

1. 7:30 P.M. Committee On Elder Affairs & Veteran Services

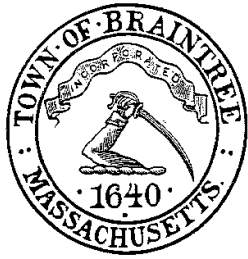
Documents:

[21 OCT 6 EAVS AGENDA.PDF](#)

2. 7:30 P.M. Committee On Elder Affairs & Veteran Services

Documents:

[2021 OCT 6 EAVS MTG.PDF](#)



# Braintree Town Council

## Committee on Elder Affairs & Veterans' Services

One JFK Memorial Drive  
Braintree, Massachusetts 02184

### MEMBERS

Julia Flaherty, Chairwoman  
David Ringius, Vice-Chairman  
Donna Connors, Member

## AGENDA

**Wednesday, October 6, 2021**

**Starting Time – 7:30 p.m.**  
**REMOTE via ZOOM Webinar**

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87318415188>

Telephone: Dial US: +1 312 626 6799

Webinar ID: **873 1841 5188**

International numbers available: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/kcQOAYs1Jb>

Roll Call

Approval of Minutes

- September 10, 2020

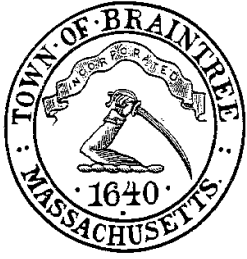
Old Business

- None

New Business

- 030 21 Councilor Flaherty: Discussion with Committee members and attendees or take up any action relative thereto
  - Introduce Veteran Services Coordinator Vincent Fontaine and discuss the short and long term plans he has to use his office to help Braintree Veterans.
  - Update from Elder Affairs Director Sharmila Biswas and an opportunity to highlight Elder Affairs activities and to address how Covid precautions will proceed as the weather cools in the coming months.
  - Introduce the new commander of the Braintree Veteran's Council – Padro “Pete” Vidal, to say a few words.

Adjournment



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Donna Connors, member

## September 10, 2020

### MINUTES

A meeting of the Committee on Elder Affairs & Veterans' Services was held Remote via Zoom Webinar, on Thursday, September 10, 2020 at 7:00p.m.

Chairwoman Flaherty asked there be a moment of silence for all those serving in our military both home and abroad.

Chairwoman Flaherty was in the Chair.  
Clerk of the Council, Susan Cimino, conducted the roll call.

Present: Julia Flaherty, Chairwoman  
David Ringius, Vice-Chairman  
Donna Connors, member

Also Present: Sharmila Biswas, Director of Elder Affairs  
Dan Clifford, resident, former Council member  
Peachie Fitzgerald, resident  
John Thompson, resident

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- July 18, 2017

Motion made by Councilor Ringius to Approve Minutes of July 18, 2017

**Motion:** by Councilor Ringius to Approve Minutes of July 18, 2017

**Second:** by Councilor Connors

**Roll Call Vote:** For (3 – Connors, Flaherty, Ringius), Against (0), Absent (0), Abstain (0)

### OLD BUSINESS

- None

Chairwoman Flaherty stated there is no Old Business. We did not inherit any outstanding projects or action items to consider.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

- 029 30 Councilor Flaherty: Discussion - Committee Objectives or take up any action relative thereto
  - Discussion with Committee Members
  - Listening Session with Residents

Chairwoman Flaherty stated the purpose for this meeting is this committee has not met in a long time. I think it makes sense to talk about the ways in which this committee can be of better service to our elders and veterans. It would be good to make this committee a more effective force on the Council and for Braintree.

Councilor Flaherty, Chairwoman of the Committee of Elder Affairs and Veteran Services stated Sharmila Biswas, Director of Elder Affairs is here joining us. I hope she can share items we can continue working on for elders in our community.

We are between Veteran's Agents. We received a letter from Karen Shanley, HR Director explaining this. The position is still open. I am hopeful the Town will find someone soon. This should not be left vacant.

Sharmila Biswas, Director of Elder Affairs stated COVID-19 struck. We continued to deliver food. Loneliness is the hardest. The children of the elders stop them from coming out. We are doing exercise videos with BCAM. We are filled with outdoor activities currently. We do a walk for senior health and fitness in Pond Meadow yearly but cannot do it this year. In October we will do a week of health and fitness. We try to do Zoom but people are not very good at that. We can try to teach it but many do not have internet in their home. One elder concern was that the Ballots are hard to read and hard to see the ovals that are required to be filled in. The suggestion is to reach out to Town Clerk, Jim Casey.

Chairwoman Flaherty asked if your services have increased at all.

Sharmila Biswas, Director of Elder Affairs stated it is hard to determine because shopping is still very busy. We cannot have 8 in a van. We only allow two in a van at one time so we drop off two and go pick up another two. I am hoping to start a support group for elders raising grandchildren and to start lifelong learning for our elder adults.

Councilor Ringius stated these outdoor activities are great. Do we have any plans in the winter months when we cannot be outside? Have we looked into other places to conduct business? The loneliness factor is real. I am glad you are thinking outside the box.

Sharmila Biswas stated we thought maybe in the end of October to use our large rooms at the center and sanitize and show movies or get heat lamps for outside. We can't do many people at one time.

Councilor Connors stated I know we have a friendly visitor program. Is this happening right now?

Sharmila Biswas stated yes it is. We are doing porch visits and instead of calling once a week, we are doubling on the calls. This is a grant program from title 3B and we just had our evaluation and they are giving us the money for next year.

Councilor Connors stated I see all the great things we have for elders on our website. How else are we publicizing all the great things we have for elders.

Sharmila Biswas stated we have the Newsletter that goes to Town Hall, doctor's offices, banks, grocery stores and it is on the town website. The children will get it for their elder parents. I would love to have a Facebook Page created for Elder Affairs.

Councilor Connors stated there are a lot of youths looking for community service like Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. Would you consider having them help?

Sharmila Biswas stated we already have an inter-generational program having kids from middle and high school teaching how to use the iPhone/iPads etc. We have had middle schoolers come serve lunch. We had children with special needs serve lunch and do arts and crafts. We also have an adult on the "work for tax" program who teaches basic computer skills like how to do email.

Dan Clifford, resident stated it is important to provide a little history to where we are today. This committee has not met in over 3 years. I sincerely hope this is a genuine and sincere restart. Leading up to 2017 the committee had veterans as members. We don't now but that is understandable because only less than 1% serve in our armed forces. Since 2017 the Council does not have any veterans serving but then again that is a factor of less than 1% served. The last two legislative session the Veterans and Elder Affairs have had no meetings, no agenda, no initiatives and honestly as a veteran that is bitterly disappointing. This committee was once highly regarded and a prestigious committee but in 2018 and 2019 when no meetings were conducted, no agendas created, there were members that effectively stole valor. I don't use that term lightly. When you don't hold meetings and you don't accomplish anything it is really unethical to wrap yourself in a banner of Veterans and Elder Affairs but it is done. I bring that up because I do not want to see that done again. I don't want to see Veteran's denigrated and stolen valor taken by people who aren't meeting and aren't accomplishing. Now with that said, you have a year left. My question is at this point Councilor and Chairman Flaherty, are you going to commit to an agenda of initiatives during the remainder of this legislative session. Let me follow that by just saying I understand that it is more than just Veterans and Elder Affairs that hasn't had meetings for years, there are others. If there aren't the resources and the bandwidth for Councilors to adequately support the committees to which they are assigned, I would ask instead of just dithering then that particular group be suspended until the next legislative session so we don't see any more unethical practices. That might seem a little stern. I hope it is because three years is a long time to ignore veterans. That group once was very prestigious and accomplished good things and there are plenty to accomplish now. We have veterans housing needs. 90 Pond Street in your district Chairman. That has been talked about for years about being veterans housing and senior housing. I would urge you to take that up. You would get a 3-for. It is in your district, it would play towards safe harbor and you would be helping out our veterans a great deal. The other thing I would like to suggest is there is a lot that is needed around PTSD for our returning veterans, soldiers, all armed services. I would urge you to connect with our State House Representative Mark Cusack and John Keenan and Walter Timilty and see what is in the pipeline for our veterans. In particular what is going on with PTSD. The last thing I suggest is you work with the Assessor's office and the exemptions that are offered our seniors. There was a time that the Assessors office accompanied with the Veterans Committee Chairman would meet with Sharmila Biswas to update the exemptions. Most recently 41C just a few years ago was a \$500 exemption and sponsored to be \$750 and then \$1000 and now is more than that because the debt exclusion to increase that. Talk sessions are all well and good. You need to take talk to action. Please take the rest of the year and put together an agenda with initiatives and use that as your framework of moving forward for your last year. If you can't do that I urge you to please

suspend it because at the end of the year what are you going to say. I am sorry, I am glad you had the meeting Councilor Flaherty but I think we need to put it into perspective, recognizing there hasn't been a meeting in more than three years.

Chairwoman Flaherty stated thank you for your thoughts. I appreciate hearing your point of view on this. I don't think any Councilor is hear in a lack of sincerity. I am particularly interested in your vision for what you see for 90 Pond Street.

Dan Clifford stated you might want to talk to Melissa Santucci in Planning and Mayor Kokoros. There have been neighborhood meetings regarding housing. This is not new. Someone needs to take this up and champion it. There is veterans housing new in Quincy. There are organizations that sponsor senior housing. I urge you to pick up this banner. This is a no-brainer. We need safe harbor. We don't have it yet. Veterans housing does not exist in Braintree. It would be a winner and you can mix it with senior housing.

Peachie Fitzgerald stated I have an interest in the seniors and their quality of life. I am willing to help out anyway I can. I am happy there are so many people interested in the seniors and veterans.

John Thompson stated I was not aware of this committee. The bulk are elderly and in 10-15 years there will not be enough veterans to make a difference in the town. The town has the tools of the Elder Affairs and the Veterans Council. I am the commander until the end of the month. You can use this to contact veterans. Communication is a problem. Technical knowledge is very good with the elders and veterans. 90 Pond Street would be a good facility for Elder Affairs and the town could use the rest of the building for other purposes. Outside speakers generate a lot of interest with the elders. The Elder Affairs has unique celebrations. One or two a month would be good. Exercise classes are good. People with their own instruments could form a band.

Sharmila Biswas stated John is a regular visitor in our place and is technological savvy and he helps us out and gives us great ideas. Our balance class is on Zoom by Bob. Come to the Senior Center and we can get the newsletter to you.

Chairwoman Flaherty asked if there are any other comments.

Dan Clifford stated I would like a follow up. John mentioned the senior veteran population is diminishing. That is an understatement. There are lots of young veterans that have returned and there is lots that need to be done for PTSD.

Dan Clifford stated I would like to follow up with you Madame Chairman that you will commit to initiating an agenda with substantive initiatives whether they be veteran housing at 90 Pond, whether they be PTSD initiatives. That is what's needed. My question again is will you commit to spending the next couple of months putting together a couple of initiatives that you can manage through the last year of the legislative session. If the answer is I don't know right now, I will just leave it at this: if there can't be an agenda with initiatives and the resources are so thin they can't follow through then I will only suggest that because there are other committees that are not meeting that the resources be suspended and allowed to work on what seemed to be other priorities. My sense is Veteran and Elder Affairs Committee should be our number one priority.

Chairwoman Flaherty stated I certainly would never have agreed to be on this committee much less chair it if I wasn't serious about moving forward with actionable initiatives. That's the truth. I am certain it is the same for the other members on this committee. I am certain they do not wish to see this committee disbanded. Now that we have some thoughts on things we can do to move forward, coming from our community, which we are here to serve, I think that we can begin that process. The answer I will give you is yes. I cannot tell you what will be on the agenda at this point because I think that is going to take some consideration. I think the sincerity of this group is real and I do not question it.

Dan Clifford stated thank you and I wasn't questioning it at all. What I questioned was there has been a three year gap and we don't want that to happen again.

Chairwoman Flaherty stated ok - noted. Are there any other comments anyone would like to make?

Chairwoman Flaherty asked if there was a motion to adjourn.

A Motion was made by Councilor Ringius to adjourn.

**Motion:** by Councilor Ringius to adjourn

**Second:** by Councilor Connors

**Roll Call Vote:** For (3 – Connors, Flaherty, Ringius), Against (0), Absent (0), Abstain (0)

Meeting adjourned at 8:05PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan M. Cimino  
Clerk of the Council