

ALEXANDRIA COMMISSION ON AGING MEETING MINUTES

Meeting: Thursday, November 13, 2025, 4:30 PM – 6:30 PM
Location: 4850 Mark Center Drive. 9th Floor, Room 9208

Members Attending In-Person:

Co-Chair, DT Oliver; Secretary, Kimberly Koch, Alan Dinsmore, Barbara D'Agostino, Barbara Huelat, Jim Lindsay, Kathleen Demik, Marshall Hespe, Michele McLaughlin, Ray Biegun, William Thomas Reeder

Members Attending Remotely With Approval From The Co-Chairs:

Co-Chair, Michael Schuster, Gerri Wallace, Jessica Lefevre

Persons Attending Under an Impairment Excuse Pursuant to VA FOIA, Code of Virginia, section 2.2-3708.2, et seq.

James Bruen, Jane M. King, Victoria Rutson

Members Excused:

Ana Rivas Beck, Canek Aguirre

Members Unexcused:

None

Liaisons Present:

Ian Torrance, Police Department; Gaynelle Diaz, Ladrey Senior High-Rise & Senior Center @ Charles Houston; Bob Eiffert, AHA; Juanita Balenger, St. Martins de Porres Senior Center; Tricia Rodgers, Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria; Jan Macidull, Housing Affordability Advisory Committee

Guests Present:

Jennifer Cohen-Cordero, Senior Communications Manager, City of Alexandria, DCHS; JeanAnn Mayhan, Public Health Advisory Committee; Cedar Dvorin; Laura Manville, Sarah R, Sarra Mohamed

Staff Members Present:

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

Call to Order Meeting called to order at 4:38 pm

Approval of Agenda as is.

Approval of Thursday, October 9, 2025 Minutes – approved with no changes.

Alexandria Police Department Liaison Report – Sgt. Ian Torrance

Sgt. Torrance had no report or updates to share. He did forward the last traffic complaints to their traffic safety section. Related to a personal incident, Jessica asked Sgt. Torrance if there was someone he could connect the Commission with to come and speak at a future meeting about traffic, pedestrian safety measures that are available to the city. He will get in contact with someone from the traffic safety section and line up time when they can speak with the Commission.

Special Presentation: Jennifer Cohen-Cordero, Senior Communications Manager, DCHS and DT Oliver.

Jennifer has held different roles over the course of her 24-year career with the City, and in her current role serves as the Senior Manager of Communications for DCHS. She manages a two-and-a-half-person team responsible for communications for the entire 650-person department and also serves as the department's FOIA officer.

Question: What are some of the communication platforms the Department uses?

Response: So some of the ways that people can connect with us are, of course, coming to the Del Pepper Community Resource Center. Of course, we've got a large presence online. You can visit us on our website.

And, one thing I like to encourage people to do is subscribe to the city news channels. There are well over 100 categories where you can receive information, pertaining to the city. So, you can go there, sign up; you can subscribe to those, you get messages in your inbox, and you can also unsubscribe at any time if you're feeling inundated.

We've got for social media platforms. Instagram is the newest for us, and in comparison to the rest of the city, all of our social media is really relatively young, so we hope that you'll... that you'll follow those, have a look at these, different platforms. We also have YouTube.

We still use a lot of flyers and posters. We've got the City Events Calendar where you can see everything that's happening in the city.

We have an online publication called Connect that comes out monthly.

And you can also peruse our publication directory, which is something new that we have, that I think is a great tool that gives people access to different resources, brochures, handouts, things that you might need for different types of events.

Question: What would you say are the most important takeaways from how to get information out to the public, and maybe more specifically for, older adults now?

Response: I would say one of the most important things that sometimes is overlooked is to remember that communication is two-way. And it's not only us putting out information, but we want to hear back from people. People tend to trust and buy into things that they have helped shape, that they've contributed to.

And also along those lines, I would say, to share how you've used their input. A lot of times we give feedback and give input, but we don't know how people used it, what they did with it.

I would also add to remember always to meet people where they are. Don't expect them to be at the platforms that we're using, but go to the places where they get their information and present that information in a way that is in their language, their tone.

Question: With the different types of housing that exist in Alexandria - you have people living in standalone homes, you have big apartment complexes, you have senior care centers - is there any... sort of tailored communication methods that are recommended based on the nuance of the housing type?

Response: We tend to think in terms of audiences. It's sometimes challenging in terms of distribution, like, how we get to those different locations, how we deliver the information, whether it's by mail or asking department managers.

We tend to think about, with older adults, who we're communicating with. Sometimes it's older adults themselves, you know, thinking, like, 60 plus. And that would really be most of these platforms you see here on this handout. In terms of social media, the focus would be Facebook, as opposed to Instagram, and so forth.

The senior high-rises, we would work with different apartment managers and ask them if they could contribute [to] it, if they have a newsletter, can they post it.

With family members, if they're in some of our programs, we have different ways that we communicate with them, the newest being a newsletter. It goes to all of the families in the Adult Day Services Center, and to the participants, and it shows pictures of them, activities they've been doing, things that they're planning, other resources and information.

Question: As we think about, you know, advocating on behalf of older adults in Alexandria, what's the toughest group, in your experience, to get information out to the city?

Response: [Its] definitely older adults, who speak another language, whose proficiency in English is limited. They really face a double barrier. You know, the barriers that age presents, and then the linguistic barrier.

They have fewer touchpoints in the community where they get information. And sometimes, because of the cultural differences, it's not understood in exactly the same way.

Question: Related to this over the past few years what are those significant milestones that you have made with the information out to those who aren't as proficient in English?

Response: We saw big changes during COVID. One of the things we've found that is most effective is, particularly because we're government, is not only having information in their language, but using trusted messengers. The information isn't coming just from us, the government, it's coming from a trusted nonprofit partner like Senior Services [of Alexandria], or ALIVE!, or Casa Chirilagua, or, you know, folks that are in the community working with our clients, and that could even include, like, different faith-based groups, or like I mentioned, even, we've done some barber shops, just to really be able to go, to places that they trust and that, that they know.

Question: Were there any pieces of the goals in the COA Age-Friendly plan, that stood out to you related to the communication?

Response: The thing that stood out to me the most with those two particular goals is that you're definitely focusing on groups that may be more marginalized.

For those two goals, I would suggest a more comprehensive communication plan tied specifically to those goals. Where you have, you know, what your objective is, who your target audience is. You have 4 or 5 different populations specified in there. What is the message to them, and what are the best platforms for delivering that message?

Question: There's a few sort of tangible initiatives that we're interested in taking on, and I think a big question on our minds is, what's the best way to communicate those things? [For example], around workforce development opportunities, as well communication with local employers and advocating on behalf of older adults related to employment. What would you say is the best way for this commission to partner with you and your team to reach as many older adults in Alexandria as possible?

Response: You need a solid communication plan of, you know, who's the audience? What is the message? It sounds like your audience may be employers, and it may also be individuals who also need to believe that they can still work, that they still bring value. Who are your target audiences? Where do we find them? What's the message? What are the best platforms, for reaching that? But I would say you need a solid, but simple, really, communication plan.

Questions from Commission Members

Question: How do you keep everything standardized? Do you have, like, templates, that you use?

Response: So we have whole policies, books, guidelines, we just updated it. So, what you're referring to is a branding style guide.

So, we/my team creates stuff, but anyone in the department can create things, but if it's going to be publicly disseminated, it has to come to us first. We are sort of the branding style checkers. Yes, we have certain colors, we have fonts, we have guidelines around how you show your department. We have, considering, like, ADA and older adults, this commission in particular, years ago, used to always be concerned about, you know things for people with vision impairments and, you know, color contrast.

And so, anything that anyone produces that's going to go to the public is supposed to come through our team, so we can make sure, that it aligns with the standards. And yes, we do build templates. Yeah. So we've got all the code of the city seal colors, related colors.

It's professional if you are more reliable, it builds trust with whoever you're sharing information with.

Question: Who is responsible for helping clients figure out where to start their connection with the Division of Aging? Who triages, a complicated client service needs?

Response: It depends. Sometimes clients go to the fifth floor to receive help, and then they send them up here. To kind of start that connection with the aging population. Our phone number is 31. 311 is a

starting point where people can call and initiate some assistance, and then it kind of gets thrown out to us.

We like to think that we are a no-wrong-door access, so that you could come to any one of our programs, and we would get you what you need, and often that happens, and sometimes it doesn't.

We do have a same-day access, where people can come in. That's typically used more for the mental health, behavioral health side of the house, where they'll do a full assessment and intake, see what your goals are, and sort of identify services, and we call it wraparound. We also have our call center. People typically contact them for anything human service related. And the idea is the call center is, you know, it's like a triage.

So, to your point, we do have a very new employee right now who is working on, system alignment. And precisely what you are talking about, so that the no wrong door really does work, but there is a more clearly communicated single correct door.

Question: Can you address, maybe, a few successes, and how are they measured? Or what tool do you use to measure them?

Response: That's a great question and a hard one. It's difficult, but we have come up with data points and outcomes. We typically rely on things depending on what we're promoting.

- How many people came to the event?
- How many visits to this website? How much time did they spend there? Where did they go from there?
- How many followers? What's... what are the different engagement levels with social media?

There's all kinds of data that we can track, but the difficulty is assessing the qualitative impact, [for example], did behaviors change because of the content. How do we know if we're having that kind of impact? Once in a while, we hear a great personal story that shows us we've had that impact, but in terms of data, it's something that's really hard to measure

Question: How do you begin to, connect and understand what this larger number of people (the aging population who may not use social media or are visually impaired) are needing and now not getting?

Response: With websites, and even with flyers and other print materials, there are new regulations for accessibility that we have to meet by April of 2026. We have the application we use called Site Improve. And it basically sends these trawlers through every web page on your site and flags things that are accessibility issues.

Related Action Items

Jim will connect with Jennifer to discuss a communications plan for the Shark Tank project.

Ashley will present the idea of a new volunteer program to assist clients navigate the system to leadership for consideration.

Liaison Reports

Division of Aging and Adult Services – Ashley shared they have two new positions posted: APS Social Worker and the nutritionist position. She shared information on the Dementia Caregiver Conference (November 22) that her team is a part of planning.

Ladrey Senior High-Rise – Laura Manville and Sarra Mohamed presented. The partners are the same. We are with WIN and IBF Development as development partners. The architect is still the same, HCMA. Bowman (?) is the general contractor. The project has changed from a Plan A, which was the redevelopment everyone knew, to a Plan B, which is keeping the existing building and rehabbing it.

Question: Do you have to go through the permitting process again, since the project is now remodeling. Is this a different permit?

Answer: We are doing a new architectural drawing set and we'll apply for building permits next year. But since it is a rehab, we don't need to go through the same, zoning process that we did in the last go around.

Question: Will the redesigned building have mixed use? Will it have, affordable housing as well as market-rate housing, or will it be all affordable?

Answer: It will be 100% affordable. It will have, public housing as well as non-public housing units, but it'll be 100% affordable.

Question: When you say affordable. Market affordable, define affordable in numbers.

Answer: 60% AMI or lower. We may have some 80% AMI units; we're still working that out. The goal is to have, you know, public housing residents and non-public housing residents having access to the same amenities and fully modernized rehabbed units.

Human Rights Commission – Tom provided the Commission's liaison report. No additional updates.

AHA – Bob shared the biggest news they have is that their longtime executive director is resigning at the end of the year, so AHA is in the process of hiring someone new.

AARP – Jane shared that AARP is scheduling a volunteer celebration on December 4th from 11:30 to 2:00. AARP continues to do a lot of planning around its legislative platform.

NVAN – Michael shared NVAN members have been meeting with delegates and senators in the General Assembly to let them know about our platform, and in some cases we're asking them to sponsor some of our legislation. Meetings have been held with Delegate Marcus Simon, Delegate, Delaney's Chief of Staff, and Delegate Hope.

St. Martins de Porres Senior Center – Juanita shared that yesterday Hilda Narahjo, the VICAP coordinator, was onsite to talk about Medicare open enrollment. And today, she met with those who wanted one-on-one sessions. Hilda will be coming back November 25th, because they weren't able to see everybody today.

The center is working with Gregory McKinney Associate Director, Community Outreach and Resources with Catholic Charities Migration and Refugee Services to bring a group of 12-16 Afghan seniors that live in the West End for their first visit to the center on December 16th. They've been working with them on getting them settled here in the communities throughout Northern Virginia.

Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria – Tricia provided an update on the Community Health Improvement Plan. She shared they had over 100 people attend both the citywide meeting on mental wellness and the Landmark Van Dorn session. They did get some feedback that the concerns of older adults really didn't rise to the surface in the conversation, around mental wellness. The partnership, in concert with the health department is looking to figure out how to do some more outreach, to make sure that the concerns of older adults are voiced.

The Landmark Van Dorn meeting, the next thing they're going to tackle is what their boundaries are.

The next two meetings have been set for December. The mental wellness one will be on December the 8th at the Del Pepper Center and the Landmark Van Dorn meeting will be at the Beatley Library.

She also thanked all the Commission members, and liaisons, who attended the meetings.

Senior Center @ Charles Houston – Gaynelle shared information about Breast Cancer Awareness Month – older adults participated in some sessions to learn about the importance of mammograms and self-breast exams. They also had Giant come out and do a nutrition seminar.

Senior Services of Alexandria – Marshall shared their speaker series event called Balanced for Life on November 20th at 10:00 a.m. and to be held at Beth El Hebrew Congregation. Topics include: wellness, health, and then importantly, how to stay stable, how to have balance. This is being offered in partnership with Northern Virginia Falls Prevention Alliance.

Arlington Commission on Aging – Michael shared they have a meeting on Monday and that their Transportation Committee is meeting this Friday. No additional updates to share.

Alexandria Housing Affordability Advisory Committee (AHAAC) – Jan shared she submitted a liaison report and has no additional information to share.

No Reports:

1. VHC Health (formerly, Virginia Hospital Center)
2. Alexandria Commission on Employment, ACE
3. Successful Aging Committee
4. Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities
5. Alexandria Adult Day Services Center, ADSC
6. Northern Virginia Falls Prevention Alliance, NVFPA

Executive Report

We've paused the Transportation Committee for the time being. Temporarily, there will be different members of the Executive Committee, joining the Transportation Commission meetings and reporting back to our full Commission.

Discussion/Action Items

Age Friendly Plan – Update and Approval of Goals and Objectives

Committees have the latest draft of the age-friendly plan and next steps are to let Michael and DT know if there's anything that was missed. We approved the preliminary goals and objectives at the last meeting and are getting it to the point where we can start polishing the presentation and prepare it to go to City Council. The goal is to have the plan go to City Council in December, but January 2026 is probably a more realistic timeframe.

City Manager Directive on Transportation Coordination

The City Manager is asking us to collaborate with the Departments of Recreation and Parks, Transportation and Environmental Services on a more collaborative approach to meeting the human service needs of transportation. DAAS is in the middle of revamping its RFP for the senior taxi program to make it more friendly for people to choose what kind of transportation they want with the subsidies or the discount we provide. The goal is to have, like, a card that you can select if you want to use taxi or Uber.

Paratransit is going to model the same kind of system and piggyback on DAAS's contract if it is awarded, a contractor that can do exactly that. That will be for folks under 60. So with Senior Taxi, the focus is, folks over the age of 60, making a certain amount of money, and then paratransit will also be able to serve folks under 60 with the same model of autonomy in transportation.

Housing 2040 Study on older adult + options

The Office on Housing has hired a consultant to come up with a study and a recommendation of affordable housing options for older adults in Alexandria. It is will essentially build on the Bill Harris concept of mixed income affordable assisted living. At the state level, the JLARC committee may do a study also on housing options for older adults with the emphasis on trying to allow older adults to age in place.

COA Meeting Modifications

Many great ideas and recommendations were shared and discussed during the meeting on how we can restructure the agenda to best meet the Commission members, liaisons and guests needs and interests. The ultimate goal is: to try to shorten the meetings a little bit more, have them a little bit more concise, and maybe certain parts of it will be a little bit longer because they're important and deal with action items. No decision was made and the next step is to have a draft. plan available for review/comment at the next meeting.

COA Vacancies

According to our bylaws one member of our commission needs to also be a member of the Commission on Women. We have had trouble filling this position and the recommendation was made to explore if we have any latitude in how it can be filled. Kate suggested speaking with Gloria to discuss the options. We have one more vacancy for a “citizen” member.

Future Speakers

Our December's guest is going to be the chair of the Economic Opportunities Commission. In January, we'll have someone from the Alexandria Commonwealth Attorney's Office. Glenn from the Patrick Henry Rec Center is to be scheduled.

Committee Updates

Housing Committee – Co-Chairs, Michael Schuster and Lois Steele: The next meeting is Monday, November 17 at 1:00 p.m.

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

Transportation – No update. Committee is currently not active.

Economic Security and Civic Engagement – Chair, Jessica Lefevere : The Committee met on November 6. She shared information about a grant for executive coaching services for displaced workers in Arlington County and Alexandria. While the grant program is not limited to support for 50-plus workers, our 50-plus training specialist has been assigned to that task. [The Alexandria/Arlington grant will fund executive coaching services, including executive-level skill rebranding, resume revamping, career coaching, mock interviews, and connections to employers for job seekers. See, <https://www.alxnow.com/2025/07/11/alexandria-arlington-regional-workforce-council-receives-150k-grant-for-executive-coaching-program/>.]

The committee raised some concerns about whether the 50-plus training funds set by City Council are now being diverted to a program that is not 50+, and whether this might set a precedent that could eventually lead to more dilution of those services

Shark Tank: Jim shared The Shark Tank will be 16th of December at Georgetown with about 30 or more people there and a couple accredited investors. There is a lot more interest, and he is starting to have to interview people for the spring cohort. He is meeting this week with Alexandria Economic Development Partnership and coordinating efforts. Montgomery County has expressed interest in learning more about the program.

Ashley shared updates on the plan for SNAP benefits in the midst of the government shutdown, as well as information that LIHEAP (a federal program, low-income home energy assistance) is accepting applications until mid-November. She also shared the Healthy Harvest voucher program is still operating. The fifth floor has also done 2 emergency food distributions for folks impacted by the SNAP.

Health /Dementia Friendly Committee – Chair, Barbara Huelat: The Committee met November 13 at 3:00 p.m. They reviewed their goals and objectives with a particular focus on Medicaid.

Other Business – None

New Business

From the Boards and Commission chairs meeting. In January DCHS issue the RFP for the next cycle of the Alexandria Human Services Fund. They are seeking volunteers for the review Committee. If you're interested, you can email agingcommission@alexandriava.gov and Ashley will pass your information onto the POC.

Public comments – No comments.

Adjournment Meeting was adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

Executive Committee Meeting: December 1, 2025– 1:30 p.m. @ Virtual

Next Commission Meeting: Thursday December 11, 2025 – 4:30 p.m. @ Virtual

Northern Virginia Network Meetings

Meeting Schedule / Rotation of Chairmanship	
2025- 2026	
September 16, 2025	Arlington
November 18, 2025	Loudoun
January 20, 2026	Prince William
March 17, 2026	Alexandria
April 21, 2026	Legislative Brainstorming
May 19, 2026	Legislative Platform
July 21, 2026	Fairfax

COMMISSION OFFICERS: Michael Schuster, Co-Chair
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