

ST. JOSEPH COUNTY COMMISSION ON AGING

ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES – APPROVED DATE

The November 19, 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 Deb Davis at 3:00 pm. Roll call was taken by Deb Davis.

PRESENT: Pat Dane, Deb Davis, John Gelvin, George Letts, Rick Shaffer, Terry Conklin, Maggie Mead, and Tim Barron.

ABSENT: Amanda Johnson, Phil Kline

AGENDA: A motion was made by Ms. Dane with support from Mr. Barron to approve the agenda with one amendment: the election of the board's officers under new business. The motion was approved 7-0.

OTHERS PRESENT: Pam Riley, Executive Director; Ammara Kanjanayothee, Marketing & Life Enrichment Manager; Britt Buscher, Finance Manager; Katie Hughes, Nutrition Manager, Dianne Wood; COA Member/Volunteer.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

None

MINUTES

Minutes from July 2025 were approved. A motion was made by Mr. Barron with a second from Mr. Letts. This motion passed 7-0.

FINANCE REPORT:

Ms. Buscher reported that the organization is currently 83.29% through the fiscal year and remains in a strong financial position. Revenues are exceeding budget expectations while expenditures remain below budget. She noted that there are no anticipated unexpected expenses at this time.

Ms. Buscher also shared that she has submitted her resignation as she will be relocating out of the area. A qualified replacement has already been identified and approved by the County. She is working on onboarding and training to ensure a smooth transition. It is expected that the next board packet will likely be prepared by the incoming staff member.

She concluded her report by inviting any questions from the Board regarding the finance update.

Mr. Gelvin made a motion with the support of Mr. Shaffer to accept the Financial Report. Motion passed 7-0.

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

Assessment Letter from AAA - Ms. Riley reported that the agency received its annual assessment letter from the Area Agency on Aging. The assessment resulted in zero findings, indicating full compliance

across all reviewed areas, including reporting, nutrition services, and in-home programs. She noted that the results reflect excellent performance and successful adherence to all standards.

2026 Meeting Calendar and OMA Requirements - Ms. Riley reviewed the proposed 2026 meeting calendar included in the Board packet, noting that the bylaws require six meetings per year. She explained that the September meeting has been difficult to hold in recent years due to conflicts with Fair Week and challenges obtaining a quorum. Several alternative months were presented for consideration, including March, May, or August.

Ms. Riley also reviewed Open Meetings Act requirements and the importance of adhering to proper notice procedures. If quorum is uncertain, staff will still be present at the meeting location, but without quorum the meeting cannot be called to order and no business may occur. In such cases, a notice must be posted on the agency's website indicating that the meeting was held but no business was conducted.

Input from the Board was requested regarding whether to move the September meeting to another month or maintain the current schedule. A motion was made by Mr. Letts to move the September meeting to August. Ms. Dane seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

PROGRAM REPORT:

Nutrition Services – Ms. Hughes reported on nutrition services activity since the July meeting. During this period, nearly 15,000 congregate meals and approximately 36,000 home delivered meals were served. The department also supported several special events and outreach activities, including World Brain Day with blueberry focused nutrition education, breakfast boxes for Tigers games and day trips, and lunches provided for Painting & Punch events.

The annual picnic was held in August with a strong turnout and a special menu including apple pie. In September, pizza lunches were offered during gallery wall events at both centers, along with the Dogs and Donuts luncheon tied to annual intake updates. That event drew close to 250 participants.

In October, Dinner Night Out was held in Three Rivers with an Oktoberfest style meal, serving 68 attendees. Friendly Reassurance participants received Halloween treats, and holiday meals continue to be provided whenever centers are closed.

Ms. Hughes also mentioned they will continue providing special meals for Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. She invited Board members to attend the upcoming Holiday Party and reminded them that RSVPs are appreciated.

Life Enrichment Services – Ms. Kanjanayothee provided an overview of recent Life Enrichment activities, noting that she began her role shortly before a couple major events and has been actively coordinating programs across the centers. Since July, the department has supported the annual picnic, the Caregiver Retreat, Oktoberfest Dinner Night Out, Craft Mania, and multiple group trips. She highlighted continued challenges related to limited activity space, particularly in Three Rivers.

Special programs included an energy efficiency class, expanded fitness offerings under consideration with potential new instructors, and networking through Project Connect to explore future partnerships with local organizations, including healthcare providers. The department also assisted with the Young Adult Transition Center's craft fair fundraiser.

Holiday and seasonal events included Dogs & Donuts during intake renewal, pumpkin decorating and costume contests, trick-or-treat bag distribution with the help of volunteers, and a Veterans Day tribute display. She noted strong participation and enthusiasm from members, as well as appreciated support from volunteers and staff.

Residential Services – Ms. Riley reported that Ms. Notestine was absent due to a family emergency. She provided an update on COA apartment occupancy, noting that two tenants recently moved out due to higher-level care needs. One of the units is a rare two-bedroom vacancy, already rented with an expected move-in by December 1. The second unit, a one-bedroom, will be prepared once the family completes the move-out process, and is anticipated to be filled early in the new year. Current waitlists include 58 individuals for one-bedroom units and 15 for two-bedroom units, with an estimated wait time of 18–24 months. Apartment rental rates have remained unchanged for approximately three years.

For in-home services, there are 46 individuals on the waitlist. Recruitment continues for two in-home aides, with one interview needing to be rescheduled, and the department is also seeking a part-time chore worker (up to 10 hours/week) to assist with minor home maintenance tasks such as snow removal, lawn care, and safety-related household needs. Larger requests are referred to outside providers. Board members were encouraged to share the job openings with prospective candidates.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

Ms. Riley highlighted the outstanding work of Ms. Kanjanayothee in Life Enrichment, recognizing her strong leadership and efforts during a particularly demanding time.

She provided an update on the Three Rivers lower-level renovation project. Due to an unexpectedly high construction estimate, an updated RFP will be issued in early 2026 with revised scope options. Staff safety remains a concern in the current space, and additional updates will be brought to the Board as cost information becomes available.

Ms. Riley reviewed contingency planning related to the federal government shutdown and possible reductions to SNAP benefits that could affect more than 1,200 seniors in the county. The COA is proactively increasing marketing and meal service capacity to ensure food access and prevent waste. Membership has risen, though meal attendance has not yet significantly changed.

She also reported on ongoing work with the County's Digital Innovations Task Force, which has transitioned from AI policy development into implementation and staff training. The COA has begun responsibly incorporating AI tools to increase efficiency in communication, reporting, and newsletter content creation.

A major technology initiative is underway to develop **custom AI-assisted menu planning software** that will streamline recipe development, ensure nutritional compliance, and directly link menu items to vendor ordering systems. This innovation is expected to save dozens of staff hours monthly and may become a model for other local governments.

Ms. Riley also delivered a farewell message for Ms. Buscher, acknowledging her years of excellent service and expressing sincere appreciation as she prepares to relocate out of state. A replacement has been secured and onboarding is underway to ensure a smooth transition.

Ms. Riley concluded by expressing excitement for technological progress within the COA and across St. Joseph County, noting that the organization is becoming a statewide leader in responsible AI adoption and digital innovation.

MEMBER'S TIME:

Mr. Barron expressed appreciation for the dedication and hard work of COA staff, noting the positive impact of committed public employees. He also commended the organization's leadership in the careful and responsible implementation of AI technology. He encouraged the COA to consider ways to support members in better understanding new technologies, as many may feel uncertain or intimidated by them.

Ms. Davis suggested contacting Detective Jennings of the Sheriff's Department, who recently presented at a local bank on AI-related scams, fraud, and elder financial abuse. She recommended inviting him to provide a similar educational "lunch and learn" program for COA members.

Ms. Dane shared that her church is adopting five local seniors for Christmas, focusing on individuals who may have no family support. Participants anonymously request needed or desired items, which are then purchased, wrapped, and delivered to them. She noted that her church has successfully supported seniors in this way in previous years.

ADJOURNMENT:

A motion was made by Mr. Letts with support from Ms. Dane to adjourn the meeting. This motion was passed 7-0.