

Notes of April 19, 2021 Brookline Community Aging Network (BCAN) Membership Committee Meeting via Zoom.

Members: Ellen Bick, Carol Caro, Susan Cohen, Ruthann Dobek (ex officio), Marsha Frankel, Janet Gelbart, Judith Kidd (co-chair), Melissa Trevvett (co-chair)

Jude and Melissa welcomed new members and members introduced themselves. Jude reviewed the agenda and the documents accompanying it. Some members mentioned that they would like to see a physical expansion of the senior center on Newbury College grounds.

Background on BrooklineCAN

For the members new to the Committee, Ruthann, who is Director, Council on Aging and the Senior Center, as well as Co-Chair of BrooklineCAN since its 2010/2011 founding, provided background information on BCAN and clarified its relationship to the Senior Center. Brookline CAN was founded as an all – volunteer arm of the Senior Center where active members of the community can come together and engage around Town issues. The focus depends on the needs identified by the members. BCAN is an arm of the non-profit that is part of the Senior Center: Brookline Multi-Service Senior Center Corp.; therefore contributions to BCAN are tax deductible.

Ruthann discussed categories of BCAN expenses (approximately \$12,000 per year), explaining that a budget is proposed to the Steering Committee each year. The main annual expense most years is the annual meeting (~\$4000), a catered event, to build community and membership. The second largest expense is the membership assistant (approx. 5 hr. per week). The administrative costs primarily represent mailing and printing of monthly newsletter and brochures. There is a budget line for the fiscal management, which the Senior Center handles for BCAN. BCAN pays 5% of its income and expenses for this service. There are reserves of around \$23,000. In response to a question about the number of members, Ruthann noted that peak membership (around 2018) was nearly 450, although it is important to keep in mind that 60-70 of the memberships were sponsored by the JFCS for low income seniors. Current membership (March 2021) is 257. It was pointed out that a person is categorized as a former member if they do not renew by their renewal date. Often renewals come in long after the renewal date.

Attracting New Members

This topic was the primary focus of discussion because it appeared to be of most concern to the Steering Committee. A larger number of members makes our advocacy more effective.

Because the pandemic interrupted several BrooklineCAN initiatives that were about to begin, Ruthann described what was in the works and the programming done during the pandemic, as well as activities and programming that seemed most effective in attracting members.

Identifying potential members

- Planning had been completed to target several larger apartment buildings along Beacon, perhaps including Brook House, where significant numbers of seniors live and to send them a brochure and letter
- Another idea which has been tried: Reaching out to realtors to identify newcomers to Brookline
- Using voting data or census data to identify people who are seniors or seniors new to Brookline

Education events featuring authors of books about aging.

- It has worked well to offer free books from the current or previous author talks to the first three attendees who join Brookline CAN as new members at the event.
- Author talks almost always draw a good audience.

Staffing information tables at regular Community events

- Tabling prior to Town Meeting at Town Hall
- Tabling at the Farmers' Market (However, people coming seemed more focused on purchasing than talking about membership)

Advocating on behalf of seniors and ensure seniors stay mobile:

- Locations of publicly available bathrooms in the Coolidge Corner area
- Apartment Buildings with elevators and concierge services
- First Town to receive the Age Friendly designation in New England
- Addressing lighting issues and sidewalk problems that impact seniors' mobility
- Installation of benches along Beacon Street,

Communication with members and other interested people

The Committee discussed the need to highlight BrooklineCAN's sponsorship of the Election Forum and agreed on the need to publicize it in neighborhood lists and ensure that there is introductory information mentioning BrooklineCAN's role in sponsoring the Forum.

The Committee agreed that it is important to contact members as the Community emerges from the pandemic and decided on sending a letter to everyone on the mailing list. The letter should remind members of what BrooklineCAN has accomplished in the past and what the organization offered

during the pandemic. We want them to know that we are still here, are planning some interesting and valuable programs and we hope that they'll continue to be involved.

Committee members recalled programs that had been very successful in the past and suggested some of these could usefully be repeated: Downsizing (7-8 years ago), how to set up your home so that you can age-in-place. (Although not a program, the vetted list of service and repair providers was also mentioned as useful.) Ask members what kinds of programs they would like. One idea for starting a discussion that could bring up possible programs is to ask people what they like or do not like about living in Brookline.

There was agreement that the discussion of whether to retain a specific requested contribution amount or to change to depending on contributions without specifying an amount was a larger discussion than we had time to complete prior to sending out upcoming communications. A key point brought up was that an important focus of Brookline CAN has always been to involve lower income seniors, particularly those in public housing, in doing advocacy work, and BCAN has always offered lower or free membership option. There was agreement in the Committee that if members pay to join it indicates the value they place on the organization and its activities; at the same time there must always be an option for seniors with low income to become members.

1. We agreed that in order to interest potential new members and retain current members we want to focus immediately on communication; therefore we decided it is best for the present to stay with the current membership price structure. The renewal letter should reflect this and also say that membership dues and contributions are tax deductible. (Jude and Ruthann)
 2. We will send a "here's what we've been doing and thinking about during COVID 19" to the entire newsletter list. (Jude and Ruthann will work with Janet on content and approach.)
 3. Email precinct groups/neighborhood associations a note alerting them to the candidate forum on April 27. (Carol)
 4. Determine the membership amounts and how many at each price and/or sponsorships paid in the last fiscal year (Melissa)
 5. Write and distribute notes of meeting (Melissa and Jude)
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