

ALEXANDRIA COMMISSION ON AGING MEETING AGENDAMeeting:

Thursday, February 13, 2025, 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM
Virtual

Members Present:

Chair, Michael Schuster, Vice Chair, Barbara D'Agostino, Secretary, Ana Rivas, Alan Dinsmore, Barbara Huelat, Canek Aguirre, DT Oliver, Gerri Wallace, James Bruen, Jane M. King, Jim Lindsay, Joy Kone, Kathleen Demik, Kimberly Koch, Marshall Hespe, Michele McLaughlin, Ray Biegun, Victoria Rutson, William Thomas Reeder

Members Excused:

Jennifer Stowe, Jessica Lefevre

Members Unexcused:

None

Liaisons Present:

Juanita Balenger, St. Martins Senior Center; Cathy Turner, Virginia Hospital Center (VHC Health)

Guests Present:

Bob Eiffert, Housing Committee; Jan Macidull, Housing Committee; Cedar Dvorin; Lois Steele; Uguriu Kutlan; JeanAnn Mayhan, Public Health Advisory; Mary Lee Anderson, Tanya Edwards, Iris Garay, Samanth Lambert-Williamson, Tesfaye Reta, Mary Ann Beatty, Wilder Escobedo, Senior Services of Alexandria

Staff Members Present:

Chris Moore, Ashley Johnson, Pam Austin, Jackie Lainez, Division of Aging and Adult Services; Clarence Parkinson, Workforce Development Center

Call to Order – 4:02 called to order

Approval of Agenda - Approved

Approval of Thursday, January 9, 2024, Minutes – Approved

Alexandria Police Department Liaison Report – Sgt. Ian Torrance was absent

Special Presentation by Senior Services of Alexandria

Marshall Hespe was the main presenter.

Mary Lee Anderson, Executive Director of Senior of Alexandria provided the Introduction:

She served on the COA for 10 years, went off 2 years ago when Marshal stepped into the role as a Commissioner representing a non-profit service organization.

Senior Services is non-profit organization and not a city agency. It's been in existence for 57 years, to provide services to all adults over 60 years of age, regardless of income or background, who live in the City of Alexandria.

The four main areas of services include – nutrition, transportation, friendly companionship program and information and education.

The Program directors discussed their area of responsibility. It is a small organization with a staff of 16 employees - 9 are full-time and 7 are part-time. The annual budget is \$1.2 million which is derived from two

city contracts: Meals on Wheels and DOT city transit program and it makes up 35% of their income. The rest of the funding comes from individual donations, corporate support, grants and two big events. On March 29th, Senior Services will hold their Gala and will honor Jane King, Jack Fannon, Lucella Flaherty and Jim Page.

Marshall Hespe – Meals programs director

SSA's nutrition program includes – Grocery to Go and Meals on Wheels.

Meals on Wheels - with the support of the Division on Aging and Adult services, Senior Services delivers meals to adults over 60 years of age that are homebound, 7 days a week. They provide city subsidized services, private pay services and private sponsorship services. The latter is a growing service. Therefore, the organization addresses different levels of needs. Jeffrey's Catering is the supplier of meals. They are now providing vegetarian options and have seen an increase in demand because of cultural preferences. The organization services 120 clients during a month. In a year, the organization will serve 250 individuals and 50K meals. Through the daily delivery, they are able to get to know the clients and they deliver during inclement weather with the help of the Sheriff's office. Because of the daily delivery, the volunteers and staff are able to observe any change in conditions for the client. Individuals delivering the meals have an app with information on the client and it allows volunteers to note any change in condition for the client. The organization has a staff driver and volunteers. Marshall says they always need volunteers and invited the Commissioners an opportunity to volunteer in delivering the meals.

Groceries to Go – For more ambulatory members of the community.

For those that can cook but have problems getting groceries. There are no minimum income requirements. The client becomes close to the volunteer because shopping for clients becomes personal. There are 85 clients in the program. The clients have the ability to pay for groceries with SNAP benefits, that help the low-income clients. There are no delivery fee and no minimum order. They also supplementing these deliveries with ALIVE grocery that includes milk, eggs, breads and prepared meals. Food is accessed from Balducci, Whole Food, etc.. This goes a long way for folks on fixed incomes. The Snap Program is utilized in this program. The organization can use SNAP benefits and have plans to support outreach and increase SNAP participation with qualified older adults. The organization is looking for ways to get people food with less resources

Tanya Edwards – Director of Companion Programs.

Friendly Visitor programs – based on research, depression and loneliness may affect the health of seniors and can also impact the self-worth of an older adult. The relationship can change the life of an older adult in a couple of weeks. Senior Services get referrals from the Division on Aging and Adults Services, doctors, children of adults, and other facilities. However, the adult must be on board to participate in the program. The organization does an assessment at their home or assisted living facility. They get as much information as they can on the individual. Then a match is made, the volunteer visits for one hour once a week. They can play board games, take walks, share hobbies, do projects, and organize something light. The volunteers are not there to do chores. The volunteers are discouraged in transporting the older adult in their vehicle. A background check is done on the volunteer. Then the volunteer must go through screening and training. Senior Services as volunteers

make a 9-months to one-year commitment. Currently there are 26 matches and looking to increase the numbers.

Friendly Caller Programs – this is in the pilot phase. There was a program, under Crisis Link, that provided daily calls to individuals to help the older adults, who were homebound and chronically ill, to maintain their independence. The program got a lot of support but lost funding, so this pilot was created after a task force was organized which comprised of SSA and DAAS and other local organizations. They conducted program evaluations and surveys that supported the pilot program. Initially, the organization looked into creating a call hub, but it was out of the budget. The organization asked SSA staff to volunteer and the program has two older adults participating in the program. In the program, the volunteer checks in to see how the older adult is doing. One of the clients just wants the check in but other older adult talk a little. The conversations last about 10 minutes during the check in. After pilot program is completed, they are hoping to expand the conversation times and number of check ins.

Animeals on Wheels – this program delivers pet food for low income adults over 60 years old. The organization has a partnership with the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria. The food is delivered once a month to 42 clients. The pets served are 45 cats, 28 dogs, one parrot and two parakeets. There are 8 volunteers and delivery coordinators.

DOT Paratransit Program– reported by Mary Lee Anderson since the Program Director could not attend.

This is a contract with the City of Alexandria which is a specialized transportation service for residents and visitors who cannot use fixed routed public transit due to their disability. Most of the clients are older adults. Senior Services coordinates the reservations. The client can make reservations to be picked up at the resident's home. They are picked up by a van which is a shared ride service. The rides can be arranged two weeks in advance but at the minimum is a 24-hour notice. There is a supplemental ride services, if the vans are booked. The client can be taken anywhere in Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax County and DC. In Alexandria City it is free, then 5 miles for \$4 and the rest is \$6 a ride. There are no limits on the rides you can take. About 1500 residents are enrolled and Senior Services are trying to increase the numbers. This is cost effective for anyone who has a disability. The services do not go to Maryland and if a client needs to go to, then they are asked to reach out to Metro Access.

Mary Ann Beatty – Director of Education and Information

There are several programs such as Senior Living in Alexandria Speaker Services. Speakers series – the program has been in existence for 15 years and it's a monthly speaker series. It starts in September with an event that encourages seniors to be engaged in the city. Topic discussed are: Senior Tech and Scams, Senior Academy, which explains what the city has to offer to older adults, and Health Fair. There is an event and the topic is cost of aging. These events include serious and fun topics. This is a popular program with up to 70 participants at each event. The program coordinates with various churches. One popular topic is Solo Aging. They have a flower arranging program, senior health fair and end with the Senior Law Day.

In June they have Senior Law Day which is presented with the Alexandria Bar Association and addresses legal issues for older adults. During the Summer they prepare for the next year events.

Samantha Lambert Williamson explained the Senior Ambassador Program

This program gets volunteers to understand the services provided in the City to the older adult community. The ambassadors become the eyes and ears of the community so they can get resources and materials to older Alexandrians. It is a wonderful program with 155 ambassadors. A training is coming up soon and it is a good opportunity for the Commission members. The training course is only one hour.

Samantha also explained the Senior Information Corners which are 31 locations stocked with literature describing the several different services provided by the city.

Iris Garay – Director Community Outreach and Development.

Senior Services goes to the community events, and where the elderly live and have the programs there. They inquire on what are their needs and make sure they get it. The Outreach program keeps growing and serves the Spanish and Amharic communities with coordinators that speak both languages. For example, in Claridge House they have a staff that connects with the diverse community and develop the trust so that the older adults can tell them what the organization can do for them. The outreach has the older adult community connected with services outside and inside their homes. Some programs are the Bingocize at Casa Chirilagua. They also meet with ALIVE! Food pantry to disburse information. There is also a wellness program that provides regular exercise and nutrition classes.

Tesfaye Reta, an outreach coordinator, has been with the organization for the last 5 years. He works with Meals for Wheels and other outreach programs. He can speak Amharic with the Amharic community. The organization also has Wilder Escobedo, another outreach coordinator, who is Spanish speaking. He creates newsletters that are in Spanish, telling the older community of the events and also provides information on future events and services. Senior Services wants to bring the outreach and resources to the Ladrey Senior Building. The outreach program works in partnership with Goodwin Living, Virginia Coop Extension and the city's Recreation, Park and Cultural Activities.

Silver Service Card – Mary Lee Anderson

This program offers discounts to Alexandria seniors 60 and older when presented at participating locations. It is a way to get older adults to be more active in the community. The program was rolled out with AHA and the Division of Aging and Adult Services. There are 45 businesses that participate the Silver Service Card program. SSA distributes to any resident that is over 60 years old. The business can provide any type of discount they want. The cardholder just presents the card at the business and gets the discount.

Senior Services need volunteers and invites the Commissioners to participate in the following:

Meals on Wheels which has the most flexibility. Senior Ambassador program is also good because you know about what is going on in the community and it's an ongoing information opportunity.

Questions –

Tom Reeder asked in which program does the organization mostly need volunteers. They said Meals on Wheels, and the Senior Ambassador program.

Lois asked about the activity in the west end of the city – Claridge House and Meal on Wheels is a big focus in that area. Also St. Martin De Porres works with Senior Services.

Kathleen DeMik asked if they ever used therapy dogs for the companionship program. The organization will if the senior is open to it. There is a non-profit, Paws for Pals, that runs that program and goes to Goodwin House.

Many participants at the meeting offered “shout outs” for all the good work by the Senior Services. The power point will be shared with the Commission.

Liaison Reports

Division of Aging and Adult Services – Chris Moore

Ashley reported on behalf of Chris, who was on the road. They are helping the Commission on Aging Friendly plan and its future meetings and have identified apartment buildings and communities to host mini listening session. They have two planned for the end of February and will replicate what was done at the Lee Center in January.

The community engagement survey is still open since it is gathering data what will be needed for the Age Friendly Plan.

The Department of Community and Human Services Boards and Commissions meeting was held on Monday to talk about the budget and bills, and new Department initiatives. Michael was there to represent the Commission on Aging.

As a department, they are trying to determine how the new federal administration will impact their work and are training the staff on the protectives procedures City residents. They are trying to determine was to do with ICE and the procedure to take if ICE officers come to the front desk of the City of Alexandria offices. They want to know the rights of the clients. Barbara D'Agostino said she can send information to Ashley on what the Goodwin Living is doing on the subject. Goodwin hired an attorney to assist with staff concerns.

INOVA Alexandria Hospital - absent

Human Rights Commission – Tom Reeder

They are desperately trying to keep tabs on the changing relationship between local, state and federal governments. A letter was sent from the Mayor to clarify the city's role on immigration enforcement. There's a fine line between protecting constitutional and civil rights and following other federal and state laws. Governor Youngkin proposed to withhold law enforcement funds for those communities who do not assist ICE. The Governor pointed out that Alexandria is considered a sanctuary city. But the Mayor clarified that we are not a sanctuary city but we also that Alexandria does not participate in federal immigration law enforcement.

City Councilmember Canek Aguirre remarked that sanctuary city is a vague term with no definition. We are a Dillon Rule state and sanctuary cities do not exist without General Assembly approval.

AHA – Bob Eiffert –

They will be co-sponsoring an event with Senior Services on the following Wednesday on Solo Aging. AHA is also participating in Virginia Villages Collectives composed of the villages in the state of Virginia. They have a budget amendment going before the General Assembly and advocating in the Senate (passed in the house) to encourage village development in Virginia. It will be run through Fairfax County and then work through a non-profit – Washington Area Villages Exchange, but it will be a state wide pilot program. Focus will be on rural areas and the funding will only be for Virginia village development.

AARP – Jane King

She echoed Ashley's earlier report and working on the strategic plan with AARP to make the city a more livable place to live for all residents.

An AARP Mclean resident is sponsoring a monthly lunch for AARP.

Movies for Grown Ups is a new AARP sponsored program online that is appealing to grownups.

AARP is very important at the state level for advocacy.

NVAN – Michael Schuster

Next NVAN meeting in is on March 18th and is being hosted by the Alexandria COA. .

The presentation on the general assembly and the budget will be presented by AARP.

In Richmond, today two things are happening. The crossover bills will be completed by next week. Most of the NVAN priorities are still alive. The Villages budget amendment is still in the mix. Certified nurse's training is still part of the budget. Eviction notice legislation will pass both houses and then going to Governor. Affordable Assisted Living provision, which will allow certain jurisdictions to negotiate set asides has also passed the legislature.

NVAN will also meet with a lot of conferees. Bob Eiffert said that the major task has been to meet with the conferees and both Bob and Michael Schuster were present in Richmond meeting with legislators. Bob also participates in the event for Older Adults Day in Richmond to advocate for the issues impacting older Virginians.

St. Martins de Porres Senior Center – Juanita Balenger

She gave a shout out to Mary Lee Anderson and Senior Services. Wilder creates newsletter that Juanita disseminates to her Hispanic population. They started Bingosize. They have been getting meal boxes out before the snow days. They had 37 participants going to the Valentines party, ballet to the Lee Center and other field trips.

VHC Health (formerly, Virginia Hospital Center) –

Kathy Turner, Director of Senior Health reported. She stated the hospital does a once a month health aging webinar. The next one is February 28th at 11 am and it is about holistic approaches to dental health. Dr. Seth Dubin, DMD, owner of the District Mobile Dental program will talk about oral health concerns as we age and common diseases – Heart, diabetes and kidney disease. If we want more information – Kathy is including her information in the chat. Kathy will be the future liaison for VHC and suggested removing Kate's name and replace it with her name. Michael Schuster added that in the General Assembly there is a bill that would mandate a special enrollment period for individuals with Medigap insurance and can change the policy without any repercussions. There is a chance that it might pass.

Commission for Women – Jenn Stowe

Absent

Senior Services of Alexandria – Marshall Hespe

Marshall said everything was covered under their earlier presentation. Some Valentine events and the Gala is important to remember.

Alexandria Commission on Employment, ACE – absent**Northern Virginia Falls Prevention Alliance, NVFPA – Marshall Hespe**

Some events coming up in March. He has not been in a direct meeting with them and will try to get a representative to report to the Commission.

Arlington Legislative Committee – Michael Schuster

No report other than NVAN update.

Housing Affordability Advisory Committee, AHAAC – Jan Macidull

Absent – she had a report that Ashely will forward to everyone.

Executive Committee Report

No additional information.

Discussion / Action Items**Age Friendly Plan – Next Steps – Jane King and DAAS Staff**

Jane reported that Ashley sent the list of what the tables provided on what the concerns are. Still need to look at that information. Also need to keep an eye on the survey and to determine what to do moving forward. That is step number one and will take some time.

Need to assess what will be looking for in objectives and strategies. And see if the committees are structured correctly to address these issues. Ashley said she will send out the confirmed dates for Claridge house and get volunteers to translate and do post it notes. She also has Ladrey confirmed. City staff is prepared to do the sessions. DAAS has folks set up to translate the paperwork to other languages. They are meeting on March to review some of the information.

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

We don't have any firm ideas on what we will be testifying on since we haven't seen the budget. Also organizing meeting with Morgan Rhutt, Director of Office Management and Budget. Bob has been involved for a long time and he will participate in the meeting.

First public hearing is scheduled for March 10th. Michael hopes to meet with Morgan and his staff by the first week of March.

Future Speakers

We are looking at a SNAP and Medicaid presentation in Alexandria. In Virginia we are a trigger state. With the federal expansion program for Medicaid, individuals can get Medicaid services with up higher incomes. However, if the Federal government cuts the 90% federal match, even by 1%, over 600,000 individuals will lose Medicaid in Virginia because we are a trigger state.

Alexandria Safe Streets – Alan Dinsmore suggested and Michael Schuster will follow up.

Other topics

Kathleen DeMik wants to talk to Sgt Torrance about the rising crime in Alexandria, the lack of police presence and staff. She found out in the Civic Meeting that the crime in schools is not included in the crime report. She said there was an armed robbery on Prince Street and this is a concern.

Michael Schuster and Ashley mentioned that he new chief of police is having meet and greet meetings. The next one was scheduled early February. Through E-News you will see alerts.

City Councilmember Canek explained that crime has gone down in the city. Alexandria is considered one of the safest cities in the country. That the folks providing information otherwise, they are misinterpreting the statistics. Violent crimes, such as armed robbery, murder and rape have gone down. Certain burglaries are considered a Level 1 crime has gone up but not violent crime. If something happened in your neighborhood and your block, it is definitely something to discuss with the new Chief of Police.

Canek stated that what is happening in the school is different. There has not been a murder in the school, except last year, at the Bradlee Shopping Center there was a fatal stabbing. According to Canek, that was the first in many years. Kathleen stated that teachers are being assaulted in the schools. Canek let her know that was not true. He suggested she talk to the police department on this matter. Reports have changed coming from ACPS. Canek stated that previously schools would provide reports on every fight that broke out at the school. Canek disagrees with this approach and discussing with the schools and cities. But the rates of fights have declined in the schools. Kathleen explained her information come from parents and from a police officer who stated he did not want to go into the high school because it is dangerous. One Commission member, who is a parent of a child in the ACPS schools, disagreed with Kathleen and said she has not seen an increase in violence in the school. Canek suggested this could be discussed further at another time

In March meeting speakers - –

It will be on SNAP and Medicaid. Michael re-iterated that Virginia is a trigger state and this is an issue because over 600,000 persons could lose their services.

For May or June – Lois suggested that we have the Sherriff come and speak with us. Alan Dinsmore suggested we have Alexandria Safe Streets to come and talk to us. Chris Moore said that the data office for the city could share its demographic information on city residents with the Commission – Michael thinks that would be good for April.

Committee Updates

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

Busy with Age Friendly events. Will be meeting on February 24th.

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

Met January 16th and next is March 20th. Talked about the SNAP program and how the outreach committee can be more involved in getting the info out to the community, The New Commissioners should be interested in joining the committee. Marshal is excited about joining the new aging friendly plan.

Transportation – Chair, Alan Dinsmore

Meeting at the Charles Houston Center in person and will discuss the recommendations from the Age Friendly community conference. We are going to see what the most reasonable actions are we can take.

Also talking to DASH and DT Oliver with the SNAP data to see if we can get a match between SNAP participants and the nearness of the DASH bus stops.

Economic Security and Civic Engagement – Chair, Jessica Lefevre

Geri reported in Jessica’s absence. The Committee is establishing a Food Advisory group – they discussed that Ashley’s summer program with farmer’s market to get vouchers to get fresh fruit. They want to know how we can get older residents fresh fruits and veggies during the winter months.

Health /Dementia Friendly Committee – Chair, Barbara Huelat

Had a meeting on the 9th and representative Caitlin Mullins who shared the survey that the Health Department did on behalf of Natalie Talis. One of the pieces of the puzzle and the work on the survey on the 17th was really a good experience and eye opener. Being with folks that filled out the survey was important. Next meeting is March 13th.

VHC Health Cathy Turner – If anyone is interested in getting information on health aging lecture you can email seniorhealth@vhchealth.org

Clarence Parkinson – He works with Mark Center and works with 55+ employee seekers. He thinks there will be tsunami of need for services here. He has done research. We have a large a population that works with federal government. Jim Lindsay will connect with Clarence Parkinson.

Other and New Business - none

Public comments – none

Adjournment

Next Commission Meeting: Thursday, March 13, 2025 – 4:30 PM, Mark Center
Executive Committee Meeting: March 3, 2025– 1:30 p.m. In-person – Mark Center
NVAN Meetings: March 18, 2025 9:30 – Virtual – Host: Alexandria COA

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