

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



DRAFT

I. The Meeting was called to order by the Chair, James V. Liptak at 1:09 p.m.

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

There were no guests at the meeting. 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 February 8, 2021 Meeting:

Upon Motion duly made by Barbara Taylor, and seconded by Eileen Rockwal, it was unanimously VOTED: To approve the Minutes of the February 8, 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 March 1, 2021. Val D'Aquisto provided an overview of Highland Valley's services and programs; eligibility to receive services; and how to contact HVES to access services. She also discussed the importance of Highland Valley's Information and Referral service. HVES is collecting eyeglasses. Mrs. Gorman commented that she just gave a box of used eyeglasses to the Westfield Lions Club. HVES has a new nutritionist. Melvin Espinoza has committed to staying on the job for at least one year. HVES also has a new van for transporting meals from the kitchen site in Northampton to the congregate meal sites in the Highland Valley catchment area. The new van has shelving and a better method for keeping the food hot during transport.

B. COVID-19 Vaccination Update

Mrs. Gorman provided an update on the COVID-19 vaccination registration process. Although the Governor has now added teachers to the list of eligible recipients, the vaccine supply has not increased. Thus the seniors, especially those who are not computer savvy or require assistance to and from the vaccine sites, remain at a disadvantage. Joyce Peregrin is the COA point person for vaccine registration and assistance. She has helped 80 older adults register for the vaccine at various local sites. She is in the process of helping an additional 85 with the process. The COA staff continues to prioritize the 75+ cohort. They are finding that many in the 65 to 74 age group are seeking assistance from the COA because they falsely believe that the department has easier access to the State vaccination website. Joyce also discovered that

those using the 2-1-1 State phone system have more success with getting an appointment, however, the location may be on the other side of the State. We continue to encourage patience to our callers and reassurance that eventually, everyone who wants a vaccine will receive one. The COA is working with General Shepard Senior Apartments on a joint vaccine clinic, but that is still in the planning stage.

C. AARP Tax Assistance Update

The AARP Tax Assistance Program began on February 22, 2021. There are five Taxaide Volunteers on Mondays and four Volunteers on Thursdays. Sixteen appointments per day have been booked through April 8. The Taxaide Volunteers and COA staff have the process streamlined. If all involved remain healthy, 200 older adults will be provided free tax service this year.

D. FY21 CDBG Spending and Companion Program Update

The FY21 CDBG was targeted toward mileage reimbursement for the Companion Program Volunteers. Most of the money remained unspent because of the Governor's 'shelter in place' order during the pandemic. In preparation for preparing and training volunteers to assist with vaccine clinic transportation for seniors, approval was granted from Peter Miller to utilize a portion of the funding for personal protection equipment and vehicle safety items. Those items have been purchased and Joyce Peregrin, Companion Program Coordinator, is in the process of sorting them. She has lined up both seasoned and new volunteers to assist with the vaccine transportation program and will be training them soon. The COA Director anticipates the mileage reimbursement funding left in the FY21 CDBG will be utilized quickly because of the distance from Westfield of the Eastfield Mall mass vaccination site as well as the limited number of passengers allowed per trip.

E. Retire the Fire!

March is *Retire the Fire!* month at the Westfield Senior Center. The focus this year is distribution of *File of Life* packets. Mrs. Gorman reminded the Board that 1,000 *File of Life* packets were purchased using FY21 Senior Safe grant money. To date, 500 have been distributed. A *File of Life* curbside give-away will be held on Wednesday, March 24 from 1 to 2 p.m. In addition to the *File of Life* packets, the staff will distribute cloth face masks, automatic night lights, and fire safety information. A series of five articles regarding fire safety was written by Mrs. Gorman and submitted to The Westfield News for publication during the month of March. WFD Deputy Fire Chief Ben Warren was interviewed for more than an hour by Harry Rock for the March edition of Westfield COA Presents, *Fire Safety for Seniors*. That interview will be aired on cable Channel 15 every Tuesday afternoon during the month.

V. Items for Action: None

VI: Director's Report

Review of Programs

- *Channel 15: 'The Love That Surrounds Us' Noah Lis Performance*
 - o Aired Wednesday afternoons at 2:40 and Saturday evenings at 6:00 throughout the month of February
 - o Pete Cowles has put the performance on YouTube

- *Spread the Love Curbside Turkey Luncheon*
 - o A sold-out event

- *'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
 - o Now on YouTube

- *New Zumba Gold Class*
 - o Now on YouTube

- *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 is gaining traction as more seniors take advantage of the service

Upcoming Programs

- *'Westfield Council On Aging Presents' Series*
 - o 'Fire Safety for Seniors'
 - o Aired Tuesdays at 2:45 throughout the month of March
 - o Presenter: Westfield Deputy Fire Chief and Fire Prevention Officer Ben Warren
 - o A wide variety of fire safety topics were discussed

- *Channel 15: 'Great Day for the Irish ~ Songs from Hollywood Classics' Kevin Farley Performance*
 - o Aired Wednesday afternoons at 2:40 and Saturday evenings at 6:00 throughout the month of March
 - o Funded by the Friends group

- *'Lucky Leprechaun' Curbside Luncheon*
 - o Menu: Corned beef, cabbage, carrots, potatoes, rye bread, dessert – Girl Scout cookies courtesy of Councilor Flaherty and chocolates courtesy of the WPD
 - o Will cap at 160; currently 125 signed up

- *Retire the Fire! ~ File of Life Giveaway*
 - o Wednesday, March 24 from 1 to 2 p.m.
 - o For Westfield residents aged 60+
 - o Will give away File of Life, CDC cloth face masks, automatic night lights, safety information

- *Diabetes Dialogue ~ What's for Dinner?*
 - 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 March 17 from 7:05 to 8 a.m.
 - o Discussion will center on cookbooks and websites for those with diabetes, flavoring ideas, altering favorite recipes to make them diabetic-friendly, and meal preparation for those who don't cook

After her report, Mrs. Gorman commented on the article that appeared on the front page of the March *Voice of Experience* newsletter, *Senior Center Pandemic Reflections*. She said that it is important for the public to know what the Senior Center staff has been doing behind the scenes for the past eleven months with the Center closed to the public. Mrs. Gorman reviewed the statistics in the article. The staff has heard a few negative comments about a lack of support for Westfield's seniors from those older adults who have yet to secure a vaccine appointment or couldn't get a tax appointment. The staff understands that these Westfield residents are frustrated and frightened. Most are just expressing their frustration, especially with the vaccine rollout. The Board offered their support and gratitude.

Barbara Taylor asked if the Director has considered a vaccine mandate for those who wish to participate in Senior Center activities once the building reopens to the public. Mrs. Gorman said that the topic has been discussed by the Western Massachusetts COA Directors' group. They are hoping for a directive from the State, but they think that a town by town decision is more likely. She will submit that question to the Executive Office of Elder Affairs for the next aging network Zoom meeting.

VII: The Chair reminded the Board that our next meeting is scheduled to be held on Wednesday, April 14, 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 Alan Sudentas, it was unanimously VOTED to adjourn the meeting at 1:52 p.m.

List of Exhibits:

- Director's Report

Tina Gorman, Council On Aging Executive Director for Elizabeth Boucher, Board Secretary