

TOWN OF NEW LONDON
CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE
JUNE 3, 2006

This month's meeting of the Citizens' Advisory Committee was held at the Kearsarge Area Council on Aging headquarters at 37 Pleasant Street. Attending were COA Board members: Marilyn Andrews, Hugh Chapin, Hardy Hasenfuss, Bob Scott, and COA Executive Administrator Nancy Friese; and Citizens Advisory Committee members: Peter Bianchi, Barbara Brown, Sue Clough (Selectman), Ray Ettenborough, Karen Hoglund, Mark Kaplan (Selectman), Doug Lyon (Selectman), Bob Lavoie, D.J. Lavoie, Harmon Lewis, Bob MacMichael, Lois Marshall, Peter Messer, Noel Weinstein, Stephanie Wheeler, Barry Wright.

Doug Lyon opened the meeting at 7:30 a.m., and turned the floor over to Hugh Chapin.

Hugh Chapin gave a brief history of the Kearsarge Area Council on Aging, beginning with its founding in 1992 by Phoebe Downing and Julie Farnum, in a 30' by 30' office space. The concept was based on the Statewide Council on Aging, and the objective was and is to be a source of help and encouragement, to provide activities and services to those fifty-five years and older, and their families—specifically, to improve quality of life for the area's senior citizens.

Since then, COA has grown to its current 2100 members, and serves nine towns: Andover, Danbury, Grantham, Newbury, New London, Springfield, Sunapee, Sutton and Wilmot. Fifty-percent of its membership is from New London. He noted that a survey of ten New Hampshire cities and 24 New Hampshire towns from among three regions of the state, showed that New London has the highest median age of 47.3 years. 40% of New London's population is over the age of 55, and of that 40%, 56% are members of COA.

COA is run entirely by volunteers, and has only one full-time employee: Executive Administrator Nancy Friese, and one-half time employee. (Nancy Friese elaborated by pointing out that in 2005, COA volunteers contributed 9000 hours, and if those hours are valued at \$18.50 each, that comes to a total of \$166,000.) COA does not charge fees for its programs with the exception of some day bus trips, or overnight trips (those fees are only to allow COA to break even on the cost of the trips). The annual operating budget to serve its 2100 members is less than \$100,000. In 2000, COA conducted a building fund campaign, and as a result of its success, was able to buy the building in which this meeting is held, as well as establish a moderate sized endowment fund for the building's maintenance needs. Later in the meeting, Nancy Friese pointed out that 90% of what is in the building including the library's collections, furniture, computers, has been donated.

Hugh Chapin said the COA board would welcome input from the CAC, specifically on how to improve publicizing its services, how to improve its mission of helping elderly people, and how to recruit younger members and volunteers.

Nancy Friese opened discussion on COA's transportation program, huge success of which makes COA significantly different than other similar organizations. Hugh Chapin said most of that success is due to the fact that COA's transportation is door to door. Hardy Hasenfuss reported that at a state-wide meeting on aging held last week in Concord, transportation was identified as the number one concern for the elderly. D.J. Lavoie also attended that meeting, and agreed that accessibility (to a bus stop, for example) is a problem for some older people. She agreed that COA's door to door service addresses that, and is a good model for the State.

Nancy Friese went on to say that right now, COA has 137 volunteer drivers, and last year they drove 60,000 miles. COA is able to schedule transportation for long term needs, as for example, a patient who needs chemotherapy or dialysis, or for one time needs, not limited to medical appointments. The COA desk is staffed by volunteers five days a week, and they are able to make the connection with drivers, and establish schedules. They do appreciate a couple days notice when a ride is needed, but have been able to accommodate transportation needs at the last minute. Marilyn Andrews pointed out that they drive in any kind of weather. Nancy Friese agreed, for something like dialysis, the patient must get to the appointment no matter the weather. She noted that Hugh and Judy Chapin

have been outstanding in providing rides through foreboding weather, and often at the last minute. Judy Chapin has donated over 1000 hours to COA.

Noel Weinstein asked about rides to voting. Nancy Friese said they are happy to provide rides to the polls, and they have done so, but it is not a separate organized program. Again, they'd appreciate a couple days notice.

Mark Kaplan asked how they handle transportation to long medical appointments. Nancy Friese said that would be for something like dialysis, in which case, they arrange for one driver to transport the patient to the appointment, and another to pick the patient up. For something like that, COA would put the drivers in touch with the patients, so that those parties can work out directions to the patient's house, as well as agree on a meeting place and time at the end of the appointment.

D.J. Lavoie asked if the drivers receive any special training to drive individuals who are very ill, or in a wheel chair. Nancy Friese said they cannot offer volunteer drivers to people in wheel chairs, unless the patient is able to get himself or herself in and out of the car on his own. Sue Clough asked if in those cases, would there be some interfacing with VNA. Nancy Friese said they work closely with VNA in general, and she refers people to them as often as a couple times a day. Hugh Chapin said that at one time, the VNA was not allowed to transport patients. Now that rule has relaxed, though that does not mean there is duplication (or conflict) of services provided by the VNA and COA.

COA does have a mobility device—wheelchairs, walkers, etc., lending program. Harmon Lewis asked about the hospital beds. COA does not have those to loan out, but VNA does..

Doug Lyon mentioned the difficulty to seniors in having to give up their vehicles, and referred to programs in which rides are given to seniors in exchange for donation of their vehicles.

D.J. Lavoie asked about people who may want to pay for the rides. Nancy Friese said they welcome donations to COA's general fund, and those go into the operating budget.

Sue Clough asked if they are seeing an increase in the number of needy people. Nancy Friese said it varies from year to year. COA's transportation program has increased its mileage every year since it began.

She went on to list some of COA's other programs including: Mr. Fix-It, Bridge (wildly popular and now on-going four days a week); computer workshops including house calls; Outdoor Recreation For Seniors (ORFS) with separate programs for kayaking and biking; chair exercises; yoga; genealogy workshops; breakfast book discussions (in conjunction with Tracy Library); men's group on Monday morning (truth in stories not required); Tai Chi; crafts; and more. For some of its discussion series, COA uses the UNH Speakers Bureau program.

In response to Noel Weinstein's question, she said that with the help of a Colby Sawyer student, they hope to have their web site up and running by August.

Noel Weinstein asked about overlap with the Community Center group. Nancy Friese said COA had some discussion with that group before the purchase of this building, but not lately.

Stephanie Wheeler asked if they have younger volunteers. Nancy Friese said they have some, and would love to have more. Everyone agreed that interfacing with the Town's Recreation Department, as well as getting onto the town's web site, would be one way to interest more younger people in COA. Jessie Levine's weekly email updates go out to over 500 people now.

Bob Lavoie asked about programs to help seniors with things like tax preparation or completion of health insurance forms. Nancy Friese said COA can connect people with those types of services. AARP and local banks do offer tax preparation assistance for example.

Peter Messer opened some discussion on how to encourage seniors to participate when they are reluctant to do so. Hardy Hasenfuss pointed out that a lot must be done in the way of education—not just of the elderly, but of society, regarding the notion of “aging.” Everyone agreed that this is a common problem. There is a stigma to organizations for senior citizens, and the name doesn’t help.

Bob Scott agreed that seniors need something to look forward to. Though COA works in conjunction with health care systems, the goal is to keep seniors out of that system as long as possible. Peter Messer pointed out that once they are in the system, there is not much a family member can do to encourage participation in outside activities. Hardy Hasenfuss said that that is why one of COA’s goals is to get people in their forties and fifties to start thinking about later life.

Peter Messer asked how one can convince a family member who is in a nursing home to come in to some of COA’s activities. Several people suggested that someone with a wealth of local history could be encouraged to share that either in the discussion groups, or perhaps one on one with someone from the Historical Society and Archives. Other suggestions included: setting up a buddy system, so people could come with friends with whom they are already comfortable; having a mother/(adult) daughter and father/(adult) son cracker barrel session; more involvement with children; interfacing with Chad Denning and the Recreation Department.

D.J. Lavoie asked if COA offers help to those who are full time care givers to spouses or family members who are not mobile and simply cannot leave home. Hardy Hasenfuss pointed out that Sullivan County has an adult daycare program, and Nancy Friese said that New London does have an Alzheimers program. COA does not offer a respite program for caregivers right now, but that may be something to consider in the future. She said that their “friendly visitor” program has never quite taken off. A lot of the success for that type of program depends on chemistry.

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Before the meeting adjourned, Doug Lyon reminded CAC members that, as discussed at the last meeting the Sewer Commission will hold its public meeting at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, June 6 in the Sydney Crook meeting room.

Meeting adjourned at 9 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S.A. Denz
Recording Secretary