

Age-Friendly Conway Working Group
Minutes from Thursday, April 25, 2024; 8:40 to 10 a.m.
Location: Town Hall, General Purpose Room

Present: Chair Robin Yerkes, members Tilda Hunting, Phil Kantor, Pat Lynch and George Forcier; and Rachel Stoler and Meg Ryan from Franklin Regional Council of Governments.

Absent: Thad Bennett

Minutes of March 28 meeting approved unanimously.

Mass in Motion committees from 11 towns in Franklin County slated to meet at Field Memorial Library May 16 from noon to 2 to cross-pollinate. The Franklin Regional Council of Governments has organized the gathering, which Conway will host, so towns with Age Friendly groups can exchange ideas and information about how towns can make aging in place easier. Phil to report on planned Conway Seniors “Uber” service.

Senior Prom: In Thad’s absence, we tried to fill apparent openings for volunteers on his to-do list for the seniors social event planned for June 1 at Field Memorial Library, in conjunction with Friends of the FML.

George volunteered to work with Thad on Marketing if needed.

Tilda and Robin said they could provide rides to seniors.

Robin, George and Thad to meet with Friends of FML before the Prom to button down final details. Robin to arrange.

Age-Friendly Conway has identified “social isolation” and lack of transportation as top issues facing seniors in Conway. Thad proposed providing free transportation for those who need it, as a way to explore ways to tackle the transportation issue. The gathering itself is seen as a way to address social isolation while also gathering more information about needs of seniors.

CSA shares and benches: Discuss the possibility of using residual money at fiscal year's end to buy food shares from Natural Roots that could be used by seniors who travel directly to the CSA. Also considered using money to buy a park bench for the town, with location to be determined later. Robin and Tilda were to gather info about where Greenfield purchased its Town Common benches.

Needs: Tilda reported back on a discussion with former Board of Health member who is a nurse about her experience with 7 homebound seniors, especially during Covid. A takeaway was that these people found their own solutions to getting help and rides, that they were self-reliant, proud people.

Phil noted from his personal experience that many of the town's oldest or most needy seniors want to be self-reliant or to be perceived as self-reliant. They are reluctant to ask for help, often feeling there are others in greater need of help.

Tilda said she will also reach out to Bob and Helen Baker and Chris Hermann, who may also have a broad sense of the needs of seniors in town by virtue of their roles as local merchants, and fire and EMT leaders.

Pilot "Uber" service for Conway seniors discussed with Phil, who after our last meeting with Franklin Regional Transit Authority Administrator Tina Cote, worked out a grant-funded pilot transportation service that expands on the existing Medride program that takes seniors to medical appointments. The Conway program will pair up volunteer drivers with seniors to provide transportation to any destination (shopping, visiting friends, movies, entertainment) inside the country or elsewhere for 40 cents a mile. The FRTA grant will subsidize and administer the program through the end of the year.

This is just the kind of service that we have heard would help seniors age in place. Riders for the same price are allowed to bring companions with them. While Medride is important to get to car-less seniors to medical appointments, Phil described the pilot “Uber” service as allowing seniors without cars to continue “living a life” because it will take them anywhere for any reason.

Rachel was enthusiastic about the pilot and lauded Phil for seeing the possibility and jumping on it. If the program demonstrates it meets a need, FRTA might continue it with a van and full-time driver.

Next meeting will be Thursday, May 23.