

**District of Columbia Commission on Aging
Minutes for
Wednesday, October 25, 2017**

Commissioners Present

Romaine Thomas; Ron Swanda; George Arnstein; Guleford Bobo; Barbara S. Hair; Charles Hicks; Grace J. Lewis; Carolyn Matthews; Buddy Moore; Carolyn D. Nicholas; Marguerite Pridgen; Mary Taylor; and Constance B. Woody

Ex-Officio Members

Veronica Longstreth, DOH; and David Quick/Deborah McKinney (DCPL)

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

Laura Newland, Executive Director; Garret King; Chief of Staff; Christian Barrera, Special Assistant; and Antonette Dozier, Staff Assistant.

Guests Present;

Gail Kohn, Age-Friendly DC Coordinator; Steve Walker, Mayor's Office of Talent and Appointments; and Emily Morrison, George Washington University.

Call to Order

Chairwoman Romaine Thomas (Chairwoman) called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m.

Inspiration

Chairwoman Romaine Thomas invited a special guest for the invocation, Susan Meehan, but the guest was not able to attend the meeting. No inspiration was presented.

Review and Approval of Minutes

The meeting minutes from the Commission's September 27, 2017 meeting were reviewed and approved without corrections.

Election Committee Update from Commissioner Charles Hicks

- No elections will be carried out today. This activity will be postponed until the next meeting. Commissioner Hicks noted to the Commission that Chairwoman Romaine Thomas and Vice-Chair Ron Swanda's terms have expired.
- Charles Hicks thanked the Chair and Vice-Chair and commended them for being an incredible duo and asked for a round of applause from those in attendance.
- Commissioner Hicks welcomed their continued engagement with the Commission.
- Chairwoman Thomas offered the following comments:
 - She is humbled and appreciates the kind words. Chairwoman stated that as the bible says, "There's a time for everything."
 - She thanked the Bowser Administration for all its efforts, especially Director Newland.
 - She reemphasized her commitment to always be an advocate for seniors in the District.

- Expressed how a great pleasure it has been to work with every Commissioner, and thanked everyone for their hard work and contributions to the city.
- Vice-Chairman Ron Swanda offered the following comments:
 - He expressed it has been an honor and pleasure to serve seniors in DC, and get to know them.
 - He plans to stay involved; and announced he will be appointed to the new Age-Friendly DC Task Force.

Commissioner Hicks concluded that he looks forward to the Chair's and Vice-Chair's appointments.

Presentations

A. MOTA Presentation from Steve Walker, Mayor's Office of Talent and Appointments

Chairwoman Thomas introduced the newest member to the Commission, Mary Taylor, and requested all Commissioners present re-introduce themselves.

Chairwoman Thomas introduced Steve Walker, Director of the Mayor's Office of Talent and Appointments (MOTA). Director Walker expressed his enthusiasm to be at the Commission's meeting as he swore in Commissioner Taylor as an official member of the Commission on Aging.

Director Walker thanked both Commissioners Thomas and Swanda for their service, announced they will be appointed to the Age-Friendly DC Task Force, and extended them an invitation to attend a swearing-in ceremony with the Mayor on Saturday, December 17, 2017, when about 300 new or re-appointed members will be sworn-in.

Director Walker presented Commissioners Thomas and Swanda with a thank you letter from Mayor, Muriel Bowser. Afterwards, Director Newland, Director Walker, and both commissioners took a picture together.

B. DC Office on Aging Update, Laura Newland, Executive Director

Director Newland began her update by thanking both Chairwoman Thomas and Vice-Chair Swanda for their service. Specifically, Director Newland thanked the both of them for being advocates for seniors, offering her their unwavering support, and also holding her accountable – a balance she expressed they kept well and made her feel always supported.

Director Newland offered the following updates:

- **Town Halls at Senior Wellness Centers (SWC):** DCOA has been busy conducting town halls, which happen every three months. Open town halls have highlighted how different the concerns or "asks" may be across SWCs. Director Newland appreciates all

those who have attended and expressed her appreciation for the conversations and dialogue.

- **Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 has concluded, and FY 2018 First Quarter has begun:** DCOA was able to close out FY 2017 successfully.
- **Safe at Home (SAH) Update:** SAH completed more than 500 projects in Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 (however, it may be closer to 600 completed projects as SAH finalizes review of the data). Since January 2016, we're looking at about 800 total projects completed – which is a significant number to do so much in less than two years. The number of calls has not decreased. Director Newland noted that the agency is getting some complaints about the program, and encouraged the Commissioners to reach out should they hear concerns. The Director stated she is focused on customer service. The Director also heard from the Commission that the application form should explicitly state what tax forms are needed –which she committed to passing along to the SAH Program.
- **Fit and Well Expansion:** All sites should be set with the YMCA. About 50 new classes will be held in FY 2018 in all 8 wards, senior wellness centers and DPR sites.
- **Finalizing Review of Senior Villages' Grant Applications:** Director Newland noted that DCOA has reviewed all applications, and is excited about this group of applicants. An announcement will be made sometime next month. She noted that she wants to ensure there is no duplication of services.
- **New Lead Agency in Ward 8:** East River Family Collaborative is the new lead agency. The previous lead agency (Family Matters) decided not to re-apply. DCOA is currently under transition for the lead agency and Director Newland is closely monitoring and listening to feedback. Director Newland is looking for lessons learned on how to improve services.
- **DCOA's Ambassador Program:** This is going well, and we continue to adapt the program as we hear from seniors about how the program is useful. DCOA wants to build meaningful relationships with the community. Director Newland stated this program is a great way to engage the community.
- **Downtown Clusters Grantee Issue:** DCOA funds several adult day health programs in the city, and this is one of them. There are some financial issues happening around this organization. Director Newland is closely working with its Board and staff. She has expressed/reassured them that DCOA is committed to the program, and confident in the service provision. We have not made any decisions; and Director Newland commits to following up on this issue with the community.

Questions/Concerns:

Commissioner Hicks had the following questions or comments for Director Newland:

1. **Any plans for new Senior Wellness Centers (SWCs) for Wards that need one?**
 - Director Newland confirmed there no brick/mortar SWCs in Wards 2 and 3. She clarified, however, that this does not mean that DCOA does not have a presence in these Wards. Director Newland expressed that the conversation on this issue has started in the wrong way, explaining that Iona was a wellness center that converted into a lead agency, which served as the Wellness Center space of Ward 3. But because it is not called a

senior wellness center anymore, residents believe there is not one. Director Newland wants to see a focus on wellness in Ward 3 to ensure fitness and wellness are still addressed.

- Director Newland would like to have a productive conversation about what makes sense. She stated we cannot continue to expand sites, so DCOA is working creatively to see what can happen outside of the SWCs facilities programmatically– this is a great opportunity for Wards 2 and 3.
- Director Newland thinks having 6 SWCs currently is a great thing, in addition to DPR sites. In FY 2017, the Director will be looking at Wards 2 and 3 to determine how to use free space and partnerships.

2. Expand on senior villages and how DCOA should invest when there is a village membership fee:

- Director Newland stated that it is true that there is a membership fee. She emphasized that these organizations are grass-roots and survive on membership fees. She posed the question, “Where does DCOA fit into these?” She elaborated by stating that DCOA has been cautious on how the agency enters this space because most successful villages are in wealthier areas. But the agency likes the village model because it taps into community members supporting each other and understanding the needs of seniors. We can tap into subsidized membership needs as there are still low-income seniors in wealthy areas in the city, so DCOA does help some villages with membership fees, technical assistance, and thinking through supporting the model in low-income areas. DCOA currently supports a village in Ward 8; and the task now is to see how DCOA supports their structure and understanding its needs. Director Newland understands that villages are important to age-in-place.
- Director Newland clarified that membership fees are subsidized through the grantee not DCOA. DCOA provides grants and they use such funds to subsidize membership, as was in the case in FY 2017; however, every village is different.
- Director Newland clarified for Commissioner Bobo that a \$20 membership fee is the lowest she has seen in Ward 8, most of them have higher fees.

3. Change in Ward 6 Bus Routes

- Director Newland stated that when moving bus stops, it is an equity issue making it a hard discussion. What may be farther for one senior may be closer to another. Thus, unless an entire senior building is negatively impacted, it is hard to discuss this issue in an equitable way. Director Newland relies on the community to raise these concerns, and if there is an obvious need, DCOA can step in and engage in the conversation. This is not an area of expertise for DCOA.

Commissioner Pridgen had the following question or comments for Director Newland:

Is there a way to make spaces more attractive to older adults to ensure DC is age-friendly?

- LN: Yes, that’s what DCOA should aim and is trying to do.

C. Gail Kohn, Age-Friendly DC Update

- Informed the Commission that Emily Morrison from GW will be giving a presentation on the results from GW's project on engagement of older adults in DC.
- The Age-Friendly Report was submitted to the World Health Organization (WHO) and AARP. AARP responded favorably and asked about sources of information. Age-Friendly is responding to all questions. These reports will be at DC local libraries.
- Nov. 16th is the last task force meeting from 10am- 12pm. WHO would like to be in attendance. They are located in Geneva. John Beard from WHO will let Gail Kohn know if he is available to attend.
- DC has focused on two domains WHO is interested in: elder abuse and emergency preparedness. These are very important to them.
- AARP CEO, Joan Jenkins, is interested in coming to the meeting as well. She wrote a book titled "Disrupt Aging."
- Gail announced that the CEO for Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind, Kim Alfonso, is the new AFDC Co-Chair.

As part of the Age-Friendly DC update, Emily Morrison, Director, Human Services and Social Justice Programs at the George Washington University, presented a presentation for the Commission titled "Older Adults: Engagement in DC." A copy of the presentation is attached to these minutes.

Questions/Concerns:

Commissioner Nicholas: These are great results. Have you shared them with the ANCs?

- Response: We have not. Who should get it from DC government?
- Commissioner Nicholas: DC Council, ANC Commissioners Office, and the Mayor.

Gail Kohn: Steve Walker has been asked to tell us the age of those who apply for DC commissions/boards.

- Feedback from Chairwoman Thomas: This is a sensitive issue. If people do not want to give their age, it's their legal right not to. This needs to be looked at from a legal lens.

Commissioner Pridgen asked if November 16, 2017 is the most likely date. Ms. Kohn responded that this is not clear yet. Ms. Kohn asked the Commissioners to add to their calendars for November 16, 2017 at the John A. Wilson Building.

D. David Quick (DCPL) and Debra McKinney (Librarian –Accessibility Department)

The Center for Accessibility ensures that everyone, especially people with disabilities, has access to the libraries and teaches residents how to use computers. In the past, DCPL has focused on residents with vision disabilities. Basic tablet technologies are taught one-on-one. DCPL has a partnership with the Library of Congress called the National Library service, which provides audio books for people who have low vision. The program provides audio equipment to DC residents (fiction, non-fiction, mystery, biography, etc.), and sends the player and audio books. It has been well-received by residents who've lost their sight.

Also, the DC for Accessibility has American sign-language classes in different languages at different branches. This is available to DC residents.

DCPL has a program called L-STAR (Library Services for At-Home Readers) which sends books, music, and videos by mail to patrons of DCPL who cannot get to a library building. DCPL staff use a library card to check out materials on the patron's behalf.

Questions/Concerns:

The Commissioners asked about the age-range, availability of books in Spanish and if the audio books provision is done via the Library of Congress. Ms. McKinney responded that: 1) there is no age range or requirement, though 3 and 4 year olds may be the youngest clients; 2) each state is mandated to provide this audio service for the blind; and 3) there is a small collection of Spanish books but DCPL has advocated for more.

David Quick concluded the update by letting the Commissioners know that DCPL is trying to combat social isolation. DCPL has a coffee and conversation opportunity for residents. He welcomes further engagement and questions from the Commission at any time.

Special Reports:

Chairwoman Thomas spoke about Susan Meehan, who was unable to attend and is applying for an arts grant through the DC Commission on the Arts. The Chairwoman highlighted the following about Ms. Meehan: she speaks fluent French; has a passionate commitment for her work; is a neighborhood leader; has led campaigns on drug addiction; and is a long-time participant in the city.

Chairwoman Thomas asked the Commissioners if it is possible to offer their support to her by drafting a letter of support for her grant application. Commissioner Hicks moved the motion. It was second by several Commission members. No opposition. One Commissioner abstained.

Chairwoman also noted each member who attended the retreat is receiving a Certificate of Participation.

Committee Reports

Transportation

Commissioner Buddy Moore shared information on DC (Seabury) Connector, and that a number residents can call to request application/services.

Elder Abuse and Financial Exploitation

Commissioner Carolyn Nicholas offered the following updates:

- The Commissioner met with DC Councilmembers to enforce the Financial Exploitation Act. Council seems to agree to enforce the bill.
- The Trump Administration signed/enacted federal law that FBI now can investigate guardianship/conservatorship cases, which the Commissioner noted is a big issue in DC, including investigations.

- Commissioner Nicholas expressed to the Council a need to replicate Montgomery County's Crimes Against Seniors and Vulnerable Adults Unit. Montgomery County is persecuting people, and in one case sentenced someone to prison— where in DC there is zero cases and no persecution.
- Vice Chair Swanda asked Commissioner Nicholas if she participated in the DCOA's Elder Abuse Prevention Committee (EAPC). She responded that she does.

Health and Wellness

Vice Chair Swanda offered the following updates:

- The Commissioner would like to see the Medicaid allocated funds for the PACE program. He expressed it has to be local money as the federal government will not give any money for this program.

Education and Employment

No updates.

Ward Reports

Ward 3

Commissioner, Marguerite Pridgen

- Van Ness Main Street received an AARP grant to improve social interactions and bring life to intergenerational activities:
 - There is an event on Oct. 28th, a kick-off for the Van Ness Social Clubs (chess, art, dance, etc). They want everyone there (4250 Connecticut Avenue, NW), and feel they have something for them. It's close to the Van Ness Metro station. Again, this is funded by AARP.

Ward 4

Commissioner, Carolyn Nicholas:

- Excellent presentation from HSEMA on emergency preparedness, and what to do in case of an emergency.
- Chairwoman Thomas noted that this presentation was already given as part of Age-Friendly DC.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Announcements

Commissioner Hicks made the following two announcements:

- 1) Commissioner Hicks sits on the MLK Holiday Commission, and they will be doing several events at churches, libraries, etc. The Commissioner will send more information.
- 2) Commissioner Hicks will be charging the Frederick Douglas Committee. The Commissioner will send more information.

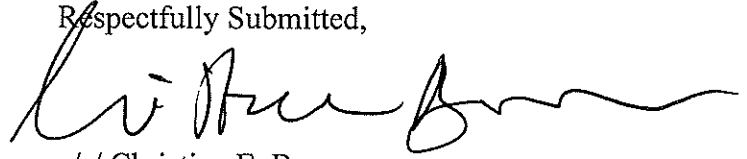
Chairwoman Thomas announced and congratulated DCOA's Chief of Staff, Garret King, on becoming a new father.

Adjournment

Chairwoman Thomas adjourned with the following quote: "Old age, believe me, is a good and pleasant thing. It is true you are gently shouldered off the stage, but then you are given such a comfortable front stall as spectator." The meeting was adjourned at 12:10P.M.

These minutes were recorded by Christian Barrera, Special Assistant, D.C. Office on Aging, and were formally approved by the Commission on Aging on Wednesday, November 15, 2017.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christian E. Barrera', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

/s/ Christian E. Barrera

Christian E. Barrera

Special Assistant

District of Columbia Office on Aging