

Tompkins County Office for the Aging

Advisory Committee Meeting

April 22, 2024

Hybrid

9:30am

Members present: Hultberg, Hart, Stamm, Dean, Lesser, Shearer, Izbicki, Mallison, Roe, Hatch

Liaisons: Hillson, Champion, Burger, Lindhorst, Askew, Evans

Staff: Bullis, Monroe, Lyon

Public: Nick Helmholdt, Presenter

1. Hart called the meeting to order at 9:30am.
2. Liaison Reports:
 - a. Hillson: TCWH-
 - Coming to an end of the Covid test kit distribution
 - Covid dashboard is shifting back to more of a graph of weekly cases; things are changing in the way data is being reported at State and Federal levels; Covid has become grouped more with other similar respiratory illnesses-come Fall with flu season you'll see more complete data around flu, Covid and RSV
 - Starting to gear up with the community health assessment process; big focus is to increase community awareness and have created some community visioning activities; posters that will ask community members 2 questions and are hoping to put around in different locations in the county

Roe asked if Hillson could tell the group how the new EMS out in the rural areas is going? Hillson does not report on that. Champion reported that it is underway (the Rapid Medical Response); on first day it was operational they got a call and arrived 15 minutes before an ambulance arrived, so they were able to help that person until the ambulance got there. Champion reported that the county is still talking with municipalities to see if they want to or are able to share in the cost.

3. March minutes approved.
4. Liaison Reports:
 - a. Lindhorst: Love Living at Home-
 - Currently putting together a Tompkins County Senior Discount Directory. It will be a virtual resource available for free to anyone; if you know of any senior discount offerings from Tompkins County businesses please share them with Lindhorst; plan is to put the directory out in May

- b. Evans: Foodnet-
 - Mac n Cheese Bowl is May 1st at the Ithaca Farmer's Market from 4:30-7pm; tickets are still available; Gadabout and Longview are providing shuttles from DMV lot to Farmer's Market; 21 competitors
 - Working hard to reach more people especially through Congregate; looking forward to some new things coming in the future

5. COFA Update:

- May is Older American's Month; always great events that month; theme is "Powered by Connection"
- COFA annual luncheon is May 3rd; Dr. Mildred Warner who has worked with us on our Age Friendly work will be the keynote speaker
- We've had some staffing changes- our P/T Account Clerk Typist and our Long Term Care Ombudsman Coordinator are both leaving; Kate Lyon will be covering as the LTC Ombudsman Coordinator; still have vacancy as Outreach Worker hope to have it filled soon; P/T Dietitian vacancy for our work with Foodnet
- COFA's four-year plan due this year; just getting information now and we are hoping to begin entering our information into the platform in May; will review with Advisory Committee prior to submission for approval

Lesser asked Monroe to say more about the future of the current staffing issues we are facing. Monroe stated that the situation with our Outreach Worker vacancy is unusual. This time around we have several applicants, however due to a variety of reasons when we made offers they were rejected; perhaps there are more opportunities at this time so people are more particular? Our dietitian position is very underpaid; part of counties compensation study and has been increased but is still low; looking to switch gears with that position and see if it makes more sense to contract with a dietitian rather than hiring one as some other AAA's do.

- A lot of advocacy done regarding the State budget and the potential for cuts; State association informed the network that the Assembly has said that the budget would only include a restoration from last year with an additional \$700,000 of new funding across the state. It's a little disappointing but as least we are restored and can move forward with that
- State is moving towards one Fiscal Intermediary for the entire State for the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program (CDPAP). Jan Lynch from FLIC informed Monroe the FLIC should be exempt from that as they were an FI prior to 1999

6. Liaison Reports:

a. Burger: Lifelong-

- Karen Koyanogi has left Lifelong; will continue on a contractual basis leading fitness classes in Brooktondale; Kate Collins has joined Lifelong as a P/T Communications Manager
- Tax season is done; 30 volunteers, completed 953 returns in an 11-week period
- Volunteer Fair 4/24 from 2-4pm
- Spring Fling May 3rd at the Library Place community room
- Annual Luncheon May 30th at Library Place
- Summer Catalog is coming out- covers June, July, and August

- b. Evans: Foodnet-
 - They are putting an entryway on their building updating their front façade; lots of construction going on
- c. Champion: TC Legislature-
 - Shared link to video that County Administration and Assessment Department that explains the assessment process; would like to remind people that a large part of the taxes comes from school tax, which is often a bigger, more challenging thing; ICSD school budget vote coming up next month
 - The county and the city continue to work to address the rising homeless population challenges; Code Blue regulation, which states that through April 1st we have to provide shelter overnight when the temperature gets below 32 degrees, has ended however people still need shelter; hard to find solutions

Monroe asked about the city having been fined. Champion explained that there wasn't a fine, but a notice of violation was given to the city and the railroad company because part of the encampment area is on railroad property. The idea is that hopefully we can work together to get that cleaned up before they need to present a fine.

Hart mentioned a city in Oregon who has a suit against them that the Supreme Court is going to start hearing. Sounds like there could be some big ramifications as a result. Champion mentioned that she believes it is related to the question of can you arrest or give people a ticket for camping on city property if there is no shelter?

Dean asked if we knew how many homeless folks are senior citizens? Monroe stated she will look into that.

Izbicki mentioned that she learned the real estate industry, at least on a national level is the largest lobbying group, bigger than fossil fuel. Asked if there has been any discussion at the county or state level about their influence. Champion explained that the Ithaca Board of Realtors has a luncheon every year for elected officials to run down the state of the market. Knows they lobby hard in Albany and at the luncheon they mentioned some things that they weren't having luck with. The real estate market is really what's controlling what's going on.

- d. Askew: StateWide-
 - New counselor in the Syracuse area.
 - May 9th Open House at new office in Syracuse
 - Teach in April 23rd 10am "How to Appeal a Hospital Discharge or Complaint about Quality Care" (zoom or call in)
 - StateWide can help with patient rights issues; also handle Medicare Fraud for NYS; Medicare fraud scams are still very popular
 - Will be tabling at the Mac n Cheese Bowl
- e. Lindhorst: Love Living at Home-
 - LLH volunteers won the James J. Burns award for excellence from the Tompkins Trust Company for the work they've done in the community
 - Will be at Lifelong Volunteer Fair and Mac n Cheese Bowl; will be in the Ithaca Festival Parade on May 30th

- May 23rd hosting a zoom presentation with FLIC, “Resources and Advocacy”
 - May 28th ribbon cutting at new office space on Hanshaw Rd.; start of silent art auction which will end with their community celebration on June 7th from 4:30-6:30pm
7. Discussion: Nick Helmholdt, Principal Planner/Tourism Program Director at the Tompkins County Planning and Sustainability Department “County Broadband information and updates”
- Covid pandemic really highlighted locally the importance of broadband internet; really made clear that those who didn’t have reliable internet access were at a substantial disadvantage.
 - Effort at the Legislative level to look at what some of our neighbors were doing in neighboring counties
 - Organization called Southern Tier Network based out of the Corning area and have been working a bit to the east mostly in developing a network in that area that was aimed at expanding broadband access; initial attempt at working with this was related to the work that Southern Tier Network was doing
 - We were hearing stories through the Legislature and other folks about people who just couldn’t log in. Spectrum wasn’t there and there were no other carriers. They were frustrated with the options and a lack of options.
 - Decided we needed to figure out where folks were that didn’t have any broadband access; NYS was doing the same effort through the Public Service Commission; discovered there were about 1,200 addresses spread throughout the county that did not have access to broadband internet; slightly more concentrated in the southern and eastern portions of the county
 - Ended up working with ECC Technologies; survey put out in late 2022 to gather more information on people experiences were having with broadband and received 1,000 responses; developed a plan end of August 2023
 - Issued request for proposals to internet service providers to figure out who could really build out their infrastructure to get to those remaining 1,200 locations throughout the county; ECC estimated it would require 120 miles of cable to get to those locations and total costs would come in at about 7 million dollars
 - Federal Government has also been slowly deploying funds for this effort through a program call BEAD (Broadband Equity Access and Deployment program)
 - 7 internet providers responded to the request for proposal including the town of Dryden who for the last 5 years have been working to establish their own municipal broadband network
 - In March 2024 they identified a solution to form a partnership with a firm called Point Broadband. Just the beginning of this partnership as this was all just voted on last Tuesday
 - Hoping to soon be in the position where everyone in the county, regardless of where you live, will have the ability to access high speed internet

Hart asked once this starts, how long it may take. Helmholdt stated that he’d have to look specifically but it was in the span of 3 to 6 months

Dean stated that this will provide the possibility to access the internet but that people will still need to pay for these services. Helmholdt agreed and explained that there is a program called

the Affordable Connectivity Program that unfortunately the funding for is a hot issue right now in Congress, but if funded this program assists with costs.

Monroe mentioned that Caroline is also working on doing their own thing so what is the county's role in those areas? Helmholdt explained that if Dryden and Caroline have a clear path toward getting everything budgeted and built out and they can determine that before the county's grant application deadline then they will basically say in the application that Dryden and Caroline have their own plan in motion for their locations so the county would be looking at the remainder of the county. Will be coordinating closely with the leadership in Dryden and Caroline.

Izbicki asked if this will make it possible that even Ithaca might get a competitor for Spectrum? Helmholdt stated that it is possible. Through the survey results they've heard a lot from people who are expressing frustration with the fact that there is no competition.

Lesser asked about ownership of the fiber optic distribution line and whether ownership was being considered with the view of looking at the possibility of future entry. Helmholdt responded that the conclusion they came to is that while there is a strong county interest in expanding access to those locations that don't have it, there was not a strong interest in owning, or continuing the long term steward of that infrastructure.

Lesser brought up the need for assisting people with using the internet. Helmholdt will send Monroe the States Digital Equity plan which includes information on training and digital literacy and fraud prevention.

8. No new business

Next meeting will be the Annual Luncheon on May 3, 2024

Meeting adjourned 11:02 am