

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, June 18, 2025

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

Meeting Attendance:

Present: Carol Thayer, John Bathelt, Sheila House, Angie Chilaka, Linda Roderick, Richard Waystack, Lauren Swift, Julie Witas

Absent: Ralph Smith

Guests: Bob Hamilton

1. **Call to Order:** Meeting was called to order at 10:00am
2. **Approval of last meeting minutes:** Motion made by Carol Thayer, seconded by John Bathelt. Unanimous vote to approve.
3. **Public Comment:** None.
4. **Chair's Comments:** Charter Committee will be checking in with everyone in the town. The Memorandum of Agreement has been renewed with the Orleans Respite Day Program (Rock Harbor Respite) for the next fiscal year.
5. **COA Director (Julie Witas) Report:**
 - A. We had two new medical drivers contact us that would like to volunteer.
 - B. Rosa Wright will be starting Monday June 23, 2025 for the Program Specialist 3 position.
 - C. Richard asked about the women's breakfast and how it was going? Julie said that it is just as well attended as the men's breakfast. She noted that we could try to increase attendance even more by asking attendees to bring a friend, as we do at the men's breakfast each month.
 - D. In response to a question about access to newsletters, Julie reported that we drop off newsletters at Pine Oaks and other sites around town, so that they can be picked up by those who don't subscribe.
6. **Old Business:**

Needs Assessment Discussion

The group discussed the report from UMass describing findings from the needs assessment. The most salient points are listed here:

- a. Carol: Appreciated that it captured the housing issue. The group acknowledged that and discussed it.
- b. Richard: The Penrose housing Project will take 2-3 years before they break ground. He noted that at Pine Oaks, it can take up to 7 years before they are approved to move in, so the need for more affordable housing is evident.
- c. Linda – Noted that in order to take care of the seniors, you also have to help the younger population be able to afford living here, so that there are people available to help the seniors. The group discussed it.
- d. Sheila: Noted that 38% of the respondents don't know who to call if they need help with something. The group discussed that issue and how to address it.
- e. Angie: She is concerned with who we are missing and how we can get information to them.
- f. Richard: Feels strongly that Harwich has some of the best services for its residents compared to all other towns on Cape. The group agreed and discussed how to leverage our strengths.
- g. John: Expressed concern about moving beyond the scope of the COA's mission and role in the community. As we don't have unlimited money and resources, we have to identify and prioritize where to focus our efforts. For example, we have limited ability to address the housing crisis, beyond perhaps advocating for more affordable housing and maintaining relationships with agencies that specialize in housing assistance.
- h. Bob: Feels that the COA need more space to hold programs. Richard shared that all departments in the Community Center have been trying to come together to discuss the best use of our shared space. The group discussed whether expansion might be a realistic goal.
- i. Carol: Suggested that the COA market to the local faith community – for example, advertising in church newsletters, building relationships with clergy. Julie agreed that this is something we should follow through on.
- j. Julie: Noted that there were some recommendations in the assessment that we have already done or are currently doing, and some items that we tried but didn't see results from. Can we improve on that? The group acknowledged it and discussed.

7. **New Business:** None

8. **Member Comments:**

- a. Bob reported that at a recent Nauset Neighbors event, the Harwich COA was praised.
- b. Sheila announced that Harwich Children's Fund still needs one more family to host the youth performers of Circus Smirkus.
- c. Angie expressed her support for the idea to network with religious groups so they know what we offer and could make appropriate referrals.
- d. Linda agreed with John's point about the scope of the COA with regard to the assessment's recommendations.
- e. Richard feels that it would be most effective to identify 3-5 of UMass's recommendations that should be prioritized, focusing on action items that yield high impact while still being very feasible to implement.

9. **Adjournment:** John Bathelt made the motion to adjourn. Seconded by Carol Thayer. Unanimous vote to end meeting. Meeting ended at 11:00am.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, **July 16, 2025** at 10am.