**COA Board Meeting Minutes for October 24, 2023**

**The Groton Center**

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| **Date** | Tuesday, October 24, 2023 |
| **Time**  | 4:00 p.m. to 5:02 p.m. |
| **Location** | The Groton Center |
| **Board Members in Attendance** | Pascal Miller, Chair Tony Serge, Vice Chair Judith Palumbo O’Brien, SecretaryHarris McWade Michelle Colette Lois Young Dottie Zale Carole Carter |
| **Board Members Absent** | Berta Erickson |
| **COA Staff in Attendance**  | Ashley Shaheen, DirectorNickole Boardman, Outreach Coordinator/Van DispatchNändi Munson, Community Engagement Specialist |
| **Guests in Attendance** | Sandra Johnson, Site Reviewer, National Councils on Aging (NCOA)Art Cheeks, Deputy Chief, Fire Department Peter Cunningham, Select Board Member, former COA Board Member and Van Driver Pat Timmons, Police Sargeant, senior liaison with Groton Police DepartmentMelisa Doig, HR Director  |

**Agenda Items and Notes**

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| **Open Meeting**  | * The meeting was officially started at 4:02 p.m. by Board Chair Pascal Miller.
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| * **Site Reviewer Introduction**
 | * Sandra Johnson, National Councils on Aging (NCOA) Site Reviewer from Evanston IL introduced herself and provided a summary of her background and experience. Sandra indicated that she had directed the Northfield IL COA that serves 23 communities in the northern Chicago suburbs and is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She has reviewed between 40-50 senior centers across the country and indicated that she reviewed the Groton COA in the old building for the 2015 reaccreditation.
* Sandra thanked everyone for attending the site visit meeting and asked each participant to introduce themselves.
* Sandra shared her thoughts about the Groton COA and our reaccreditation documentation. She complimented the group on the thoroughness of the materials submitted.
* Sandra next asked a series of questions about the Groton COA, the accreditation process, the Board, the Strategic Plan, location, marketing and long-range plans.
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| * **Group discussion regarding why the Groton COA felt the need go through reaccreditation again, the process, and the benefits**
 | * Peter shared that the Groton Center was a new building and noted all the work that went into it: gaining support, funding, designing, constructing and opening a new COA/Community Center.
* Deputy Chief Cheeks noted that the assessment process is always a positive thing as it identifies areas that can be enhanced or added to help meet and/or exceed our members’ needs.
* Sandra indicated that we would be receiving formal feedback from the National Councils on Aging with their recommendations on where we can go from here.
* Pascal and several participants chimed in to talk about how the reaccreditation process had been an excellent learning experience for the Board Members, who had each served as lead for one of the nine standards. Pascal also talked about the collaboration between Board members, staff, the members and our volunteers. These activities provided Board members the opportunity to learn more details about the Town and the COA policies and procedures and documentation available.
* Sandra noted that the reaccreditation documentation was remarkably organized.
* Pascal shared that it was Ashley’s guidance that directed the group to divide the nine standards, one per Board member, and then to create working groups with other community members. These working groups reported back to the whole group. This process also allowed us the opportunity to improve and update materials documents etc.
* Ashley shared that it was a combination of volunteers, Board members, other town employees, and COA staff which allowed the group to share institutional knowledge. She commented that Groton is a community that supports and fosters collaboration.
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| * **Group discussion regarding the reaccreditation process and the community involvement**
 | * Sandra remarked that this process gave other community members the chance to learn about the Center.
* Michelle reiterated that each Board member, as lead for one of the nine standards, recruited others from different areas of expertise and experience to participate on their working group.
* Tony mentioned that he was a COA Member for a few months when he was asked to join Michelle’s working group, which ultimately lead him to serve on the COA Board. Participation allowed Tony to learn about the Center, its organization, bylaws, strategic plan, policies and procedures.
* Judy shared that participation allowed Board and team members to personally learn from staff and from members as they researched and complied their responses and documentation for the questions presented in their standard. This involved identifying appropriate documents, assuring documentation was accurate and up to date, and organizing the materials in a centralized location.
* Dottie Zale stated that it will be a “feather in our cap” if we become reaccredited, and that community members will really appreciate that. She also noted that maintaining this prestigious status may help when pursuing grants and revenue sources.
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| * **Group discussion regarding surprises identified in the reaccreditation process**
 | * Dottie stated that she learned that the Groton Center had a lot more to it than she knew before participating in the review process. The experience enhanced her perspective and appreciation for the work involved and importance of the Accreditation.
* Pascal indicated that the process allowed us to identify gaps and areas of improvement.
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| * **Group discussion on gaps that may have been identified**
 | * Pascal stated that we identified some documents were outdated and those documents were flagged and/or updated.
* Dottie shared that we learned the importance of surveys and the value of getting opinions, likes and dislikes. This was an impetus for the Center to review and enhance programing and resources.
* Judy noted that we have many helpful tools for volunteers, to include job descriptions, a Volunteer Guide and Application Form. The form affords members the opportunity to highlight areas they are interested in, recommend future programs, and volunteer their background and experience to personally lead a specific program or talk.
* Nickole shared that the process brought the Board together, especially with newer Board members. It also provided the opportunity for Board members to connect with new staff.
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| * **Question from our Reviewer - regarding the Strategic Plan and how often it would be reviewed?**
 | * Tony answered that we are in the midst of reviewing the Strategic Plan and that each of the six strategies will have a Board Member serve as a champion of that goal. He indicated that the Board is committed to work together to make the Strategic Plan real and that they will be conducting a deeper dive to identify next steps.
* Dottie shared that a former Board Member emphasized the importance of keeping up with the plan and reviewing it every year. Dottie also noted that the Board has recently participated in an off-site retreat, that included facilitators and speakers from the Massachusetts Councils on Aging. The group spent some time getting to know one another and learning about each participant’s personal background and work experience. The roles and responsibilities of Board Members, the Bylaws and Strategic Plan were reviewed.
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| * **Question raised by our reviewer asking the impetus for the Board Retreat.**
 | * Ashley indicated that the idea was initially discussed during the reaccreditation process. The Board identified the need and benefits of clearly understanding their role as Board members and strategic plan.
* Michelle noted that a plan is only as good as its implementation, and expressed the value of self-assessment. Since her focus was on evaluation, she found it very useful to spend lots of time thinking about that topic in regards to the COA.
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| * **Question from reviewer regarding length of a Board Member’s term**
 | * The group chimed in to answer indicating that a term is three years, and that a Board Member may be reappointed consecutively for a second three-year term.
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| * **Query from reviewer: “What prompted everyone to serve on the COA Board?”**
 | * Pascal shared that he started as a volunteer, and was approached by the former Director about joining the Board.
* Dottie indicated that she had just retired and wanted to be involved in the town. She saw the posting and applied.
* Lois was serving on another Board which was very policy-oriented. Since she is very hands-on, Lois began as a Meals on Wheels volunteer at the Center. She was impressed with quality and variety of programs and how staff listened to what seniors in town want.
* Harris shared that she got involved through the Garden Club, the Woman’s Club, and the Nashoba Valley Artist Guild. She noted community groups really gravitate here, and there is strong community engagement. She also pointed out that the Garden Club, Woman’s club, and Artist Guild all have many senior members. Harris also belongs to the Trails Committee, local Cultural Council, and is very interwoven with many aspects of the Groton COA.
* Michelle has an association with other town Boards and departments, and sees this role as a logical place for a forum such as the Sustainability Commission. As she wears many hats, Michelle has been involved in an Intro to Public Health and the Gender Identity Lunch & Learn Programs. We offer many educational topics and take advantage of opportunities to collaborate. These types of events are well-attended by people who don’t necessarily come for traditional COA activities, regardless of age.
* Judy indicated that she is an advocate for fitness and the importance of staying active and praised the instructors and variety of exercise programs offered at the center to include aerobics, strength training, yoga, Zumba, bone building, and dancing. She also talked about the $50,000 Blue Cross grant awarded to the Center which will allow the development, design and construction of outdoor fitness stations and walking trails for senior adults and the all community members.
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| * **Query from reviewer: “Is it difficult for people to get to the Groton Center?”**
 | * The group shared that this is a good location for most members and that the location is out of the busy traffic areas. They also talked about the extensive van transportation services offered.
* Harris expressed that it is very easy to get here.
* Peter relayed that there was a public open assessment process to choose this site. As Groton is a large, rural town, people are accustomed to having to travel a bit to get around, and this is not a barrier.
* Harris shared that this site is a known entity, as it was the former site of the VFW, as well as the Senior Center building.
* Tony shared that he observes many people coming here, and the large community room gets packed regularly.
* Judy noted that the downtown is a bit congested, so it’s better to have the Center off the busy main streets.
* Peter stated that the town made a very conscious decision to name the building The Groton Center, to encapsulate that it’s inclusive of all groups, and it’s more than just a senior center.
* Lois stated that making the center pleasant and convenient may help dispel ageism, and may help people feel better about interacting with older people.
* Harris stated this place is not just the COA, it’s a community center, and that it feels good to come here for a meeting, it’s a comfortable setting.
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| * **Query from reviewer: “How has marketing changed with the new center?”**
 | * Peter noted the distribution of our newsletter, as well as online outreach, emails, keeping our website updated has all been an intentionally strategy that we’ve increased.
* Ashley noted that the building speaks for itself, and word of mouth is a highly effective outreach tool we observe in action. If someone comes over the weekend for a community event, they often come back during the week for COA programming. We have been paying even more attention to marketing, and recently distributed an outreach letter to all heads of household over 60. We continue to receive referrals from that outreach.
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| * **Query from reviewer: “Is there a rental fee for outside groups to use the space?”**
 | * Ashley shared that last year was the first full-year we were completely operational. Rental policy is an area we are revisiting, and are currently reviewing this policy. We are operating from an older Building Use Policy at this time until the new policy is finalized and approved.
* There are currently charges for private entities using the space outside COA hours. We have 3-4 rentals per week, and any fees go into a revolving account with the town. We are in the process of developing a building monitor role who can serve on site during off hours activities.
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| * **Question from reviewer: “Is there an agreement policy for groups that use the space without paying a fee?”**
 | * Ashley noted that we have Memos of Understanding (MOU) with some groups such as the Woman’s Club, who also volunteer at the center during COA programming. There has been an arrangement in place for a number of years.
* The Garden Club collaborates on COA programs throughout the year.
* Ashley noted we always provide first-time visitors a tour of the facility, and that the Center receives new guests most every day.
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| * **Question from reviewer: “Where will the Groton Center be in 5 years?”**
 | * Harris stated the Groton Center will be the epicenter of Groton life.
* Peter noted we have an established and evolving model that will continue. It’s been successful and well received by the community.
* Judy stated that the outside fitness park and walking trails will be in place and actively utilized.
* Harris noted that the vegetable and pollinator gardens will be thriving.
* Lois expressed that we will continue to grow our marketing and outreach to keep the growing senior population engaged. We will also evolve to meet the changing needs of older adults.
* Dottie hoped we will have more vans.
* Peter can see that transportation needs and trips will grow.
* The group discussed that the kitchen is underutilized, and in the future, we can pursue having a formalized lunch like other COAs, as meals draw people and are great social opportunities.
* Michelle foresees expansion of the social services component, and continuing to combat isolation.
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| * **Question from reviewer: “Is there a social day program in town?”**
 | * The group noted there are nearby towns like Leominster and Lowell. We also discussed our Memory Café.
* Lois noted that there is a shortage of home care services.
* Nandi discussed that in Massachusetts, the state subsidizes home care services including Adult Day Health programs.
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| * **Group discussion on strengths of the Groton Center.**
 | * Michelle shared that we provide rides to Boston, which is very unique.
* Nickole relayed that we provide 400 rides per month between our 3 vans and 7 drivers. We take people to haircuts, grocery shopping, the Groton Center, medical appointments, and even veterinarian appointments. It is free to get a ride to and from the Groton Center, $3 for in town destinations, $4 out of town, $5 to Emerson Hospital, $15 to Boston, and free to go to the VA.
* Tony noted that Groton is a very desirable place to live, and seniors have moved in. People tend to stay, and the population is growing. The future may look like considering the potential need to expand the building.
* Deputy Chief Cheeks noted that surveys, customer service, and feedback is very important.
* Officer Pat Timmons described the police liaison position and its value. The COA has a long-standing collaboration with the Police and Fire departments. Pat described that the police and fire departments are in the unique position to see “boots on the ground” folks who might be struggling. They relay info to the COA through TRIAD meetings, where a round table discussion of public health officials, first responders, and COA staff to identify issues collaborate on resources. The TRIAD group maintains a high level of professionalism and communication.
* Sandra asked if HIPAA gets in the way of collaboration. Pat responded that no medical information is shared, and the Emergency Preparedness database allows functional collaboration.
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| * **Question from reviewer: “How does Adult Protective Services work here?”**
 | * Nandi noted that Aging Services of North Central Massachusetts provides Adult Protective Services for this region. Michelle noted referrals may come through Boards of Health and the Public Health nurses.
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| **Closing of Meeting** | * Sandra thanked everyone for attending this meeting.
* Pascal thanked Sandra for her visit, and expressed we look forward to her feedback.
* Pascal closed the meeting at 5:07 p.m.
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| **Next Meeting** | * Next meeting is Monday November 13th at 2:00 p.m. at the Groton Center.
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Respectfully submitted,

Judith Palumbo O’Brien

November 8, 2023