

Minutes of the Meeting of the Shutesbury Council of Aging

August, 13 2025

Approved at the meeting of September 10, 2025

Meeting came to Order, Aug 13, 2025 at 5:34 p.m.

1. Members present: Identified in a roll call: MaryJo Johnson (MJJ), Jessica Makepeace (JM), Susan Millinger (SM) and Jeannette Stockton (JS). Guests: former co-chair JoAnn Bernhard, Rich Strangman.

Business:

2. Presentation by former co-chair JoAnn Bernhard. Before she resigned from the COA because of moving out of town, JoAnn (JB) was the COA's specialist on transportation. Transportation has again moved off the Council's backburner, so we wanted the information on earlier work on the subject. JB had become a member of the Council from a role as driver in our former MedRide program. On the Council, she began to do research on transportation. Elizabeth Fernandez-O'Brien (EFOB) was doing similar research for Village Neighbors; both came up with very little information. JB investigated MedRide records to see where Shutesbury residents wanted to go. 85% wanted to go South, to Amherst, Hadley and Northampton; only 15% wanted to go North. Yet the county line was a problem. FRTA (Franklin Regional Transit Authority) would only drive within the county; it would not drive people into Hampshire County. Similarly, with some exceptions, PVTA (Pioneer Valley Transit Authority) only offers rides in Hampshire County. [That Leverett, in Franklin County, gets PVTA, is due to the accident that a PVTA route goes through Leverett.]

Meanwhile, LifePath, Franklin County's Area Agency for Aging, applying for membership in AARP's Dementia-Friendly Communities program, launched a survey of interested towns in which transportation played a large part. In this very rural county, those surveyed rated public transportation as a very important need. LifePath set up a Transportation Working Group; both JB and EFOB were members. Its conclusion: what FRTA offered didn't meet most people's needs.

FRTA offered (as it still does) a Demand/Response program accessible for those over 60, as well as people with certain disabilities, including veterans with a certain percent of disability. The van could accommodate wheelchairs. However, the van-driver could not help people get in and out of the van (or their own house.) The rider could bring a companion for a small fee. The prospective rider had to fill out an application form and provide proof of their status (age or disability.) Once their application was approved, the rider had to contact FRTA ahead of time to request two different trips: one to the appointment and one return. A rider might have to wait a long time for a van-driver to be able to get back for the return trip. Could regular rides be set up with FRTA for a recurring appointment? JB wasn't sure.

The current FRTA Demand/Response program seems to be a continuation of the program JB investigated, though at least in 2025, it is free for the rider; a companion pays a small fee. What JB and EFOB decided in the past still seems true: for people with medical needs, the public bus system is hard to use.

MedRides vs. Demand/Response

MedRide in Shutesbury had a more helpful structure: the driver waited for the rider to be ready to return, and as neighbors were helping neighbors, the driver might stop at a pharmacy for a prescription to be filled, or even at a grocery store. However, the driver was not permitted to help the rider get into and out of the car. Drivers were interviewed and CORI-checked; riders were not.

LifePath's MedRide program, in which volunteer drivers using their own cars wait for the rider, is more like Shutesbury's. However, it is only for people who are registered clients of LifePath, and the drivers can not take riders out of the county.

JS commented that Village Neighbors' ride service is VN's most requested service. Rides are to be reserved in advance, though in an emergency the call manager tries to meet needs. To get a ride, the prospective rider must be a member of VN, which involves a home visit. Is the rider as well as the driver CORI checked? The possibility of Shutesbury collaborating with VN's rides should be explored.

JB provided some general information about Shutesbury's MedRide program, created by former COA chair David Dann, and pointed to the MedRide records for further information about, for example, any state regulations. Shutesbury's program was funded by the grant from what is now Aging and Independence (was EOEA).

Representative Aaron Saunders has earmarked funds for the Neighbors in his district. It is thought to be for transportation (as has been mentioned in earlier Minutes.) It would be helpful to contact him for further details.

3. Minutes: Consideration of the Minutes of July 9 was postponed to the next meeting, due to the press of business.

4. Financial report as of August 13 was postponed to the next meeting.

Discussion moved to item 6: Contents of the September/October Geezette issue

Following on the decisions made in the July 9 meeting about date, length, and prospective editor (JS), the focus was on who would draft a short piece on the topics listed: Those who agreed follow

JM: Community Lunch

SM: Foot Clinic: an introduction to Simonne

SM: Library physical fitness classes (which COA helps support)

JS: Neighborhood Dementia Support (which COA publicizes and has two representatives on steering committee)

--brief description of the project;

--resources available

--upcoming program(s)

JM: Police Chief's Sand for Seniors program (which COA has helped support)

JS: Transportation, a longtime COA concern

-FRTA's Call and Response program with a link to/ for the application

-New Transportation Group: its goals and accomplishments (as of the newsletter)

Ask Sarah Fiske for a piece

Joan Green to be asked to write up her Move to Music after Community Lunch (if it exists at the time of the newsletter.) It doesn't exist as of 9/7/25.

To be included: Request for email addresses of recipients, so we can use our limited budget on other programs of interest to local seniors. Survey giving some possible options of other programs, asking people to email

coa@shutesbury.org

5. Brief reports on current programs:

a. Community Lunch continues to offer good food and good company under the leadership of Sally Fairfield and Susie and Dave Mosher.

b. Footcare Clinic Simonne Westort (Nurse Simonne) has now held two clinics. Rich Strangman, an on-going client, has had his first session with her and much prefers the services provided by FootCare by Nurses. We agree we need more responses from clients, though several seem quite happy with Nurse Simonne.

c. Neighborhood Dementia Support: The second presentation: The Many Faces of Dementia was given on July 31 to a group smaller those for the first presentation; however, participation indicated real interest.

7. The Search Committee for a New Police Chief: MaryJo Johnson was thanked for volunteering to be a member.

8. Membership:

a. Rich Strangman indicated that he is willing to join the Council on Aging, much to the delight of the Council members

b. A draft warrant article to be presented at the Fall Special Town Meeting was presented; a motion was made, seconded and unanimously approved that the following language:

[Move] “that the Town vote to amend the number of members on the Shutesbury Council on Aging, to return to the initial number of five citizens.”

With an accompanying explanation of the reason for the change. be sent to the Town Administrator, the Select Board and the Administrative Assistant for inclusion in the Warrant.

9. Updating the webpage was passed over for lack of time.

10. Unanticipated business: The Council was asked to provide a member for the new M.N. Spear Library Reuse Committee. MaryJo Johnson volunteered and was thanked by the Council

11. Next Meeting: Wednesday, September 10 at 5:30 p.m.

12. Meeting adjourned at 6:43.