

Commonwealth Council on Aging Community Conversation on Aging

May 14, 2013 5-6:30pm

Vola Lawson Lobby, Alexandria City Hall
301 King Street, Alexandria, Virginia

Meeting Minutes

Welcome:

Jane King, Chair, Alexandria Commission on Aging (Commission), welcomed everyone at 5:10 p.m. and introduced Alexandria Mayor Bill Euille. Mayor Euille stated that he was on the way to a City Council work session dealing with the City Master Plan where the Council would be discussing affordable housing. He noted that Alexandria's Strategic Plan on Aging (Strategic Plan) completed in 2012 is a roadmap to make the city a livable place for all ages. He congratulated the winners of the Alexandria Commission on Aging's 2013 Excellence in Aging Awards and regretted he would be unable to attend the ceremony immediately following the meeting.

Commissioner Jim Rothrock of the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services noted the Commonwealth is preparing for the coming 'Age Wave' of vintage Virginians. By 2030, persons over 60 in the Commonwealth will expand to more than 2 million and we must be more responsive to issues like employment and community living. He commended Alexandria for its Age Wave plan, especially its goal that focuses on wellness and health care and other supports. He looked forward to hearing about this region's issues this evening.

Roberto Quinones, Chair of the Commonwealth Council on Aging (Council), stated that Bob Blancato, 8th Congressional District Representative, who represents the Alexandria region on the Council had a meeting on Capitol Hill and would be delayed. He was pleased to join with the Alexandria Commission on Aging for the evening's conversation. He introduced Council member, Brenda Kelly-Nelum.

Community Conversation on Aging Public Comment:

- Commission member, Jan Macidull, noted that the Strategic Plan calls for housing that is affordable for healthy older people and those with special needs. There is an emphasis on keeping people in their homes for as long as possible. While Florida knows how to deal with older people, Alexandria wants livable communities with both young and old. Seniors will spend money on services and the business community needs to respond and also provide employment opportunities. Many seniors were hit by the recession and their retirement income was affected.
- Velator Smith said she is an early retiree and lives in the Annie B. Rose House. As a person with a physical disability, she noted issues with the Alexandria sidewalks and the Metro where a platform was too high to permit her to exit the train. She enjoys her housing and the wonderful activities, as well as those at the Charles Houston center.

- Barbara Norton said she recently retired and attends the Charles Houston center where the following senior activities occur: meals, Bingo, craft classes, exercises, and computer skills. She noted there is a great need for affordable housing.
- Veronica Green Pace said affordable housing is a critical issue. Middle and low income housing is gone. The region needs more housing like the Annie B. Rose House for those with lower incomes. Another issue is Alexandria traffic and timing of the lights for pedestrians. We need green walkable communities where senior pedestrians can be less fearful.
- Shirley Sims agreed the city needs more low income housing and housing on one level for those with physical disabilities. She believes citizens should have a voice in the construction plans.
- Jim Lindsay owns a home health company in Alexandria and he states he sees a greater need for custodial non-medical home care. With the increase in fall risks, the state might do better to subsidize home care to reduce high cost hospitalizations. The Affordable Care Act places greater emphasis on community-based programs and increases the role of community care-giving. Home health agencies can contour services around people's needs. First, the Medicaid program is too poverty driven and there should be a shift to greater consumer direction with wrap around services geared toward staying out of nursing homes. Aging in place is a good concept. Second, technological advances are such that we should transfer that knowledge to keep people in their homes where it is cheaper. He said he is willing to assist with piloting a community care based study. Commissioner Rothrock agreed that if we have dollars in the wrong pocket, advocates have a very important role to make sure the system of supports responds to the need of the community.
- LaDonna Sanders, NAACP President, called for better transportation and affordable housing. She expressed concern about the HIV/AIDS levels in seniors increasing.
- Bob Blancato arrived at 5:50 p.m. and told the group that he had come from Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders' office. Senator Sanders plans to reintroduce legislation to reauthorize and strengthen the Older Americans Act which supports Meals on Wheels and other critical programs for seniors. Mr. Blancato said that Senator Sanders asked why are seniors not making noise to get these issues at the forefront of Congress.
- Ms. King noted that advocates needed to get louder because the effects of Sequestration boiled down to inconvenience at the airports versus real hardship involving the hit to the meal programs and other services for seniors.
- Commissioner Rothrock said that a story about Sequestration's affect on Meals on Wheels had been picked up on by the Huffington Post and then by Chris Matthews on Hardball with the result that a gentleman has funded one individual's meal program. He noted there is a movement to end Senior Hunger by 2020.
- Lavanda Flinore was concerned about more bus transportation like the Charles Houston bus and housing.
- Dolores Neiman was concerned about more senior services like meals on wheels that help seniors stay in their homes.

- Janet Barnett, Executive Director of Senior Services of Alexandria, wished to recognize the Ronald M. Bradley Foundation who was receiving the Commission’s 2013 Excellence in Aging award that evening for its commitment to the City of Alexandria’s holiday Meals-on-Wheels program.
- A gentleman who works for Virginia Cares says this organization partners with other charities in the city to distribute food on Saturdays. He stated his grandfather taught him to give back and “never forget that we need to get seniors necessary food, medicine, blankets, etc.,” “we need to take care of our own;” and that he “raised him to give back.”
- Debbie Ludington that one of the lessons learned from her work on the Strategic Plan was how difficult it was to get the information to people about services like the congregate meal program, for example. AARP, newspapers, church bulletins, and word of mouth seemed to be best.
- Commission member, Cedar Dvorin, commented that another issue was that the Bureau of Insurance rubber-stamped the doubling of Long-Term Care Insurance rates to the detriment of seniors. Legislators should do something Medigap insurance and the expansion of Medicaid.
- Carol Downs, Commission Vice-Chair, urged assistance to seniors in navigating the complications of our health care system. Mr. Blancato noted that perhaps at the federal level the role of navigators to the ACA could be expanded and Commissioner Rothrock said education and outreach was a component of the Commonwealth’s Dual Eligible Project through DMAS.
- Bettie Samuel of Capital Caring, an Alexandria nonprofit for hospice and palliative care, urged education.
- Virginia Fennback discussed a problem with the Medicare reimbursement by physicians and said her ophthalmologist dropped all his Medicare clients. Mr. Blancato said there is a discussion about fixing the Medicare Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR).ⁱ
- Bill Harris requested affordable assisted living. The Auxiliary Grant does not work in Alexandria and the rate needs to be increased.
- Ms. King noted that caregiving is an arduous job and caregivers need help. She concluded by asking the Council how to be effective at “making noise.” Commissioner Rothrock noted that legislators do rely on their constituents to tell them what needs to be done. Mr. Blancato, newly elected Virginia President of AARP, said you need to learn your grass roots and focus on building structure around these advocates. Further, it is best to localize and humanize issues.

The meeting adjourned at 6:25pm. Staff counted approximately 65 audience members in attendance.

ⁱ SGR is a method currently used by the CMS to control spending by Medicare on physician services