



Human Services Committee

Meeting Minutes

December 8, 2022

7:00 pm

Acton Town Hall, Room 2

04

472 Main Street Acton, MA 01720

Present: Leo Fochtman (Chair), Madeline Cruz (Co-Chair), Paula Walsh (Clerk), Boris Klebanov, Mark Conoby, Franny Osman, Jeff Bergart, Laura Ducharme, Hema Santhanakrishnan, and Fran Arsenault (Select Board Liaison)

Invited Guests: John Mangiaratti (Town Manager), Sharon Mercurio (Council on Aging Director), James MacRae (Veteran Services Officer)

1. Opening

Chair, Leo Fochtman opened the meeting at 7:05 p.m.

2. Regular Business

- i. Approval of Meeting Minutes – There was a motion to table approval of the meeting minutes from the Human Services Committee (HSC) meeting of November 17, 2022 made by Danny Factor and seconded by Madeline Cruz to allow additional time for review of the minutes. The motion passed 7-0, with Boris Klebanov abstaining. There was discussion around the town’s policy for timing of meeting minutes which committee members will review.
- ii. Voting: Various town committees have nominated representatives to the HSC, however, they have not yet completed the process that would allow them to participate fully in HSC voting. They are either awaiting approval from the Select Board, have not yet completed the required training or have not been sworn in. Thus Mark Conoby and Franny Osman are not eligible to vote during tonight’s meeting.
- iii. Election of Officers:
 - a. Chair: Leo Fochtman was nominated by Paula Walsh, seconded by Jeff Bergart. Approved by vote of 7-0, Danny Factor abstained
 - b. Co-Chair: Madeline Cruz was nominated by Danny Factor, seconded by Jeff Bergart. Approved by vote of 8-0.
 - c. Clerk: Paula Walsh was nominated by Jeff Bergart, seconded by Hama Santhanakrishnan. Approved by vote of 8-0
- iv. Member Updates:
 - a. Leo Fochtman relayed a concern raised to him by a HSC member concerning how to keep the length of the meetings to a reasonable



time. Members are asked to limit statements to a couple of minutes so that others may have sufficient time to voice their concerns and point of views.

- b. Franny Osman shared that the Housing and Climate Justice for Acton Fundraiser was a success.

3. New/Special Business

1. Invited Guest Presentations:

a. John Mangiaratti: Mr. Mangiaratti offered an introduction to the other two town employees who will be offering an overview of the services currently provided by their departments. He also offered to have representatives from other departments that provide social, financial, mental health and community services to the community OBJ present at future HSC committee meetings.

b. James MacRae, Veteran's Service Officer, provided an overview of some of the programs the town administers to veterans as well as a slide presentation with an overview of the State and Federal benefits available to veterans. Mr. MacRae is the initial point person for all these programs within the town. A couple of the highlights of his presentation were: Chapter 115 assistance for veterans and surviving spouses which a dozen people in Acton are currently on the program. There are an estimated 650 veterans in Acton but only an estimated 160-170 are taking advantage of the town's veterans services. A veteran's census is taken every 2-3 years which is used to compile a mailing list. The state does supply an email list of recently returned veterans with addresses which Mr. MacRae uses to initially contact veterans. There is a general knowledge within the veteran's community that there remain unmet needs. Yearly, there is a Veterans Affairs Meeting to identify unmet needs, and which recently increased the income threshold limits above \$2,265; if this limit could be raised to 250% of the Federal Poverty Level more veterans could be helped. Mr. MacRae said he is looking forward to working with the HSC and finding ways to expand getting information to more veterans.

c. Sharon Mercurio, Council on Aging Director. There are currently 5,570 seniors within the town of Acton. Using a PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Mercurio was able to highlight some of the programs and activities at the Senior Center as well as social services beyond programming that staff are providing. For example, Bev Hutchings is the Senior Services Coordinator and works closely with Laura Ducharme, LSWA, the town's social worker. There is a monthly Elder at Risk meeting held. Additionally, there is an area agency on aging, Minuteman Senior Services, that provides some services, including meal programs to town elders. Currently the private transportation program is still on hold due to COVID. At the conclusion of Ms. Mercurio's presentation, several committee members asked for elaboration on several points.

1. Private Aides: Some seniors are currently being provided with a once-a-week schedule for an in-home aide. However, there are no backups if that scheduled person cancels (ie: due to illness). Ms. Mercurio acknowledged this is an ongoing issue but that a shortage of aides is exacerbating this area of concern.



2. Transportation: Seniors with appointments outside the current service area. Ms. Osman, who also is Chair of the Transportation Advisory Committee, was able to provide some additional information along with Ms. Mercurio as to transportation options and programs/funding being sought. A Taxi Voucher program that was funded by a state grant during the pandemic proved successful and the town is pursuing additional funding to resume the program. The largest challenge is finding and contracting with local taxi companies. There is a train service from Littleton Commuter Station, called the TRIPP program, which offers rides to the major Boston Medical facilities. Private transportation for trips to Boston is on hold.

3. Funding: Many of the programs at the Senior Center are funded by the Friends of the Council of Aging rather than with town funds.

4. Outreach: How do we reach additional seniors to inform them of what is available? There is a monthly newsletter (digital and paper) that is mailed or emailed to people who sign up via the Senior Center. In addition, the programs and services are listed on the Council on Aging (COA) website. They are aware that there are over 60-year-olds in Acton who are still working and cannot participate in the daytime activities so extended hours at the Senior Center on Tuesday evenings allow those seniors to access services. It discussed what other streams could be used for communications to seniors. There is a hotline that is currently manned by a COA staffer, it may be helpful to have her write up frequently asked questions. Acton TV was also suggested as a source for communications as well as a simple word index on the COA site with links to multidisciplinary staff.

5. Volunteers: It was asked how the center got volunteers. Per Ms. Mercurio, there is now a part-time volunteer coordinator.

2. Discussions Current Services and informing the Public

1. Mr. Fochtman reviewed some of the current sources for informing the public of services now available and discussions on how HSC could disseminate information going forward. He asked the committee to send him ideas on creating public access information sources so he can create an initial document for the committee to work with; Franny Osman volunteered to post edit the document. Ms. Cruz would like to see teens incorporated in future meetings.

2. Meeting dates and times: Ms. Cruz raised the concern that the public does not know how to find out about upcoming committee meetings, including those of HSC. It was pointed out that all meetings are posted on the town website. Additionally, Ms. Walsh raised the question of the timing and location of future meetings. Mr. Factor pointed out that although the larger room is not yet necessary, due to attendance, it is preferable for respiratory/ventilation reasons. There was a general preference to continue to meet in Room 204. Mr. Factor suggested that at future meetings, a separate person be designated to oversee technical concerns such as letting the public be added to meetings.



3. Resident Concerns:

1. Homelessness and transitional housing
 - a. The Acton Housing Authority is not part of the Town Departments but could be invited to a future HSC meeting.
2. Community Meals- should be held nightly
 - a. The currently provided Community Suppers are being funded by the religious community; representatives of which could be invited to a future HSC meeting.

4. **Adjournment**

At 9:49 p.m., it was moved by Fran Arsenault and seconded by Madeline Cruz to adjourn the meeting.

The motion was approved unanimously 8-0.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting are available through DocuShare*

- A. [December 8 Meeting \(actonma.gov\)](https://actonma.gov)