

**Rochester Council on Aging (RCOA)
Board of Director's Meeting
67 Dexter Lane
Rochester, MA 02770**

January 10, 2024

In Attendance: Pauline Munroe (President), Eric Poulin (Director), Carol Galante-Dias (Administrative Assistant), Sandy Charron, Michael Daniel, Sue Norton (Vice President), Pat Joy, Mary Bessey (Treasurer), Marjorie O'Brien (Secretary), Andrew Revell

Absent: Marjorie Barrows, Lorraine Thompson (Outreach Coordinator)- Excused- conducting wellness visits

Guests: Andrew Daniel (Rochester Facilities Manager), Glen Cannon (Rochester Town Administrator, Paul Ciaburri (Select Board)

The meeting was **Called to Order** by Pauline Munroe at 9:01 a.m. with confirmation of a quorum (8 of 9 Board members were present).

I. **Acceptance of the Minutes:** A **MOTION** was made by Sue Norton to accept the minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting held on December 13, 2023; the motion was **SECONDED** by Mary Bessey, there was no further discussion and the motion **PASSED** by unanimous vote.

II. **Treasurer's Report:** Mary Bessey reported that the balance in the Sunshine Fund had not changed since last month. Eric Poulin reported that our beginning balance for the fiscal year was \$364,667.00, expenditures thus far into the FY were \$163,046.09, leaving an ending balance of \$201,620.91 through June 30th. With 6 months left in the fiscal year we are tracking fine. Other related Treasurer news: we have new potential van drivers. A reminder, we are filling the "Program Coordinator" position (19 hrs. per week) by hiring Kenneth Viera, who is the Food Safety Manager for our Breakfast Program. He is the person coordinating the program every day making sure the plates that leave the kitchen are safe. He has a number of certifications that are necessary to keep that program running. He was being paid via federal funding for a number of years, but he has been employed through that program for the maximum number of years, so his time is ending. When accepting that funding the COA Director at the time agreed to either a job placement for Ken or to hire him by the time the funding ended. We are now honoring that agreement. We have also hired Paul Santos as a custodian for 15 hours per week. (Monday through Friday from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.) and we are considering Tom Mello (suggested by our former custodian George Smith) for additional hours as we have up to 30 hours per week in our current budget for custodial help. Sue Norton made a MOTION to accept the Treasurer's Report; Sandy Charron SECONDED it, and with no further discussion, the motion **PASSED**, unanimously.

III. Director's Report:

1. Landscaping Project: (Eric Poulin) The project went out to bid and although we expected the cost to be in the vicinity of \$20,000 plus or minus, the lowest bid came in at \$14,325. The company with the lowest bid is "Guerrini Landscaping" out of Mansfield. As a reminder, this is being paid with grant funding. The project will begin in either April or May depending on nursery/greenhouse stock.

2. Transportation & TRIAD: (Carol Galante-Dias) Last month we put in over 3,000 miles on our vehicles- that is up from December of 2022. In the last 6 months we have put in over 19,000 miles! Rarely does a senior get turned down for a requested ride. We are proud of the fact that we have expanded our fleet of vehicles and drivers to accommodate the needs of the seniors in Rochester. (All of our local, state, and federal partners should be thanked for their help.) Carol shared some upcoming TRIAD events: 2 Car Shows (May/Sept.), Block Party (June), and a Health Fair (Oct.). Before the end of January, an annual Transportation Report must be submitted to MassDOT and Eric said that he will be sure that it is completed and submitted in a timely manner.

3. Outreach Report: Lorraine Thompson (Outreach Coordinator) Lorraine is absent from our meeting as she is doing wellness visits, but her monthly Outreach report was provided to Board Members and there were no questions.

4. Monday Lunches: In December, our Monday Lunches collected \$4,110.00, expenses were \$3,691.30, leaving us with a profit of \$418.70.

5. Check-ins for December and all of 2023: We had 300 unduplicated check-ins for December 2023, which surpassed last December and set a record for the month of December for the senior center. In addition, a total of 632 individuals swiped their membership card at least one or more times in 2023, which is a record for the senior center. We added about 200 new members this past year, and this was our best year ever, attendance-wise, on record (we can track back to 2009).

6. AARP Tax Season: AARP will be providing free tax services to our Rochester seniors on Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. starting on Feb. 7th and ending on April 10th. We are planning to make three offices available for the volunteer tax preparers. People need to call the COA to make an appointment and a list of items to bring to their scheduled appointment will be mailed to them and it can also be found in our COA monthly newsletter.

7. Annual Evaluations: Eric has completed and submitted all his employee reviews to the Town Administrator. The COA Board also needs to complete and submit their reviews of the COA Director. All the reviews must be turned in to the Town Administrator by the end of the month of January.

8. Friends Quarterly Check: A request was submitted to the Friends of the Rochester Senior Center for our next quarterly check, and it (\$2,500) was received and deposited (on 1/10/24).

9. Special Town Meeting: This is a reminder that there will be a Special Town Meeting on Monday, January 22nd at 7 p.m. at the Rochester Memorial School on 16 Pine Street. Articles 2, 6, & 8 are applicable to the COA. **Article 2** relates to the Senior Tax Work-Off Abatement Program. **Article 6** contains funding requests from the COA for masonry and roof repairs. **Article 8** was placed on the Special Town Meeting agenda by the Town Administrator at the request of one or more members of the Select Board. The COA Director and COA Board were not informed of this idea/proposal until after it appeared on the Special Town Meeting agenda. The proposal seeks to change the hiring authority for COA employees from the COA Board to the Select Board.

10. Discussion with Town Administrator on Article 8: At this point in the meeting, the Town Administrator, Glenn Cannon, joined the conversation to answer questions/concerns of the Board and the public in attendance. Glenn began by addressing the Board saying that from the Town's standpoint, "It is all about treating everyone the same. The town wants all job applicants to be asked the same interview questions and all employees to be managed in the same manner." He suggested that the Interview Committee for COA positions consist of Eric, Glenn, and Glenn's Secretary Amanda. Eric said that one of the COA's issues with potentially removing hiring authority from the COA is that he and the COA Board wonder what the advantage would be of having people unfamiliar with the COA involved in the interview/hiring process? Sue Norton asked Glenn if the Town has had a COA employee for whom they have had concerns regarding fair treatment in hiring, discipline, etc.? Glenn answered that they had not. Mary Bessey asked a question about how other COA boards function in terms of their roles and responsibilities when it comes to hiring, discipline, etc. and Glenn could not answer this question. Eric replied to the question by saying that it is his understanding, that due to state law, that all COAs must have a Board but that the city or town, in many or most cases, is allowed to define the roles and responsibilities of the COA Board with some being "supervisory" like ours and others being simply "advisory". Both Mary and Mike Daniel had similar follow up questions asking if interviews are done by the Town Administrator or his Secretary, how would these interviewers know what questions should be asked and consequently, what answers would be appropriate responses for someone seeking employment at the COA? Several Board Members went on to ask if there have been no prior problems with hiring at the COA, then why is this coming up? The proposed change would allow the Select Board to do all the hiring at the COA although as the Town Administrator explained, if this proposal passed, they would delegate their authority to him, and he would then further delegate that to his secretary as needed. Mike Daniel asked who brought this proposal up? Glenn responded that it was the Select Board. Marjorie O'Brien asked the Town Administrator why he questioned back in December whether she and Board Member Andrew Revell had been sworn in properly? The Town Administrator said it was due to an anonymous complaint and when pressed further he would not reveal the name of the complainant. However, it was confirmed by the Town Clerk that the process to swear in all COA Board Members was properly followed. Audience member Rick Munroe was allowed by the Chair to ask a question at this point, and he asked if this was the Town's way of taking over the COA department and then, in

turn, any funding that they generate through fundraising by their Friends group, etc.? Paul Ciaburri (Chair of the Select Board) stated that he has been tracking social media, and he wants everyone to know that this is in no way meant to be a “power grab.” He is just trying to follow the “process.” All COA Board Members present expressed both surprise and disappointment that this appeared on the Special Town Meeting agenda without notifying them/giving them prior notice that it was under consideration as it deals with stripping the COA Board of a responsibility that they have held for many years. Audience member Woody Hartley was allowed to speak by the Chair, and he shared his concern that “this is the first step in the Town taking over the COA.” Mr. Hartley said that “there was no discussion of this at a public meeting and he shared his opinion that this could be a violation of the Open Meeting Law.” Audience member and the Secretary of the Friends of the Rochester Senior Center, Sheila Daniel, was allowed to speak by the Chair. Sheila expressed that she felt that this was “a slap in the face” to the COA Board, its staff, volunteers and to the town voters, who many years ago had determined how they wanted their COA to function. Sheila said, “this place (Rochester COA) is so successful due to the efforts of this man (Eric), the COA Board, the COA staff, and the many volunteers like her who spend countless hours at the COA. For others who spend little or no time at the COA to try to take over without any prior notice or discussion on the matter is just disrespectful.” Carol Galante-Dias (Administrative Assistant) added, “We are called the Council on Aging, but we are always here for the whole town whenever needed. The work being done here supports our seniors and ALL Rochester citizens.” Paul Ciaburri responded that the Select Board has always supported the COA and it was not their intent to disrespect. The Chair of the COA Board, Pauline Munroe, helped to move things along by responding that, “We’ve all learned a lot through this discussion today and if there is no further discussion we should move to the next item.” Margie O’Brien made a **MOTION** asking that the COA Board go on record as being in opposition to Article 8 on the Special Town Meeting Agenda. Sandy Charron **SECONDED** the motion, and with no further discussion, the motion **PASSED** unanimously.

***Mail/Correspondence-** None

***Acceptance of Donations-** There was a **MOTION** made by Sue Norton to accept two donations to the COA, it was **SECONDED** by Sandy Charron, and with no further discussion, the motion **PASSED** unanimously.

***Volunteer Update(s)-** None at this time

***Public comment–** Andrew Daniel, Facilities Director, said that during the recent storm, which knocked out power to many parts of town, the senior center’s generator kicked in, but it was really straining to perform. When Andrew came into the senior center, kitchen equipment was being used like normal. Andrew asked if there are power outages in the future, and if we are on generator power, if we could use only what is necessary to keep people comfortable- including only using the gas stove for cooking and not other electrical appliances. The Board noted Andrew’s request and will certainly try to honor his request next time. Eric offered to write up a policy for the Board to review and vote on and if it passed, we could post it in our kitchen. The policy would describe which kitchen appliances to use or not use when we are on generator power.

***Adjournment-** With no further business, a **MOTION TO ADJOURN** was made by Mike Daniel, **SECONDED** by Sandy Charron, and **PASSED** unanimously. The meeting **ADJOURNED** at **10:35 a.m.**