

ALEXANDRIA COMMISSION ON AGING MEETING MINUTES

Meeting: Thursday, December 11, 2025, 4:30 PM – 6:30 PM
Location: Virtual

Members Attending Remotely:

Co-Chairs, Michael Schuster, DT Oliver; Vice Chair, Kimberly Koch, Alan Dinsmore, Barbara D'Agostino, Barbara Huelat, Gerri Wallace, Ginny Kalish, James Bruen, Jane M. King, Jessica Lefevre, Jim Lindsay, Kathleen Demik, Michele McLaughlin, Ray Biegun, Victoria Rutson, William Thomas Reeder

Members Excused:

Canek Aguirre, Marshall Hespe, Ana Rivas Beck

Members Unexcused:

Liaisons Present:

Ian Torrance, Police Department; Gaynelle Diaz, Ladrey Senior High-Rise and Senior Center @ Charles Houston; Bob Eiffert, AHA; Juanita Balenger, St. Martins de Porres Senior Center; Jan Macidull, Housing Affordability Advisory Committee

Guests Present:

Lois Steele, Housing Committee; Natalie Talis and Sean Curry, Alexandria Health Department, unknown "owner (guest)"

Staff Members Present:

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

Call to Order Meeting called to order at 4:32 pm

Approval of Agenda as is.

Approval of Thursday, November 13, 2025 Minutes – approved with no changes.

Alexandria Police Department Liaison Report – Sgt. Ian Torrance

Sgt. Torrance had no report to share. He is working with Ashley to coordinate a future speaker from the Police Department to discuss pedestrian safety.

Special Presentation: Natalie Talis and Sean Curry, Alexandria Health Department and DT Oliver – "What Mental Health Areas Should the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) Focus On?"

This was an interactive session soliciting input from COA members for the section on mental wellness in the upcoming Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) .

For context: the Community Health Improvement Plan is a community-centered, data-driven process, to focus on how we can improve health in our community. It's something that health departments do

pretty regularly. Alexandria does one about every 5 years. This is going to be our third time doing one in the city of Alexandria.

The Health Department and the Partnership for a Healthy Alexandria are forming these coalitions of community members, local organizations, other city agencies and others, to work on what it is that we need to work on, and also, how are we going to do it? What's our plan for moving this forward? Who's going to be working on what?

They use data from our Community Health Assessment (CHA) completed over the past year or so, and work with other city agencies and community organizations, for both plan development, and implementation.

Timeline: Community-based meetings were held in October and November to discuss the vision for what a healthier Alexandria looks like in the year 2030. In December they solidified the visions for the different coalitions, which are now being voted on by different stakeholders. A part of this they will also be identifying what are those potential focus areas.

In the new year is when the work begins to create the work groups within each of the different focus areas, deciding on what we're working on, who's doing it, and how we're measuring progress. With a goal of beginning to implement the work in the summertime of 2026 through the end of 2030.

Sean shared two mental wellness vision statements that will be put out to the community to vote on [Deadline is January 9th to vote]:

- **Option 1:** Alexandria is a community where everyone can feel safe, connected, and supported, because mental health and wellness are prioritized, accessible, and part of everyday life.
- **Option 2:** Alexandria is a place where mental wellness is prioritized, stigma is eliminated, and everyone has equitable access to supports that nurture recovery, joy, and lifelong wellbeing.

Sean shared themes they heard from the various listening session/meetings in October/November related to mental wellness: Safe, inclusive, connected communities, accessible and equitable mental health services, supportive environments for all ages, healthy, green, and active spaces, holistic and integrated approaches, and celebration, joy, and hope. <https://www.alexandriava.gov/public-health/project/community-health-improvement-plan-2030-focus-area-backgrounds>.

The presentation then transitioned into a brainstorm exercise to solicit input into the focus areas for mental wellness. The goal is to agree on two or three options they can bring to the larger coalition for voting. Overall, they're looking at voting on 10 to 15 focus areas. To note: a focus area is something that's more thematic versus a specific action. It's not we're targeting the specific, population, and this is the specific activity we're doing to work on it. Work groups will be formed to identify the action steps.

Highlights from the Brainstorming Exercise

Question posed: Reflect on what was shared about the process and goals, reflect on what you care about in your life, the people around you, other older adults that you either know or work with, or love and care about and think about that mental wellness focus area. Input was a solicited through a variety of channels re: the chat feature, polling and discussion.

Initial themes identified and discussed include:

- Integration of mental health and medical care for older adults
- Dementia-friendly community, including caregiver support
- Social isolation of older adults - community participation opportunities
- Economic security for older adults, such as aging in place
- Access to timely care for mental health services for older adults
- Mental health support specifically for caregivers of older adults

After a robust discussion and reworking of some of the themes, COA member voted on these as the top themes to move forward:

- Economic security for older adults, to include aging in place and affordable housing
- Dementia-Friendly Community (community awareness/supporting individuals)
- Mental wellness support for caregivers of older adults

As a next step these top responses will fold into the larger package of focus area options for the Mental Wellness Coalition. They will then vote to continue to narrow down the list. COA members are encouraged to continue to advocate for these areas through future voting opportunities.

General Questions Related to the Presentation

Q. [COA member] I know one of the issues when we talk about older adults and mental health, is how dementia and, and Alzheimer's are classified. How do we address that within this plan, and everything, so it doesn't necessarily give short shrift to that?

A. [Natalie Talis] When we think about this broader category of mental wellness, the reason we chose that framing rather than just mental health is that it allows for a lot of different things. It allows for the conversation on dementia and Alzheimer's, it also allows for the conversation on substance use and addiction and behavioral health. So, it has this broader bucket that provides more flexibility for our community about what they want to work on

Executive and DAAS Reports

DAAS – Chris shared the Nutritionist position currently open due to a recent retirement has been made a full-time position. The position is open and applications are being accepted. Paula Knighton has taken over for Rhonda Williams as the Older Adult Mental Health Team Program Director.

They will be attending V4A Legislative Day in January, visiting the Capitol and advocating for the AAA funding, among other things, on the NVAN platform.

Age Friendly Plan – Next Steps - The Age-Friendly Plan document is almost done. The working document has been sent to Jennifer Cohen Cordero for her review to make sure it's accessibility compliant, as well as meets the City-style standards. Once approved Chris will prepare the docket

memo in January and hopefully have a date on when that will go before the City Council for its approval.

Discussion and Action Items

COA Meeting Protocols

As a group we reviewed the proposed plan, which reflected feedback from the last Executive Committee and Commission meetings. The overall rationale is to be more efficient with our time and prioritize action items by establishing timeframes for each section and providing structure and expectations around report.

There was robust discussion on process for distribution of meeting pre-reads, to include liaison reports. The Commission agreed to the plan and we will keep the discussion open on opportunities for future improvement. This is a work in progress.

Draft Testimony on Alexandria's Legislative Package for Richmond

Michael pulled together in short order testimony for an upcoming public hearing on December 13. He will refine it, and then try to send it in to the City Clerk to distribute to City Council members before Saturday. The draft basically tracks what we've been talking about for the last two years in terms of increased funding for AAAs, the Division of Aging and Adult Services, dealing with caregivers, the Certified Nurse's Assistant free tuition program. The legislative package encompasses virtually everything that we proposed.

There was a motion to approve the testimony. Approved and seconded with no objections.

Housing 2040 Study on older adult + options

No updates. This is being drafted and they'll have something in January. Depending on when it's finished, we can either put it on the agenda for the January meeting or sometime soon thereafter.

Future Speakers

- We will reschedule the Chair of the Economic Opportunities Commission for a future meeting
- George Worthington to speak on statewide efforts related to dementia care
- Inova Alexandria Hospital and their senior programs

Committee Updates

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

The Committee met on November 17. They received an update on the Ladrey project. They met with the Office of Housing and learned more about the 2040 plan and the consultant (Trilogy Consulting) working on this effort. Trilogy will be evaluating the inventory, the status of what we're doing and see what options there are out there to incorporate into the 2040 plan. They estimate getting a report to the City, to the Office of Housing by February 2026.

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

No updates. The Committee is looking forward to hitting the ground running and working with some of the other committees, to see where we have some overlap, in the new iteration of the Age-Friendly Plan.

Economic Security and Civic Engagement – Chair, Jessica Lefevre

The Committee wants to recommend that the Commission make ongoing funding for the 50-plus employment specialist and refunding for the work-based learning program priorities in our testimony on the new city budget. These two programs deserve funding in their own right, but also given the new work requirements, 20 hours of work or volunteer time for 50-plus individuals who are seeking to receive SNAP benefits, expanding employment opportunities is very important in this regard.

Jim shared the Shark Tank will be occurring next Tuesday at Georgetown University. They have about 50 people coming, in addition to the students that are going to be presenting and pitching there will be three accredited investors as the panel judging the presentations, and two other accredited investors who will be in the audience. Please let Jim know if you are interested in attending.

Health /Dementia Friendly Committee – Chair, Barbara Huelat

The Committee didn't meet in December. The next meeting is January 8, 2026 at 1:30 p.m.

Liaison Reports –**Ladrey Senior High-Rise – Gaynelle Diaz**

They are on track to have everyone relocated from Ladrey by the end of this month. To date 113 moves have been completed, with an additional 30 scheduled. A large portion of those people have been relocated to the Alate, and others have been located to other properties within the city that they chose. There are 18 remaining to be scheduled.

Human Rights Commission – Tom Reeder

The City Council issued a declaration on Tuesday recognizing December as the International Human Rights Month.

AARP – Jane King

Bob and Jane gave a recent presentation on AARP's program, HomeFit, to a senior center in Arlington.

NVAN – Michael Schuster

Michael shared that he, Bob E and a few others went to Richmond to meet with the staff for the House Committee on Appropriations and the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations to discuss the budget items in the NVAN platform.

St. Martins de Porres Senior Center – Juanita Balenger

Juanita shared dates the Center will be closed over the holidays. Sheriff Casey was there today, bringing glad tidings of joy with and medicine lockboxes,

Senior Center @ Charles Houston – Gaynelle Diaz

The seniors at Charles Houston are planning their own holiday celebration next week, in addition to the various parties and events happening across the City. It's going to be a sneaker ball. She also shared the Center's closures over the holiday.

Senior Services of Alexandria – Marshall Hespe

SSA is embracing the holiday spirit, Activities include the holiday party tomorrow, sharing donated flower arrangements with Meals on Wheels clients and some of our other program clients, as well as providing donated toiletries to clients in need.

Arlington Commission on Aging – Michael Schuster

Michael will be attending their meeting next Monday. Every year they plan a civic engagement event for the County. Last year's focus was health. In 2026 they will be focusing on transportation issues and older adults, so he'll get more information on that later. He suggested the COA explore doing something similar in Alexandria.

Alexandria Adult Day Services Center, ADSC – Chris Moore

Chris shared Darrell is in the process of hiring for open positions.

Housing Affordability Advisory Committee, AHAAC – Jan Macidul

Jan shared additional context on common interest communities report by the Office on Housing as a part of the Housing 2040 Strategic Plan. It was a real, reminder that when you are an owner or an investor in a condominium, how important it is to know what your responsibilities are and what the condo's responsibilities are.

No Reports:

1. AHA
2. VHC Health (formerly, Virginia Hospital Center)
3. Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria
4. Northern Virginia Falls Prevention Alliance
5. Alexandria Commission on Employment, ACE
6. Successful Aging Committee
7. Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities

Other Business – None

New Business– None

Public comments – No comments.

Adjournment Meeting was adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

Executive Committee Meeting: Monday, December 29, 2025 @ 1:30 p.m. (In-person)

Next Commission Meeting: Thursday, January 8, 2026 @ 4:30 p.m. (In-person)

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