

**District of Columbia Commission on Aging  
Meeting Minutes for  
Wednesday, June 28, 2017**

**Commissioners Present**

Romaine Thomas; Ron Swanda; Grace Lewis; George Arnstein; Guleford Bobo; Carolyn Nicholas; Constance B. Woody; Carolyn Matthews; Barbara Hair; Buddy Moore; and John Giacomini

**Ex-Officio Members**

Raka Choudhury, DDOT

**D.C. Office on Aging (DCOA) Staff Present**

Laura Newland, Executive Director; Garret King, Chief of Staff; Tanya Reid, Executive Assistant; and Karen Dorbin, Director of Communications

**Guests Present:**

Alan Karnofsky, Mayor's Office of Talents and Appointment; Emily Morrison, George Washington University; Wendy Wagner, George Washington University; Deborah Grimstead; and Brian Flowers, Board of Ethics and Government Accountability

**Call to Order**

Chairwoman R. Thomas (Chairwoman) called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

**Inspiration**

Chairwoman gathered inspiration from a Ms. Senior D.C. pageant contestant. The contestant talked about smiling through life and being able to turn "ugly things" in life into happy things because she smiled. Chairwoman Thomas encouraged everyone to smile and keep going and understand that everyone has a purpose.

**Swearing in of New Commissioners**

Alan Karnofsky swore in two new commissioners, Carolyn Matthews (Ward 1) and John Giacomini (Ward 3).

**Review and Approval of Minutes**

The meeting minutes from the Commission's May 24, 2017, meeting were reviewed. The minutes were approved without corrections.

**Presentations**

**A. Ethics Review: Brian Flowers, General Counsel, Board of Ethics and Government Accountability (BEGA)**

Mr. Flowers showed a video showcasing appropriate and inappropriate behaviors regarding DC Government employees or "special" government employees receiving gifts, using government resources, etc.

Mr. Flowers informed the Commission that he was not aware of BEGA receiving any ethics complaints against the Commission on Aging. The Commission on Aging is a “fairly” unregulated commission.

BEGA generally conducts ethics trainings, provides formal and informal ethics advice, conducts investigations, and enforces ethics laws. He explained where complaints come from; most come from employees, other commissioners, etc.

Mr. Flowers went over the “Ethics Standards.” He stated the biggest standard, from the District Personnel Manual, that affects the Commission on Aging is the “appearance” standard. Commissioners are obligated to avoid conflicts of interest and the appearance of conflicts of interest.

Commissioners are considered “special” employees because they serve less than 60 days out of 365 days. Unlike other government employees, they can interact with the District government if they have an outside business and ask for things; however, they cannot come back to the Commission with requests.

He discussed the *10 Principles of Ethical Conduct*.

1. *Public Office is Public Trust* – do not use your title or position for personal gain for yourself, others, affiliate organizations, etc.
2. *Avoid Financial Conflicts of Interest* – do not take any action that could benefit you or someone close to you financially.
3. *Avoid Representational Conflicts of Interest* – (Does not apply to Commission; except if the representation is before the Commission) Do not represent anyone against the District.
4. *Avoid Gifts and Payments from Interested Parties* (includes bribery) – do not accept gifts from prohibited sources (lobbyist, vendors, contractors, etc.); unsolicited gifts must be returned, donated to the District, or destroyed; if perishable, it can be shared with other Commissioners; do not accept gifts that are given because of position; gifts of a value of \$10 or less are acceptable; you can generally attend dinners put on by trade associations.
5. *Avoid Outside Payment for Government Work* – you should not get paid for District work from anyone besides the District; generally, this applies to police and fireman accepting tips directly from a citizen or entity.
6. *Act Impartially* – Do not give preferential treatment to friends, neighbors, family, etc.
7. *Safeguard Government Resources* – do not misuse government property (i.e. using a printer for personal matters, using District email for personal business, etc.)
8. *Safeguard Confidential Non-public Information* – do not leak non-public information.

9. *Disclose Waste or Illegal Conduct by Government Officials to the Appropriate Authorities* – you have an obligation to report violations of the Code of Conduct to BEGA, and/or the Inspector General.
10. *Abide by Revolving Door Restrictions* – after departing the Commission there is a one year bar.

**Questions/Concerns:**

Commissioner Lewis: Do you have to have prove that you destroyed an unsolicited gift? Yes.

Commissioner Moore: Is there any limitation on political involvement when it comes to the Commission? Only limitation is using your office, title, or government resources while engaged in politics. The Commission is not subject to the Hatch Act.

Commissioner Bobo: I'm attending a Villages meeting, am I eligible to receive a meal? Yes, if it is a part of your duties and it is a widely-attended event.

Commissioner Nicholas: Can we advocate for individual elderly people who have a need and come to us for assistant? It is a potential problem if you are coming before the Commission, but as long as you are going through the official channels it should not be an issue. It really depends on what the Commission statue says your duties and responsibilities are. If it is done routinely, it should not be a problem.

**B. Senior Engagement Survey: Dr. Emily Morrison, George Washington University (GWU)**

In 2015, GWU tried to design a study to understand the major demographic shift happening; however, they learned from non-profit partners and government leaders that they were not fully prepared. There were four aims: 1) Understand the experiences of well-being, what are the positive strengths of growing old; 2) Engage students in meaningful learning experiences; 3) Collect data that would be useful to the community; and 4) Promote intergenerational learning.

Three components to the study: 1) Document review – undergrad students reviewed scholarly documents; 2) Conducted interviews with seniors; and 3) Honors students conducted focus groups.

They looked at six components of well-being: 1) physical, 2) intellectual and career, 3) social, 4) financial, 5) community, and 6) spiritual.

There were seven faculty members, 5 different classes, over 200 students, and various community partners involved.

**Data**

Seniors were 60 years of age or older; all eight wards participated; 202 students participated; 167 seniors did individual interviews; Spanish speaking students translated interviews from English to Spanish and reverse; and 27 older adults participated in three focus groups.

Demographics: Average age was 74; ages ranged from 60 - 96; mostly women; over half were Black/African American; and most responses were from Wards 2 and 6, only 7% of sample population were from Wards 4 and 7.

The majority of people self-reported that they were doing well. 75% rated their wellbeing in three or more categories as high; spiritual was rated the highest.

### **Wendy Wagner**

How does the survey benefit GWU? Faculty are noticing students learning in a dramatic and more powerful way; students get hands on experience by hearing from the seniors directly.

How does it benefit the Community? It helps ensure that the information GWU is gathering is important and useful to the community. Also, we found that seniors enjoyed participating in the survey and they enjoyed having someone listen to them about their experiences.

### **Questions/Concerns:**

Commissioner Arnstein: What is the definition of an Older American? For GWU, 60 and above

Commissioner Arnstein: There is nothing about transportation in the findings. It did come up, but not enough to be on the pie chart; however, some students that heard the issue a lot wrote research papers on it.

Commissioner Matthews: What did the study engage in as far as financial information? We did not ask specific questions about income; we had people think about their own sense of having enough financial means to live in a way they need to live; it was a self-assessment.

Commissioner Matthews: When you did the initial research, why was a small population used? The biggest issue was finding older adults to participate and getting the word to them. A barrier was students having phone numbers not beginning with 202, which deterred seniors from answering the phone.

Commissioner Matthews: Seniors need to feel like they are a part of the community. Seniors feel disenfranchised and that they are more of a burden than an asset.

Commissioner Nicholas: Did responses vary ward by ward? We had fewer participants in Wards 4 and 7. More participation in those wards are needed to do a ward by ward comparison.

Commissioner Nicholas: Are we looking at the same people every year and where are they finding them? No, we worked with our community partners to identify seniors.

Commissioner Giacomini: Did you include congregations? We did not, but our community partners, who helped us, may have.

Commissioner Moore: Were interviews via phone or in-person? In-person.

Commissioner Moore: Was the survey designed for any specific outcome? We wanted to understand how people are thriving; and to determine if they were feeling the best that they could, where they are right now.

Commissioner Hair: Some seniors were called by interviewers but they could not find an agreeable place to meet; however, Wellness Centers are a great place to meet.

Deborah Grimstead: Offered ideas of where to get other participants for the survey.

Raka Choudhury: DDOT did a survey about transportation and the findings might be helpful to GWU students.

### **C. DC Office on Aging Update: Laura Newland, Executive Director**

Director Newland welcomed new commissioners, thanked GWU for the study, and acknowledged Director of Communications, Karen Dorbin, on the work she has been doing for the past few months and her team's multiple outreach efforts.

#### **Budget**

She gave quick FY 2018 budget refresher. The agency will continue its current Alzheimer's programming and may possibly have funds for new Alzheimer's programs; funding to having Fit and Well programming in collaboration with Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) to increase its presence at DPR sites; there is a continuation of funding to help support villages; the agency is adding money to the Ward 8 grant to align it with other ward's grants; the agency has additional funds for transportation; all senior wellness centers will have access to transportation (it does not mean for every attendee, but at least enough for one bus, possibly a 12 seater); and additional funds will be put into the budget for case management.

#### **Announcement/Updates**

The senior symposium will be held on June 28, 2017 at Kenilworth Park from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.

Ms. Francis Johnson is the new Ms. Senior D.C. Director Newland encouraged Commissioners to talk to their friends and neighbors about the pageant.

The agency put out a request for applications for the Ward 8 grant. DCOA wants one grantee to operate both the Senior Wellness Center and the Lead Agency.

#### **Questions/Concerns:**

Commissioner Bobo: Is the 12-seater bus for the entire year and will DCOA or a contractor operate it? Yes, Seabury will operate the bus, but they may use a contractor.

Commissioner Moore: Are you familiar with how all of the villages operate? All of the villages are different, but I am familiar with a lot of them. They are driven by the community. Capitol Hill Village is more established and operates more like a lead agency.

Commissioner Bobo: I would like clarity on the grant in Ward 8. It will be one contract; Ward 7 kind of operates like that now as the same operator operating both the lead agency and wellness

center, but with different programming. We would like it to be operated as the same program, where the lead agency connects with the wellness center.

Vice Chair Swanda: What are you doing about the concept of virtual wellness centers in Wards 2 and 3? We plan on having community meetings and conversations about them; however, it will not be ready on October 1. What would you like to see that's different in Wards 2 and 3? The impression I get is not that there is a need for more programming. The baseline need is to figure out what programming is currently there.

Chairwoman Thomas: What steps can the agency engage in to address some of the concerns that were brought up in GWU's survey? There is a short term and long term; the short term is that we constantly ask the question, so we are setting up customer service surveys for everyone that calls our Information and Referral Assistance line. We are also setting up community surveys. We want to be sure that it makes sense for our seniors' lives. We also work with our agency partners very closely.

### **Committee Reports**

**Housing:** Commissioner Moore attended the Save HUD 202 rally. It was huge rally on the eastside of the Capital. They are pushing HUD to increase or at least not to cut the budget in the 202 housing program for seniors. He also met with Irene Kang; she is taking over Councilmember Anita Bonds' housing committee. They are trying to determine where seniors are in terms of housing, what is the need and what can be done to ensure seniors are not left in the cold. Mr. Bobo informed the Commission that the IZ program is in the process of taking applications for the Waterfront Project.

### **Ward Reports**

**Ward 5:** Chairwoman Thomas reported that there are talks about a new senior citizen building in Edgewood but there is a parking concern.

### **Public Comment**

There were no public comments.

### **Announcements**

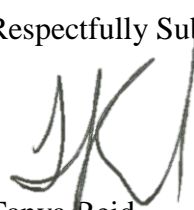
The Commission's retreat will be held on July 19<sup>th</sup> at the Department of Employment Services. The focus is *Pathways to Successful Service for Underserved Seniors*. The topics are demographics, communication, and programming. Commissioners are encouraged to invite Mini Commissioners from their ward or any other activist who is concerned about seniors. Limit invitations to 2 – 3 people per Commissioner.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

These minutes were recorded by Tanya Reid, Executive Assistant, D.C. Office on Aging, and were formally approved by the Commission on Aging on September 27, 2017.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'TKR', written over a vertical line.

Tanya Reid  
Executive Assistant  
District of Columbia Office on Aging