

THE WINCHENDON COUNCIL ON AGING
April 6, 2023
Minutes of the Meeting

WINCHENDON COUNCIL ON AGING
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Accepted
5/18/2023
JMM

PRESENT: Shiela Bettro, Director, Judy Mizhir, Chairwoman, Jean Joyal, Diane Alexander, Ann Coderre, AnnMary Smith, John Webber, Rita Amenta, Sue Kuchta, Nancy Romanowski.

SPECIAL GUESTS: Justin Sultzbach, Town Manager, Miranda Jennings, Director CAC and HEAL.

BY REMOTE: Gail Casavant, Lynn Murray.

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Informational meeting only to update members regarding suggested changes in the Old Murdock Senior Center building.

The director, Ms. Bettro, stated that she was approached by the CAC director, Ms. Jennings, to combine the two institutions in one building in view of the pending sale of the current CAC facility to Ahimsa Haven. The proposed combination would be in the current Old Murdock Senior Center building. This would tentatively include accommodating the CAC, HEAL Haven of Hope, and Sunshine Cafe organizations.

It was noted by the director that we work very well with the CAC as we have been unable to do for many years.

Ms. Mizhir, the chairwoman, noted that change is inevitable and can be beneficial. We need to consider what is best for the town and of prime concern is that of the elders in our community. She suggested that we be cautious and consider the pros and cons of such a merger. There will be no vote taken today as it is just an informative discussion meeting to assess what might work with this merger and what will not.

PROS AND POSITIVE aspects presented and discussed included:

- *Intergenerational activities,
- *More opportunity for funding for various projects,
- *Larger clothing and food pantry offerings.

Ms. Jennings noted that we could work collaboratively to adjust hours open and use of the spaces. The possibility of added staff from the CAC may provide for coordination of more evening programs including youth and seniors.

She stated that the clothing pantry and food pantry could be merged into the basement. She noted that they would be able to cover the utility and overhaul costs. A note of interest was observed that the clothing pantry was originally set up in the basement and was quite poorly patronized d/t the cold and inconvenience of the basement.

Ms. Jennings stated that the CAC was also looking at the old bowling alley as a prospective new lodging for their facility. That building is in need of renovation as well in the form of a new roof. She stated that there was a lot of support through the HEAL organization as well as a substantial additional volunteer staff. She stated that there is funding for a basement kitchen renovation.

Mr. Sultzbach proposed that in speaking with both Ms. Bettro and Ms. Jennings and taking the temperature of both organizations, I would only support this proposal if the COA is in favor of it and it would be of benefit to the town. The collaboration would likely help with building improvements and water main updates. The town hall is also in need of repairs. A financial aspect of this proposal should be considered also. He advised giving some more thought to having a good shot at bringing in more funding in the future.

Ms. Mizhir stated that this will likely not happen quickly with a lot to be considered. She suggested that it would be beneficial for the CAC to become more aware of what the Senior Center does and the Senior Center might become more aware of what the CAC programs are. We want to be sure we are making it better for the populations that we serve.

It was noted that the Senior Center is growing consistently following a set back from the Covid-19 virus deterrent. The CAC likewise has nearly tripled in patrons.

QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS included:

- *Hours of operation overlap.
- *What number of rooms including private office rooms are needed.
- *All upstairs rooms are currently in use daily for various ongoing activities and are well attended.
- *Security issues that likely will present are a very large concern.
- *Possible security camera installation and closing off of floors was suggested as well as closing off the two floors if possible. It was noted that the elevator currently goes to all three floors.
- *A new electrical update of the basement rooms would be necessary.
- *Heating system would need updating.
- *Elders may be upset and stay away from commotion, noise, and drastic change to building dynamics.
- *Possible installation and updating of bathrooms with showers, etc.
- *Entire renovation and addition of a kitchen in the basement.
- *Transportation may become a large issue.
- *Is there space here to accommodate all that the CAC needs as is proposed.

The illegality of homeless persons using Old Murdock as an address was noted by Mrs. Bettro, as it is a public building is open to all people.

Ms. Jennings observed that the Gardner CAC and the Senior Center have merged into the very large Waterford St. School building and appear to be doing well with some seniors sharing skills with the younger generations.

Ms. Casavant asked what the next step might be.

Ms. Jennings will continue to look into other possible facilities to accommodate the CAC.

Ms. Jennings and Ms. Mizhir agreed that there was more need to talk and express visions and feelings, considering the large number of people who would be impacted by such a move. It was suggested to table the discussions for now, digest the information given and resume meeting.

Ms. Bettro suggested that we gather all questions and ideas of how this proposal might work. She also suggested that the CAC come and spend some time at the Senior Center and that the COA come to spend time at the CAC to better understand the operations of each.

Ms. Mizhir and Ms. Bettro both reiterated that this decision would need to be done cautiously rather than hastily or rushed, given the vast amount of issues to consider and work out possible solutions for.

Ms. Bettro stated that she is scheduled to take a vacation from Apr. 12-26 and will be retiring in January 2024.

Ms. Jennings stated that she is also scheduled to take a vacation also on April 14th for a week.

An informational meeting was scheduled for this Tuesday, April 11th, at 9AM for any who may attend.

Meeting adjourned at 11:15AM by motion and second.

Respectively submitted:

Diane M. Alexander, Secretary COA