

**AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES  
SPECIAL MEETING**

Friday, October 18, 2013, 10-11 AM  
Glass Room, Bangs Community Center

**Members Present:** Dan Clapp, Sue Dierks, Joel Gordon, John Magarian, Barbara Sutherland, Jack Wollensak

**Town Manager:** John Musante

**Select Board Liason:** Stephanie O'Keefe

**Staff Present:** Nancy Pagano (Director/Program director), Maura Plante (Assistant Director/Services), Karen Erman (Administrative Assistant), Helen MacMellon (Social Worker)

**Absent:** Joan Golowich, Mary Jane Laus, Juana Truillo

**Guests:** Representative Ellen Storey, Jan Klausnder-Wise (Rep. Storey's Office), Edward J. Sayer (Executive Director, Hilltown Community Health Center), Jeff Harness (Cooley Dickinson Hospital), Diana Stein (Select Board), Shirley Packard (Senior Health Advisory Group), Ann Grose (Senior Health Advisory Group), Janet Bunce (Senior Health Advisory Group), Julie Federman (Amherst Dept. of Health), Doris Holden (Friends of the ASC), Rosemary Kofler (Friends of the ASC), Richard Kofler (Friends of the ASC), Cheryl Zoll (Amherst Survival Center), Anne Burton & Diana Day (resident of Amherst), Scott Merzbach (Reporter, Gazette)

**WELCOME:** Dan Clapp, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. and gave a warm welcome to all attending this special meeting.

**DISCUSSION OF HILLTOWN COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER SATELLITE:**

**John Musante**, Amherst Town Manager, began the open discussion by explaining that the Town of Amherst was exploring the concept of having a community health center located in Amherst and that one possible location would be in the Bangs Community Center. This location provides great potential to meet the needs of the community. In previous discussions with Nancy Pagano and Dan Clapp, there were a number of questions; therefore, he thought it would be most helpful to have a team working on this, to come together. He has not made any decision yet.

**Ed Sayer**, Executive Director of the Hilltown Community Health Center, said that the Hilltown Health Center has not made a decision. They are a federally qualified health center to do primary care, dental and behavioral health. They get people signed up for food stamps. The basic population served does not have access to basic health. They started 60 years ago. They were started by an R.N. to develop a health access place for people not able to travel from the hill towns easily into Northampton. They serve a diversity of people: the rural poor and trades people. They are able to do that through the Federal subsidy. They have a patient centered style. Amherst could never have a community health center but they could have access through a satellite center. The population in the hill towns of Worthington and Huntington is declining and aging, so they would like to grow. They looked at Northampton but found there was a tremendous support for bringing it to Amherst. A prime location seems to be the Bangs Center as it is centrally located and near senior housing. Research shows that 8500 people in Amherst are in the poverty level. It is their goal to offer top quality health care in one place and then work with existing agencies to better the health care. They did a business plan and hope to now attract patients if underinsured. It is a long wait to get primary care service. They welcome anyone to come to the health center.

**Jeff Harness**, Director of integrated care and population health at Cooley Dickinson Hospital, said that in the early 90's a group got together to improve community health. They decided on the Hampshire Health Connect for people who don't have health insurance. It was successful but they felt they really were not touching everyone. Insurance doesn't guarantee access. There are some situations such as cultural, transportation, homeless. Therefore we need to offer more. We still have access issues. In 2010 a small group met to look at this and made six recommendations. One of these was to expand the Hilltown Satellite services and to use nurse practitioners more. A case in point is Casa Latina. Latinos were going to Holyoke. Recently they had focus groups to have people tell about their health care experiences. There is one report on mental health and the Amherst Survival Center. We can have copies of the report. One example was of a woman in Sunderland whose son is in a wheelchair and how she was trying to get services. We feel we can do better. Our role is to advocate for better health service.

**Julie Federman**, Amherst Health Department, spoke about the beginnings of the health department's immunization clinics in 1997 at the Bangs Center. When they began 18 years ago a lot of services were not being met. One example is immunizations for the poor.

So many could not afford to have immunizations, so they started that program. They wonder if there is someplace where routine health care can be offered including immunizations. Having the Clinic here would help. In Amherst there are many where Spanish is their first language so now once a week, they have Spanish help. This year they served 189 Spanish-speaking people. The number is going to be up this next year. Elders come to them needing dental and mental health care and they need a car to go to Orange or Holyoke etc. where such care is offered.

**Dan Clapp** asked what is the current need here? At the Survival Center he sometimes sees 6 to 8 a day.

Immunizations are done here at the Health Department. He could understand the need for mental and dental care but the need for regular medical care is not clear.

**Jeff Harness**, Director of Integrated Care and Population Health at Cooley Dickinson Hospital, responded that a small group was convened to find out if there is a need and it was determined that no question, there is a need. There were 30 some at the meeting representing agencies with patients for us. The Federal Bank would like to sign up Food Stamps for undocumented people. We want to reach seasonal workers, homeless and vets. Our goal is long-term.

In doctor offices people come with families and translators but it is not patient friendly.

**Ed Sayer**, Executive Director of the Hilltown Board of Directors, added that there are complex social needs and many need referrals that take time to obtain the information. A regular Doctor's office is not equipped to do this. The reimbursement for the Doctor is in 15-minute increments. The billing drives their time. We are able to do things in a different way.

**Dan Clapp** suggested we consider the suitability of the Bangs Center. One concern is about contagion. The senior center clients are more susceptible to contagion and that is a concern. Another concern is the people who might be coming. Some are difficult to control and we look at the compatibility of those coming to the Senior Center.

**Rosemary Kofler**, President of the Friends of the ASC, expressed that her concern mirrored Dan's. We see many frail and vulnerable seniors. 17 % have disabilities. Many use the downstairs rooms for fitness. She questioned the wisdom in sharing the same space with people with communicable diseases. It would be intimidating to elders and risky for their health. However, she also sees a great need for a health center for health care for all.

**Dan Clapp** mentioned another difficulty is with the use of the restrooms, given past experiences Bangs users have had when people with physical and mental health problems have created unhealthy messes in the restrooms.

**Diana Day**, visitor, said she was a regular nurse and that the fears of elders might keep them from coming to use the Senior Center, especially in using the staircases where they might meet those with mental health issues.

**Cheryl Zoll**, Amherst Survival Center, said that there is an aspect of people hanging around that does happen but these people would be coming to have appointments. We need to balance the needs. She advocated caution regarding elevating this fear.

**Ed Sayer**, asked if seniors would use the health center? We do have a nurse. Some might use it. He asked if there was some way to make this move more attractive for seniors? He would be interested in hearing what services would be attractive to seniors.

**Dan Clapp** responded that there would be interest in dental care and vision and hearing needs.

**Ann Grose**, Senior Health Advisory Group, stated that she was on the original committee to decide what to do with this building, the Bangs Center. She asked why we would want to have a health center here? We already have a free nurse for seniors here. She suggested that we focus on helping the clinics we already have. We want to use the building as a Community Center for all ages, not as a Health Center.

**John Musante**, Town Manager, asked what is the vision for the Bangs Center? My grounding is that seniors are one component, as well as others. We want to be welcoming to all ages. It's intriguing to me the notion of a small health service here, one with a proven track record and a collaborative approach. We want to make services available to all ages.

**Anne Burton**, resident of Amherst, stated that it took 20 years to establish the A. Ashe Urban Center and they have experience and we know there is a need for services. I don't question the need. No one building could be one thing for all people. Do we need health care--yes. Do we need it in this building? I cannot picture a health center that doesn't need more than one floor of this building. How much square footage would be needed for this satellite health center and how much staffing?

**Ed Sayer**, Hilltown Health Center, responded that we have a three-year model to get started. We would need 100 square feet. The dental care would need another 800 square feet. We could get started with part of the LSSE space, based on the expected 700 patients per year. If we had 1000 patients we would have one full time Primary Care Physician. Our current plan is to have 1 PCP and one Nurse Practitioner and a Medical Assistant. We are not sure about a Social Worker. We want to partner with the resources in the Valley. We have a logistics sub-committee.

We want to make the space user-friendly and connect with other providers. Be an information center. Our vision is a collaborative model. We also have access to low cost pharmacy; i.e. Walgreens. We could set up with a pharmacy in Amherst.

**Dan Clapp** wondered if you would need extra space for the dental care? He also wondered about the use of Kate Atkins empty office if it was available. He was told it was not available.

**Ed Sayer** replied that regarding the need for space for the dental care, all the LSSE space is too much. If we add dental care in the following year we might need more. We don't have the money to have it in the first year.

**John Musante** added that they are exploring the expense of moving LSSE to the East Street School. We need to identify the money needed.

**Julie Federman**, Director of the Health Department said regarding the dental care that it is a key part of a Health Center, but to fund raise for it there needs to be an established health center to do this kind of fundraising.

A visitor asked why not use the East Street School for the health center?

**John Musante** replied that the space requirements for a health center are less than the East Street School. Transportation is also an issue. This space in the Bangs Center already has potential patients in the building.

**Nancy Pagano** stated that the 60+ population in Amherst grew 34.8% between 2000 and 2010, according to the Federal Census. The senior center sees about 5000 people currently--20% are over the age of 70 and about 200 are 90+. There is already a strain on the senior center handling people of all ages with behavior problems. We have issues handling the numbers of people with mental and physical health problems. The doors to the bathrooms have had to be locked on occasion because of misuse. The homeless shelter closing in the daytime has also had an impact on the Bangs. Nancy is concerned that the senior center would be less of a safe, welcoming space for seniors to congregate if the numbers of people with these issues grows substantially.

**Dan Clapp** asked if the Hilltown group had considered the Survival Center as a possible site?

**Nancy Pagano** added her concern about the impact on the Senior Center's 1.5 social workers who are overwhelmed already with **elderly cases**. **If the Satellite Center does not plan to have a social worker as part of their staffing**, an influx of new cases could be a problem. Except for social workers in the schools, the Town has no other social workers except those in the Senior Center. They can't handle the increased social work demands of people of all ages from around the Pioneer Valley.

**Rosemary Kofler** said that another problem is that when there is a heavy rain, the offices on the bottom floor flood and the ramp is unusable.

**Jeff Harness** said that they would like the Senior Center to be part of the planning and their concerns to be heard.

This is a great first step. **The next planning meeting is open and it is at 8:30 AM at the Town Hall on November 13th.**

**John Musante** echoed the invitation to having this be a dialogue. Solutions are not going to be achieved unless it's people working together. He welcomes more senior discussion.

**Dan Clapp** thanked everyone for coming.

The meeting closed at 11:10 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Dierks  
Secretary ACOA