

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

Wednesday February 19, 2025

Harwich Community Center
100 Oak Street, Harwich, MA 02645
Harwich Channel Studio

Meeting Attendance:

Present: Sheila House, Carol Thayer, Angie Chilaka, Linda Roderick, Richard Waystack, John Bathalt, Lauren Swift, Jen Andersen

Absent: Ralph Smith, Julie Witas

Guests: Bob Hamilton, Carolyn Carey

1. **Call to Order:** Richard Waystack called the meeting to order at 10:00am
2. **Approval of last meeting minutes:** Motion made by Carol Thayer and seconded by Sheila House. Unanimous vote to approve.
3. **Public Comment:** Bob Hamilton, The Friends of the Council on Aging President attended. He wanted to mention the lack of space in the COA; the results of the needs assessment will hopefully shed more light on this issue. The Friends currently have 8 members on the board, which is a good number now. The new board is working well together.
4. **Chair's Comments:** Richard Waystack explained that there are 3 organizations that work together to implement and support COA operations: the Board, The Friends of the COA and the COA department (a department of the Town of Harwich). The Friends do a lot more than people realize, and they provide a great deal of financial and volunteer support to the COA. Sheila asked if any board members attend the Friends meetings. Richard said that Julie attends, and Bob said that it is an open meeting so anyone can attend.

Richard said that he was interviewed for the needs assessment for 1-hour last month. It was a very in-depth interview. It made him realize that we are a very active COA. And that what we do may affect the younger population as well. The assessment is a year long process and we will get a follow up from Julie at the next meeting.

5. **COA Director (Julie Witas) Report:**

A. Programming – We have consistently been expanding our program offerings for the past few years. Thanks to our program specialist Jen, the range and quantity of programs has really grown over the past 6-9 months. In the upcoming March/April newsletter, we have over 20 special one-time programs scheduled. We'd also like to invite everyone to our St Patrick's Day Luncheon on March 12, where Chef Linda will be serving a traditional Irish meal of corned beef and cabbage, and the Cape Cod Ukulele Club will be playing everyone's favorite Irish tunes. We're taking registration for this event on March 3rd – check out our newsletter for details on how to sign up.

B. Needs Assessment – In January, the researchers at UMass conducted key informant interviews with the five stakeholders we identified in December. These included our Town Nurse, Sue Jusell, a Harwich Fire Captain, a protective services worker at Elder Services, our town's Housing Advocate, and our COA Board Chair. These one-hour interviews were fairly in depth, where respondents were able to share their opinions about the strengths and challenges of serving older adults in Harwich.

Julie sent a draft of the section of the report that will describe the COA and its operations and have offered some suggestions and revisions for the draft and returned it to UMass.

The next step in the needs assessment is to conduct focus groups with residents and community stakeholders. In March, UMass will work with the COA to schedule three focus groups – two for residents, and one for service providers that work with older adults in Harwich. Each focus group will include 8-12 people and is estimated to take 90 minutes.

The intention is to recruit a diverse group of residents who represent the full array of perspectives on living in Harwich, including both older and younger seniors, those who have lived here their entire life and those who have retired here in recent years, families who are acting as caregivers for their spouse or parents, and families with unique challenges, such as grandparents raising grandchildren. Most of the focus group participants will likely be familiar with the COA and what we have to offer, but we are also going to strive to reach out to people who do not use our programs and services, to the best of our ability.

For the focus group that will include local service providers, Julie will be inviting several people who work closely with seniors in Harwich and who provide the services that are most valuable or most utilized. We hope that someone from the Alzheimer's Family Support Center, the Police Department, Outer Cape Health, and at least one nursing home or assisted living facility will join us

In the background while the focus groups are being organized and conducted, UMass will continue working to analyze the data that was collected in the surveys that went out in the Fall. We ended up having a very good response rate to the survey. A total of 1,772 surveys were returned, which yielded a response rate of 25.3%, exceeding our target of 20%. This was a slightly higher rate of return than a neighboring town saw in their needs assessment two years ago.

C. Volunteer Needs – The Volunteer Luncheon is scheduled for Thursday, April 10. The exact time is TBD, but we are tentatively planning for a noon start time. We will compare menus and costs at the Harwich restaurants that have enough space for our guests.

6. **Old Business:** Needs assessment – Richard said that it will be a good tool for us to utilize and maybe getting some staff opinions on it would be helpful.

7. **New Business:**

Jen Andersen – the newsletter got expanded last fall so we have a lot more programs available. The assessment will also help us know what to offer. There is so much that we offer now that we would like feedback on what the board and what the COA members think works.

Some programs coming up: 2/10 – Wabi Sabi dancers (partnering with the Community Center), 2/25 – Centerville Historical Society outing, 2/26 – Candlestick program, 2/28 – Women's Breakfast,

2/21 – Big Screen Movie Day, 2/28 – craft workshop, 3/5 – Lunch and Learn: Future Planning Toolbox, 3/12 – St. Patrick's Day Dine In Lunch.

We have been partnering with the Community Center to help with our outreach.

Events are shared on Facebook and are in the COA as a monthly calendar notice. Follow us on Facebook and check out our website. We also use the newspaper to advertise some of our programs as well.

Richard Waystack asked if you need to be a senior to attend the COA programs. Jen said that we don't discriminate on age so even if someone under 60 wants to attend, we don't turn them away.

Sheila shared that another town renamed their COA to the Center for Active Living. It seemed to get more people and age ranges to attend.

Richard mentioned that we don't control the rooms so we can't always have a lot of people attend a program. It depends on what is assigned to us. The Community Center and the COA staff have to work together to see what is available for use. Jen said that we are currently booking rooms for the May/June newsletter. Richard wondered if a quarterly newsletter would work better for scheduling. Angie shared that the newsletter is more lively than it used to be and she likes the color.

Richard said that the Select Board met last night to go over budgets. Getting the assessment back will help show what we need.

Carolyn Carey – the Community Center is 25 years old this February. The collaboration with the COA has been great. Special thanks to Carol and Sheldon Thayer for all their help over the years and to Jen Andersen and Reagan Wilda for enhancing what the building has to offer. We are happy that the Community Center is growing and expanding. We need to enhance the communication within the building to help with what is offered and work together to make that happen. We should have a combined meeting of all board members of all the departments in the building. This meeting should include the Facilities Committee, of which Angie Chilaka is chair. Ralph Smith will be stepping down as COA liaison so there will be an opening if someone is interested. The Facilities Committee meets every 2nd Friday of the month at 3:30pm.

8. **Member Comments:**

Carol Thayer: she said that she attended the senior living program yesterday, which was great. She wished they had given a list of all the facilities on Cape.

Jen offered a reminder that the pancake breakfast with the Community Center is this Saturday 2/22 from 8-10 am. And we are good on medical drivers but what we really need is a reception desk volunteer, for Friday afternoons, as one of our volunteers that did 2 days has gone down to one day.

9. **Adjournment:** Motion made by Sheila House and seconded by Carol Thayer. Unanimous vote to end meeting. Meeting ended at 10:46 am.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, **March 19, 2025** at 10am.