

GREAT BARRINGTON COUNCIL ON AGING
Claire Teague Senior Center
917 Main Street
Great Barrington, MA 01230
Phone: (413) 528-1881

MEETING MINUTES
April 28, 2021

WELCOME: The meeting of the Great Barrington Council on Aging held at the Claire Teague Senior Center, 917 Main Street, Massachusetts is called to order at 1:15 pm by Chair David Rutstein.

BOARD MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Chair David Rutstein, Vice Chair Pat Kinne, Treasurer Maureen Avery, Secretary Susan Hipwell Morris, and Members Amy Rutstein, Eileen Gaarn and Sandra Larkin (via Zoom) are present. Members Barbara Bailly and Jeanne Holcomb are absent.

ZOOM ATTENDANCE: Ed Abrahms, Carol Diehl, Sandra Larkin, and Vivian Orlowski

MINUTES: Chair Rutstein asks for a motion to approve the minutes of October 28, 2020. Member Rutstein makes the motion to approve and Vice-Chair Kinney seconds the motion.

TREASURER'S REPORT: Treasurer Avery reports a balance of \$72,734.97 as of Wednesday, April 28, 2021. A \$40,000 donation was anonymously given to the Council on Aging to be used for transportation. The COA extends their sincerest thanks to this unnamed benefactor.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

Updates:

- Polly will be presenting reopening plans at the May 10th selectboard meeting. Permission, to date, has been granted for outdoor exercise, indoor bingo, and outdoor events beginning in May. A cook-out with the police force is planned for June.
- The Service Incentive Grant and the Formula Grant have been given an extra year to allow for carry-over of unspent funding.
- Nutrition Resources
 - Elder Services Meals-On-Wheels continue with an average of (50-60) "take and go" meals per week. Over the past year, up to 3,000 meals have been distributed.
 - Brown Bag: The Food for Elders program continues to provide a free bag of healthy groceries to eligible seniors once a month at local senior centers and community organizations.
 - Berkshire Regional Aid, providing emergency food support, has distributed over 80 bags of food to those in need in our community.

- Wheeler & Taylor Insurance in Great Barrington teamed up with the Claire Teague Senior Center to give local seniors a complete Thanksgiving dinner they can easily prepare at home. Over (60) Thanksgiving meals were delivered.
- Berkshire South, through the assistance of Berkshire Mutual Aid, has distributed Friday meals during periods of shut-down.
- Local grocery store Aberdale's in Housatonic donated a generous supply of bath tissue when little to none could be found on grocery store shelves at the beginning of the pandemic.
- Big Y Baked Goods delivery has continued throughout the pandemic.
- Transportation
 - BRTA secured a contract in October 2020 and hired transportation coordinator Karen Smith.
 - Sheffield COA aided in transporting our seniors while our Great Barrington COA staff began the process of becoming certified drivers as well as working with Berkshire Regional Transport Authority to secure vans by November.
 - Zoom meetings were initiated to discuss regional transportation with other south county towns.
 - Driver training : MArtap training in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was concluded online. CPR/First Aid certification was completed in person. Drug and alcohol screening, and physicals were completed. Beginning in November, vans were secured and ready for use, and certified drivers Pat Larkin, Joan Peters, Polly Salenovitch, Karen Smith, and Jerry Thorson began to dispatch and drive seniors.
 - Currently, two more drivers are being trained and more will be hired.
 - To date (56) seniors have been transported, culminating in 1,000 rides.
 - At this time, Great Barrington has signed agreements with Monterey, Alford, New Marlborough, and Stockbridge for regional transportation.
- Vaccination Roll Out
 - Calls for appointments began at the end of January and the phones rang continuously round-the-clock.
 - Polly expresses her overarching appreciation to Maureen Avery for assisting with answering the numerous phone calls and scheduling the appointments for vaccinations during February, March and April.
 - GB COA transport has provided rides for seniors to the Saturday vaccination clinics at the W.E.B. DuBois Regional Middle School.

CITIZENS SPEAK: Vivian Orlowski, resident of Great Barrington, details the benefits of the Elderly Tax Deferral Safety Net Pilot Program. Orlowski explains that as city home buyers continue to flood the town during the coronavirus pandemic, older residents who have lost income this past year, or are retired and on fixed incomes, “are struggling” as taxes rise with escalating property values. Orlowski reports that single-family homes in Great Barrington rose

78% from 2019 to 2020 and the median home price shot up 31% in a single year from \$325,00 to \$425,000. The Elderly Tax Deferral Program will alleviate some of the financial pressure helping qualified seniors to “age in place.”

Carol Diehl of Housatonic urges the COA Board members to help expedite the pilot program to get it on the warrant for this year’s town meeting.

BOARD SPEAKS: Chair Rutstein states he would like to go on record in support of Orlowski’s proposed tax deferral pilot program and suggests a motion that the COA is in complete support of the Elderly Tax Deferral Safety Net Pilot Program as requested. Treasurer Maureen Avery seconds the motion and the Great Barrington Council on Aging stands in agreement.

Chair Rutstein queries Polly as to when the Claire Teague Senior Center will reopen. Polly replies that reopening plans will be discussed at the May 10th selectboard meeting and that the center will reopen in phases.

Polly extends thanks to Amy Culver for graciously setting up the zoom meeting.

ADJOURNMENT: Chair Rutstein calls for a motion to adjourn. Member Amy Rutstein makes the motion to adjourn and Treasurer Maureen Avery seconds the motion. It is unanimously agreed to adjourn at 2:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Hipwell Morris

Secretary

Approved November 17, 2021