

**TOWN OF ENFIELD COMMISSION ON AGING
MINUTES FOR WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2023 – 2:00 P.M.
DSS, ALCORN SCHOOL, 1010 ENFIELD STREET**

Attendance

Present: Mike Arnone Jr., Pauline Devino, Howard Florian, Dave Goyette, Cynthia Guerreri, Mary Ann Harris, Marlene Hoginski, Mary Keller, Patricia Linehan, Marie Pyznar, Council Liaison and Tim Slade.

Absent (Excused): Mayor Bob Cressotti, Council Liaison, Alice Egan, Justin Lopez, Elderly Care Services Coordinator, Will St. George and Kay Tallarita.

Guests: Kate Bailey, Initium Health and Steve Belinda, Director of Human Resources, Town of Enfield

I. Welcome

Cynthia Guerreri opened the meeting at 2:10 p.m. by introducing Kate Bailey from Initium Health virtually to conduct the focus group discussion for the Mental Health and Wellness Coalition.

II Mental Health and Wellness Coalition Interview

Kate Bailey briefly discussed her public health consulting role in the coordination of a coalition for wellness and mental health in the Enfield community. She commented that through focus groups the plan is to develop a model for the collective impact of the communities services and to gain continuous input from the community.

During the 30 minute video conference, Kate asked the commissioners about what mental health and wellness concerns have been observed in the Enfield senior community. Several members like Mary Keller from the Enfield Senior Center, Mike Arnone and Tim Slade from the SMHR program commented on the effect of self-isolation on seniors particularly since COVID. Pat Linehan, Mary Ann Harris, Howard Florian and Marie Pyznar discussed how the lack of well-trained care giver services and short term adult day care facilities, to provide respite to families in need, compounds mental health and isolation issues for homebound seniors.

To the question of what a healthy Enfield looks like? Mary Keller commented that the senior population grew up in a sense of community which is lacking today and with neighborhoods changing, seniors are more isolated and fearful. Mike and Marlene concurred that the hard part is trying to get seniors out and that more volunteers are needed to facilitate this. Tim commented that more volunteers are needed to go to home bound seniors and interact with them as well.

To the question of what would you like to see in Enfield? Many suggested that more volunteers are needed to support programs like the new UR community to interact with seniors by providing socialization and community. Seniors need to find places that give them a sense of community in a safe and caring environment. We need to share resources with social services and strive to help where we can. Mary Ann suggested that intergenerational activities can provide a way to help seniors interact in community and feel included. Marie noted that we need more programs that give seniors a sense of safety and make them feel comfortable. Mary Keller stated that Enfield has a vibrant senior center which strives through programming to bring people together through social activities, fitness, technology training and education. For example, the Triad group provides continuous fire and police safety education to protect seniors.

At the end of the video conference, Kate thanked the participants for their input and mentioned that a follow up survey will be sent.

III. Secretary's Report:

Dave Goyette asked if there were any corrections to the September minutes. With no corrections needed, Marlene Hoginski made a motion to accept the minutes as presented and Tim Slade seconded. The motion was carried by a show of hands.

IV. Treasurer's Report:

Tim Slade provided the treasurer's report and noted that this report contains few expenses for the month. With no corrections needed, Marlene Hoginski made a motion to accept the report and Mary Ann Harris seconded. The motion was carried through a show of hands.

V. Committee Reports

A. Senior Center Focus

Due to short staffing at the Senior Center, Mary Keller presented her report out of sequence. She reported that Nancy Darrah, Enfield Senior Center Coordinator is retiring after 25^{1/2} years of service. The Senior Center and The Friends of the Enfield Senior Center are hosting a reception with light refreshments in Nancy's honor on Friday, November 17th from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Everyone is welcomed to attend.

On another matter, Mary reported that we are actively seeking to hire a company to perform footcare services. We have reached out to 5 companies, but are waiting to hear back. She also reported that of the 9 million dollar State ARPA funds being distributed to Senior Centers, \$101,000 has been granted to be used at the Enfield Senior Center for new fitness equipment and for a move to an automated registration system.

B. SMHR - Senior Minor Home Repair Program

Tim Slade reported that the program was suspended for 3 weeks due to no requests, however, it began again with 43 air conditioners being installed, 30 removed as of 10/10/23 and 15 more scheduled to be removed. 31 gutters have been cleaned with 8 more scheduled as of 10/31/23. A total of 220 tasks have been completed as of 9/12/23 by 7 volunteers (1 volunteer is on medical leave). Tim again reported that all completed jobs are referred to Justin Lopez for follow up and expressed his appreciation to Social Services for their outstanding support. He noted that the schedule is full until October 31st except for one request, when the 2023 work season ends. Tim remarked that although he often gets recognition for its success, it is really the volunteers that make the program work well. Dave Goyette commented that partial credit goes to Tim for coordination of the resources required to run this program. He also noted that in the future more younger volunteers are going to be needed to perform some of the vigorous tasks currently performed by older volunteers.

Dave also commented that a week ago Thursday a sign was posted by the door leading to Door 21 where SMHR tools and volunteers are located that read NO VEHICLES BEYOND THIS POINT which effectively prohibits the SMHR volunteers from loading their trucks to perform their work. Steve Belinda explained that this sign was posted due to complaints from parents who are worried about their children's safety as they enter the building for swimming lessons and addresses the town's liability in the event of an accident. Both Dave and Tim took offense at this action and explained that the SMHR volunteers are responsible individuals who are cognizant of safety concerns around children for the one day a week that they operate. The discussion became extremely emotional with one commissioner, who is very passionate about the program, walking out and another threatened to resign from the program. Steve Belinda explained that he is here to understand the history of the SMHR program and help to find a solution to the current issue. Dave Goyette explained that the program has been in effect for over 10 years with hundreds of seniors being serviced by dedicated volunteers. He noted that in the last 3 to 4 years the Town has put up roadblocks to the continued success of this program. For example, in the last 10 years, this program's work area has been moved 6 times with it finally being located in Door 21 at the Enfield Annex with ample storage space and easy access. Marie Pyznar commented that an apology is needed to Dave Goyette and Tim Slade who successfully manage this program, but who were not contacted about parking concerns and were circumvented with a complaint being made to the Town Manager. She said that she has texted Mayor Bob Cressotti who said that he has Dave and Tim's backs on this matter and will find a solution. The members were quite upset at the way the volunteers for this program are being treated. At least one said that with just three weeks left to perform tasks this season, just cancel the program and contact those who have signed up for help. Other members asked that there be a solution so that tasks pending for this year's program can be completed for the seniors that truly need these services. Steve Belinda said that he understands the frustration and that with just 3 weeks left in the program to continue to work as if the sign is not in force and that he will work to find a work around for the sign. Steve and the town also realize the importance of this program for the seniors in Enfield and that a permanent solution can be reached.

B. SMHR - Senior Minor Home Repair Program (continued)

Dave Goyette's final comment to this discussion is that if by Monday, October 16th there is no resolution to this problem, he will ask that the program be cancelled for this year and that Melissa contact the clients and advise them that the program has been cancelled and that tasks cannot be completed. If the sign issue is resolved by Monday, the scheduled jobs for the next 3 weeks will be completed. Further discussion over the next few months will be needed so that the program volunteers can remain in their current space near Door 21 and that they will be able to load and unload their trucks near Door 21 since this only takes 15 minutes before leaving in the morning around 8:30 a.m. and 15 minutes when the jobs are completed usually by noon.

VI. Announcements

Dave Goyette said that in view of the late hour that additional reports be suspended to the next meeting.

VII. Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, a motion to adjourn was made by Mary Ann Harris and seconded by Howard Florian. It passed unanimously and Dave Goyette adjourned the meeting at 3:55 p.m.

Next Meeting Wednesday, November 8, 2023 at 2:00 p.m. at the DSS Alcorn School.

Respectfully Submitted by Pauline Devino, Secretary

Cc:

Mayor Bob Cressotti, Council Liaison
Cindy Guerreri, Staff Liaison & Director of Social Services
Mary Keller, Enfield Senior Center Manager
Marie Pyznar, Council Liaison
Ellen Zoppo-Sassu, Town Manager