

**District of Columbia Commission on Aging
Meeting Minutes for
Wednesday, February 22, 2017**

Commissioners Present

Romaine Thomas; Ron Swanda; Barbara S. Hair; Grace Lewis; Guleford Bobo; Clarence “Buddy” Moore; Marguerite Pridgen; Brenda Atkinson-Willoughby; Constance Woody; George Arnstein; Carolyn Nicholas; and Charles Hicks.

Ex-Officio Members

Mary Terrell, DOES; Sheila Jones, APS; and Eric Riley, DCPL.

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

Laura Newland, Executive Director; Tanya Reid, Executive Assistant; and Michael Kirkwood, General Counsel.

Guests Present:

David Koch, DDOT

Call to Order

Romaine Thomas (Chairwoman) called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m.

Inspiration

Chairwoman shared a “Recipe for Living,” by author Garnet Shultz, as today’s inspiration.

Review and Approval of Minutes

The meeting minutes from the Commission’s January 25, 2017, meeting were reviewed; hearing no corrections the minutes were approved as read.

Presentations

A. DDOT General Overview and Update, David Koch, DDOT

Mr. Koch is part of AccessDC. AccessDC focuses on paratransit and how people with disabilities and/or seniors get around without a vehicle.

There are multiple transportation options available; however, all the modes have different funding streams and eligibility requirements. AccessDC was started to help people understand what might be the best mode of transportation for them.

AccessDC is working with Project Advisory Committee, a consortium of government agencies and community members who are attempting to determine who is using the various modes of paratransit and identifying the issues and challenges with each mode. For example, AccessDC recently established a survey to determine what the services are used for and the challenges that exist. The survey targeted older adults and/or people with disabilities. The survey revealed that most people use paratransit for medical appointments, shopping or recreation trips, and senior center visits.

Additionally, most people use Metro Rail or Metro Bus; Metrorail/Metro bus was ranked number one in order of preference. The second most popular paratransit mode was WMATA Access.

Respondents were asked about services they don't use. It was found that people know about various services even though they do not use them. For instance, 56% of respondents said they know about Seabury even if they don't use it. And when asked why people aren't using services most people said it was due to lack of information; some said it wasn't convenient; and only 22% said it was an affordability issue.

Questions/Concerns:

Commissioner Pridgen: How many people were surveyed and which wards were they from? According to Mr. Koch, there were 255 respondents; 40 were in Spanish language; the ward breakdowns will be in the final report. It was a paper and online survey. 255 is a good response rate for a small survey like this one. Mr. Koch shared it was qualitative information and, therefore, you can't say it translates across the whole city.

Commissioner Moore expressed some of the challenges and/or issues with the Seabury Connector Card program. Mr. Koch, in response, shared that through this study he and his team can make policy recommendations that will probably have to go thru DCOA as Seabury's grantor.

Commissioner Arnstein asked about mobility to include walking. Mr. Koch reiterated that this study just looks at transit and paratransit. However, there is a separate group (at DDOT) that looks at sidewalks, curb cuts, and ADA issues. They are working on putting together a database to log all of those issues. They are also working on a crowdsourcing portal for the public to report issues. Mr. Caesar Breatto, of DDOT, is in charge of fixing the broken sidewalks. Also, 311 can be contacted for repair requests for broken city sidewalks.

Commissioner Lewis mentioned a dangerous intersection in her community; she has been trying since October to have DDOT repair or upgrade the crosswalk. According to Mr. Koch, now is the period for sign installation and painting because of the weather. He encouraged her to forward the issue to him for follow-up and/or resolution.

Mr. Koch offered that solutions for options and information for each of the services is coming soon. An online or telephone portal can be created to allow people to call and have the correct trip booked for them; eligibility would be accounted for, perhaps with profile information. DDOT is looking for ways they can create a service like this.

Commissioner Hair asked "what are the difficulties with using an online service." Mr. Koch contends there are various challenges; any solution DDOT comes up with will have to include a telephone.

Commissioner Pridgen: Asked if the group was aware of "Reach a Ride". It's an online database provided by the MWCOCG, the regional body comprised of DC, MD, and VA. It serves as a

comprehensive database for specialized transportation and is a regional solution. According to the Commissioner, DDOT could improve it and make it better for DC.

Commissioner Pridgen also asked if there is broader umbrella for seniors to access safe and effective transportation from point A to point B. Maybe it needs to be a coordinated effort for people to get to where the need to go . . . In response, Mr. Koch opined that DDOT is the broader umbrella and can coordinate better with its divisions within the agency.

On March 11, 2017, DDOT is conducting an open mic session from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. The agency will be unveiling some of its draft recommendations at the meeting. David passed out flyers regarding the session to share with the committee.

Vice-Chair Swanda recognized Ms. Heather Foote, D.C. Senior Advisory Coalition member, who also works on transportation matters. According to Ms. Foote, it has been challenging to learn about the grant that launched the study Mr. Koch discussed. And she encourages a wide variety of older adults from all over the city to attend the meeting on March 11, 2017, because it could be the last study of its kind for a while.

Mr. Koch also encouraged the Commissioners to come to the meeting on the 11th and the smaller project advisory meetings that are also open to the public. He also welcomed them to sign-up for AccessDC's distribution list.

B. Update on Office on Aging- Laura Newland, Executive Director DCOA

Performance Oversight Hearing

Director Newland thanked those Commissioners who attended the agency's recent performance oversight hearing and/or spoke on behalf of DCOA. It was the longest hearing Director Newland attended; it was also attended by a large number of Council members who also remained for the discussion after Director Newland's testimony. The testimony is available online.

Several matters came up that Director Newland highlighted:

Budget

Safe at Home: Mayor has supported the program significantly as evidenced by the budget this year's \$8.7 million program budget. It is now the largest program that the agency now operates.

The Mayor has committed \$4 million for accessibility upgrades to be used across the six Senior Wellness Centers (e.g., HVACs, painting, tables, carpets, etc.). According to the Director, DCOA will work with wellness center participants to make selections.

Programmatic

Ward 5, Model Cities: This was a learning experience. DCOA had a communication issue with the Wellness Center. But the transportation issue has been resolved since January of this year. DCOA has a solution in place with the grantee, Providence Hospital; the center has a bus now. The usage of the bus, on any given day, may be two passengers or 14 passengers. When used like this, two people using a bus that can hold 20 people doesn't seem like an effective use of funding. However, for the two people who use it is very valuable to them. Nonetheless, DCOA

has to make hard choices and/or choices that the community does not agree with. The reason DCOA discusses its budget and is transparent about it is to engage the community and get their input to help the agency prioritize what's best for the community.

The seniors at Model Cities did a great job testifying, according to the Director. She was pleased with how they came together and organized their testimonies. However, Director Newland disagreed with how they chose to exercise their voice because she sees the bus matter from the perspective of usage. Yet, she counts it as a success because DCOA has been wanting the seniors to become more active and to use their collective voices.

Questions/Concerns:

Commissioner Hicks asked, "What do you see as your priorities when you're looking at the budget so that when people come to the table people know?" Director Newland shared DCOA's priorities are reflected in its budget; it is a gap filling agency. The teams figure out where the gaps are in DCOA's services and fills them.

But DCOA has some services that are not being done anywhere else; the first is nutrition. These needs are not being met by another district agency in a meaningful way. DCOA spends roughly 20% of its budget on the meal program. The Director wants to improve the meals program so that DCOA is a leader in this space.

Case management is another priority. It is offered through Medicaid and other agencies. Only about 2,500 seniors in DC benefit. It helps keep people in their homes longer because it allows people to get assistance with organizing their lives. It really helps people remain in the community. It is the primary service that lead agencies provide. But there are inequities across the city, partly because the grants haven't been competed in a long time; some of the organizations are amazing (the grantees are tech savvy and sophisticated) and are able to do things that other organizations aren't able to do.

For instance, Iona has various streams of funding; they only rely on DCOA for one third of their budget. They also rely on grant writing. In order to grow and adapt you must have a great communications team because it may lead to donor dollars to sustain yourself. Iona has one of the largest grants because Ward 3 has the largest number of seniors. However, when you look at disabilities, living alone, income, etc. need becomes different. Iona has a private pay model and that works in Ward 3 because of the level of income that exists there.

Commissioner Pridgen: Many of the lead agencies are too reliant on the government. Is there a plan to assist the lead agencies with a sustainability plan? According to Director Newland, it's something the agency has been talking to its Network about. DCOA has discussed providing training to the Network. The Director expressed to Commissioner Pridgen that she'd love her help with connecting to resources for the lead agencies.

Commissioner Bobo attended a village meeting recently. He inquired if Director Newland would encourage villages to be established in all parts of the city? Director Newland said yes. Villages are effective with services for seniors because government cannot be everywhere and

take care of all citizens' needs. DCOA's role is to fill-in and support what's happening in the city.

Commissioner Moore asked, "Can a Wellness Center apply for a grant?" According to Newland, Yes. The Office of Partnerships and Grants Services does trainings for groups on grant writing

Director Newland also expressed that falls prevention is another priority which is linked to the Safe at Home program. Falls prevention is a new one and was added because of what we heard from the community via the Needs Assessment.

Director Newland also cited the following agency values: 1) Equity; 2) Gap Filling; and 3) Adaptability. Director Newland doesn't see Nutrition and Case Management changing as main priorities because of the needs assessment.

Commissioner Nicholas asked if people have money, can they get case management and pay for it. Yes. Or, they can get it for free! A model now exists where people can donate money for the services. Money doesn't solve everything; it can make things easier but doesn't solve everything. The solution for us for people with money is to help them plan and connect them with services and not to provide them with free services.

Committee Reports

According to Commissioner Nicholas, the Elder Abuse and Financial Exploitation Committee never took off because members did not show up for the meetings.

Ward Reports

There were no Ward reports.

New Business

Mini-Commissions: According to Vice-Chair Swanda, Ward 6 has not had a mini-commission in a long time; however, he's committed to assist with the establishment of one.

Commissioner Moore: The Commission's special meeting was held on February 15, 2017, here at DCOA. Various amendments were offered by the members present concerning the Operating Guidelines for the mini-commissions. According to Swanda, the goal was made to be flexible enough to accommodate each ward. Comm. Moore moved the adoption of the document; and Comm. Woody seconded the motion.

Comm. Arnstein expressed he was troubled that they were being asked to approve a document they only had for a couple of minutes. As such, he recommended it be voted on at the next meeting. He moved to table the matter until the next meeting. Arnstein was the only member to vote to table the motion. Six members voted to not table the motion. Vice-Chair Swanda abstained from that vote.

The main motion, to accept the operating guidelines, was voted on with a majority; As such, the motion passed and the guidelines were adopted.

Needs Assessment

Commissioner Bobo attended the advocacy performance oversight hearing held at the Wilson building. A person misrepresented the assessment by saying that it was done in 2014, giving the impression that it was outdated. She was referencing information from the 2012 needs assessment.

Commissioner Arnstein pointed out that the prominent concern is the fear of falls but there's no link between falls and sidewalk issues. Also, there is no encouragement for seniors to engage in walking as a form of exercise.

Vice-Chair Swanda suggested that Arnstein submit his notes to DCOA to be kept with the minutes. Mr. Swanda asked if the Director would like to respond to Comm. Arnstein. She shared that walking is simple and should be included as part of Wellness; and DCOA needs to do a better job pulling it all together and it was not addressed by the Needs Assessment. However, a success of the Needs Assessment was that it got people to express what was not addressed in it.

Commissioner Nicholas recommended the Commission establish a sub-committee to discuss ways to reach more people. Newland reminded them that she did ask for the Commission's help with asking for means to reach more people. It was a great suggestion regarding partnerships with other District agencies to connect with more seniors and/or share information about DCOA services. She'd still love to have their advice.

Commissioner Nicholas asked if there has been consideration regarding the use of a public relations firm and if there is a way to secure a copy of Director Newland's performance oversight testimony. Director Newland's remarks can be provided.

Commissioner Pridgen wanted to clarify that she meant to convey outreach for anyone not just seniors. If you can get professional marketing services that would be good.

Public Comment

Heather Foote suggested that DDOT and DCOA continue to have focus groups in order to collect a range of feedback after assessments are conducted.

Announcements

Chairwoman Thomas mentioned that the Centenarian celebration will be held in May.

According to Commissioner Moore, Comm. Nicholas will be at the Bernice Fonteneau Senior Wellness Center March 29, 2017, reviewing and signing her book "Hilda".

Director Newland: Comm. Moore gave me a copy of his memoir months ago; it was lovely. It's a really valuable tool that should be done all across the city. It was the result of the memoir writing class offered at the SWC. It gives a new perspective about the scope of someone's life. I think it would be great for the Commission to continue to push as a programmatic tool.

Commissioner Nicholas shared that Mary Cheh's office recommend fines be increased for speeding!

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:06 p.m.

These minutes were recorded by Michael Kirkwood, General Counsel, D.C. Office on Aging, and were formally approved by the Commission on Aging on March 22, 2017.

Respectfully Submitted,



Michael Kirkwood

General Counsel

District of Columbia Office on Aging