

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE FOR 2020 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE FRIENDS OF THE HARWICH COA
10-12-22

Jim Knickman

Welcome to our annual meeting. I recognize that many here are on the board or very connected to the Friends group. Even for you, I hope these remarks remind us of what we have accomplished and what we aim to accomplish soon this year. For our friends, I hope this helps you understand our mission and activities better.

Let me start by noting our general mission and priorities:

- 1) Most broadly our mission is to improve the lives of older adults living in Harwich. This is the mission of both the Friends group and our COA.

Traditionally we first and foremost see our role as providing the Harwich COA with resources to do programs for seniors that might go beyond what is affordable with their normal revenue sources. Funding for community-based programs is complicated in Massachusetts but our COA receives town support from taxes, state government support and federal support thru pass through organizations at the county level.

But...these resources are never enough to do all of the things that are needed and that our COA is capable of making happen. So....we try to expand their capacities.

- 2) Over the years, we have focused on several priority issues to help seniors:
 - a) Transportation services: thru our van used for shopping outings and excursions that engage older adults in activities around the county.
 - b) Emergency assistance to specific older adults in crisis. We learn about these needs thru the COA and support things like temporary housing, costs of crucial unfunded medical needs, and the costs of medical equipment when it is necessary and unfunded.
 - c) Meal programs, usually here at the community centers. Food security is still a challenge even with many county-based food assistance non-profits.
 - d) Initiatives done collaboratively with the Fire Department and Fire Association to make older adults homes safer.

- 2) Here are some of the actual activities we have accomplished or supported this year:
 - a) Restarting our van services as COVID has become at least a bit less harmful.
 - b) A lock box initiative with the Fire Dept and Fire Association to make access to homes in crises less damaging.
 - c) Assisting a range of seniors around town who needed emergency support, and
 - d) A new program the COA staff will launch next year to educate older adults and their families who fear early signs of dementia or Alzheimer's.

- 3) Additionally, over the past year the Friends Board has spent a lot of time and energy developing a few more ambitious activities that we have learned still need to be addressed to improve the lives of older adults.

Last Fall, we started this venture by holding a day long retreat with 30 to 40 key players/leaders in the Barnstable County world of aging services.

We brainstormed to identify what new initiatives could help older adults live well and live independently as long as is possible. We wanted ideas that were important and doable.

It was a fun; invigorating day and we followed up with a smaller meeting involving 4 particularly active retreat members and our board to make sense of what we learned and to choose a few ideas to pursue.

We identified 5 major gaps/shortcomings that could be addressed:

- a) going to scale for activities already supported
- b) availability of information sources to guide older adults to available services
- c) respite services for families caring for frail elders
- d) more senior housing options
- e) more friendly advocacy by the Friends group to push for needed services and to prepare our town for the baby boom aging onset over the next few years.

Since this planning event, we have been working on 2 new ambitious efforts and 1 quietly emerging effort:

- a) Going to scale on transportation services that are key to reducing social isolation and make it more possible for older adults to live independently.

We have been working closely with Nauset Neighbors, a volunteer run program, to recruit drivers who take older adults to medical appointments and shopping as well as helping them do things to make their home life easier.

To expand their services to people living in Harwich, we need to help them recruit more volunteer drivers from Harwich. We are working on this in collaboration with

the Chatham Harwich Newcomers Club which has over 600 members, many of whom may be engaged in this new initiative. We also hope to work with the Chatham and Harwich COAs to help identify older adults who most could benefit from the services. We go into this recognizing that it has been difficult across the Cape to recruit volunteers since the Covid pandemic. But....we are seeing signs that this effort might in fact work out and be successful.

- b) The second effort focuses on expanding access in Harwich to respite care for family caregivers, especially when a loved one is coping with dementia and Alzheimer's. Harwich had a source for this service in the past, but it vanished during Covid. There are some nonprofits that could take on this challenge with financial support that we might be able to create.
- c) Finally, we hope to address some of the other 5 needs and gaps through friendly advocacy. Just as starters for example, I was pleased to be appointed to the new Local Comprehensive Planning Committee in Harwich and hope to keep aging issues on this agenda. I also had a chance to do a lecture series at the Chatham Library about aging services and needs and how they are financed.

So...we are busy and hopeful that some of our new initiatives will work out. And we recognize that aging service needs will continue to grow as our town has an increasingly large number of older adults in residence. Our mission and activities are important ones to pursue.

I want to finish, however, with a few somber thoughts and some needs that we have to address as an organization.

First.....this has been a difficult year for us because we lost our long term leader, Jack Brown, who passed away this summer. Jack was president of the Friends group for many years, but Jack did much more than then this for our town.

Jack served as chair of the Harwich Town Finance Committee...a challenging task demanding sharp leadership skills. He also served for many years on the zoning board of appeals which is another tough assignment. Over the years, he served on the town preservation committee and the Friends of the Arts. He also played key roles in helping to make the new high school happen and to make this excellent community center happen. Jack brought energy and smarts to all that he did.

We will very much miss him.

In addition to the challenge of losing Jack, we have a list of a few other challenges:

- 1) We lost 2 other long standing board members this year: Joanne Brown, Jack's wife, who needs some more personal time, right now, and Richard Waystack, another Jack-type in terms of community service who now feels a bit over extended.

So, we really need help to identify perhaps 4 new 1st rate board members:

We hope to find people with passion about our aging challenges in Harwich and perhaps one person with experience in the aging services world.

- 2) We need more drivers for our van activities. It has been a challenge to recruit volunteers for this assignment and we could expand the use of the van if we had more drivers.
- 3) Our final challenge this year has been that we lost Emily Mitchell who was elected to be our town's clerk. We will miss Emily immensely but.....we are quite pleased that Julie Witas was named Director of the COA and has taken the reigns very effectively. It is great that our town moved this recruitment process along quickly and in the end chose a person who has been a successful part of the COA staff for some time.

Jim Knickman

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