

**Harvard Council on Aging
Planning Workshop
Friday, August 12, 2011**

Present: Lucy Wallace, Carlene Phillips, Katie Petrossi, Bonnie Sweeney, Sharon Briggs, Connie Larrabee, Mike Peters, Debbie Thompson

Absent: Fran Nickerson

Call to Order: 9 am

Housekeeping Items

Welcome Tea: The board set Monday, September 12, from 3 to 5 p.m. as the date and time for a tea to welcome Debbie Thompson as our new COA director. Town officials will be invited, as well as users and friends of the Hildreth House. Lucy will ask Judy Pon if she will organize the event, and Carlene will handle publicity. Sharon volunteered to start compiling a list of regular helpers at Hildreth House to ensure they will all be invited, and as a resource for Debbie.

Board Meetings: Board members agreed to continue meeting on the third Monday of every month from 4 to 6 p.m. The next meeting will be September 19.

Volunteer Appreciation Event: The board agreed that early April would be a good time to hold our second annual event honoring COA volunteers. The timing would call attention to the COA's activities just before Town Meeting, and hopefully muster support among voters.

Thursday Lunch: The increasingly popular Thursday lunch prepared by Lucille Hughes is ending because Lucille has used up her allotted tax work-off hours. The board hopes to find someone willing to continue the project and has one volunteer who will do it until school starts. A request for more volunteers will appear in the newsletter and newspapers. Debbie reported that some folks are bringing bag lunches to eat on the porch on Mondays and Wednesdays.

Tax Relief Programs: Lucy distributed information about various existing tax-relief programs for seniors, here and in other towns. Marie Sobalvarro is working toward formulating a tax-relief proposal for the selectmen's consideration and wants the COA's input. The board agreed that the town should have a range of options that would be easy to understand and implement. Debbie suggested getting somebody to do a workshop in tax issues for seniors, and the board agreed that the COA should provide free transportation to the program.

Five-Year Plan: Sharon distributed copies of the COA's Five-Year Plan requested by the selectmen. That led to a discussion of the pressing need to build up the Friends of the COA (or Friends of the Hildreth House) as a first step in pursuing our goal of building a safe, accessible COA facility. Lucy agreed to talk to Renee Senes to try to locate a list of people who contributed to the Friends group this year and who might be recruited for further participation.

Brainstorming Session

Image of the COA: Board members agreed that improving public perception of the COA is an ongoing challenge, and that better communication and outreach are needed. Debbie said she plans to attend monthly meetings of all department heads and work to build collaborative relationships with them. She wants to align the COA more closely with police, fire, and ambulance personnel as a precursor to starting a Triad program here that would strengthen the safety network for seniors at risk. Establishing and publicizing joint programs is a good way to increase public understanding of the COA's vital role in helping seniors stay safe in their homes.

To broaden COA appeal, particularly among younger seniors, Katie suggested promoting Hildreth House as a place of continuing growth, where the goal is to lead purposeful, productive lives as we age. The newsletter could foster this effort by including short profiles about active seniors doing interesting and exciting things. Other suggestions included forming a knitting group that would make items for charitable organizations, and inviting similar groups from the town's churches to meet at Hildreth House on a regular basis. More intergenerational activities in the building would gain added exposure in the community, as well.

Hildreth House: The board agreed on several improvements to be accomplished in the near future. They include moving the director's office to the middle room upstairs to increase visibility and create a more welcoming atmosphere. Mike volunteered to paint the floor in that room and he and Connie will clean it. As part of the relocation plan, the outreach coordinator's office would be moved to the former director's space, and the other back office would be occupied by the activities coordinator and volunteers. The first step is to find out how to get rid of the many walkers, canes, wheelchairs and other donated items that now fill the upstairs closets. Debbie will consult Tim Bragan about that, and about whether we could run a dehumidifier in the basement. If so, Katie has two dehumidifiers to donate.

Board members also considered a suggestion to hire a cleaning service periodically to do a thorough cleaning, but finally decided to look for volunteers to do the work, possibly as a tax work-off project. Lucy agreed to tackle the butler's pantry, and Connie will clean the parlor.

And finally, the board agreed to create a receptionist's area in the living room alcove next the stairs. Ideally, the desk would be staffed every day from 9 to 3, initially by volunteers and eventually, in part, by someone funded by MART.

Summary

The board agreed on the following goals for the coming year:

1. Evaluate tax-relief programs – Sharon and Fran will work with Marie on this.
2. Re-activate and energize Friends group – Lucy
3. Coordinate with emergency services to start Triad program – Debbie

4. Improve newsletter and expand Web site – Debbie, Carlene, Connie, Mike
5. Expand program offerings at Hildreth House – Katie
6. Move upstairs offices and create reception area downstairs – Mike, Connie

Respectfully submitted, Connie Larrabee