

Aid to the Elderly Committee Meeting
March 31, 2017
8:00am

Attending:	
Lina Arena-DeRosa	Jim Gavin
Pat Ahearn	Josepha Jowdy
Pat Conley	Sharon Pappetti
Leo Crowe	Janice Polin
Pam Dukeman	Mike Walsh

After introductions, Pam reviewed the charge the Board of Selectmen recently gave the Aid to the Elderly and Disabled Committee, that they would like the Committee to make recommendations regarding the amount to ask Town Meeting to appropriate toward the Aid to the Elderly and Disabled fund at the Fall 2017 Town Meeting.

Pam then reviewed the current structure of the program, and discussed the changes with the new Home Rule petition which was passed by Town Meeting in May of 2016 and adopted by the State in early 2017. This new rule allows the town to appropriate town money to the fund for the first time, rather than only relying on donations.

Currently, the fund receives money by soliciting donations from three main sources:

- Quarterly insert in tax bills (\$12K annually)
- Annual appeal letter to all residents each September (\$26K annually)
- Sporadic donations
 - Charity fund (Church)
 - Town Clerk notary fees
 - Corporate donations, these have been difficult to get reliably. One reason is that the fund is not a 501(c)3, and cannot be made into one.
- The total of these sources typically amounts to approximately \$45,000 per year in donations.

The committee identifies appropriate recipients through two main methods, referrals (from the Council on Aging, Veteran's Affairs, the Assessor's office and the Collector's office) as well as applications directly from potential recipients which are available at Town Hall, the Senior Center and the Library. The typical recipient is approximately 88 years old and has lived in town for 50-60 years. Each year, the fund is able to help an average of 39 residents with gifts that range from \$800-\$1,500, depending on the assessed value of their homes. Residents with higher home value receive smaller gifts. Each applicant's federal tax form is reviewed to determine their adjusted gross income, which is used as the qualifying metric. These distributions from the fund are processed as credits against the resident's tax bill.

With the adoption of Home Rule, this committee now needs to determine if the process of identifying recipients needs to be revised, and how much to ask the town to contribute at Town Meeting. Also, is there an opportunity or need to expand the number of recipients being helped. The group asked for more data regarding the population in town, how many residents fall into the age group that this program is appropriate for and how many have homes that fall into the range of values typically helped.

One idea is to make the town contribution a dollar for dollar match up to a stated limit to donated funds. This provides an incentive for individual donors to continue to give. A funding source that may be available is the recently adopted meals tax, which has been accumulating, but not yet used. This might lessen the feeling that tax payers are being burdened.

The group agreed that more information is needed to make these decisions. Some key data items that will be collected include:

- Number of residents age 65+
- Number of food pantry patrons
- Number of residents with home values under a Westwood's median

Once this data is collected, the group can work to determine how to help the population most effectively. Ideas were also discussed for using the data to highlight the fund to this population, including mailing a summary of the program and application to everyone who is potentially eligible. This would also include determining how much of each bill to pay, how many people should be helped, and what metrics should be used to determine who to help and at what level.

The group plans to meet again in May of this year, in order to be prepared in advance of Fall Town Meeting.