

Commonwealth Council on Aging
Community Conversation on Aging
Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services
January 9, 2014 2:00-4:00 pm
Senior Center of Greater Richmond, Inc.
2101 Maywill Street, Richmond, Virginia 23230

Meeting Minutes

Thelma Bland Watson, Ph.D., Executive Director, Senior Connections, The Capital Area Agency on Aging, thanked all attendees for coming. Commissioner Jim Rothrock of DARS, thanked Dr. Watson for her effective leadership and thanked Senior Connections for collaborating with the Council on Aging in hosting the event at the Senior Center. The Commissioner encouraged speakers during the public comment period to share their concerns about Virginia's age wave planning. Commonwealth Council member, Nancy New, convened the meeting at 2:10 p.m., welcomed everyone, and noted the Commonwealth Council makes recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly each year and she urged all to share ideas during public comment.

Ms. New stated this community conversation on aging was also an opportunity to share information on aging in place and to provide an update on the Greater Richmond age wave readiness for meeting the needs of the Greatest Generation and the Baby Boomer's. Ms. New introduced Marie Gerardo, MS, RN, ANP-BC who is a Nurse Practitioner with the VCU House Calls program. Ms. Gerardo discussed, "Staying Healthy and at Home: How to Age in Place." Ms. Gerardo noted the benefits of being physically active, discussed preventing falls/injuries, choosing food wisely, taking care of your teeth, keeping mentally fit, learning how to manage stress, medication issues, stopping smoking, getting vaccinated, modifying your home and planning for aging. Dr. Watson introduced Sara Link, MS, Director, Greater Richmond Age Wave Readiness Coalition. Ms. Link showed a video from Vital Pictures (TheAgingAmericaProject.com) that discussed aging issues and statistics nationally. She talked about Virginia's statewide and regional initiatives to address the age wave in our Commonwealth. The Greater Richmond Area Age Wave Planning started in 2009 and, in 2012, the Age Wave Readiness plan was adopted as a regional call to action. Senior Connections and the VCU Department of Gerontology have received a grant and they have established work groups with implementation partners to educate, track work, and establish both an advocacy network and age-friendly business strategy. Their website is agewellva.com.

Commissioner Rothrock introduced the first public commenter, Joanne White, who stated 10,000 people are retiring every day for the next 10 years and that adds up to 70 million retirees. She said that there is a retirement community near Boston whose residents are required to take classes at LaSalle College with students to keep seniors learning, engaged, connected and not socially isolated. She noted her parents are fearful at night thinking they are vulnerable and subject to attack. Commissioner Rothrock noted that DARS has taken over the state Adult Protective Services function that deals with abuse/neglect, as well as financial exploitation. He noted there are a number of adult financial exploitation bills filed in the 2014 General Assembly.

Kelly and Buz Hickok spoke about persons with physical disabilities and promoted the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) as community resources. CILs increase community access for persons with disabilities and seniors, too. Ms. Hickok promoted the Chronic Disease Self Management Education (CDSME) program as an important program for self empowerment and independence. If you are living with a chronic condition, the CDSME program provides tools and techniques to transform thinking about illness to take back control. Commissioner Rothrock recognized the accomplishments of Mrs. Joan Welch, Coordinator for Senior Connections' CDSME program. Ms. Hickok also noted her grandparents no longer drive and they feel this has made them lose independence. It is hard to keep people engaged and socializing when loss of driving privileges cuts people off. Further, she noted housing architectural design has to change and she would like to see fiscal incentives to have builders design homes that meet changing abilities as person's age or become disabled. Buz Hickok called for additional resources for independent living and discussed how technology scares people and he volunteers to "open the door" of technology to other people like his in-laws and suggests others do the same.

Aileen Howard participates in the great Growing Younger program at the Chickahominy YMCA. Having come from DC, until she got involved in this exercise program, Richmond was not as senior friendly and she'd like to see more regional programming. Jean Dyson participates in the Senior Center and she sees a vital need for greater transportation. Every age group in the suburbs suffers from lack of multimodal transport and she would like to see volunteer drivers organized.

Sara Abbott works in an assisted living facility (ALF) and would urge all to visit and reach out to ALF residents who would benefit from the social contact. The Honorable Carson Tucker, Chairman of the Powhatan Board of Supervisors, noted the importance of visiting with isolated, lonely seniors who need to know that people still care about them. Mr. Tucker suggested that friendly visits by volunteers mean a lot to seniors who may be living alone. He quoted the Chinese proverb: "When you have only two pennies left in the world, buy a loaf of bread with one, and a lily with the other" meaning be practical, but appreciate the beauty in life and do something for your soul in helping others.

The Henrico County Fire Department was dropping off calendars at the Senior Center during the meeting and the fireman commented that seniors are at higher risk for fires if they have clutter. He also urged seniors to have a fire escape plan.

Commissioner Rothrock thanked all speakers and noted that there are big issues in age wave planning such as financial planning and caregiver flexible work schedules. However, there are some simple things to do such as CDSME, Growing Younger and a program DARS will be working on under a federal grant, Care Transitions, to provide better hospital discharge planning to reduce hospital readmissions. Ms. New and Mr. Wildy thanked all for the approximate 65 participants in the community conversation and the meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.