

**District of Columbia Commission on Aging
Meeting Minutes for
Wednesday November 16, 2016**

Commissioners Present

Romaine Thomas; Clarence “Buddy” Moore; Ron Swanda; Barbara Hair; Carolyn Nicholas; and Grace Lewis.

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

Laura Newland, Executive Director; Michael Kirkwood, General Counsel;

Guests Present

Eric Riley, DC Public Library; Danielle Creek, DC Dept. of Parks and Recreation; Guleford Bobo, Ward 8 mini-Commissioner; and Harold Cash, creator, the Solomon Plan.

Call to Order

Romaine Thomas (Chairwoman) called the meeting to order at 10:15 a.m., although there was not a quorum of Commissioners.

Introductions- guests in attendance were introduced; likewise, the three commissioners present introduced themselves.

Inspiration

For the inspiration, the Chairwoman encouraged everyone present to renew our faith and hopes as they relate to our responsibility to aging.

Review and Approval of Minutes

The meeting minutes from the Commission’s October 26 meeting were reviewed and approved as read.

Presentations

A. Standing Committee on Fairness and Access to the D.C. Courts- Michael Kirkwood, General Counsel, D.C. Office on Aging

Michael Kirkwood, DCOA’s General Counsel gave a brief explanation on the Committee’s request for feedback and suggestions from the Commission regarding access to the courts for seniors. Chairwoman agreed to make this an agenda item for the Commission’s December meeting. However, in advance of the December meeting, Mr. Kirkwood agreed to summarize the Committee’s request and send an email to each commissioner requesting they come to the meeting prepared to share topic ideas.

B. Needs Assessment- Laura Newland, Director, D.C. Office on Aging

The needs assessment has been completed and is approximately 100+ pages. DCOA will email a copy to the Commission and give each Commissioner a hard copy at the December meeting. Also, Director Newland will also provide a summary of the assessment from the agency’s perspective and discuss its key takeaway. The assessment will also be made publicly available.

What was learned? The top two challenges were: the services available and concerns regarding falls and other accidents. Indeed, the survey revealed that participants didn't really know the various services offered by the agency. Twenty percent or more persons surveyed reported they didn't know what services were available. Of the seniors who did know, only one third identified DCOA the source of the service. Word of mouth, AARP, and senior centers were the places where people were getting their information from. DCOA ranked fourth as a source of information for services for seniors.

The falls preventions and information regarding available services highlight an area where DCOA needs to improve. DCOA's current communication strategy is not meeting residents' needs. The agency also needs to reach people it's not reaching. And the agency must better communicate the purpose of its programs. It is a communication failure on DCOA's part because most of the wellness programs address falls prevention. However, DCOA doesn't make the connection for participants with its programs by communicating how the agency is trying to meet their needs. Fortunately, DCOA hired a new Director of Communications; she's been tasked with improving the agency's communication strategy.

There were five major recommendations from the assessment: 1) Improve communication and connectivity; 2) bridge social and health needs; 3) build urgent and emergent capacity for critical services (e.g., housing, transportation, and nutrition); 4) develop quality measures to monitor and measure services; and 5) spur collaboration with the Senior Service Network (SSN) and other entities that serve seniors.

The recommendations also clarified things Director Newland knew—communication and the need for better data to assist staff when talking about programs. And the need to highlight the goals of our programs and whether we achieved them.

DCOA needs to step into our role as the leader of senior advocacy services in DC. DCOA should take a much more active role in coordinating conversations regarding seniors and be a leader in the community.

What are the next steps? The short term measures for this year and next will be evaluation of the communication strategy. DCOA is also considering developing a virtual wellness center. The staff is looking at ways to use technology to bring wellness into seniors' homes. DCOA may use some portion of its home delivered meals list to try out virtual wellness. The Safe at Home program will continue. The agency is upgrading its case management system which will allow staff to capture better data.

For the long term, Director Newland wants to research quality assurance measures so DCOA can build more equity in its service-delivery model, because it's not equitable across the city. And the agency needs to take seriously that it needs to meet the unique needs of every ward; the needs should be determined and then prioritized. And the agency needs equity in its funding streams. Why is this a long-term measure? "Because the devil is in the details," according to the Director. One of the reasons she conducted the town hall meetings in two parts was to start a conversation about equity. Although she got what she wanted, she "did not get what I needed."

DCOA is working with the lead agencies on an annual or bi-annual survey that's built into our grants to avoid commissioning a future needs assessment.

Questions/Concerns:

Commissioner Moore- How does a virtual wellness center work? We may have a page on our website dedicated to wellness programs. For instance, the wellness classes offered at the wellness centers, which are structured for seniors, would be recorded and posted online.

Commissioner Lewis- How are the SWCs' programs monitored? Every one of them has a calendar. The challenge is that you have to show up to get it. DCOA needs to do a better job of collecting them and distributing them.

Chairwoman Thomas- She received communication from Commissioner Nicholas about her visit to a Ward 4 mini-commission meeting and the complaints she heard from the group. Commissioner Nicholas has since shared the complaints with Director Newland. The Chairwoman also heard a concern from Betty Florence, mini-Commissioner, Ward 4, regarding members of the Ward 4 mini-Commission who are having problems getting answers back regarding personal matters.

Director Newland expressed that she and the Deputy Mayor have attended a Ward 4 mini-Commission meeting, but its members still feel like no one talks to them. They need to work with the Commission on Aging. Although they seem to be setting themselves up as commissions in the Wards, DCOA is deferential to the Commission on Aging. Director Newland recognized the mini-Commissions' frustrations about line-item cuts to the recent budget; but there have not been service disruptions; and there will not be service disruptions. The funding stayed the same for the Senior Wellness Centers, but the Ward 4 wellness center made certain decisions regarding how they structured their budget. DCOA gives the Directors leeway on how they devise their budget.

Moreover, several grantees were told they needed to become Medicaid providers; but they didn't believe it. DCOA did this to discontinue paying for services funded by Medicaid.

Chairwoman Thomas- How was the Model Cities transportation matter resolved? According to Director Newland, the number of people affected was less than 15. DCOA has the connector card program with Seabury for low-income individuals to receive affordable transportation; so, everyone who qualified was able to get a connector card. Yet, some seniors were still upset about the matter.

Chairwoman Thomas- She suggested recognizing the Senior Wellness Centers with awards or incentives to inspire motivation for improved work; do they have any incentives? Director Newland has discussed building in bench marks for additional funding. And there have been discussions on how DCOA can recognize grantees for their work; it's easy to recognize individuals. But the agency doesn't want to appear to favor people. Nevertheless, Director Newland and her team are trying to figure out how we can recognize grantees for good work.

C. Distract Government Agency Representatives- Director Newland asked them to say a few words about their positions and their services for seniors.

Ms. Creek- Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) manages the Senior Program and Activities for DPR. According to Ms. Creek, there are 22 recreation centers that offer programs for seniors across the city. At the other centers the staff conduct senior activities. DPR wants to provide a space for seniors to come out and interact with each other.

Commissioner Moore- Do you connect with the Senior Wellness Center in your ward? Yes. DPR has some staff that does coordinate with the SWCs. Also, many DPR program participants attend the wellness centers.

Commissioner Lewis- The weight room in Ward 5 has been redone, but there is no one there to provide guidance on how to use the equipment. Ms. Creek indicated her staff could do an offering, maybe once or twice a week, to assist seniors or provide guidance. But as a general rule, DPR doesn't staff its exercise rooms.

Commissioner Nicholas- The seniors at Ft. Stevens reported being treated very badly by recreation center staff and cited inadequate resources. But Ft. Stevens is currently closed for renovations. Ms. Creek committed that when it reopens it will be different.

Ms. Creek also raised the idea of a possible collaboration between DCOA and DPR. According to Director Newland, DCOA does collaborate with DPR. For example, the Senior Picnic is the joint venture between the two agencies. Also, there are DCOA meals sites within DPR facilities. Nonetheless, Director Newland is open to opportunities for additional collaboration.

Commissioner Hair- Can we get our program back on track during the summer at Bald Eagle? The reason it is not offered during the summer is due to the kids programming.

Eric Riley, Program Coordinator, D.C. Public Library (DCPL)- Mr. Riley coordinates age-friendly and senior-focused programs. DCPL is currently considering age-friendly programming for seniors during day time hours. In each branch's Center for Accessibility there are assisted listening devices for hearing and visual support. DCPL offers book delivery services for homebound seniors; and there has been conversations with DCOA about promoting the program via its home-delivered meals program.

DCPL and DCOA have worked together regarding library services being provided in the wellness centers; DCPL is in roughly four or five of the wellness centers. DCPL offers a short story discussion program in the Ward 1 center and will continue the program and expand it to the other wellness centers.

DCPL is also working on mobile access to technology; it is a lending program at the Wards' 7 and 8 libraries. As part of the service, seniors can check out a mobile Wi-Fi access point and laptop; it is DCPL's way to expand internet access at home. The program has been extremely successful. DCPL is also working on establishing a mobile technology van to be deployed to events around the city for technology training. And the library intends to make its memory lab mobile too. The lab allows residents to digitally archive their personal affects (e.g. photos, movies, etc.). DCPL is looking for a way to deploy various services around the city for when Martin Luther King, Jr. branch closes for renovations.

D. Age-Friendly Report- Gail Kohn, Director, Age-Friendly DC

The Age-Friendly plan is complete. Director Kohn handed out index cards and asked the Commissioners to write down things they see missing from the plan. She will collect them in December. According to Director Kohn, in the back of the plan is every strategy the city is undertaking. She requested the Commissioners identify things the city is not addressing. For example, things such as emergency preparedness and resilience; are more drills needed?

Director Kohn intends to invite Ceaser Bretta to the Commission's December meeting. He's the ADA coordinator for the D.C. Department of Transportation. D.C. has been mapped for accessibility because it's an age-friendly activity.

Also, Director Kohn passed out a flyer describing the Voices of Wisdom Project. The project will enable homebound seniors to talk with DC residents about topics important to them. It is funded by AARP

Committee Reports

There were no committee reports.

Ward Reports

There were no Ward reports.

New Business

See letter A regarding the D.C. Courts above.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Announcements

Commissioner Hair was happy to report that on the 9th of this month, she discovered benches at the National Museum of African American History and Culture, where originally there had been none.

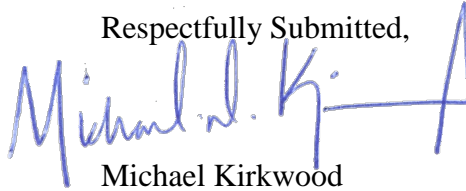
Chairwoman Thomas expressed condolences on the loss of Commissioner Moore's mother.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:17 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 January 3, 2017.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael Kirkwood". The signature is stylized, with the first name "Michael" written in a cursive-like font, and the last name "Kirkwood" written in a more blocky, slightly cursive font. The signature is positioned to the left of the typed name.

Michael Kirkwood
General Counsel
District of Columbia Office on Aging