

**City of Westfield
Minutes of the Council On Aging
Monthly Meeting ~ ZOOM Conference Call
February 8, 2021**

I. The Meeting was called to order by the Chair, James V. Liptak at 1:02 p.m.

Board Members Present: Elizabeth Boucher, James V. Liptak, Eileen Rockwal, Barbara Taylor, Alan Sudentas, and KerryAnn Kielbasa. Also present were Tina Gorman, Director of the Westfield Council On Aging and Ralph Figy, City Council Liaison.

There was one guest, Peter Currier from the Westfield News. This COA meeting was recorded as it is a legal meeting available to the public and was broadcast on Cable Channel 15. Mr. Peter Cowles recorded the meeting.

II. **Approval of Minutes of January 11, 2021 Meeting:**

Upon Motion duly made by Barbara Taylor, and seconded by Eileen Rockwal, it was unanimously VOTED: To approve the Minutes of the January 11, 2021 meeting.

III. **Public Participation: NONE**

IV. **Items for Discussion/Information:**

A. Highland Valley Elder Services (HVES):

Mr. Liptak attended the HVES Board meeting, virtually, on February 1, 2021. The history of HVES was reviewed. The organization was established in 1975 under the Older Americans Act Amendments. In 1978, the Older Americans Act Amendments consolidated the Title III Area Agency on Aging administration and social services, the Title VII nutrition services, and the Title V multi-purpose senior centers, into a new Title III. HVES was designated an ASAP (Aging Service Access Point) in 1997. Highland Valley covers nearly 650 square miles and offers services and resources to more than 20,000 elders.

Currently, HVES's finances are in good shape. A Nutritionist has been hired. HVES has seen a 30% increase in home delivered meals during the pandemic. Positions open are bulk driver and protective service worker.

B. COVID-19 Vaccination for 75+

Mrs. Gorman explained in detail the current status of the vaccination rollout for those 75 and older and the events leading up to the abrupt transition to include that cohort. The Governor's announcement on January 25 that those 75+ would be eligible to receive the vaccine beginning on February 1, and "call your local Senior Center for help" created a chaotic avalanche for COA staff across the State. No advance warning was given and there were no plans in place to assist this specialized population with this new and unique situation. These clinics are entirely different from organizing and facilitating the annual flu clinics with which most of the COAs are familiar.

MCOA (Massachusetts Association of Councils On Aging) has lobbied for a telephone hotline to assist seniors (with the currently required online registration) who are not tech savvy, do not own a computer, or do not have internet access. The administration is working on a phone assist program at the State level. The COA began the vaccination process by attempting to assist seniors to register for the Eastfield Mall mega vaccination site. Each assist was lengthy and the staff was unsuccessful with getting anyone an appointment. The appointment slots were filling up faster than they could keep up. After receiving guidance and updated information from EOE, the staff changed its approach. The rollout for those 75+ will begin on February 1 but the process will continue into the summer. In the coming weeks and months, the COAs have been assured that more sites will open locally and more vaccine will be available. Callers are being encouraged to be patient and reassured that if they want a vaccine, they'll be able to get one. They are being advised that updated information is available to them through the City website, Channel 15, The Westfield News, the *Voice of Experience* newsletter, and flyers distributed at the Senior Center curbside lunches and events. Some of the Board members relayed their own experiences with obtaining appointments for themselves and for relatives.

C. AARP Tax Assistance Update

The AARP Tax Assistance Program is scheduled to begin on February 22, 2021. There will be five Taxaide Volunteers on Mondays and four Volunteers on Thursdays. Sixteen appointments per day have been booked through the end of March, with a waiting list of 35. No additional names will be taken for the waiting list unless Bruce Tomaso, Regional Coordinator, finds that the process goes faster than anticipated. All technology is set up in the Multipurpose and Games Rooms.

D. FY22 State Formula Grant

The FY21 allocation is \$12 per elder based on 8,000 older adults in the City of Westfield. In past years, any unspent money was deducted from the grant amount for the following fiscal year. Beginning in FY22, that will no longer be the case. This is positive news for the COAs. Unspent money will actually be added to the grant amount for the following fiscal year. That said, Mrs. Gorman advised that one proposal by the Baker administration is to reduce the FY22 per elder amount to \$9. If the 2020 census figures are used, Westfield's 60+ population is estimated to be 10,000 and the total amount of the grant will be roughly equal to the FY21 allocation. However, if the \$9 figure is used and is based on the 2010 census figure of 8,000 seniors in Westfield, there will be a significant decrease in funding from the State in FY22. Councilor Figy advised that the FY21 budget was already cut by 10 percent. Mr. Liptak described Mrs. Gorman as a "magician" in her ability to work with whatever funds are available.

V. Items for Action: None

VI: Director's Report

Review of Programs

- *'Beating the Winter Blahs' Friends Group Fundraiser*
 - o February calendar raffle with a gift card prize for each day of the month
 - o A huge success in every way
 - Friends group raised \$1,275; 255 calendars were sold
 - Winners are notified each morning; name and prize are posted on the curbside lunch cart

- *Comfort Food to Comfort Rehoboth Seniors*
 - o A fundraising charitable event for the Rehoboth COA following the demolition of their Senior Center by fire on September 12, 2020
 - o The lunch brought in \$350 which was matched by the Friends group
 - o Combined with other donations, Westfield raised \$1,000 for the Rehoboth seniors

- *Book Bundle Give-Away*
 - o The give-away was done curbside during and after lunch
 - o This was so successful that we ran out of book bundles in about an hour
 - o In addition to books from the Fireside Lounge, we gave away the Westfield 350 Anniversary books to those who had not yet received them

Upcoming Programs

- *Channel 15: 'The Love That Surrounds Us' Noah Lis Performance*
 - o Airing Wednesday afternoons at 2:40 and Saturday evenings at 6:00 throughout the month of February
 - o Focus is on the love of family, friends, neighbors, and the community (instead of the traditional Valentine's Day romantic love)
 - o Funded by the Friends group

- *Spread the Love Curbside Turkey Luncheon*
 - o Thursday, February 25
 - o Will cap at 175; Expect a quick sellout

- *'Westfield Council On Aging Presents' Series*
 - o 'Staying Connected Through Radio'
 - o Aired Tuesdays at 2:45 throughout the month of February
 - o Presenter: Harold Anderson, Programming Coordinator, Valley Eye Radio

- *New Zumba Gold Class*
 - o Trying to update one fitness class per month on Channel 15

- *Technology Support*

- o Seniors can sign up to work one-on-one with WTA twelfth-grade students on computer, laptop, and smart phone tutorials
- o Sessions are done via telephone
- o Program has been slow to start because of school schedule, but the sessions with seniors have been very productive thus far

- *Diabetes Dialogue ~ Heart Health*

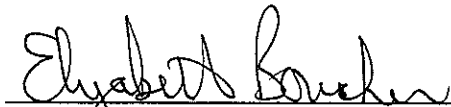
- o Diabetes support group offered the third Wednesday of the month during the Wake Up Wednesday cable Channel 15/WSKB radio show
- o Support group members are mailed a flyer each month with the topic to be discussed
- o Facilitator: Jennifer Giffune, Registered Dietician and Licensed Nutritionist
- o February 17 from 7:05 to 8 a.m.

VII: The Chair reminded the Board that our next meeting is scheduled to be held on Monday, March 8, 2021 at 1:00 p.m. via ZOOM.

VIII. There being no further business to come before the Board, upon Motion duly made by Barbara Taylor and seconded by KerryAnn Kielbasa, it was unanimously VOTED to adjourn the meeting at 2:10 p.m.

List of Exhibits:

- Director's Report



Elizabeth Boucher, Secretary