

ST. JOSEPH COUNTY COMMISSION ON AGING

ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES – APPROVED JUNE 18, 2025

The April 16, 2025, meeting of the St. Joseph County Commission on Aging Advisory Board of Directors was held at Oaks Enrichment Center. The meeting was called to order by Terry Conklin at 3:02 pm. Roll call was taken by Terry Conklin

PRESENT: Deb Davis, Pat Dane, John Gelvin, Phil Kline, George Letts, Tim Barron, Rick Shaffer, Terry Conklin, Amanda Johnson

ABSENT: Maggie Mead

AGENDA: Mr. Letts made a motion, supported by Mr. Gelvin, to move the program reports to follow immediately after the meeting minutes. The motion was approved with a vote of 8-0.

OTHERS PRESENT: Pam Riley, Executive Director; Ruth Mancina, Marketing & Life Enrichment Manager; Britt Buscher, Finance Manager; Nicole Notestine, Residential Services Manager; Katie Hughes, Nutrition Manager; Dianne Wood, COA Member and volunteer.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

None

MINUTES

Minutes from January 2025 were approved. A motion was made by Mr. Shaffer with a second from Mr. Letts. This motion passed 8-0.

PROGRAM REPORT:

Life Enrichment Services –Ms. Mancina reported St. Patrick’s Day Celebrations were held at both centers with free bingo and mint chocolate ice cream for visitors. A Dinner Night Out was held and it featured live music and food, with positive feedback. Another themed dinner ("Derby Night") is planned for May, including themed decorations and a special catered menu. In May, Life Enrichment will be hosting a Muffins and Mimosas event to honor mothers with relaxing activities such as hand treatments, lip scrub making, stress-relief smoothies, and breathing exercises. In celebration of Older Americans Month, a free trip will be raffled to 12 members, including a concert and dining. Ms. Mancina also mentioned volunteer luncheons are scheduled for April 29 (Sturgis) and April 30 (Three Rivers). Ms. Mancina encouraged attendees to RSVP. She recognized the significant support of volunteers, especially in decorating, preparing goodie bags, and assisting with events.

The COA continues to appreciate Thurston Woods for lending a bus and is co-sponsoring their Antique Appraisal event as a gesture of gratitude.

COA participated in a Meals on Wheels ride-along with Glen Oaks Community College staff, including their new president, as part of a volunteer initiative.

Photos of recent activities were circulated, and Ms. Mancina invited questions.

Residential Services – Ms. Notestine reported ongoing staffing shortages in Home Services, specifically among aides. She has attended job fairs and visited the community college to recruit, but staffing remains insufficient. The current waiting list for apartments includes 50 individuals for one-bedroom units and 14 for two-bedroom units.

She also discussed issues with the 24-inch apartment ranges, which are smaller than standard and increasingly difficult to repair due to discontinued parts and long delays in replacements—often from overseas. While the ranges have lasted about 5.5 years, four stoves and one refrigerator failed just in April. Heating elements and coil switches are the most frequent issues. Replacement costs for 24-inch stoves are high (\$800–\$1,300), and repair parts are increasingly unavailable. Switching to standard 30-inch stoves would require renovations, removing cabinets and modifying countertops. Cabinet replacements would cost \$80–\$130 each, plus labor and associated remodeling. Alternatives such as purchasing from Amazon or contacting local vendors like TC Appliance were discussed, but TC will only service appliances purchased directly from them. Mr. Barron mentioned the possibility of partnering with Habitat for Humanity’s education program for cabinet modifications if renovation is pursued. She noted that residents primarily use cooktops, though oven functionality remains important, and the current models have temperature inaccuracies. Ms. Notestine budgeted approximately \$8,500 for appliance replacements in 2025 and intends to remain within that budget by salvaging usable parts when possible.

She concluded by noting that the full appliance package includes dishwashers and microwaves, though only stoves and refrigerators are currently targeted for replacement. The board is not inclined toward full remodels but is exploring options.

Nutrition Services – Ms. Hughes reported that overall meal service has increased approximately 13% from January to present compared to the same period last year, including restaurant meals. Home Delivered Meals remain steady, with seasonal increases during winter months. The Congregate Meal Program has served approximately 9,000 meals year-to-date. Home Delivered Meal Program is around 35,000 meals year-to-date.

She noted one meal delivery truck is currently being converted and should return to service within 4–6 weeks. At that point, all active delivery vehicles will be model year 2017 or newer. However, issues remain with older trucks (2012–2013) that have cracked frames, likely due to structural flaws in the conversion boxes.

One substitute driver is leaving the agency, but a new candidate has been offered a position and will begin onboarding shortly.

Ms. Hughes continues to closely monitor pricing and food costs, noting minimal fluctuations since October, despite tariffs observed on some imported supplies. She maintains detailed invoice records to track cost trends.

Finally, Ms. Hughes addressed delivery logistics: some trucks travel up to 100 miles per day depending on route coverage. Efforts are made to cluster clients geographically, though delivery times must remain within strict service windows to ensure food safety and program compliance.

FINANCE REPORT:

Ms. Buscher began her report by presenting the Revenue and Expenditure Report as of March 31st. At this point in the fiscal year, the Commission on Aging has completed 24.66% of the year and collected approximately 55% of its anticipated annual revenue, primarily through property tax receipts. Expenditures remain low, currently at 19% of the budget.

She clarified some of the revenue categories for the board, explaining that “charges for services” refers to participant contributions for home-delivered meals, homemaking, and personal care services. Revenue listed under “interest and rent” pertains to income from apartment rent at the Rivers Apartments and rentals of the COA’s facility spaces. She acknowledged that the finance department’s labeling of these categories can be somewhat confusing, but the figures are accurate.

Next, Ms. Buscher provided a detailed follow-up report on the budget for the Rivers Apartments, revisiting prior discussions about whether a rent increase would be appropriate while still maintaining affordability. She presented data from 2020 through 2024. Expenditures in 2020 and 2021 were somewhat elevated due to one-time or start-up maintenance costs, such as repairing glass, interior painting, elevator servicing, and the installation of security systems. She highlighted a notable spike in “Other Supplies” in 2021, which totaled around \$20,000 compared to an average of \$3,000–\$4,000 in other years. This spike was attributed to necessary HVAC and backflow system repairs, inspections of the fire suppression system, and the replacement of a faulty valve. She also explained that “contractual services” includes recurring vendor contracts, such as those with State Line Mechanical for preventive maintenance.

Although there has been a slight increase in utility costs, she does not find the trend alarming. Overall, the net operating expenditures are comparable to those seen in 2020, with some years higher or lower but nothing significantly outside expectations. She confirmed that any net positive income is returned to the COA’s fund balance, which supports operational sustainability and potential equipment purchases. The current goal is to maintain a positive net income.

Ms. Riley discussed the division of utility expenses, noting that costs are generally split 70% for the apartments and 30% for the center. This allocation was originally set up when the building opened and reflects the higher utility usage by apartment residents. Over time, more residents have added in-unit washers and dryers, deep freezers, and medical equipment such as oxygen machines, all of which contribute to increased consumption. Some residents also keep decorative lighting plugged in around the clock. While these small changes may seem minor, they cumulatively affect utility costs. Ms. Riley concluded by emphasizing that while the apartments are homes for the residents and should be enjoyed as such, continued monitoring of these impacts is important for financial planning.

Mr. Barron made a motion with the support of Mr. Letts to accept the Financial Reports. Motion passed 8-0.

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS – Goals for 2025:

Ms. Riley presented the Commission on Aging's goals for 2025, noting that some items are carried over annually, such as delivering the annual report, updating the capital plan, and working with the finance department. Under the goal of community benefit, she highlighted a 7% increase in exercise class attendance compared to the previous year. The team continues to assess class participation by type and adjust offerings as needed. Efforts are ongoing to hire an evening or weekend exercise instructor, which is expected to attract strong attendance once hired.

Additional community benefit efforts include a caregiver retreat scheduled for September at Camp Amigo, featuring speakers, meals, and recreational activities aimed at providing caregivers a break. The COA will also continue its annual distribution of back-to-school supplies for kinship families. In the area of MMAP and SHIP services, which provide Medicare and Medicaid counseling, staff member Cassie Graber assisted 250 residents last year, saving them over \$125,000 in premiums. The program is now operating under a multi-agency grant titled "No Wrong Door," and the organization is awaiting confirmation of funding, which previously totaled around \$10,000. The Director expressed hope to expand the program through increased advertising and volunteer support.

Ms. Riley emphasized the need to explore new fundraising and grant opportunities, especially considering federal funding uncertainty. COA lost \$30,000 in NSIP (nutrition support) funding last year, and delays in federal budget approvals have paused some funding streams.

Under the quality goal area, she discussed facility improvements, including assigning the newly hired custodian—who has decades of painting experience—to repaint hallways and common areas in the Rivers Apartments during the fourth quarter. The Oaks Enrichment Center will undergo a landscaping renovation in the spring and summer, including clearing overgrowth, installing new weed barriers, and using rubber mulch for longer-lasting maintenance.

In the category of sustainability and transparency, Ms. Riley shared a long-term vision to develop a micro-farming initiative. She emphasized the potential benefits of growing produce locally without pesticides. While initial plans to use unrenovated space at the Three Rivers Courts building fell through, she is now exploring partnerships with local organizations. She hopes to apply for a USDA grant in January but acknowledged that building costs may present a challenge.

Ms. Riley also noted a 2% increase in membership, which, while below the 5% goal, brings the total number of active members to nearly 4,400. Lastly, she addressed ongoing concerns about the "dungeon" space, a basement area formerly used as a bar. While remodeling remains on the capital project list, it is currently on hold pending grant funding clarity. The space is not safe or functional, with uneven flooring and poor lighting, but is currently used for lunch storage. Long-term goals include converting it into a multi-use space with a conference room, staff break area, and bathroom.

She concluded by inviting questions and feedback, affirming her commitment to transparency and continuous improvement.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

None

MEMBER'S TIME:

Ms. Davis complimented Ms. Riley's explanation at the AI training session related to how the COA is using AI, specifically with Ms. Hughes nutrition program.

Mr. Barron thanked Ms. Riley for getting him involved in the St. Joseph County focus group.

Mr. Kline thanked Ms. Buscher for providing a finance report related to the Rivers Apartments.

Mr. Shaffer mentioned the upcoming Burr Oak Grange Hall celebration. It is their 150th anniversary.

Mr. Gelvin shared he was happy to see everyone and wished everyone a happy Easter.

Mr. Conklin thanked everyone for their commitment to providing services in the county and said everyone is doing a wonderful job.

Ms. Dane suggested Ms. Riley contact The Huss School Project for potential space for the micro farming project. Mr. Barron and Mr. Shaffer followed up with two other suggestions, which were Butternut Farm and Walthers Farm.

ADJOURNMENT:

A motion was made by Ms. Davis with support from Mr. Letts to adjourn the meeting. This motion was passed 8-0 at 4:07 PM.