

**COMMISSION ON AGING
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
February 12, 2024**

Present: Michael Bekech
Ilene Harris
Joe Palazzo
Margret Hughes
Marge Caste
Wendy Fiore

Absent: Joan Bengtson

Also Present: Kristen Caramanica, Director
Rose Ann Hardy, Ex Officio
Kevin McGowen

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
EAST LYME, CT
2024 FEB 14 A 9:40
Cassidy M. McGowan
TOWN CLERK

1. PRELIMINARY BUSINESS

- a. **Pledge of Allegiance.** The Pledge of Allegiance was observed.

Chairman Bekech called the February 12, 2024 Commission on Aging Regular Meeting to order at 5 p.m.

- b. **Delegations.** Kevin McGowen was present.

- c. **Approval of Meeting Minutes January 8, 2024.** Mr. Bekech asked for additions, deletions, or corrections to the January 8, 2024 Commission on Aging Minutes.

MOTION (1): Ms. Harris moved to approve the January 8, 2024 Commission on Aging Minutes, as presented. Seconded by Ms. Hughes. Ms. Caste and Ms. Fiore abstained from voting. (4-0-2) Motion carried.

- d. **Correspondence.** Ms. Caramanica reported she received correspondence from AARP about a grant. She was considering applying for the grant for a shed for medical supplies or an outdoor patio. Ms. Hardy suggested contacting Blue Door for medical supplies. Ms. Harris suggested contacting the Chelsea Foundation.

2. STATUS REPORT

- a. **Transportation.** Ms. Caramanica informed the Commission she received a new 5310 grant application which she will write for a new bus. It is due by April 7. If received she will retire the R-1 bus.

She added we have two part-time drivers that are waiting for endorsements.

- b. **Senior Trips.**

1. Enrichment Trips:

- 1. Lil Pub in Old Saybrook on February 14 at 11 a.m.**

2. **A Valentine's Day Tea at Brookside Farm on February 14 at 1 p.m.**
3. **Cork Birds Art Project on February 15 at 11 a.m.**
4. **Valentine's Day Lunch on February 23 at 12:30 p.m.**
5. **ROMEO to Sneakers on February 28 at 11 a.m.**

Overnight Trips. The following trips are planned:

1. Washington DC April 5 to April 8, 2024
2. The Orchid Show at New York Botanical Garden on April 16, 2024
3. Mackinac Island on June 14-June 22, 2024.
4. Iceland Magical Northern Lights November 5-November 11, 2024.
5. Croatia and It's Islands, April 22, 2025-May 3, 2025.

c. Programs

1. **Senior Nutrition Program.** Ms. Caramanica reported Meals-on-Wheels meals were delivered for today and tomorrow.

2. **Senior Center Programs Ongoing.**

Registration for classes begins on March 11 for residents and March 18 for non-residents.

AARP classes are doing well.

To date 240 applicants for energy assistance have been seen.

3. **Senior Center Programs New.** Ms. Caramanica informed the Commission AARP classes will now be held on the following Saturdays: February 10, February 24, March 9, March 23 and April 6.

- e. **Budget-General Fund, Revolving Account.** Ms. Caramanica reported our budget is doing fine. We are at 62% which is the same as last year at this time.

- f. **Revenue.** Ms. Caramanica reported the annual appeal letter was sent to 139 users of the senior busses. We have received \$1,535 to date.

3. OLD BUSINESS

- a. **Request for ARPA Funds.** Ms. Caramanica informed the Commission she met with the Board of Selectmen on February 7 to discuss the \$5,000 we were awarded for the coffee and tea station.

- b. **Request for TVCCA Reimbursement.** Ms. Caramanica informed the Commission the Board of Selectmen approved reimbursement for paper, folders and printers.

- c. **Other Pertinent Business.** There was no discussion of other pertinent business.

4. NEW BUSINESS

- a. **Request for AARP Funds.** We will meet with the Board of Selectmen on February 14 at 5:30 p.m. If approved, a town meeting will be held on March 6 at 7 p.m.

b. DOF/First Selectman Budget Review Meeting. Ms. Caramanica and Mr. Bekech met with the Director of Finance and the First Selectman. They had no cuts to our budget, except in our drivers' budget. Our full-time bus driver line item was decreased from 61 hours to 55 hours. Our new receptionist works 25 hours. We have the social worker position for 26 more weeks.

Mr. Bekech complimented Ms. Caramanica on an excellent job. He was pleased he attended with her. The Finance Director wished no increases to our last year's budget. We received ARPA money for 26 weeks for the Social Worker position. Mr. Bekech added we no longer pay benefits for our part-time drivers. It was noted that East Lyme has a population of 9,107 residents over 50 years of age. Many are receiving energy assistance. Ms. Caramanica added some are socially isolated and need transportation. Ms. Caste stated cutting transportation hours would require ending activities earlier.

Ms. Hardy reported the Selectman was complimentary on our obtaining grant money. Further discussion will be held with the entire Board of Selectmen.

Ms. Harris agreed to be at the meeting with the Selectmen.

c. Other Pertinent Business. Ms. Caramanica reviewed the Feasibility Study with the Commission. She stated our existing space is 4,767 square feet. The smaller plan will not help, the medium plan is 6,102 square feet and the larger plan is 7,409 square feet. Ms. Caramanica suggests the larger plan. We would have a lobby shared with the Library and Parks and Recreation, and a small reading room. A family restroom and storage space would be added. The estimate for the small plan is \$787,760, the medium is \$1,294,760 and the larger \$1,916,860.

Mr. Bekech felt the small plan doesn't do any good at all. It takes away storage and the Arts and Craft room would be split in two. The medium gives a little more room. It would give outside room, but because we are in the northern region there are not many days, we can be outside. The larger plan is better. To have a second floor would be difficult for some seniors. We also wonder if the building is able to support a second floor. The senior population in East Lyme is increasing. Ms. Hardy added many seniors are not mobile enough for an outside area. Ms. Caramanica added we can have a Fitness Center in the larger plan. Ms. Caramanica asked commission members to review the plans and give their input to Mr. Bekech. Ms. Hughes asked how will it be funded? Ms. Caramanica stated this is merely a study. Mr. Bekech added it may be bonded. Mr. Bekech reported the town has received ARPA money for the past two years and spent it on ongoing projects. We are looking at larger increases to the budget than they would like to see.

Mr. Bekech reported Ms. Bengtson has been unable to attend meetings for some time because of poor health. This Commission needs to consider a new member. Mr. McGovern stated he is interested in becoming a member of this Commission. He has been a veteran for 27 years and retired in 2013. He has worked in health care and taught about AIDS. He added COVID is not going away. Suicide is increasing in youngsters. He volunteers with Meals-on-Wheels. He and his wife help with St. Vincent de Paul. There are many individuals living in the street. He works on the parking lot at Crescent Beach. Ms. Hardy suggested that a recommendation be made to the Board of Selectmen.

5. EX OFFICIO REPORT

Ms. Hardy reported the Selectmen have been working on acquiring the Hathaway property. There is lots of competition for money. Budgets will be reviewed on six nights of special meetings. We will do our best to serve residents.

She stated most senior citizens in East Lyme are life-long residents or moved away and returned. Isolation is a large issue. Some cannot drive and are unable to get out without the Senior Center's bus drivers.

6. PUBLIC DISCUSSION

There were no guests.

7. BOARD RESPONSE

There was no response.

8. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION (2): Ms. Palazzo moved to adjourn the Commission on Aging February 12, 2024 Regular Meeting at 6:10 p.m. Seconded by Ms. Hughes. (6-0) Unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted,

Frances Gheri, Recording Secretary