

YOUTH COMMISSION MINUTES**FEBUARY 8, 2022****Attendance:**

Board Members: Joan Clementi, Jennifer Lipton-O'Connor, Casey Rickli, Sandy Scott, and Sherry Clark

Staff Members: June David-Fors, Director and Doreen Genna, Office Assistant

Guests: John Coderre, Town Administrator and Karen Wixted, Select Board

1. **Call Meeting to Order:** Motion made by Joan Clementi, seconded by Casey Rickli
2. **Date of Next Meeting:** March 17, 2022, at 7:00 pm
3. **Review of Minutes:** The minutes for the June 17, 2021 and October 21, 2021 will be reviewed at the next Youth Commission Meeting.
4. **John Coderre, Town Administrator**
5. **Director's Report:** June David-Fors, Director

Since 2012, the Department has been committed to preventing and reducing underage substance use through local and regional coalitions. Current initiatives include:

Northborough and Southborough formed a collaboration aimed at addressing youth substance abuse and prevention. Currently, the group is contracting with a consultant to develop a strategic plan and learn of funding sources to support the coalition. Each Town will contribute \$7,000 toward this initiative.

MassCALL3 is a state-wide initiative created to address youth substance abuse. With Hudson as the lead agency, other communities include Ashland, Marlborough, Natick, Northborough, Southborough and Westborough. This grant award is \$125,000 per year over the next 8 years.

Since July of 2020 – May 31, 2021, our contract with INTERFACE Referral Service has provided 47 residents with referrals to outpatient therapists.

The remainder of the Director's report will be discussed at the next meeting.

6. **Introduction of Guest:** June introduced John Coderre, the Town Administrator.

This purpose of this meeting was to give Board Members the opportunity to meet with John to follow up with questions, requested information and concerns they discussed at the Youth Commission Meeting on October 21, 2021. More specifically, this included the Department's staffing levels and use of available money from the CARES Act and ARPA Funds.

Sandy Scott, Chair began the meeting stating that each year June has provided information about the increased numbers of residents utilizing FYS services. Board members expressed concern about the current staffing level not being able to meet these increased needs of residents.

Joan Clementi agreed and presented the specific concerns of the Commission, namely could the part-time

requisition become a full-time one (compared to other towns this would be beneficial). She asked if the Town received COVID funding from the Government and if so, how much and what amount was available to health services and Family & Youth Services? Did the Town use all of these funds, and lastly, if they have questions for John, how does the Youth Commission get the questions to him.

John thanked the Committee for having him at the meeting – and stated he has a standing policy that he is available at any time to answer questions and he will always meet with anyone who requests it.

John explained that the CARES Act (1.3 million dollars) had to be used in direct response to COVID, making it very frustrating. There was limited capacity, and it was challenging to get a direct response. He did request to utilize these funds to support the INTERFACE Referral Service; however, A&F did not approve it. The Benevolent Fund paid the fee. He stated that the Town used most of the funds, but most towns could not spend it all. This fund also expired 6 months earlier than expected, not in December of 2021 as originally planned.

Joan asked if any of this money could have been used to help the homeless. John replied that they saw no spike in homelessness during COVID, that the state had instituted a moratorium on evictions, and had also targeted money to state programs for the prevention of homelessness.

In regard to housing insecurity John said there are only 8 families at-risk of homelessness and the Department is working with them. Joan stated that having one family at-risk of homelessness is too much.

John felt that the Town would be best served by referring people in need of housing to these state programs. He said that the Town would have had to create a program and that would not be cost effective.

He explained that he is looking at service delivery models versus a town new hire that is more costly. He stated that counseling was not the original intent of the Department. He previously told June the Department should not be in the counseling business, that June can deal with the occasional direct counseling cases until the client is stabilized and referred out. Joan stated the Department has always provided counseling since its inception.

John wanted board members to know that he has been trying to fill the vacant part-time counselor position – the town is not holding back on hiring this position. It has been difficult as counselors are in high demand and are difficult to recruit right now. Other towns are having recruitment issues as well, so many of the jobs are regionalized.

Sandy Scott asked if it is because of the lack of benefits and that it is not a full-time position. Are we limiting ourselves by the part-time position (19 hours versus 40 hours), and is it difficult to hire due to the lack of benefits and that it is not a full-time position? John explained that the Town and Schools agreed to hire either a 19 hour part-time position or a 40 hour full-time position. Jennifer Lipton asked if the salary is a problem and is there a creative way to combine positions? John replied that many towns have created regionalized positions.

John feels that service delivery models versus a town new hire is more cost effective. For example, our contract with INTERFACE Referral Service is a very good solution for providing referrals for therapy.

FYS needs to leverage staff, focusing on acting as a liaison, doing grant writing and phasing out counseling. So, a service delivery model that makes the most impact with the resources we have.

At this time, John said he is not convinced that a full-time position is the solution.

The Board Members stated that they have a different perspective about the needs in Town. They also hear from many residents who view the needs in town as very significant.

Sherry Clark asked if there had been any studies done to determine if there is an added benefit to having a full time position to help June with grant-writing, recruiting and mentoring interns, etc. She sees an extra person freeing up June's time and also having interns as being extra hands that the Department could use. She feels

that we need to get ahead of the game in servicing the Town's teens as it would be a benefit to the whole community.

John agreed that interns would be great, but that they require a lot of supervision. He prefers the model of outsourcing to the extent that Shrewsbury has done.

Kristen Wixted said that it appears that adding staff is difficult and that John does not appear to be inclined to add a full-time position. Would it be possible to collaborate with another community and create a full-time position out of two part-time positions?

John said that he wants to listen and explain his thought process; he is not saying "no" to a full-time position. This has been an on-going discussion with June for quite some time.

John reviewed some of the actions the Town took during COVID. He stated the Town created a COVID Task Force, of which June was a member, to ensure community needs were being met such as housing and food security issues. This includes the Northborough Food Pantry and Community Meals. Maintaining contact within the community was done on a weekly basis. This is very important to him.

He spoke about the Senior Center who called every senior 3 times to check on them; in the initial round of calls, all seniors were called; by the last round of calls, only the eldest of the seniors were called. Out of roughly 3,500 seniors, only a couple needed assistance.

John consistently asks the staff about the needs in Town during the COVID Task Force Meetings and "Be Well Northborough." This has been a priority for him.

John explained the "Be Well Northborough" initiative. This was established to address needs that might not be being met (loneliness, isolation, anxiety and depression); to rebuild the sense of community, and the committee will work to find out what the people want and there will be direct outreach for input.

ARPA funds will be used for this initiative; \$100,000 over 2 years. Doreen Genna asked if John could explain how the leveraging of a part-time position might work (ex. Veteran's agent). John explained that there are various models that are used; the Veteran's Agent is a formal arrangement (under MA General Law), and districts are formed with separate governing bodies made up of various communities. When asked if this arrangement type was a possibility, he replied that everything is possible. We need to figure out what we want to do, what goal do we wish to accomplish.

Jennifer Lipton-O'Connor inquired as to what the mission was of the Youth Commission and Family & Youth Services, and what is the need in Town?

June stated that she typically meets with new board members to discuss the history and mission statement of the Department, but due to COVID restrictions she has not been able to have a face-to-face meeting. She said that in these meetings she also discusses the programs and services offered by the Department.

Jennifer Lipton-O'Connor replied that that's not what she is looking for; she wants something that is formal and agreed upon. John replied that many committees were formed 30 years ago, and we need to pivot and base the services on what is happening now. This helps to free up resources to address current issues; that people with the most needs are being helped; but the overall community is feeling a deficit in community connection.

June quoted the mission statement of Family & Youth Services and the Youth Commission. She mentioned that the Department is planning on developing a community-wide needs assessment, for which she would like to be grant-funded. John replied that perhaps this is something that the "Be Well Northborough" could do.

John said that the Town does have resources to help people and that is a good place to be. These limited resources can be invested if we can get a significant return on the investment.

Joan Clementi explained that prior employees did create and provide programs and services (many of which were in the schools); while also providing counseling. She stated that she is still a proponent of having a full-time Assistant Director in the Department. Counseling should continue to be available as many people cannot afford the insurance co-pays.

John replied that service delivery models have changed over the years; that everyone has insurance now and that INTERFACE provides services for both individuals and families. He agreed that programming is beneficial and that perhaps it can be addressed by "Be Well Northborough." A program could be set up to help townspeople pay for co-pays (driven by the Benevolent Fund). He asked if is this really an issue?

Joan Clementi replied that this appears to be more of an issue for middle income families, as there are programs for low income families, and it is not an issue for upper income families. A study was done roughly 3 years ago, determining that people were having difficulty paying the insurance co-pays.

John responded that perhaps INTERFACE should be asking people if co-pays are an issue and if it is, then this should be addressed. INTERFACE should try to set them up with a counselor who will either waive it or refer them to a program that will pay it. June stated that INTERFACE has been fantastic, but if a person can't afford the co-pay, they are referred back to Family & Youth Services.

John said that he would like data that is statistically valid in order to make informed decisions. June stated that she does provide data and statistics at the Youth Commission Meetings and via the Annual Report. If people are looking for additional data June asked if they could please be more specific.

John responded that performance measurements are needed, measuring efficiency, effectiveness and outcomes. Casey Rickli agreed that we need data to work with, so that we can identify what are the issues impacting the youth of our community, and how can we help.

7. Other Business: None

8. Motion to Adjourn: Made by Joan Clementi, Seconded by Jennifer Lipton.