

Draft Minutes - Youth and Family Services Committee Meeting January 12, 2023

Attendees: Heidi Porter, Marge Heckman, Sarah Sjostrom (clerk), Susan Schwartz, Matthew Derman (chair), Scott Jones, Shirley Chan

Matthew opened the meeting at 7:03pm and read the state's remote meeting guidance.

Public comment opened. No public attending for public comment. Public comment was closed.

Agenda items:

1. YFS Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting minutes reviewed from November 10, 2022. Marge indicated that a section of the minutes appeared to have been omitted from paragraph 6 requiring the addition of the statement "within the community". Susan noted on page 3 inquired about the terminology ELL. It was indicated that English Language Learners is the new terminology with the acronym ELL. This will be included in the minutes. Susan made a motion to approve and Marge seconded. Roll call for approval. All in favor.

2. Gun Violence Prevention

Board of Health reviewed/established goals over the summer of 2022.

In response to recent, nationwide incidents of gun violence and frequency of news and information on gun violence, the Board of Health noted that this should be accepted as a public health epidemic.

Discussion to reinvigorate the gun buy back program given former success.

Hope to disseminate information about gun buy back and gun safety emphasizing the need for safe gun storage.

Reviewed the option to provide gun locks as part of this program.

Noted local towns that have existing programs of this nature – Cambridge and Somerville.

Town boards, committees and community groups have come out in support.

Board of Health thought this could be included in the Youth and Family Services Safe Homes program.

Discussed and requested the endorsement of the Youth and Family Services in supporting this effort.

Discussion stressed that this initiative is not political in nature and does not intend to encourage people not to own guns, but emphasizes the need for gun safety in managing and storing guns.

Board of Health has recognized that this is not the main priority for our community where incidence is low, however they recognize this as a goal due to the consideration as contributing to preventive health initiatives.

Noted that in Bedford there are 700 existing licenses for guns, a fact which may not be well known.

Scott Jones spoke to the past experience of the police buy back program, indicating that previously many had guns that they simply did not know how to get rid of safely.

Scott continued to indicate that this seems a thoughtful initiative given that gun violence is a leading cause of death in young people.

Mailing to go out to 5600 households via USPS with messaging about the enhanced buy back program and the community presentation on March 1st with the intent of promoting gun safety.

The motion was made to endorse the campaign by Shirley, Marge seconded the motion and all approved.

Heidi, as staff member on the committee, will complete the form required for official endorsement.

2. YFS Department Programming and Activities

Youth Services coordinator has been hired and will be starting her position. She has experience in direct work with youth and serving their families. She will be invited to an upcoming YFS meeting.

Over 200 people were served at the Thanksgiving gathering, an increase from last year when 170 people were served. Service was shifted through the Bedford Community Pantry and Table to provide gift cards rather than food selected for them. This allows participants the agency to select their own food items that may be more personally or culturally appropriate.

New part time staff member working to support the operation of the food bank, though have a need for a volunteer to assist with this program. There has been applications for grant funding to assist with transportation that will allow for the program to bring fresh produce in during the colder months. Clientele greatly appreciates the fresh produce option and new mechanisms are being sought to continue this service. Money still exists in the emergency relief fund as well.

Office space evaluation is being continues which has affected the programming that was occurring previously in the space that the Food Bank now occupies. The consultant is attempting to determine recommendations for continuing to find space for other programs that may have been impacted by this space transition.

Town staff has been working on signing people up for SNAP with about a 70% success rate in application acceptance. This state program provides funding back to the town to support other social services. Some supports are pulling back that were previously in place through the pandemic.

126 residents received the Christmas Eve dinner as supported by local temples. Many veterans received this meal as well.

Many families received Christmas gifts thanks to Bedford Santa and Cradles to Crayons has been able to provide many new coats. Previously, it was required to have an appointment to receive materials. At present, a store front has been set up that allows increased agency to the community members needing to take advantage of these items. Bombas will be contributing socks to these efforts as well.

Wait list for therapist has been reduced by approximately 6 months to allow community members to mental health services more expeditiously. Partnership with William James College has also allowed enhanced access to more urgent services.

Contact was initiated to be a conduit for an organization that provides free feminine hygiene products to communities. At present, girls will have to go to the nurse's office. Schools installed dispensers, but did not support the refilling of these dispensers. This will allow the dispensers at JGMS, Bedford High School and Shawsheen Tech to be filled.

Scott mentioned the Community Behavioral Health Center and Heidi noted that Advocates has been a partner as a crisis team. Heidi noted that Advocates will only come to the community if they are notified before 10:30pm and that timeline often does not work effectively. About 18 months ago, the state put out a request to establish community behavioral health centers with improved access. BHCs are regional. The Bedford BHC is located in Waltham. Advocates will continue to support this work, but with new parameters that allow urgent, emergent and more easily accessible services.

Scott noted that the state has invested a significant amount of money to provide 24/7 services which will enhance access and reduce strain on emergency departments. Noted that although Bedford has been very progressive in putting in place supports for mental health access, this is likely to alleviate significant existing gaps. Shirley inquired the age range for available services and it was noted that services are available for all ages.

3. Police Department Updates

Scott provided the update and reviewed new team members and positions filled: Justin Brooks is the new Resource Officer who is working well with schools. Kaitlyn Fisher is the new social worker who is starting this week and will be working with Bedford and Lexington.

4. Board of Health Updates

Susan gave the update and opened by noting that there is a new variant of COVID that is highly contagious. Promoting continued reminders of mitigation strategies including masking, testing, hand hygiene, ventilation, cleaning in homes if a family member has been ill and staying home if ill. Noted that town has test kits available. Provided the reminder that RSV and Influenza continue to circulate in the community.

Board of Health is also continuing work on tobacco regulation and preventing sale to minors. Heidi indicated that one-off products will arise that are not included in current regulation and slip through the cracks requiring continued work to ensure that regulation remains tight and continues to be effective in preventing sale to youth.

Heidi mentioned, for Joshua from the Recreation Department who was unable to be present, that capital funding has been made available for improving the tot lot and there are community groups highly supporting making town areas more accessible. It is anticipated that improvements to the tot lot will enhance usability and access for those who require enhanced access. She also mentioned that efforts are underway to catalog existing recreation spaces so that families can find spaces that meet their needs.

5. Committee member updates

Shirley raised a question to inquire about whether the town was providing any activities commemorating MLK day. Heidi indicated that representation from the community and committee would be present at the town event.

6. Adjourn

Marge moved to adjourn the meeting and Shirley seconded. All in favor and meeting adjourned.