

# **ALEXANDRIA COMMISSION ON AGING MEETING AGENDA**

## **Minutes**

Meeting: Thursday, November 14, 2024, 4:30 PM – 6 PM

DASH Headquarters  
3000 Business Center Drive  
Alexandria VA 22311

### **Members Physically Present:**

Vice Chair, Barbara D'Agostino, Secretary, Ana Rivas, Alan Dinsmore, Barbara Huelat, David Kaplan, DT Oliver, James Bruen, Jane King, Jessica Lefevre, Jim Lindsay, Marshall Hespe, Ray Biegun, Victoria Rutson,

### **Members Attending Remotely:**

Kathleen Demik

### **Members Excused:**

Chair, Michael Schuster, Jennifer Stowe, William Thomas Reeder, Canek Aguirre, Geraldine Wallace

### **Members Unexcused:**

Joy Kone

### **Liaisons Present:**

Juanita Balenger, St. Martins Senior Center; Darrell Wesley, Adult Day Services Center; Ian Torrance, Police Department; Harold Little, Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

**Guests Present:** Bob Eiffert, Housing Committee; Josh Baker, Martin Barna, Camila Olivares, DASH

**Staff Members Present:** Chris Moore, Ashley Johnson, Pam Austin, Jackie Lainez, Division of Aging and Adult Services

**Call to Order – 4:33pm**

**Approval of Agenda - Approved**

**Approval of Thursday, October 10, 2024, Minutes – Approved**

### **Alexandria Police Department Liaison Report – Sgt. Ian Torrance**

No reports just checking on questions and concerns. Barbara D'agostino stated that street lights at the median near Goodwin House Have been out for a while, and she put in a 311 report three weeks ago. There seems to be an issue and Sgt. Torrance said he will look into it.

There are job openings in the police department and Sgt Torrance will send those in an email.

### **Liaison Reports**

**Division of Aging and Adult Services – Chris Moore**

It's end of year working and still working on regs with DARS and State. Ashley Johnson added that they co-wrote a grant with Economic Well Being Division (part of Social Services) regarding SNAP enrollment with elder adults and received the grant. They work on efforts to re-brand and de-stigmatize SNAP enrollment. This grant will cover a full-time position.

Ashley also report that they are working on Age Friendly Plan meeting on Monday (11/18) – they want the survey to be short but comprehensive. So far 12 questions in total.

#### **INOVA Alexandria Hospital -**

No attendance.

#### **Human Rights Commission – Tom Reeder**

Tom sent a report that will be attached to the minutes.

#### **AHA – Bob Eiffert**

Big fundraiser in the end of the year. There will be the Scottish Christmas walk. It will be the first Saturday of December.

#### **AARP – Jane King**

There will be an end of year volunteer celebration on December 6<sup>th</sup> in Falls Church. Michael Schuster is involved with AARP legislative agenda work. On 12/5, AARP will report what will be on their agenda. AARP is providing a lot of technology training for members.

#### **NVAN – Michael Schuster**

Michael Schuster did not attend meeting.

Bob Eiffert asked when the Commission's platform will be submitted to City Council. Chris said it was submitted. Jane King mentioned that SNAP benefits increase was requested by the Commission for 2025. JT Oliver stated that Federation of Food Banks is also pushing for increase in SNAP benefits and has been connected with Michael Schuster. He also reported that Jane Ayres from ALIVE will also advocate for the increase too.

#### **St. Martins de Porres Senior Center – Juanita Balenger**

The center had their dental clinic with six new seniors participating. Friends from Latin America celebrated Dias de los Muertos. They also watched the movie COCO. Several inter-generational activities were organized and well attended. Also, the police department came and talked about scams and frauds. Thanksgiving dinner will be on 11/26. Field Trips are scheduled for December.

#### **VHC Health (formerly, Virginia Hospital Center) – Kate Chutuape/Blanca Cali**

No one attended.

#### **Commission for Women – Jenn Stowe**

No one attended.

**Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria**

No one attended.

**Public Health Advisory Commission**

No one attended.

**Commission on Persons with Disabilities**

No one attended.

**Senior Center @ Charles Houston**

No one attended.

**Senior Services of Alexandria – Marshall Hespe**

There will be a Speaker Series and Seminary held at the center in the near future. On 11/20 there will be a seminary on Volunteering for Senior and Engaging After Retirement. Also there will be a seminar on the Friendly Aging Plan in January. Marshall passed out some flyers advertising the speaker series.

**Alexandria Commission on Employment, ACE**

No one attended.

**Northern Virginia Falls Prevention Alliance, NVFPA – Marshall Hespe**

Only meet quarterly so nothing to report.

**Arlington Legislative Committee – Michael Schuster**

Chris reported that platform is being submitted to the City.

**Arlington Commission on Aging – Linc Cummings**

No one attended.

**Successful Aging Committee – Harold Little**

Festivities for Halloween was well attended. Next event is the Holiday Event at Lee Center on 12/13 and is open to the public. They will begin advertising in November.

**Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities – Harold Little**

Big news is that Jim Spangler is retiring at the end of the month. New swimming pool is being constructed and there will be new space at the pool. Chris suggested that we hold a commission meeting at the pool.

**Alexandria Adult Day Services Center, ADSC – Darrell Wesley**

Staff update that a recreational leader is retiring after 30 years. Jackie McCoy has taken a new role at the center. She has been there for 27 years. They have two vacancies for therapeutical recreational therapist openings.

**Housing Affordability Advisory Committee, AHAAC – Jan Macidull**

No one attended

**Special Presentation:** Josh Baker, CEO, DASH.

Martin Barton and Camille Olivares – both staff persons attended from Dash

Slide presentation was included

Mr. Baker provided an intro about the mission and vision for the bus system.

Gave a historical summary. Dash was founded in 1984. It is 100% fare free.

Have electric, hybrid and clean diesel buses. Community does use services – carried 5.3+ million passenger in 2024

DASH is run by the governing board and it also has an advisory committee. They are looking for friends and colleagues that use DASH to engage and participate in the advisory committee. It will provide rider insights to DASH leadership. The committee ranges from 9 to 14 members (looking for diverse set of perspectives)

2024-2025 Priorities For DASH–

Mr Baker stated that they appreciate that the Commission and City Council are supporting the services provided by DASH. They continue to fund the current services with free fares.

They also work to make sure the fleet is in good repair

Dash is pushing forward on the 2022 ATV improvements. They are looking for new funding sources to improve the current services and to expand the services in the Eisenhower Corridor

Dash hopes for a fully electric fleet by 2027

DASH provides access to various services in the City. But their biggest challenge is the budget. They are noticing for 2025, that the city is capping on the investments that can be made based on revenues. DASH may not be able to fully fund their services. Also, DASH needs to fund the staff's earning increase. Right now DASH need to fund the increase in earnings for the staff at the organization. So now DASH can only provide 2% increase vs. 4% which is the base increase in DASH collective bargaining agreement. Therefore, DASH has to find solutions to address the 2% shortage.

There are also 2022 implementations that are unfunded. So, DASH is behind in some investments.

Since 2020, DASH has found \$4.1 million reductions in DASH budget without reducing services. But they can't reduce more, unless they reduce services. DASH doesn't want to reduce services because it is in demand in the City.

Capitol funding and capitol funding investments are not there. The City's CIP is oversubscribed and underfunded. With this trajectory, DASH knows is that in future fiscal years they won't have enough funds to replace the buses that need to be replaced. DASH is now going after federal grants to fund the replacement buses. With new change in administration, they are concerned about possible federal funding.

Martin Barna from DASH reported on Older Resident usage of DASH services. He provided the information through a slide presentation. In their recent survey, they found that 5% of riders were

seniors which this seems low. DASH conducts the surveys on the bus in a point in time. The surveyors approach the riders they believe to be seniors and asked them the survey questions. If that day there were not enough seniors it may have impacted the results (i.e. the percentage of riders that are seniors). However, from the survey they attained it was found that free fares were important to the seniors. Half of the riders use it more than five days a week.

Mr. Barna also discussed bus top shelters. They are working to provide more shelters for riders waiting for the buses.

DASH trying to reduce barriers in using the service. Biggest issue is waiting. Folks don't like to wait. They are working with apps to help determine when the busses are coming. Jessica mentioned that the Google GPS app is very accurate in letting the bus rider know when the bus will be coming.

Kathleen asked if DASH ever considered collaborating with the school system. Mr. Baker mentioned that they are working with schools because they see the opportunity of students using the services. But at the same time, DASH is dealing with over-crowded buses right now and are looking to purchase larger buses. Once they are able to do that, then collaborating with the school system will be easier.

Kathleen also mentioned that DASH is only used by residents who cannot afford it. Mr. Baker mentioned that Fare Free is a very popular part of their services it has been great in reducing the burden in the infrastructure and reducing traffic. Also having fares doesn't real chip at the funding shortages, because collecting fares is very expensive. They would need \$7 million to begin collecting fares. Also changing people's behavior is hard, we would likely have 100% fare evasion. And since bus drivers are not allowed to deal with the conflict, it will be difficult to enforce fare payment.

DASH must be seen as a positive service that brings money to the communit, because it gives access to more residents to interact with more business which in turn increase business for local businesses. It is not a burden to the budget in the community.

Alan Dinsmore asked about data collection for DASH. Since we don't have a fare collection system, it must be difficult to figure out how many are elders. Mr. Barna mentioned that they have surveyors in the bus that ask bus riders the survey questions. Also, be noted that these surveys are compelted every 4 to 5 years.

Camilla Olivares from CASH reported on the new pilot program - Q'Strant Quantum. This pilot program allows passenger with mobility devices to secure themselves in as little as 25 second after entering the bus. This will work with all type of wheelchairs, operators will not have to leave the driver's seat to help. DASH showed us a video on how it works. This is available in one bus. So far receiving positive feedback, but also need some improvements (some folks are getting motion sickness because it is a rear facing seat). Mr. Baker added that the seat is rear facing to prevent serious injuries if there are accidents.

## **Executive Committee Report**

Barbara D'Agostino states that Michael Schuster is at a meeting and that Eric Johnson's conversation showed that they are concerned with the affordable assisted living and the other concerns are in Michael's notes that were provided to the Commission.

Silverado is no longer adding beds. So they are not even taking the proposal to zoning.

### **Age Friendly Plan – Next Steps – Jane King and DAAS Staff**

The 12 questions survey will be sent out. In January they will convene with the public to discuss what has been accomplished with the plan.

### **Suggestions for Testimony on the City Budget, to be released on February 25, 2025.**

Jessica asked when are the recommendations must be available Ashley thinks the deadline may be January. Eiffert mentioned that ad-hoc advocacy committee is convened as soon as the budget is released and it is very intense work. A Meeting with Budget Directors is held within a week. The window is very tight.

### **Future Speakers**

Alan Dinsmore suggested that Hilary Allure come and discuss issues on Transportation. Also there are going to be significant changes in drug price provisions in Medicare that will translate to reduction of prices. It's going to be a very big change and he thinks that we should have someone who can discuss with this with us. This specifically deals with Medicare Part D. VICAP which is part of Virginia could come and talk about this.

### **Committee Updates**

#### **Economic Security and Civic Engagement – Chair, Jessica Lefevre**

Two big development for this Committee. They are talking about food security and insecurity. We are going to work on refining list on access to healthy food, transportation and food diversity because of the racial and ethnic differences in the community. Also, we talked about the SNAP grant Ashley mentioned. We are trying to increase 1500 participants.

The Committee is inviting Jan Macidull to be an advisory participant that will allow us to work with Age Friendly Plan (AARP). One of the challenges are access to food. Many elderly residents do not have access to cars to go to grocery stores. Jessica asked if we could we arrange transportation services such as DASH to go to Southern Towers to take the elderly to grocery stores is an opportunity to explore.

Mr. Baker from DASH, stated that DASH needs to capture that need. He asked Jessica Lefevre to send an email to DASH to explain the concern in more details, so they can figure out ways they can help out. Marshall mentioned that it may mean some coordination. Camilla Olivares from DASH could be a good point person for this project.

Jessica explained to the committee and DASH is first in the issue spotting stage and will reach out when we know a little more.

JT had a follow up question asking DASH if they have data on location and stops and routes they have that may coordinate with the SNAP vendors.

Another issues brought up by this committee was that there are residents that don't meet SNAP requirements but still face food insecurity. Our committee wants to find a way to identify this population.

**Housing Committee - Co-Chairs, Michael Schuster and Lois Steele**

Bob Eiffer reported that major focus is on the Age Friendly Plan and affordable housing plan. They were talking about Silverado and the change on the Silverado plan.

Also the affordable housing issue – the “ALATE” near Carpenter Shelter were rentals for more affordable rental unit was priced at \$2400 and they are changing tier model. It was originally described as independent living but now there are no services and they still are charging \$2400 for rent. They also discussed the re-development of Ladret as an issue, since the residents will be displaced while the construction takes place.

Ashely also reported changes in the Rental Program to increase the rent relief. They are waiting to see if that will get passed.

**Outreach Committee – Co-Chairs, Marshall Hesse & Barbara D’Agostino**

They are meeting virtually and didn't meet this month

**Transportation – Chair, Alan Dinsmore**

Meeting Wednesday on 11/20 and it will be an in-person meeting. Michael and Alan will meet with Hillary Ore to discuss the issues on transportation. And Alan will ask if she wants to be a speaker to the Commission next month.

**Health /Dementia Friendly Committee – Chair, Barbara Huelat**

Did not meet this month and will meet in January. They are waiting for a report to determine their issues and initiatives.

**Other Business NO**

**New Business NO**

**Public comments – please limit your comments to 3 minutes NO**

**Adjournment – at 6:00 pm**

**Next Commission Meeting: Thursday, December 12, 2024 – 4 PM, VIRTUAL**

**Executive Committee Meeting: December 2, 2024– 1:30 p.m. VIRTUAL**

**NVAN Meetings: November 19<sup>th</sup>, 9:30 – Virtual – General Assembly 101 Presentation**

**COMMISSION OFFICERS:** Michael Schuster, Chair  
Barbara D’Agostino, Vice Chair  
Ana Rivas Beck, Secretary

