

Brookline Community Aging Network

Livable Community Advocacy Committee

Notes

October 29, 2015

Attending: Jane Gould, Joan McCabe, Susan Granoff, Elaine Mountleigh, Ann Stitt, Ellen Weiss, Matt Weiss, Ruthann Snyder, Carol Schraft, Roberta Winitzer, and Frank Caro. Guests: Cheryl Snyder and Jennifer Johnson (an emergency preparedness intern)

1. Cheryl Snyder led a discussion of emergency protection for vulnerable seniors who live independently. Cheryl is the Emergency Preparedness Coordinator for the Town. The Health Department offers the Emergency Preparedness Buddies Program. The program matches Brookline Medical Reserve Corps volunteers and Community Emergency Response Team volunteers with vulnerable seniors and other adults with disabilities. The volunteers serve as coaches for their buddies to assist them in preparing for a wide range of potential emergencies. Coaches help their buddies organize a life file and encourage buddies to attach their files to their refrigerator. Buddies are also encouraged to have a “go” bag in place so that they have essential items available in their homes in case they need to leave quickly. Program participants are called when advance information is available about weather emergencies. The program has been in operation for a little more than a year. As far as Cheryl knows, the program is a Brookline original. The program has 35 coaches of whom 18 are active and 14 are assigned. The main current challenge is recruitment of more vulnerable residents to use the service.

The RUOK (Are You OK) program is another resource for vulnerable people who live independently. RUOK is a telephone reassurance service that begins with automated calls. If participants do not respond appropriately, a human caller gets involved. The RUOK program is administered by the Norfolk County Sheriff’s Office. The total number of program participants is modest. We raised questions about the reasons for modest participation. We wonder about the extent to which Brookline residents are aware of the program.

Cheryl reported that the Emergency Preparedness staff members in the Health Department work closely with the Police Department and the professional staff of the Council on Aging. The Health Department does not have a close tie to the Brookline Fire Department. We wonder about the strength of Brookline connections with the Norfolk County Sheriff’s office.

Cheryl is emphasizing large buildings such as the BHA senior developments and Center communities where there is a possibility of greater efficiency in administering the buddies program.

We agreed that there is a major challenge in persuading vulnerable seniors to accept emergency preparedness services. We discussed various educational strategies such as the BrooklineCAN newsletter, the Senior Center newsletter, and the BrooklineCAN website. Roberta and Matt announced that this topic will be featured on their next age-friendly show on BIG.

2. We voted unanimously to recommend favorable action on Warrant Article 4 to increase compensation for participants in the Property Tax Work Off program. Frank will inform Ruthann Dobek so that she can announce our support when presenting the proposal to Town Meeting.
3. Frank and Susan reported on our project to monitor adequacy of street lighting for pedestrians. A very small team of volunteers observed North Brookline streets after dark in early October. Observations were made in an area as far north as Commonwealth Ave, South to Brookline high school, East to Powell and Kent Streets, and west to Park and Winchester Streets. The volunteers documented over 50 cases of street lighting problems for pedestrians. Many cases involve tree foliage that blocks street lights. The volunteers have held a street meeting with Town Engineer Peter Ditto and Town Arborist Tom Brady. Some of the problems will be challenging to resolve quickly because they involve difficult decisions about mature trees, the potential need to add new utility poles, and potential complaints from residents who do not want more street lighting “invading” their homes. More monitoring is expected next year.
4. Joan and Susan described the follow-up work they are doing on BHA pedestrian safety project. Joan and Susan have organized resident walks to replicate the data collection done in June. They have determined the extent to which the problems have been resolved. DPW has addressed some of the problems. Cross walks have been repainted. Auburn Street has been resurfaced. Most problems associated with tree wells have not been addressed. A follow up meeting with DPW staff has been scheduled for Nov. 2 at Town Hall at 3:00 PM.

We discussed the advisability of seniors carrying flash lights when they go out at night. Jane demonstrated a very slender flash light that she carries with her.

5. Frank appealed for a few additional volunteers for the Winter Sidewalk Monitoring team.

Susan endorsed the use of “Yaktrax” to help seniors enjoy good traction on ice. Yaktrax are attached to foot gear. Susan is interested in making arrangements for seniors to purchase Yaktrax at the Senior Center. Susan will follow up with Ruthann Dobek.

6. Next meeting: Monday, November 30 at 3 PM at a location to be determined.