

ST. JOSEPH COUNTY COMMISSION ON AGING

ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES – APPROVED JULY 16, 2025

The June 18, 2025, meeting of the St. Joseph County Commission on Aging Advisory Board of Directors was held at Rivers Enrichment Center. The meeting was called to order by Deb Davis at 3:04 pm. Roll call was taken by Deb Davis.

PRESENT: Deb Davis, Pat Dane, John Gelvin, Phil Kline, George Letts, Rick Shaffer, Terry Conklin, Maggie Mead, Amanda Johnson.

ABSENT: Tim Barron

AGENDA: A motion was made by Mr. Letts with support from Mr. Gelvin to approve the agenda as presented. This motion was approved 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.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

None

MINUTES

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

FINANCE REPORT:

Ms. Buscher provided a brief financial update, noting that the COA is approximately 41.4% through the fiscal year. Total revenues to date are \$2.74 million, with expenditures at \$1.17 million, resulting in a current surplus. She cautioned that additional expenditures are expected in the coming months.

Ms. Buscher also shared that she has begun working with Ms. Mancina to track donations and expenses related to the upcoming caregiver event. She noted the positive impact of corporate donations received last year and mentioned that a portion of AAA grant funding designated for caregiver support training and education will be allocated to this event. All related financial activity will be tracked closely.

Ms. Riley provided additional context regarding funding for the upcoming caregiver retreat. She noted that Thurston Woods Village discontinued its adult day center operations in December 2024. As a result, grant funds previously allocated to that program through the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) have become available. Ms. Riley is working with Laura Sutter to potentially redirect a portion of those funds supporting the caregiver retreat, including the provision of respite care services. This proposal is pending approval from the Board of Health, which is expected to review the request later in the week.

The team is assessing logistics, including staffing capabilities and potential collaboration with local AAA-approved agencies. They are also determining whether full assessments will be required to provide up to eight hours of care.

Ms. Riley invited suggestions from attendees with experience in respite services and shared that promotion for the event will begin in July.

Ms. Dane made a motion with the support of Mr. Gelvin to accept the Financial Report. Motion passed 8-0.

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

None

PROGRAM REPORT:

Residential Services – Ms. Notestine reported that since the last meeting, six new applications were received for one-bedroom units and one for a two-bedroom unit. She continues to conduct tours and follow-up calls regularly, approximately every other day.

She shared that recent fire and city inspections were completed, both with excellent results. The city inspector praised the facility, calling it one of the best and nicest apartment complexes he inspects in the area.

Regarding in-home services, there remains a need to fill eight positions to meet the current waitlist demand. While some applications have been submitted, none have resulted in hires due to lack of qualifications or no-shows for interviews.

Nutrition Services – Ms. Hughes reported on several nutrition-related activities and updates for May and June. The nutrition team supported the activities department by providing food for events, including a Kentucky Derby-themed dinner night out, which served about 40 attendees. Breakfast boxes were prepared for participants attending a Tigers game and more will be provided for future games. A special lunch was served for Waterfest in Three Rivers, drawing approximately 110 people and featuring strawberry shortcake for dessert.

The department has received a new delivery truck from Delivery Concepts, although it required a return for repairs to the cold box. It is now back in service. Two older trucks will be scrapped, and three spare trucks will remain in the fleet.

Summer assistance from Youth Adult Transition Center (YATC) students will continue, helping to ease kitchen operations. Ms. Hughes noted rising food and supply costs, including tariffs on certain items and a 30% increase in coffee prices. The team is monitoring prices closely and adjusting menus as needed to manage costs.

Preparations are underway for the upcoming AAA annual assessment in July. Since the last board meeting in April, the team has served approximately 7,000 congregate meals and 20,000 home-delivered meals.

Life Enrichment Services – Ms. Mancina reported a variety of well-attended events and trips in May and June, including a popular Kentucky Derby-themed dinner and a Tigers game that required two buses and had a waitlist. Due to demand, another game trip is scheduled for September 7.

The Water Festival in Three Rivers included free bingo for 65–70 seniors. July activities include visits to a Michigan beach town and the Gerald R. Ford Museum, which features special exhibits for the 50th anniversary of his presidency and the Vietnam War. Lunch that day will include his favorite dessert, butter pecan ice cream.

The department will also celebrate World Brain Day with blueberry pie and brain-boosting bingo. The summer picnic is planned for August 27 at Sand Lake County Park.

Finally, Ms. Mancina mentioned the upcoming Caregiver Retreat on September 9 at the Amigo Centre. It will offer respite care, meals, activities, and two dynamic speakers. Sign-ups begin in August, with promotion through newsletters, social media, and word-of-mouth.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

Ms. Riley began her report by addressing upcoming board member term expirations. The terms for five members—Pat, Deb, John, Maggie, and Amanda—will end on June 30. Those wishing to be reappointed were asked to email Ms. Riley so she can submit an agenda request to the County Commissioners for their July meeting. One board seat remains vacant. Due to the addition of two commissioners to the board, a bylaw amendment was proposed and unanimously approved to change the number of annual term expirations from six to five. This change reflects that commissioners' terms only end when they leave office or request removal from the board. Officer elections, which normally occur before June 30, will be postponed until the July meeting to allow time for board appointments to be finalized. Current officers will remain in place until then.

Ms. Riley also announced a new partnership with the Juvenile Day Treatment (JDT) Center. Youth ages 14 to 17 who have been assigned community service hours have begun volunteering at the COA in Three Rivers. They are working in groups of three to five, along with JDT staff supervisors, assisting in the kitchen with meal preparation, dishwashing, and unloading deliveries. On days when the kitchen becomes crowded, the youth may be reassigned to tasks such as landscaping, vacuuming, or dusting. The program is off to a positive start, with the teens showing enthusiasm and a strong work ethic. Additional Saturday service days are scheduled throughout the summer.

She then provided a detailed update on the Senior Project FRESH program, which has shifted to a digital-only format this year. Previously, income-eligible seniors would receive a \$25 coupon booklet to purchase fresh produce from local farmers markets, but now the state requires participants to apply through a smartphone app, using an email address and setting up a secure login with a six-digit PIN. The rollout of this new system has been delayed multiple times and is still not operational. Ms. Riley expressed concerns over the increased barriers this creates for seniors. The state suggested that staff use their work emails to assist clients, but Ms. Riley has directed COA staff not to do this due to the legal liability it would create for the county. The program typically serves 100 to 200 seniors in St. Joseph County. Currently, the state has not provided information on participating farmers, funding allocations, or a launch date. The COA will assist clients as soon as more information becomes available.

MEMBER'S TIME:

Mr. Conklin expressed support for the COA, stating that the organization is one of the best in St. Joseph County. He commended Director Pam Riley for her willingness to have a candid conversation with him after a recent vote. Mr. Conklin emphasized the importance of transparency and open communication, and he encouraged others to feel similarly comfortable engaging in honest dialogue. He concluded by affirming his continued support for the COA and appreciation for the work being done.

Mr. Letts inquired about the status of after-hours facility use, referencing past discussions. He asked if things were running smoothly, and it was confirmed that there have been no recent issues.

Mr. Shaffer began by acknowledging the recent passing of fellow board member Maggie's mother, expressing condolences. He then shared an experience during a Medicare wellness visit at Covered Bridge Healthcare. While conducting the visit, he spoke with a woman who, without knowing he was a COA board member, spoke highly of the COA. She praised the exercise programs, activities, the quality of meals, and described the COA as her "family." Mr. Shaffer highlighted this as a testament to the positive impact of the COA.

Mr. Kline thanked the COA for the sympathy card following the passing of his mother.

Ms. Johnson echoed the appreciation expressed by others. She shared that several individuals she works with through Covered Bridge expressed gratitude for the services provided by the COA. She also noted that Covered Bridge currently has openings for new patients in both medical and behavioral health services and encouraged anyone in need to reach out.

Mr. Gelvin commented on the condition of the walls in the Community Room, noting they currently have a worn appearance. He recalled that the chair rails at the Oaks Center were installed and how much they have helped protect the walls and reduce repainting needs. He suggested chair rails when funding is available.

Ms. Dane shared that the COA truly feels like a family, especially from her perspective as a part-time staff member. She emphasized how much the participants care about one another and noted the recent loss of a beloved bingo regular.

Ms. Davis expressed appreciation for the COA and its leadership, particularly commending Director Riley for her advocacy at a recent commission meeting. She noted how valuable it is to have a director who is willing to speak up and to do so professionally and thoughtfully.

She also shared a personal story about her neighbor, who was hesitant to join the COA after losing his wife. After some encouragement, he eventually joined and found a renewed sense of purpose and connection. Ms. Davis emphasized the importance of the COA's social and supportive environment, especially for older adults who may feel isolated, noting that the COA is now recognized as a resource for all older adults, not just those with financial needs. She concluded by thanking the team for their continued work.

ADJOURNMENT:

A motion was made by Mr. Shaffer with support from Mr. Letts to adjourn the meeting. This motion was passed 8-0 at 3:49 PM.