

Senior Citizens Advisory Commission

Meeting Minutes 4/15/2014, Jordan Conference Room

Attendees: Brett Seekins, Chair, Elizabeth Baillie, Patricia Bredenberg, William Marshall, Bruce Nelson, June O'Neill, and Barbara Page. Staff: Matthew Sturgis. No members of the public attended.

The meeting was called to order at 11:05 am by Chair Seekins.

1. Introductions: Chair Seekins welcomed the Commission members and welcomed Bill Marshall. Mr. Marshall introduced himself and described his background and reasons for interest in being on the Commission.
2. The minutes of the April 10, 2014 meeting were reviewed and no changes were requested. Bruce Nelson moved for acceptance of the minutes, Patricia Bredenberg seconded, the motion passed unanimously.
3. Chair Seekins began the discussion on the determination of the Top 10 issues that the members identified that are confronting seniors in Cape Elizabeth. The discussion identified a number of issues and a thoughtful discussion.
 - a. June O'Neill identified as the first issue that seniors face is taxes. Property taxes are a challenge to seniors aging in place. Often the impact is significant as they seem to demand a greater share of seniors' expenses. Chair Seekins asked Matt Sturgis what his experience has been regarding this issue. Matt Sturgis reported that it is a longstanding and real concern for seniors as their incomes are fixed to diminishing and the potential impacts may be to choose to pay taxes or buy oil. Matt also mentioned the Circuit Breaker program elimination / conversion to the Property Tax Fairness Credit came as a surprise and a disappointment to seniors as the benefit changed from a maximum of \$1,600 to a flat \$400.
 - b. Heating was an issue identified as well, both cost of fuel and efficiency of homes. June O'Neill raised the concern that seniors need improved knowledge of the available programs. Bruce Nelson inquired as to the availability / expansion of access to natural gas, noting there was a significant difference between the cost of gas vs. oil and propane. There was a brief discussion regarding Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), the Thomas Jordan Fund (locally), and General Assistance are locally administered sources of aid. The concern expressed by the Commission members was there was not literature available, or was not widely publicized.

- c. The Commission discussed the need for a referral and resource area that would house senior concerns under one umbrella. There is a need for access to and assistance with navigating available resources. The resource could be staff or volunteers. Seniors get overwhelmed and it does seem to be too much, as paperwork is an intimidating obstacle.
- d. For renters in the community these issues also exist, but there are difficulties as efficiency programs are not readily or easily available to renters, and there is no incentive for rental property owners who do not include heating costs in the rent. The LIHEAP benefit is for one month of heating, which is inadequate.
- e. The access to the internet and development of internet skills for seniors is an obstacle. Some may have access with no skill to employ it, whereas others may not have easy or affordable access. For those who do not have the skills, a help line may be beneficial. Many rely on family members for assistance, but if they become unavailable the senior is without assistance. Sources for repairs in the case of equipment failure, software crashes, etc, are not readily available. There may be strong demand for a program at the high school for the elder population, where instruction on how to use email, the internet, and applications is taught. This may help in lowering the intimidation factor of technology, as the suspicion is that older seniors have little to no computer access or knowledge. Finally, this is a segment of the population that employs the telephone primarily for communication and email may be considered too difficult.
- f. Isolation, access to care, and nutrition are three major concerns for seniors. In addition to these three, hydration and medication management are also significant concerns.
- g. How does the Town provide these services organizationally? At present there is no “senior services” staff person. There may be demand to create a position of senior liaison who coordinates this. There may also be the ability to provide more senior focused programming at the library.
- h. The group discussed what is considered the informal vs. formal structure of operations in the community. The informal structure is by calling Town staff to get information or service. The formal structure is through filing of forms and applications and navigating the systems formally. A brochure that lays out where to go, who to call, when to call, what to ask could be a useful tool in making services more accessible.

- i. The Town does have social work provided on a limited extent by Maurice Geoffroy from Opportunity Alliance, Tuesday and Friday from 9 to 12 pm. The Commission will reach out to him to have him as a speaker.
 - j. There is a perceived need for greater training for 911 operators in assisting seniors with mental health issues.
 - k. An additional program that Barbara Page brought up was the Farm Shares for Seniors program. This is a program based on income and age. The recipients get fresh produce weekly, with some delivery available all at a cost of \$50. The sign up period is right now, however there is limited publicity of this program.
4. Potential speakers for the group at this time include David Galvan, CE Police Department and TRIAD, Maurice Geoffroy, Opportunity Alliance, Tom Kohan from CE High School for Senior to Senior program, a representative from Southern Maine Area Agency on Aging, State Senator Rebecca Millett, Representative Kim Monaghan-Derrig, and CE Police Department Chief Neil Williams. Finally, the local churches and food banks may also be a great resource as presenters.
5. Barbara Page supplied the information on the SMAA's "Senior News", with the contact information and reported they would welcome information.
6. Chair Seekins will be speaking with Wendy Keeler of the Courier on the activities of the Commission.
7. David Galvan of CE Police Department and his associate from the South Portland Police Department will be speaking at the next meeting, 4/29/14. The format for the meeting will be to speak for a half hour and allow a half hour for questions and answers.
8. The Commission members discussed that they need to keep the focus on Cape Elizabeth specific issues, with a focus on who is it that needs help and how can the Commission best address their issues. There was discussion that Cape Elizabeth may find it is isolated from the other communities like South Portland, Portland, and Scarborough, where there are extensive programs. One concern is that it may be a perception of a socio-economic issue, where elders may not participate out of pride, or the perception may be that there is no need.
9. Next steps: The Commission discussed that they need to develop a plan to successfully attain the goal of crafting their report. The discussion acknowledged that this is the early stages of the process and the Commission is in the information gathering stage, but the need for a plan also exists. The consensus was that this can be achieved at the same time as fact finding continues.

10. Next Meeting: The next meeting will be held on April 29, 2014 in the Jordan Conference Room at 11 AM.

11. The meeting adjourned at 1pm.