



Human Services Committee

Meeting Minutes

February 9, 2023

7 pm

Acton Town Hall, Room 204

472 Main Street

Present: Jeff Bergart (remote via Zoom), Mark Conoby (remote via Zoom), Madeline Cruz, Leo Fochtman, Boris Klebanov, Franny Osman, Hema Santhanakrishnan, Danny Factor, Fran Arsenault (Select Board Liaison), Laura Ducharme (Staff)

Absent: Paula Walsh.

I Opening

Mr. Fochtman opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

1. No resident concerns.
2. **Chair Update:** Mr. Fochtman thanked Ducharme for sharing the information about NAMI presentation which was held on January 23rd. The chair was really impressed by the new community behavioral health centers, and he shared the link to the committee members.

Mr. Fochtman and Ms. Cruz asked that the comments should be brief, and question should be limited to clarification of something said during the Human service department presentation and they can send an email to the appropriate department or the staff member.

3. **Member minutes-** Ms. Ducharme updated that at the Board meeting on 6th February, she has requested a recommendation that the \$50,000 of upper money which has been allocated for rental assistance to be expanded to include emergency assistance categories. including rent, but also mortgage utilities and childcare. The Board supported her request, and Ms. Ducharme is working on an application before March 1st to start assisting residents in those categories with grants up to \$1,000.

II Regular Business

Presentations given by Acton Human Services Departments can be found in the following location.

<http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-16280>

a. Acton Housing Authority:

- i. Ms. Kelley Cronin, Director of the Acton housing authority walked through the slides including the various housing



options for seniors and low-income families, rental assistance provided for those families and housing vouchers.

Ms. Cruz asked about the fair market rent and if it accounts for Acton separate from the state?

Ms. Cronin answered that the market rent was accounted for the Greater Boston area and not just Acton. She also commented that the waiting list is large for Acton due to higher demand.

Ms. Cruz asked when you guys decided to do the new elderly property? Did anybody ever suggest, or has it ever been put into place where we could get more use of the land to kind of like accommodate that high number?

Ms. Cronin answered by saying that we started 8 years ago with the Whittlesey village, we were able to add more units since we owned that land. Despite that we still have a longer wait list as the population grows and thankfully the town is planning to work on the sewage which will increase the number of units to accommodate. There has been increasing population of adults all over the country and they are in need of subsidized housing due to the reduction in income at an older age. We can accommodate only those with vouchers, state had a better program which they stopped two years ago.

Ms. Cruz last question was How can we help to do your job better or help you in getting more fund?

We are part of MASS Narrow and we are trying to join hands with other organizations such as CHAPA and GBIA. All these organizations are putting together a brochure and she can share it with the tenants. So right now, we get 150,000 a year, but we have 7 million and expired components. So, it'll take, you know, 50 years, just to take care of the expired components.

Mr. Klebanoy asked two questions:

1. *Where is the FSS information available? Is it on the website or on the internet?*

Ms. Cronin answered that she was not sure if it is there on the website as its only for voucher holders, she has to check and let know.

2. *What is the velocity of people moving in your housing?*

For the past five years it has been 5 for seniors and 2 for families. I will email the right number, but I think it is 8 for seniors and 4 for families as the turnover increased in the past year after a slowdown during covid time.



Ms. Osman asked, How many communities are we talking about when we say that the state have 17000 waitlists and how are they applying?

Basically, the state maintains a centralized list and the applicant gets a choice of where they want to live. They could choose only Acton or any of the 20 communities where they can relocate. It has gotten messy once the state started maintaining the centralized list as we do not have any control over our local list getting preference.

Ms. Osman inquired about the elevators in some of the buildings?

Ms. Cornin replied that there has been a zone policy of not building high rise buildings, so we have all two or three floor buildings, and it is not feasible to build that many elevators.

Mr. Factor asked about how to accommodate elderly people who cannot afford more than 500 dollars per month? The rent keeps raising but their affordability is not, how or who will fund to bridge the gap?

Ms. Cornin replied that town fund cannot meet all the needs, Acton has been gracious enough to fund lot of projects. However, like every other town it depends on federal and state grants as they have the big bucks. We are in contention with school budget and other budget needs of the town. The town is trying to implement multi family zone to ease up the pressure and try to do that to reduce commuting.

Mr. Conoby asked: I know there is a huge list of elderly and low-income families but how about the disabled? How many buildings are accessible friendly?

Ms. Cornin answered that we have the number that we're required, which is 5% per development. So, at Windsor app we have 4 handicapped accessible units. That means barrier free. At McCarthy village we have one at McManus village we have one, and at Whittlesey village we have one at the new development we're going to have. I think it's 8 41 units 8. We prioritized, having more units for people with disabilities, so that people can successfully age in place, but it also meets universal accessibility standards.

In the new Mac village, we will focus more on the family housing.

b. Acton memorial library:

Presentation is there in the PDF file. Ms. Zoey Mills walked through the slides talking about the two libraries, where their budgets come from and the services they offer.



Ms. Cruz asked. How does this information is being communicated to Acton residents especially there has been a lot of changes over the past few years. The website has been increasingly difficult to navigate.

Ms. Mills: We are planning to create a brochure that can be distributed for people with no internet connection. We are also planning to do presentations to condos and other apartments to educate the group in totality.

Ms. Cruz: Received some anonymous questions on what happened to those books pulled out of West Acton Library and how the decision has been made to pull out the books.

Ms. Mills answered We do not throw away or recycle these books. We either donate them to the friends, or we donate them to a program called more than words, which is a Boston-based program.

Mr. Factor questioned about, what was the reason for the change in library timings, specifically closing a hour early at 8 pm. This impacts lot of meetings especially the Grassroots group?

Ms. Mills: It was a temporary decision made primarily due to short staff and we also noticed a considerable slowdown or inactivity between 8 and 9. We have hired few new employees and can revisit on the library hours and can go back to old time if needed.

Mr. Conoby asked about the community meeting rooms, and they're used not only for public town meetings, but for a lot of other community activities and things, and it's also important for a lot of support groups. So is that something, you know the hours and the availability, and it's being accessible. And do you have enough space to accommodate everyone?

Ms. Mills answered that they definitely offer quite a few spaces and offer the meeting room and the conference room. The meeting room holds about 70 people in the conference room holds about 15, they are free to reserve. If you are an action resident, and then we also offer study rooms available that hold between one and 5 individuals.

4. **Short term goals – How to disseminate information?**

We need to set short-term goals and not just focus on disseminating information. Information can be communicated in many ways – post a poster in library, send post cards, have a telephone number (like 911).

Mr. Factor suggested that we need to provide importance to basic necessities such as food, shelter, healthcare and essential transportation.

Ms. Osman was stressing the need for essential transportation and want to know what we can do to increase the frequency of CAT, currently it runs for every hour and that is not enough.

Mr. Conoby short term goals focus was on seniors and disabled and identifying them and little bit of outreach to make sure that they're well.

5. **Discuss Future Presentations and committee member research.**



Ms. Osman is going to research on transportation. Mr. Factor on economic security, Ms. Santhanakrishnan on recreation, Ms. Cruz on Housing, Mr. Klebanoy on Police department.

Mr. Fochman suggested that there's so much good information out there and just getting that information out to the public would be very useful.

Ms. Ducharme added that we had a resident speak this morning at the Community Resource network. Becky Barnett, who was the former pastor of Great Road Church, her and her husband run that church. She is now working for the 908 in the CBHC and she gave a good presentation this morning. She may be someone that we'd want to bring here. She's doing a lot of the outreach and information parts of the program and we could engage her in future on these presentations.

Ms. T commented on a resource list that we have created is still around everywhere in town. That might bring these organizations every year and have them tell what they're doing, and what they've improved and give an update.

Ms. Cruz suggested that in future we can meet, maybe twice a month, so that we could get these organization to come in here and give them ample time to talk about what they do. Mr. Fochtman suggested that in future we can keep the questioning part simple and have more time in discussing. some of these presenters that we're seeing now with the departments want to keep it just for questions to clarify what they were saying. In future we can have fewer presentations and we can prioritize them.

6. NAMI presentation :Review

Mr. Fochtman presented a few Human Service Committee hotline numbers like Life-threatening emergencies, National suicide and crisis lifeline, Massachusetts behavioral health phone numbers, Mobile Crisis Intervention, Veterans crisis line. We need to reach out to people that don't have an internet connection or don't have email, we can post at the library and Dunkin donuts places where people can find it easily. A flyer or a postcard or in mail or Action unlimited can be used to provide information. Mr. Conoby suggested that some of the local organizations and businesses to leave that information in Churches and some of the politicians have privileges, so they wouldn't have to pay for postage. That might be some other way to leverage that issue.

Mr. Fochtman agreed with Mr. Bergart that this is the reason for why we need some short-term goals. We have to kind of figure out what we need to do there. At this juncture we should focus initially on at least putting out some phone numbers to people on who they can contact while we work on the other options.

III. Closing Items

7. Review Meeting Minutes for January 12, 2023

Ms. Osman moved, seconded by Mr. Conoby to approve Meeting Minutes for January 12, 2023, and approved unanimously.

8. Future Agenda Items



- a. List all three presentations for the next meeting.
 - b. Meeting Frequency on how to accommodate all topics.
9. Moved by Mr. Jeff Bergart, seconded by Ms. Cruz to Adjourn and approved unanimously.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting
<http://doc.actonma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-16280>