

**Bedford Council on Aging Board**  
**Minutes**  
**January 26, 2026, 10:00 a.m.**  
**Meeting held in person**

**Attendance**

Board Members Present: Paul Fath (Board Chair), Marilou Barsam, Roberta Ennis, David Santos, Tom Kinzer Karen Moore (via Phone) &, Kim Olson (via phone).

Board Members Absent: Lewis Putney

Other Participants: Alison Cservenschi (COA Director); Susan Schwartz (Board of Health Liaison to COA), Linda Langone, Judy Morgan, Bridget Clayton, Ken Clayton.

**Opening Discussion**

- The board officially changed its meeting schedule to the fourth Tuesday of each month, from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM, to better align with the Disability Commission's schedule. Both voted on individually (6-0-0) (Mr. Kinzer late arrival)
- Minutes from the November 20th meeting were approved. (7-0-0) Motion: Ennis, Second, Santos)
- A new AI recording device is being trialed to assist with minute-taking. Chair and Director will edit.
- Board members were reminded to complete their annual Conflict of Interest training sent via email from the state.

**Director's Report**

**Town Budget, Funding, and Advocacy Strategy**

The board acknowledged significant town budget challenges, leading to cuts across departments and limiting the COA's ability to make new requests. The Finance Committee's recommended 2% budget increase is insufficient for new initiatives, and the town manager indicated this is not the year for new funding asks, such as the COA's enhanced medical rides program. The board shared feeling of frustration with the lack of town support, with some seniors feeling that the town does not care about their needs.

In response, the board agreed a proactive, multi-pronged advocacy strategy is needed to influence future fiscal year budgets (specifically FY27). The current last-minute approach is ineffective. The new strategy involves following our strategic plan, consistently communicating needs to the town manager and finance committee throughout the year, and mobilizing community members to voice support at Finance Committee and Select Board meetings, not just at the final town meeting. A key first step is to engage with Paul Mortenson, Select Board liaison, to get guidance on the best approach and timing for attending select board and finance committee meetings to advocate for COA needs, and make funding requests. The board will populate a calendar with key town meeting dates to create a roadmap for this effort.

**Liaison Report**

An update from the Board of Health noted that they, like the COA, have faced budget cuts. Respiratory viruses are still prevalent, and the board is considering next steps following a study on ultrafine particles from Hanscom Field. Two Board of Health positions on the board will be open in the upcoming March election.

**Fundraising and Donations**

To supplement town funding, the Director has established a new system to accept online donations via a Unipay link on the COA's town webpage and a QR code is being uploaded. This service is free as it leverages the town's existing, and familiar, Unipay infrastructure. Signage is also posted on the COA's notice board on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor.

The board discussed conducting a newsletter push for annual contributions but must adhere to specific laws for a town department conducting targeted fundraising. The Friends of the COA (FBCOA) have committed \$500 a month specifically for medical rides, starting February 1st. A seed was planted with the Friends to consider donating extra funds towards acquiring a second vehicle.

### **Medical Ride Services and Transportation Needs**

A primary focus is the long-standing need for a second, smaller vehicle to enhance out-of-town medical ride services. Research into comparison towns, conducted by Ms. Barsam, in Stowe, Harvard & Maynard revealed these other towns having more robust transportation services, often funded directly by town budgets for operations and maintenance, despite the towns being smaller than Bedford. This comparative data will be used in or advocacy materials to “paint the picture” for town officials of what is possible. For instance, Harvard (pop. 6,800) has two vans and offers free rides, while Maynard’s services are supported by the Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA). It was noted, however, that these towns also struggle with providing transportation to major hospitals in Boston. The board concluded that creating a high level of community awareness about Bedford’s transportation deficit is the first critical step.

### **Community Outreach and Board Operations**

To support its advocacy, the board will adopt a multi-pronged outreach strategy. This includes using various channels like social media (Next Door, Facebook), the town newsletter, partnerships with groups like Youth and Family Services, and direct engagement with Bedford’s diverse cultural communities. While the COA itself must use the general Town of Bedford social media pages (which has a large following), the COA Board is permitted to create its own page to grow a following but this must be maintained and kept current for it to be effective. The existing Marketing work group will consolidate all data (UMass study, financial reports, comparison town research) into compelling materials, including one-page flyers and detailed articles, with a call to action for community feedback.

Operationally, the board will conduct an internal self-evaluation survey to identify knowledge gaps and training needs. Due to a reduction in staff hours and failure to hire a new social worker, the COA will begin a trial in March of closing at 1:30PM on Fridays to manage operations with reduced staff while making the position more attractive for future candidates.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 PM - Board Vote: 7-0-0, Motion

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Council on Aging Board will take place in person on Tuesday, February 24, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. in the COA’s computer room. (This is the fourth Tuesday, not the second Tuesday.), and approved unanimously (7-0-0) at approximately 12:00 p.m.

### **Inter-Departmental Collaboration and Updates**

The COA is partnering with the Disability Commission to host a presentation from the MBTA Ride in March, which will be recorded by Bedford TV. This marks a positive first step in collaboration between the two groups.

### **Documents Used:**

Agenda

January Minutes

Financials

December Department Report