

**Town of Norwell
Select Board Meeting
Open Session
7/26/23**

Present: Jason Brown, Bruce Graham, Brian Greenberg, Andy Reardon, Pete Smellie, Darleen Sullivan

The meeting was called to order by Chair Pete Smellie at 7:00pm.

Approval of Minutes

Motion; made by Brian Greenberg, seconded by Andy Reardon, to approve the Open meeting minutes of 7/12/23. Unanimously voted

Select Board Reports

Mr. Graham invited all to read the Norwell Historical Society publication, which has two excellent articles.

Town Administrator's Report

Ms. Sullivan reported that two RFQ's have been published for the multigenerational feasibility study and the new Town Hall OPM.

Citizen Comments - None

Cable Committee Application – Wendy Bawabe

Ms. Bawabe was present to give a summary of her extensive background and work with many Town committees.

Motion; made by Andy Reardon, seconded by Bruce Graham, to appoint Wendy Bawabe to the Cable Committee for a term expiring on 6/30/26. Unanimously voted

Community Housing Trust Application – Debbie Vitale

Ms. Vitale was present to give a summary of her background and reasons for offering to serve on this committee.

Motion; made by Andy Reardon, seconded by Bruce Graham, to appoint Debbie Vitale to the Community Housing Trust for a term expiring on 6/30/26. Unanimously voted

Community Housing Trust Application – Jamie King

Ms. King was present to give a summary of her background and reasons for offering to serve on this committee.

Motion; made by Andy Reardon, seconded by Bruce Graham, to appoint Jamie King to the Community Housing Trust for a term expiring on 6/30/26. Unanimously voted

Council on Aging – UMass Boston Community Needs Assessment

COA Director Susan Curtin introduced Caitlyn Coyle, PhD., UMass Boston to give this presentation. Ms. Coyle urged the board to review the 94-page report, which was funded by a grant. She thanked Ms. Curtin and her staff and the COA board for their assistance with the data collection.

The report highlighted the following information:

1. Current and future community needs to inform Town planning and raise awareness
2. Interviews were conducted last summer
3. 3 focus groups held discussions which are highlighted in the report
4. Demographic profile of the Town for 2017- 2021
5. Surveys were sent to residents aged 50 and over: 1081 responses for a 25% response rate
6. This age group represents a significant % of Norwell's population, which has remained relatively stable over time
7. The age 60-79 population is growing as residents are staying and aging in place
8. For older residents staying in place is a priority
9. Concerns for those who want to stay here:
 - a. Increasing property taxes is the top concern
 - b. Cost of living
 - c. Home upkeep
 - d. Access good and services/transportation in community
 - e. Maintaining health and independence
10. 43% need home repairs or modifications, some can afford, some cannot
11. If a change is being made to current living space, most prefer a smaller single family home, then condo or assisted living.
12. Transportation: 25% are modifying their driving in some way, some over age 80 don't drive at all
Per Ms. Curtin, the COA drives residents as part of their services, but more vehicles and drivers are needed (she is working on that). The ride services and hours are well advertised, but staffing impacts some accessibility.
13. Caregiving is common and challenging to maintain daily responsibilities. 34% were caring for those with dementia related issues. Ms. Curtin noted the dementia friendly Norwell program and gave details. A survey is out this week to address these issues and the COA is putting resources together to address this condition.
14. Those surveyed were in support of a multigenerational facility.
15. The COA is at a critical point in its evolution; most are supportive (75%)
16. Use of the COA increases with age, but many responders gave reasons for not going: many are still working, not old enough, don't have time
17. Good support for the many activities offered by the COA, from day trips to learning new skills
18. Growth and expanded services would be helpful; responders offered suggestions such as partnership with library, local business, schools, etc.
19. Financial security is a big issue.
20. All would like more diverse housing options.
21. Family support for caregivers
22. Isolation is an issue – maybe "adopt a grandparent" or similar program

Mr. Reardon gave kudos to Ms. Coyle and Ms. Curtin for a well done study and report, noting the importance of raising awareness for these issues. He invited all to take advantage of these community resources!

Ms. Curtin reported that the new Community Services Coordinator will be starting after Labor Day.

Mr. Graham noted that the Select Board sponsored the village overlay district, which has an affordability component. Age restricted and affordable housing would be beneficial.

Ms. Curtin announced 4 weeks of great local music and mocktails (thank you, Joseph's!) at the COA.

Multigenerational Facility Feasibility Study Committee, Discussion and Vote

Ms. Sullivan reviewed the process to set up a committee; the Select Board could appoint the committee or designate the Town Administrator to appoint the committee. The Town is going out to bid for this feasibility study.

Mr. Smellie stated that he would like the board to set up and appoint the committee. He highlighted several concerns with this project - the cost projections are scary, with an estimated project cost that is double that of the new library at this point. The override for this would be a staggering tax hike. The board is not sure it would pass at Town Meeting, as it would be forcing out the very people this facility would be trying to serve. A better approach might be to look at it in light of other needs in the Town, versus wants or nice to have. It might be prudent to wait until the estimate for a rehabbed or new high school comes back.

Ms. Curtin replied that this study is just to identify sites and the money was already budgeted and approved at Town Meeting. There may not be anything available.

George Grey gave the particulars of the Article that funded this study. This would be a conceptual design only and identify potential sites. The current Town Hall site, the South Street site and the old highway barn site next to the library were discussed. The St. Helen's property is no longer an option. No commercial property has been included in the search at this point. Mr. Graham strongly recommended including this category as it would be significantly cheaper than construction at prevailing wage.

The board expressed major concern about this project. Is there a better way to do this before we start spending the money?

Mr. Brown wants to retain decision making authority over committee creation and appointments. He agreed with Mr. Graham that an expanded search would be cost beneficial. This is a worthy endeavor but is a "want" vs. a "need". The list of potential costly projects is very long; schools, ongoing maintenance to any new property, other Town properties needing work, the new highway yard, OPEB funding, pension liability, etc. This is the exact type of expenditure that puts financial stress on the very people this project is planning to serve. Mr. Greenberg added that existing buildings are always more cost effective than new construction. The board asked if other options have been explored such as funding Y memberships.

Questions were asked and answered about Recreation space needs/availability at the new Town Hall, which would be far less expensive. Mr. Grey gave the board an overview of the current status of his Rec programs and space needs.

Mr. Reardon added that spending this money would provide data to move forward or not. At least give this project a "looksee".

Further discussion ensued, with the suggestion to spend some instead of all the Article money.

Next steps include having the board form and appoint the project committee including the following members: Mr. Grey, Ms Curtin, member of the Recreation Commission, member of the Council on Aging, Select Board member and At Large member. This topic will be added to the next meeting agenda on 8/9/23.

Future Meeting Agendas/Dates; August 9th and August 23rd

Adjournment

*Motion: made by Bruce Graham, seconded by Brian Greenberg, to adjourn at 8:24pm.
Unanimously voted*

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Peter W. Smellie". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Peter W. Smellie, Chair