton MA 01060

Ann stated that people quit coming to the Senior Center because it is depressing and people do not feel welcome in their own community.

Diane Liebert, 4 Mountain Laurel Park Florence, MA 01062

Diane stated that she frequents the Senior Center 4 days a week. Her main concern is that there is no written communication. She also stated that volunteers do not have information about credits. She stated that the \$15 wellness grant does not allow for other activities and would like to see a sliding scale similar to the YMCA at 10%-60% off, a punch card system and that the burden to pay for instructors should not fall on the seniors.

William Joss, resident of Easthampton, MA

William inquired about why the Mayor was not present and suggested that the Mayor be requested to attend the meeting.

Aniko Gordano, resident of West Hampton, MA

Aniko felt that the 3 minute time limit per person seemed arbitrary. She stated that the February 2019 Chronicle stated the purpose of the COA was to listen to the needs of the seniors. She stated that the staff, volunteers and seniors are not happy since the Director came in. She asked the COA to review Article 2 and that she is waiting for an apology from the Director.

Kimberly Lambert, 97 Pine Edge Dr. Northampton, MA 01060

Kimberly stated that people had to be turned away from the meeting due to space constraints. She stated that she feels that the focus of the Director and staff is punitive governance and that many volunteers have left. She stated that the role of the COA is to be advocates of the seniors. She called for people to meet with the Mayor. Kim stated that transportation has been cut back and that transportation and housing are top priorities for seniors.

Susan Martins, 71 State. St. Apt 219, Northampton, MA 01060

Susan stated that an exercise teacher was let go and nobody knew what was going on. She stated that the Senior Center used to be a place where seniors needs were met but she doesn't feel welcome or as though the Senior Center cares about needs of seniors. She stated that she doesn't feel like the Senior Center is an enjoyable place and that people have quit.

Mina Harrison, 35 Vernon St. Northampton, MA 01060

Mina referred to a letter to the Mayor by Diane L. and that there is no way to have voices heard. She suggested a point person be appointed to get together regularly with the board and staff.

Review and approval of minutes from the previous meeting:

- Deborah Epstein requested that the minutes from the previous meeting be amended to reflect her absence as an excused one as it was due to unavoidable circumstances for which she did not have time to notify the Council. Kathy Service made a motion to accept the minutes with the aforementioned amendment. Robert Dionne seconded the motion. amended October 10, 2019 minutes were unanimously approved.

Announcements: None

Old Business: The public notice regarding NCOA meetings, complaints, public record is still under revision and not yet ready to be published in the Chronicle.

New Business:

- Marie Westburg is reviewing information from peers in other Senior Centers about policies regarding non-senior visitors or participation in programs. The policy may include a visitor's sign in sheet and visitor's badge. She is working on a clear policy that can be publicized in order to reduce confusion. Funding requires that the Center is for the use of seniors 60+ years old but policy can be set to include exceptions. Jeanne and Kathy expressed an idea to allow for "one off" non-senior guests. Cynthia Langley suggested "special event" guest policy. The general consensus is that the policy have very clear parameters. Jeanne offered to set up a working group. Marie will send materials from other centers.
- Marie discussed the draft of the complaint process that was sent to NCOA for consideration. The process was to reduce confusion about how anonymous suggestions are handled versus how to bring forth formal complaints to the Director. Robert Dionne raised a question about how a completed formal complaint form would be directed to Marie. The idea is that the patron could either mail it to Marie or drop it off at the Center.

Cynthia suggested that a suggestion form also be developed that would allow for the choice of identifying oneself or remaining anonymous. Marie is also working on a program proposal form that would encourage patrons to provide ideas for new programs. Michael Ford asked Bob to clarify his comments (from previous meeting) about acknowledgment of anonymous complaints. Bob explained that although complaints or suggestions may be anonymous, if there are enough similar thoughts expressed about the same topic, this makes the suggestion or complaint relevant. Marie had taken that input from Bob and is in the process of developing a FAQ Binder for patrons to peruse. Deborah raised a question about how to differentiate between a suggestion and a complaint. Jeanne suggested that the complaint form include a question about what the patron would like to see at an outcome.

Assistant Director's Report:

- Jae Casella reported that there is always a need for volunteers, that heavy recruiting is underway with one new candidate interviewed today and a couple more planned for next week. There is a special need for 12 -14 volunteers to for setting up, serving and cleaning up the Holiday Dinner on December 4th . The number of volunteers will be predicated on the number of tickets sold. Jae will send out a call for volunteers closer to December 4th.
- There was questions/discussion about the Senior Tax Work Program and how it is publicized. Marie advised that the Mayor's office is preparing a press release. Cynthia asked if there was a cap to the number of seniors who could participate. There is no cap. Seniors can work off \$1500 of their tax bill through volunteering

Director's Report: Marie's report was sent to the NCOA in advance of the monthly meeting. She reviewed some of the items from her report:

- Marie asked if there was any feedback on the Transportation Survey and advised the Council that we are obtaining two new vehicles soon. Marie answered Bob's question that no special license is required for medical driver volunteers. Geriann advised that requests for medical drives have not been coming through via email lately. Marie will investigate.
- Marie is looking into how to roll out the Board of Health rules about groups bringing in food to share. Due to the health vulnerability of the senior population, the BoH feels strongly that the policy to restrict shared food to that which is prepared by Kevin, our onsite Serve Safe certified chef, be strictly enforced. Kevin has developed a catering menu with affordable pricing from which all groups can order food. Cynthia suggested that we engage the BoH as co-communicator around getting the message out to our patrons.
- The Arts and Culture working group still needs volunteers.
- We are still looking at options from the Fitness Survey. A business plan is needed to analyze revenue, financial aid, costs, etc.
- The inter-generational program had to be cancelled due to low enrollment which may have been related to the proximity of the Indigenous Peoples day holiday. The program may be re-introduced at another time.
- Coffee with the Director will begin next week. This is Marie's initiative to meet with patrons in an informal setting. The day of week and time of day will vary from month to

month in order to allow participation by patrons. Marie responded Michael that the expected outcome of the meetings is to improve communication with the patrons. Jeanne expressed that she thought it was a great idea and that the first meeting might be like a “fire hose” and requested a report. Marie will include a summary of the meeting in her monthly Director’s report.

- Marie reported that the marketing plan is moving along nicely and that the insert in the Gazette was well received. The donor directory campaign for the Chronicle subscription had reached \$3245 as of last week.

Other Business:

- Robert asked Marie to address some of the comments that came from the public session about patrons, staff and volunteers leaving the center. He inquired about whether we had statistics to evaluate. Marie advised that there are various reasons for people leaving. The statistics regarding participation in programs from My Senior Center are not completely accurate because patrons do not always scan in to each program. However, the latest report shows that since April 2018, membership in the center grew by 668 new members for a total of 2662 (2015 residents, 641 non-residents). Regarding comments about lack of diversity, Marie reported that she met with Northampton Neighbors about Latino outreach programs and will the Council examples of what other Centers are doing.
- Michael requested that the Council develop a simple process by which to determine relevancy around providing meaningful advice. He congratulated Marie on the good job she did to correct mis-information.
- Deborah thanked Marie for covering so much ground. She also reminded the Council that November is National Diabetes month and expressed a desire to advocate for patrons with diabetes and the types of foods that are served at the Center. Kathy mentioned that she requested and Kevin has responded with acceptable food options.
- Marie responded to Kathy’s inquiry that the FAQ binder would be located near the suggestion box.
- Kathy likes the idea of working group and offered to help with a dementia friendly group and also around helping to make the Center a more welcoming place.
- Jae responded to Bob’s inquiry about scanning in as a volunteer.
- Casey Fowler expressed being appalled by the way in which Marie was treated by the public in today’s meeting as well as when she was hired. She stated that she would be drafting a letter to the Mayor about him not being supportive. Marie advised that by not being present, she is able to better represent herself in the independent role of Director of the Center.
- Donna Park expressed gratitude for being part of the group.
- Gerianne thanked the Council for participating in today’s meeting.

Adjournment:

- Kathy made a motion to adjourn. Michael and Bob seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously carried. The meeting was adjourned at 5:35 pm.

Next NCOA Council Meeting: Thursday, December 12, 2019 at 3:30 PM at the Northampton Senior Center.

Respectfully submitted by _____ Jae J. Casella

