

Council on Aging Minutes for Virtual Meeting on December 1, 2021

The meeting was called to order at 5:32 p.m. A roll call identified those present: JoAnn Bernhard (JB), Susan Gomberg (SG), Janis Gray (JSG), Susan Millinger (SM), and Linda Avis Scott (LAS). Absent: Melissa Makepeace-O'Neil. Also present: Guests Leslie Luchonok and Jill Marland.

Minutes of the Meeting of November 3, 2021, a special meeting: Motion to approve the minutes as presented was made, seconded, and passed by a roll call vote.

Minutes of the regular monthly meeting of November 10 were tabled until the January meeting.

Business

The Senior Tax Exemption programs:

Ms. Marland presented information about details of the Tax Work-Off program, used by some towns in our region. LAS pointed out that Town Meeting must accept the program; then the Select Board may establish it. A warrant article would need to be submitted. A citizens' petition could initiate the issue, also. However, it might have more impact if supported by a Town body like the COA. The question of the availability of work in a small town like Shutesbury, where much work is done by volunteers, was raised.

Marland spoke of the possibility that the State was or has been working on another senior exemption involving state rather than local taxes; the Town's Administrative Assessor has knowledge of that as of the other tax exemptions.

Bernhard suggested that Town Hall be contacted to find out the steps involved in producing a warrant article; Scott suggested the Administrative Assessor, Kevin Rudden, be invited to attend the next COA meeting to talk about the various tax exemptions available for seniors.

Financial Update:

The balance as of November 19: \$1,236.61 in the grant.

Expenses as of December 1:

\$140: FootCare by Nurses

Currently, the approximate balance is \$1,096.61

Grant Update: No new information is available.

Foot Clinic Update: Gomberg reported that the client whose confusion about the cost of a home visit she answered has indeed signed up for a home visit.

Annual Report: Gray discovered that she had accidentally omitted reference to the essay "How to Prepare for a Medical Emergency;" she has corrected that omission. In answer to her question, upon asking about the next step, JSG is told to send the Annual Report to members of the COA; anyone who has a question is to contact her directly.

Survey Update: Gray provided a detailed report on the virtual LifePath meeting she attended on November 18, whose purpose was to comment on the draft of the Age- and Dementia-Friendly Communities Survey that had been circulated. It was decided that these minutes should include only the suggestions for changes made at that meeting.

- Concern that some of our seniors might be reluctant to fill out on an online survey, assuming they even have internet access or the technical ability to use it.
- The survey still seemed more for “urban” populations rather than very rural ones.
- It assumed smart phone/computer/internet literacy.

(Suggestions to get around that last point included asking “Do you use a computer or smart phone?” and “Do you have internet access at home?” (Not just asking readers to rate how well their communities provided access at a senior center, library or other public building – as the draft does now.)

- Add from our own draft survey, “Do you need help?” with the just-mentioned technologies.
- Ask if you need help with meals, not just rating your region on “health and wellness programs in areas such as nutrition.”
- The survey should note at the beginning that answers are confidential and optional (you don’t have to answer every one – related to comments on length below).
- Add “I don’t know” or “N/A” as an alternative to rating your community as excellent, good, fair or poor in areas like outdoor benches, which tend to imply a more urban environment.
- Combine “good and fair” into one answer to narrow the range of answers to shorten the survey.
- Try to get a sense of what an impairment is without asking directly (Are you: “hearing impaired,” “need wheelchair,” “legally blind,” etc.) by asking, “If you have an impairment, what would help?” (“Hearing loop system installed in public buildings” might be one response.)
- Ask if English is the respondent’s first language.
- Ask readers to select the age range in which they belonged, such as “50-64, 65-74, 75-90,” etc.
- Asking if a person lived alone might be helpful info to collect, but there was also concern that this might be seen as a bit threatening to a senior concerned about security, fearful that the answer (even if anonymous) put them at risk. The group liked Shutesbury’s draft survey’s alternative, which was “How many people live in your household, including yourself?”
- Concern about perceived length: Nour agreed that he would work on shortening it (and also make it less “wide” across by reducing the number of possible answers, as noted above).

Website Content Update:

-Gray has added a short paragraph on “Age- and Dementia-Friendly Communities” while waiting for Nour to send a paragraph that every member town can use.

-JSG wrote up Property Tax Reduction 41C, asked the Administrative Assessor for comments, then used his preferred language after he sent it to her.

Membership on the Council will be discussed after prospective new member Tracy McNaughton, who joined us during the visit from Nour Elkhattaby Strauch, the Program Manager of LifePath's ADFC, has been able to attend a regular meeting of the COA.

Unanticipated Items and Tasks:

- EOEAs has asked COAs to reach out to older adults to encourage them to get booster shots. LAS suggests sending this request to the BOH, and she will do so.
- LAS will also ask Kevin Rudden if he can attend the next COA meeting.
- SPM suggested that perhaps we could use VN's contact lists to access the Shutesbury seniors who are members or volunteers of VN. She will contact VN to inquire about this.
- JB brings up the need for us to find answers to the problem of contacting Shutesbury's seniors.
- Note: basic information about warrant articles and citizen petitions can be found at http://www.Shutesbury.org/town_meeting.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, January 12 at 5:30 p.m.

Motion to adjourn was made, seconded and carried unanimously by a roll call vote. The meeting was adjourned at 6:47.