

ALEXANDRIA COMMISSION ON AGING MEETING

DRAFT

Meeting: Thursday, October 9, 2025, 4:30 PM – 6:30 PM

Location: Virtual (Zoom)

Members Attending Remotely:

Co-Chairs, Michael Schuster, DT Oliver; Vice Chair, Ana Rivas, Secretary, Kimberly Koch, Barbara D'Agostino, Barbara Huelat, Gerri Wallace, Jane M. King, Jessica Lefevre, Jim Lindsay, Kathleen Demik, Marshall Hespe, Michele McLaughlin, Victoria Rutson, William Thomas Reeder

Members Excused:

Alan Dinsmore, Canek Aguirre, James Bruen, Ray Biegun

Members Unexcused:

Joy Kone

Liaisons Present:

Juanita Balenger, St. Martin de Porres Senior Center; Darrell Wesley, Adult Day Services Center; Ian Torrance, Police Department; Pamela Guerra, Senior Center @ Charles Houston

Guests Present:

Lois Steele, Housing Committee; Cedar Dvorin; Thomas Bezabih, Human Services Specialist I; Harumi Reilly, Alexandria City Food Security Coordinator; Ginna Kalish

Staff Members Present:

Chris Moore, Ashley Johnson, Pam Austin, Division of Aging and Adult Services

Call to Order Meeting called at order at 4:30 pm

Approval of Agenda as is.

Approval of Thursday, September 11, 2025 - Minutes approved with no changes

Alexandria Police Department (APD) Liaison Report – Sgt. Ian Torrance

Sgt. Torrance provided a reminder about Vision Zero where they are looking at traffic safety through October. Three main intersections identified: Duke and Washington, King and 395, and Duke and Van Dorn. PIO is sharing this campaign through social media. The message is: “slow down, stay alert, give space, seen and be seen, using headlights, and plan ahead if . . . , Obey traffic signals and posted signs.” Gerri raised a concern about a No Turn on Red sign at Walker and Duke. Sgt. Torrance will forward the request to the Traffic Safety Unit. Michael asked for Sgt. Torrance to review the Transportation Plan for the Age Friendly Plan.

Special Presentation: “The State of Food Security in Alexandria” with Harumi Reis Reilly and Jessica Lefevre.

Harumi is the Alexandria City Food Security Coordinator. Past positions include working for: Alexandria Health Department, National Association of County and City Health Officials, and with the federal government. Her background is in nutrition and food systems, maternal child health. She acclaimed, “I'm a nutritionist, a lactation consultant, and public health specialist.”

Question [Jessica]: Can you give us a little bit, a brief overview of the food safety net in Alexandria, the different nodes that, currently exists to support food security for residents?

Response [Harumi]: Food Security Work Group, that is a group with about 20 to 30 members. They developed a food insecurity report for Alexandria that identified community needs and wants. One important thing to mention here is that older adults was identified as a priority population. The City has a robust food charitable network (e.g. ALIVE!), plus the City also manages their own distributions. One observation is the work tends to happen in silos.

We focus on five priority areas since I started in my role: 1) creating awareness with the Office of Community Services of a surge of unhoused residents from DC; 2) working with organizations supporting organizations that work with the Hispanic Community and ensuring continued access to food; 3) multiple events in September as a part of Hunger Action Month; 4) applying for a grant with the Mayor Alliance to end childhood hunger, and 5) coordinate with the DCHS public benefits team and customer relations staff related to a SNAP benefits scam.

Question: Could you just expand a little bit more on your work with SSA [Senior Services of Alexandria], ALIVE!, the faith community, and maybe a little bit about, any outreach efforts to other departments in the city that you're doing?

Harumi: Everything is revolving now around this, food security strategic plan we're developing, more accurately a mitigation plan, a crisis response plan of everything that's been happening. Focusing on five pillars: food access, the need for culturally diverse nutrition and food safety, partnerships and infrastructure, outreach and community engagement, and food waste reduction, food systems and sustainability.

Examples are: working with ALIVE! and other food distributors to understand, their capacity to expand through evening and weekends; Food Security Work Group, coordinating with the Environmental and Transportation Services on the Food for Good program.

Question: Can you talk more about efforts that local communities can make to redress losses, the loss of federal funding for different programs?

Harumi: One goal is to identify all and map all the community gardens in Alexandria. Looking to borrow from successes from other communities, e.g. the urban farming community feeding garden. There is one at Community Lodgings in the City and one beginning at the Lee Rec Center.

Question: Would you share more about collective impact?

Harumi: The collective impact approach is a way to organize around a shared goal. Main thing is to have a common agenda and a shared measurement system and data coordination. One of the challenges on food security is, track data. Everybody's collecting some different type of data on food. A common approach would involve a central point for data collection.

Question: Can you share more about the SNAP grant the City received?

Harumi: Thomas Bezabih, Human Service Specialist, is managing the grant and presented on the topic. The City was awarded a grant in late 2024 with a goal of enrolling older adults (age 60+) into SNAP. Only 26% of eligible adults (ages 65+) were enrolled prior to the grant. Goal of the grant is to enroll 1500 older adults. As of May 31, 2025, there are only 350 applications. One priority is to why people are not applying. One challenge is the length and complexity of the application. Another is where is the program being marketed/promoted. We are working closely with many partners, nonprofits and government agencies, to promote the program to their constituents. As a part of the grant's data collection efforts we collect data every 3 months as follow-up (e.g. a survey call.)

Question: What can the Commission on Aging and individual members can do to help support your work?

Harumi: Recommendations include: provide inputs in our draft strategic plan with the lens of the older adults; work together to craft a strategy around food security; help to identify who is missing, where are the other thousand adults that are eligible but not enrolled; how can we sustain this past the grant ending in April 2026; and develop strategies to make choices more culturally diverse.

[Michael shared the COA proposed to the City Legislative Director that they put into the City's legislative package for Richmond an increase in the minimum benefit from \$23 to \$50, as that might be a driver for low participation; and maybe testifying on that later on this year.]

Resource - Food Insecurity Report: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/news-dchs/2024-03-18/city-of-alexandria-releases-food-insecurity-report>

Liaison Reports

Division of Aging and Adult Services – Chris shared he just returned from a V4A meeting in Lynchburg with nothing major to report. They are coming close to hiring for the Older Adult Mental Health Team Leader position (open due to Rhonda Williams retirement.) Internally the Division is looking to begin work on a strategic plan. This work will dovetail nicely with the Age Friendly Plan.

Human Rights Commission – Tom shared the Commission met with the new legislative director, and they adopted the proposals in the legislative package, and specifically supported the Commission on Aging's proposals by reference and explicitly included, one very similar to COA's with respect to increasing the grace period in non-payment of rent evictions from 5 to 14 days.

AARP – Jane shared that on October 14th AARP will be offering a program on Medicare 101: Understanding Your Rights, October 15th is a movie screening of Aging in America, Survive or Thrive, and more information to follow on the November 22nd Dementia Caregivers Conference. Michael shared that AARP volunteer advocates will be meeting with AARP Virginia staff in Richmond to strategize on older adult issues, such as prescription drug costs, SNAP, a free Certified Nursing Aide program, and some other items in the NVAN package

NVAN – Michael shared the NVAN breakfast was successful – had 150-200 attendees. He can share the background papers on the approved NVAN platform.

St. Martin de Porres Senior Center – Juanita shared the Center hosted a vaccination clinic in September in partnership with Safeway. For October they have quite a few activities happening for program participants: the dance rehearsal at the Lee Center, Masquerade Ball on 10/31, of intergenerational activities with local high schools, and in November a presentation on Medicare Open Enrollment followed the next day with time to submit the application.

Senior Center @ Charles Houston – Pamela shared the Center hosted a vaccination clinic the week before. Other activities include a pumpkin patch trip and the Masquerade Ball.

Senior Services of Alexandria – Marshall shared their Oktoberfest celebration was a huge success. Upcoming Speaker Series event is scheduled for Thursday, October 23rd, at 10 a.m. at Westminster Presbyterian Church. The theme is the Journey to Healthy Living. He reported that they have enough volunteers for their Friendly Caller program but are looking for new clients. Referrals can be sent to their team.

Arlington Legislative Committee – Michael shared the committee has disbanded and are looking to do something different. On a related note the Arlington Commission on Aging meets the third Monday every month, and their next meeting is going to be virtual on October 20th.

Alexandria Adult Day Services Center (ADSC) – Darrell shared he is working with the HR Department for the therapeutic recreation leader position.

Alexandria Housing Affordability Advisory Committee (AHAAC) – Jan shared the next meeting will be on the 15th, and that will be with the Commission on Aging. Michael shared the COA will do a short presentation on the Age Friendly Plan. This is an opportunity for COA on what we do on legislative advocacy,

No Reports:

- INOVA Alexandria Hospital
- AHA (At Home Alexandria)
- VHC Health (formerly, Virginia Hospital Center)
- Commission for Women
- Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria
- Public Health Advisory Commission
- Commission on Persons with Disabilities
- Alexandria Commission on Employment (ACE)
- Northern Virginia Falls Prevention Alliance (NVFPA) – Marshall Hespe
- Arlington Commission on Aging
- Successful Aging Committee
- Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities

Executive Report

This report is reflected in the Discussion/Action Items below.

Discussion/Action Items

Age Friendly Plan – Next Steps: – Jane led a discussion on the status of the Age Friendly Plan. For the November meeting, we will go into more detail, evaluating and hopefully approving it at that time. She opened the floor to the Committee Chairs for feedback on their goals and objectives:

- Housing – Lois reported they have **3 goals**.
 - **Goal 1:** To advocate for mixed-income affordable assisted living facility, as approved by the COA concept plan for such a facility. The Committee has plans to put more energy into this by building more support for an Alexandria affordable assisted living facility, and advocating for amending Section 7-700 of the zoning ordinance (e.g. revisit that section so it includes aspects of independent and assisted living developments)
 - **Goal 2:** Enhance, affordability for older Alexandrians by always promoting for increased funding for City rent relief for older persons, eviction protections and the use of accessory dwelling units.
 - **Goal 3:** Prevent the unnecessary or unwanted institutionalization of older adults who could and would prefer to remain in their homes or in the community for as long as possible. Accomplish this by working to increase awareness of the aging population and their caregivers of what services are in place.
- Economic Security and Civic Engagement – Jessica shared:
 - **Goal 1:** To support and expand support for the Workforce Development Center's 50-plus programs. Objectives include: continue funding for the 50-plus employment and training

specialists and assess the possibility of the City to reestablishing funding for the 50-plus work-based learning program (the latter in particular due to federal layoffs.)

- **Goal 2:** Expand employment opportunities for Alexandria seniors, such as Jim's work on entrepreneurial opportunities with his Shark Tank. Also plan to look into a roundtable working with, local businesses. and Chamber of Commerce to create awareness around the work being done to train workers and needs of the business community.
- **Goal 3:** To increase access to food assistance services to support the work under the grant to increase SNAP enrollment, and to work with the City, local not-for-profits and the faith community to increase knowledge of and access to food services.
- **Goal 4:** To advocate for additional resources to fill gaps created by likely federal cuts to the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, acronym is LIHEAP.
- **Goal 5:** To work on social participation and equity in aging, given that we have such a diverse population in Alexandria. Ensure that minority communities have knowledge about and access to City services, recreation, parks, cultural activities, and the opportunity to engage in opportunities of interest.
- Outreach Committee – Marshall shared:
 - On the Social Participation and Aging Equity goal encourage older adults to sign up for SSA e-news and other city social media to bring more seniors into the network and increase civic engagement
 - To add to the communication and collaboration goals and objectives asks that when the individual Committees have work that related to the Outreach Committee that you attend their meetings and inform them of the work going on. To collaborate on a common goal.
- Health /Dementia Friendly Committee – Barbara shared:
 - The goals described in the plan are what they agreed to. These goals are based on the community health assessment (CHA), Health Department priorities, etc.

Chris shared he and DT met with Dennis Lenders (now with DCHS, formerly with Montgomery County) to discuss how we can get some more data to better inform our plan.

Kathleen commented on the housing affordability issue. Her ask is if we can add in there something using AMI in Rent Relief, rent control. Michael shared rent control is not an option, but rent stabilization will probably go in the 2026 legislative packet.

Jane moved we approve the goals and objectives shared as a preliminary draft to develop a full-scale plan. Was seconded and approved.

Next steps: 1) Committees to finalize their plans – goals and objectives. 2) Draft a new plan using the Committee plans. 3) Provide to City Council and AARP. Goal is to have this close to finalization after the November meeting. There is some work that needs to be done on the introductions to the domains, introduction to the plan itself, as well as final formatting.

Report on October 3rd NVAN Legislative Breakfast: DT copied and pasted the NVAN priorities into the chat. He shared the topic of the keynote presentation was reframing aging as it relates to these priorities.

Report on Status of COA/NVAN Legislative Proposals to Alexandria Legislative Director: Michael shared the COA received a letter from the City Manager asking for ideas for the FY27 City budget due on November 1st. Ideas for inclusion are: the knowledge base position, and a study on the, mixed-income affordable assisted living concept. A motion was made, seconded and approved for Michael to draft a letter to send to the City Manager.

Commonwealth's Attorney Community Academy: Michael shared he recently attended the Academy where Brian Porter was the presenter. Michael suggested we invite him to present at a future COA meeting.

Update on the Alexandria Fund for Human Services: No updates.

Future Speakers

Brian Porter Commonwealth's Attorney in-person. Brian would like to be there in-person, so looking at January. Other presenters mentioned include: a representative from Parks & Recreation. For the November meeting the DCHS Director of Communications was invited and we need to confirm.

Committee Updates

Housing Committee - Co-Chairs, Michael Schuster and Lois Steele: The next meeting is, the October 20th. We're going to have Tamara Jovovic talk about a RFP they did on mixed-income Affordable Assisted Living. They will also be discussing Ladrey.

Outreach Committee – Co-Chairs, Marshall Hespe & Barbara D'Agostino: The next meeting is November 20th and will be virtual.

Transportation – No update. Committee is currently not active. Work is being done to determine how to best move forward on transportation issues.

Economic Security and Civic Engagement – Chair, Jessica Lefevre : The Committee met last Thursday, and the next meeting is November 6th. Last week's meeting was focused on reviewing and adopting the age-friendly plan. They had a few brief reports from Clarence Parkinson (Workforce Development Center) on engagement and outreach events, Jim on Shark Tank updates, and Ashley on Blooming Health Texting Program.

Health /Dementia Friendly Committee – Chair, Barbara Huelat: The Committee didn't meet in October; their next meeting is virtual on November 13th at 3:00 PM.

Other Business - None

New Business

- 1) DT brought up the idea of revisiting the format and flow of the COA meetings. Next step is to discuss at the November meeting.
- 2) Tom shared that next week is the beginning of open enrollment in Medicare, and the city is putting on lots of different presentations on Medicare 101, and we are sponsoring, one-on-one counseling sessions that people can get appointments for. We're doing presentations in most of the rec centers, and in many public libraries.

Public comments No comments.

Adjournment Meeting was adjourned at 6:33 PM.

Next Commission Meeting: Thursday, November 13, 2025 – 4:30 p.m. @ Mark Center
Executive Committee Meeting: November 3, 2025– 1:30 p.m. @ Mark Center

NVAN Meetings: November 18, 2025 9:30 AM – Host: Loudon COA

COMMISSION OFFICERS: Michael Schuster, Co-Chair

DT Oliver – Co-Chair
Ana Rivas Beck, Vice Chair
Kim Koch, Secretary