

ALEXANDRIA COMMISSION ON AGING MINUTES

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

Mark Center - Del Pepper Community Center, 4850 Mark Center Drive – Alexandria VA 22311

Members Attending In-Person:

Chair, Michael Schuster, Vice Chair, Barbara D'Agostino, Secretary, Alan Dinsmore, Barbara Huelat, David Kaplan, Gerri Wallace, Jane M. King, Jessica Lefevre, Jim Lindsay, Kathleen Demik, Kimberly Koch, Marshall Hesper, Victoria Rutson,

Members Attending Remotely With Approval From The Chair:

Ana Rivas, DT Oliver, James Bruen, Jennifer Stowe, Ray Biegun

Members Excused:

Canek Aguirre, William Thomas Reeder

Members Unexcused:

Joy Kone

Liaisons Present:

Juanita Balenger, St. Martins Senior Center; Darrell Wesley, Adult Day Services Center; Ian Torrance, Police Department; Gaynelle Diaz & Margaret Wilborn, Senior Center @ Charles Houston; Clarence Parkinson, Workforce Development Center

Guests Present: Bob Eiffert, Housing Committee; Jan Macidull, Housing Committee;

Lois Steele

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

Call to Order – 4:30 pm

Approval of Agenda – Approved

Approval of Thursday, December 12, 2024, Minutes – Approved

Alexandria Police Department Liaison Report – Sgt. Ian Torrance

He asked if anyone had questions or concerns. The department is trying to keep streets clear to avoid traffic accidents due to icy conditions. The new chief is doing community talks and looking for public input.

Michael mentioned that some houses do not clear sidewalks. According to the Sargent, if it is private property, then management company or owner is responsible for clearing the sidewalks. If it is a street, then it is a city requirement

Introduction of new Commission Member - Kimberly Koch

Ms. Koch introduced herself and stated that she is very excited about joining the Commission. The Commission members introduced themselves to Kimberly Koch.

Special Presentation: Barbara Huelat, Commissioner

Barbara is a Commissioner and she provided a power point presentation that will be included with the minutes. Her talk was on the dementia care and caregiving. She specifically addressed the upcoming crisis in dementia.

Her background is what led her into dementia research. It was combination of professional experience (architecture and design for senior living facilities and memory care) and then personal side. She had loved ones with all types of dementia (Parkinson, vascular). Living it personally, solidified her professional side.

The Coming Storm – 55 million people are living with the disease, worldwide. She provided statistics from her slide show which included the vast amount of diagnosis and the stress on the caregivers.

In the next 30 years, the number of individuals with dementia will explode to 150 million people worldwide. There are no cures or effective treatments. Caregiving is in crisis, because of population growth of those 65+. Also this disease is the most expensive to treat. Seventy percent of all caregivers are family members and unpaid family members, and 60% are women.

The causes of dementia include genetics, health conditions where there are lots of correlation with lifestyle, obesity, and other healthcare factors that are common health risk factors in our society.

Dementia is an overall umbrella term for cognitive impairment. It impacts short term memory and it impacts language and communication. But symptoms are varied with individuals, the type of disease and also the stage of the dementia that individual is in.

Complexity of dementia – it is very difficult to diagnose and there is inconsistent understanding in the research of what is happening. Important to understand that it is also long-term. Because of the symptoms, specifically behavioral symptoms, it becomes difficult to manage and understand, especially for the people who are closest to the individual.

Long term journey for dementia – There are three phases - Early phase, mid phase and late phase. In caretaking, we need to know that the individual needs care for at least 10 years of the disease.

It is very costly to treat dementia and there is a caregiver crisis. Barbara provided statistics that are provided in her slides. 80% of healthcare professionals lack sufficient training. 50% of caregivers feel that lack support or information. 40% of caregiver report worsened health, their own health. 70% of caregivers report emotional stress. Barbara explained how she had a heart attack while caring for husband.

The Mayo Foundation has put out information on the primary tests for diagnosis and evaluation, and also provides information on treatment options, clinical trials, coping and support, and therapies. However, this is not enough. Many individuals take time to get diagnosed because of inconsistencies in the result, but family should not give up on finding a diagnosis.

Barbara spoke about treatment options. The medications are there for the early onset of dementia, but they are limited. The therapies are occupational and environmental. Environmental are to remove items that are hazardous to the individual. Lifestyle therapies are good.

Research has grown – The clinical trials are very limited because of the funding. Caregiver education, training and networking is key to learn in research.

New research shows that semantic memory – everything we learn in school (data, language skills, problem solving skills and behavioral filters) - is attacked by all forms of dementia. Episodic memory – emotional and human side is relatively intact. Some of it declines but remains mostly intact. Therefore, love, happiness, social behaviors, laugh, childhood, is all good.

Approach to dementia care. Barbara provided a slide show that mentioned the following categories:

Training – consistently between home care caregiver, daycare giver, and in hospital and other institutions.

Environmental - sensory interventions – giving the individual safe hazard free and human centric care. Social connection relationships are important in preserving and finding ways to keep connection socially. And the more there is social connection there are less symptoms.

Dementia based technology is growing faster than medical research. Very effective

Physical activity is very key – exercise, program engagement and art.

Communication – learning to speak dementia. Family members and caregivers need to speak their language. We need to learn how to speak to them.

Episodic engagement – need engagement in the human side.

Global lesson on dementia care –

In the Netherlands, the Hogeweyk Institution has a landmark study on episodic memory, and specifically in late-stage dementia. The outcomes are amazing. They have shifted from custodial care to normalcy. The Hogeweyk Dementia Village mission is about managing symptoms but preserving dignity and joy. It is not a hospital like facility. Residents live in a real home, walk to cafes, stroll through gardens or sit in the town square. Residents are surrounded by familiar sounds. The concept supports 4 lifestyle options and personal preference.

Barbara next discussed the Medstar program. They have social workers visiting households to provide assistance to caregivers. They also provide network calls to provide assistance.

Dementia is a global public health priority.

Bridging the Gap - There is a call for action to support policies for caregiver and dementia friendly environments. Also, policies to train caregivers and to educate all of us about the disease. Train caregivers, community members and also educate ourselves.

Barbara asked if there is any relevancy for the Age Friendly Plan.

Barbara published a book on the topic: *Taming the Chaos of Dementia: A Caregiver's Guide to Interventions That Make a Difference*.

Division of Aging and Adult Services – Chris Moore

Legislation – V4A – he will go to the meeting in two weeks and it is devoted to legislative advocacy. This is part of NVAN – another voice to amplify the concerns for the division.

Personnel – they are trying to hire 4 temps. The good problem is that there is a waiting list for assessments and evaluation and the demand keeps increasing.

Daryl was not able to make the meeting so Chris reported on his behalf. He should be hiring at will drivers any day now. Darryl said he has second round of interviews for therapeutic staff members. The older adults at Adult Day enjoyed the activities this past month.

Ashley reported on the nutrition programming in the Division. They have two interns in January to assist Charles Houston Senior Center to beef up their meal consumption. They want to know how they can increase the senior's food consumption. They are thinking of cooking classes, since they currently don't like the goods provided by the current vendor. They have done this and it was a big hit. The participants went to a cooking school in Arlington. The SNAP grant will also increase enrollment and work with 5th floor Economic Support. Also Bingo Size is coming up. Ashley is needing some volunteers, specifically in the nutrition side of things. Age Friendly Plan – they need the survey to be completed and still working on that. Some older adults are also going to Phillips collection to see the quilt that was created by the older adults in the City. The Reception will be January 26th.

Chris mentioned that Connect America, personal emergency response system, the button you wear around your neck to press when there is emergency and will alert local authorities. They are hiring folks to do the installs in the city. Great opportunities for older adults, Commissioners and others who would like to work with older adults. Ashley suggested he connect with Clarence, at workforce development.

INOVA Alexandria Hospital – no report

Human Rights Commission – no report

AHA – Bob Eiffert

Virginia Villages - a neighbor to neighbor model of serving older residents to remain in their home as long as possible - are talking about legislation. They have formed the Virginia Villages Collective bringing together the Virginia Villages across the Commonwealth. NVAN is sponsoring amendments to provide funds to start villages around the Commonwealth.

Bob also discussed Northern Virginia Aging Network (NVAN)– brings all the aging organizations together to advocate for northern Virginians. Every year they put an agenda (legislative package) request needs that require funding and no funding. This year, there are several items that look at providing funding have focused on dementia care – training of all kind and eviction prevention. We have one of the highest eviction rates in the nation. Looking to pass legislation that hold landlord more accountable.

We have 25 local aging divisions in Virginia and each jurisdiction is looking to increase the funding for their divisions. Currently the proposed budget amendments seek a \$4.3 million increase to cover funding for the local area agencies on aging. Bob testified virtually last week at a regional budget hearing on this topic

Also looking to increase SNAP benefits to increase participation of those 60+. Currently at \$23 a month is not enough to attract many older adults to apply, because the process is complicated. Looking to increase the amount to \$50 a month.

Michael added that NVAN launches this list of policy and budget items at a breakfast in September, then presents the package to the Commission for adoption, and finally the COA requests that the City Council make it part of the Alexandria City Legislative package.

AARP – Jane King – AARP has The city has recognized Alexandria as a place where older person can age well.

St. Martins de Porres Senior Center – Juanita Balenger

William Ramsay students visited and sang holiday songs and gave out gift bags. They also completed the Age Friendly survey for Ashley.

Looking ahead they will have the sign up for Bingo Size. Also, they are holding the dental clinic and hopefully indoors rather than the van because of the cold. There is a field trip in the end of the month – US Army Museum. Working on the Valentines Party.

Commission for Women – Jenn Stowe

Not too much to report. They meet this coming Tuesday. Do not believe they have council members on the commission. But they do have members who sign up to interact with City Council members.

Economic Opportunity Commission – DT Oliver

Overview on the community block grant that is used for housing and rental assistance. Served folks age 60 and above. And they did a presentation on homelessness.

Senior Center @ Charles Houston – Gaynelle Diaz

Gaynelle Diaz mentioned that the cooking class in Arlington was a success. She wanted to note that the participants raved about the session. They participated in Durant Center line dancing. They are trying to reschedule some activities that got postponed because of the storm. Also they are interviewing someone again for the vacant position for Senior Center Manager.

Northern Virginia Falls Prevention Alliance, NVFPA and Senior Services of Alexandria– Marshall Hesper

Lots of training in February and Marshall will forward the information. Both in person and virtual and will also be held in Arlington. He said December was super busy with so many activities and holiday parties.

Housing Affordability Advisory Committee, AHAAC – Jan Macidull

Met last night virtually. It was an interesting meeting, focused on the city's homeowner programs and resources, and also programs offered by the Office on Housing for lower income residents so they can remain in their homes. There were 60 people on the zoom call. Of those 41 were interested in the programs described. These programs are specific to older adults and for those who currently living in their homes. Also discussed were the programs for those who needed rehab, such as some assistance as updating a bathroom or safety in the home.

Executive Committee Report – no report

Discussion / Action Items

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

Ashley and Jan met yesterday. The script will be placed on each table. We need one commissioner on each table. Post-its that are color coded (health care, housing, transportation, and economic safety) will be placed at each table. We will ask each participant to list their concerns on the Post-it. And then we will talk about solutions. We will have a facilitator's guide.

It will be held next Friday at the Lee Center. There will be tables with information from Housing, DAAS, SSA, At Home in Alexandria and the Health Department. Information will be provided at each of these tables

During the table discussions, each person will write down one issue per Post-it note. And the Post-it notes will be collected by the facilitator and given to runners, and then are to be categorized by concern

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

Michael Schuster explained that the city manager will be releasing his proposed budget on February 25th. He will convene the Budget Advocacy Committee meeting to go over the proposed budget, and to draw up recommendations. Everyone is welcomed to join.

Jessica LeFevre mentioned that her committee is moving through the Age Friendly Plan process, and asked whether their recommendations would be for the new budget – FY2026.

Michael explained that any new budget starts on July 1st. Likely the recommendations will would relate to future budgets through the next 3-5 years.

Future Speakers

Senior Services of Alexandria will present at the next meeting with Marshall and others on the SSA staff.

Committee Updates

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

No meeting in December, so nothing to report

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

Meeting scheduled for the 16th

Transportation – Chair, Alan Dinsmore

Did not meet in December will meet in January.

Economic Security and Civic Engagement – Chair, Jessica Lefevre

Met in December but didn’t meet in January.

Health /Dementia Friendly Committee – Chair, Barbara Huelat

Haven’t met for couple of months but met this afternoon. The Committee received information from the Department of Health, which it will review.

Other Business

Ashley is doing the final draft master copy of zoom committee links and the dates, and when completed she will send it out to the COA. In-person commission meetings will be at 4:30. Virtual meetings are on even months, and in-person meetings are on odd months. The meetings are listed in the city calendar. Therefore, we are not able to make changes unless there is at least a three business day notice.

New Business - none

Public comments – please limit your comments to 3 minutes - none

Adjournment - 6:36 pm.

