

Senior Citizens Advisory Commission

Meeting Minutes: August 5, 2014

Jordan Conference Room, 11:00 am

Attendees: Chair Brett Seekins, William Marshall, Bruce Nelson, June O'Neill, Barbara Page, Pat Bredenberg. Excused: Elizabeth Baillie, Council Liaison James Walsh
Visitor: James Phipps, Maine Iris Network, Kathy Ray, Town Council.
Staff: Matthew Sturgis

1. Chair Seekins called the meeting to order at 11:05 am.
2. The minutes of the prior meeting were reviewed; motion to accept the minutes made by William Marshall, seconded by June O'Neill, unanimous approval.
3. Chair Seekins welcomed Mr. Phipps for coming to provide information to the Commission.
 - a. Mr. Phipps began his presentation. He cited that the Iris Network has existed for over 100 years, with many clients in the senior population. As people are living longer, there is actually a 1 in 3 chance of losing some to all of your vision. This presents challenges to living as people were used to during their working lives. The Iris Network comes into play as a resource to help adapt.
 - b. Iris Network can assist in developing the skills to work with vision loss, and help keep the ability to live at home. There are rehabilitation services, however funds are limited for advertising their services.
 - c. Mr. Phipps explained the origins of the Iris Network, explaining how vision rehab began to be pursued in earnest after World War I, with veteran's needing vocational training. Iris Network was on the cutting edge of providing training in the use of canes and other job skills for vision impaired people to earn a living. Today the work is in providing training, not vocational, but for the skills of self sufficiency, and the network has a staff of professionals who provide this service. Additionally, they have computer adaptive screens and other tools to aid in developing skills.
 - d. Today's clients are mostly due to age related vision loss, with average client age at 78 years. This has two benefits, it helps keep seniors viable in the work force and helps employers understand that vision loss can be overcome. Additionally, the upcoming challenge will be serving those who are done working, as over the next 15 years there will be four times the number of 75 plus year olds as there are today. Funding will be a challenge. Vision rehab services are not medicare reimbursable, there are efforts to have physical and occupational therapy covered. Right now Iris Network is assisting 1,000 clients at an average cost of \$1,800 per person.

This may assist in helping a person stay in their home. If they can avoid being in a facility for less time than if they had no help, then they have done well. Often the senior ends up in a facility due to vision impairment causing a fall.

- e. The Iris Network is trying to provide more efficient services, and are updating their facility so they can begin an extensive new training program. At this time they are sending out therapists to work 1 on 1, but with their expanded facility they can be more efficient with having one therapist work with many clients at the same time.
 - f. Mr. Phipps made the observation that people can become isolated due to blindness, and therapy can be a vehicle to re-engagement.
 - g. Barbara Page asked if there are transportation resources for Iris Network? Mr. Phipps stated there are resources available, but more often in cities out of State. Portland and South Portland have public transit, but there is none in the suburbs. Independent Transportation Network is available to people in Cape Elizabeth, it is a non-profit that exists off fees.
 - h. Bruce Nelson asked if the services provided by Iris Network are means based for payment. What do people who cannot afford to pay do? Mr. Phipps explained that the services they provide are funded by tax dollars, with 80% Federal funding and 20% State funding.
 - i. William Marshall asked if Iris Network does anything with service dogs, or if that was passé? Mr. Phipps stated it is not passé, there are schools that provide that service. Iris Network can provide info on deciding what works for the client.
 - j. Chair Seekins thanked Mr. Phipps for coming today and providing his information.
4. Chair Seekins referenced the prior meeting, and the need for the Commission to decide if they want to have a public information session, take part in the Senior Expo, have a survey, etc.

- a. Barbara Page started the conversation by stating a listing of agencies who provide senior services would be critical.

June O'Neill agreed, and thought the Expo would be a great opportunity to knowing who is out there.

Chair Seekins agreed that we need to have a listing of service providers, maybe on the website, and as an appendix in the report.

Pat Bredenberg agreed that we need a resource guide of what is available.

Bruce Nelson asked if there was additional funding available specific for senior population.

Matthew Sturgis replied that outside of the \$10,000 for the discount, no.

Barbara Page stated there seems to be a void out there for seniors. Maybe a senior center would be a good option, and perhaps that may be a recommendation from the Commission.

June O'Neill stated that Peaks Island has an element of Senior services, and it is integrated into Parks and Recreation.

William Marshall stated that in the history of the Town it was a primarily young community, but over time as properties have increased in value, the access to property in Town by young families has become more difficult. Community Services has traditionally been focused on children, for example Cape Care has \$230,000 of the roughly \$465,000 expenditure of the budget. This is for pre and after school care.

Matthew Sturgis pointed out that that is the expenditure side of the budget and it may be wise to also have an understanding of the revenue provided by Cape Care to get an actual net operating amount.

William Marshall stated that it will be important for the Commission to know what Community Services is doing for seniors and programming.

Pat Bredenberg inquired if we should get South Portland Recreation to come and speak about what their funding is, programming is, and what their challenges are.

William Marshall stated that Jen DeRice was the senior programmer in South Portland before coming to Cape Elizabeth. She would be an excellent resource. He followed up by stating that there is not programming available for house bound seniors. With the emphasis on aging in place and people staying in their homes, we need to adapt the model of services.

5. The meeting adjourned at 1:00 pm.