



## Senior Center Committee October 11, 2024

Senior Center Committee members convened online on Friday, October 11, 2024. Members and attendees joined the meeting online via Microsoft Teams.

### **Members Present:**

Commissioner Eugene Guskowski, *Chair*  
Commissioner Mark Behar  
Commissioner Terrence R. Moore Sr.  
Kent Mayfield  
Ted Rehl  
Howard Snyder

### **Members Excused:**

Commissioner Amber Miller  
Commissioner Crocker Stephenson  
Ramona Dicks-Williams  
Alice Steuck Konkol

### **Staff Present:**

Christel Colorado, *DHHS*  
Jill Knight, *DHHS*

### **Attendees from the Public**

Cathy Wood, *SOA*  
Cherie Swenson  
Emma Smith  
Florine Robeinson  
Keith Smith  
Alice Watts  
Carolyn Ward  
Charlotte Lewis  
TL Robinson  
Susan Nelson

## MINUTES

### **I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**

Chair Gene Guskowski called the meeting to order at 1:10 p.m. Chair Guskowski shared with the public the Senior Center Committee of Milwaukee usually meets on the first Friday of the month. Due to travel plans, the committee has deviating from their usual monthly schedule. He expressed gratitude for attendees and is excited to share updates about their work. Christel Colorado, DHHS Executive Assistant took roll; a quorum was not present.

### **II. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF SEPTEMBER 6, 2024 & SEPTEMBER 13, 2024, SENIOR CENTER COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

This item was skipped, as a quorum was not present.

### **III. CATEGORIZING THE 2025-2027 PRELIMINARY AREA PLAN GOALS**

Chair Eugene Guskowski discussed the goals for Senior Centers as part of the area agency's action plan for senior services in Milwaukee County, which is updated every three years. The focus is on establishing goals for the period of 2025 to 2027. Over the past couple of months, the committee has collaborated with the Advisory Council to review these goals, which encompass various

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topics such as nutrition, caregiver support, and transportation—key components of the core services available to older adults. Member from the public, Emma Smith questioned why the board does not have any African American representation. Guskowski shared there is representation, Terrence Sr. Moore and Ramona Dicks-Williams, yet are always looking for new members to join. Committee member Howard Snyder shared they are not diverse.

Guskowski highlighted the diverse composition of the senior center select committee, which included representatives from each of the five senior center, particularly from communities of color. The committee, with over 20 members, played a key role in developing a new vision for the senior centers. Kathy Wood, President and CEO of Serving Older Adults, emphasized that participants from each center contributed to this vision by sharing their experiences and suggestions during visits. She encouraged ongoing community input and invited attendees to connect with staff or her directly to stay engaged in the process.

Aging Director Daniel Idzikowski emphasized the importance of participant involvement in senior centers, highlighting that the county's contract with Serving Older Adults ensures that every center has an advisory group made up of participants. This structure allows for regular updates from staff and opportunities for participants to provide input on programs and projects. He noted that these advisory councils meet monthly to discuss various issues, including transportation and building concerns. Idzikowski reiterated the value of community feedback in enhancing services, clarifying that the current meeting is specifically for the Senior Center Committee, not an advisory council meeting.

A public member emphasized the importance of including new classes and activities like jewelry making, music, and crochet classes. Idzikowski shared significant news about funding, noting that the county received nearly \$4 million from the state to upgrade Clinton Senior Center. Plans include transforming the kitchen into a teaching space for cooking classes, redesigning the dining area into a welcoming café environment, and converting the computer room into a maker space with improved technology and fiber optic internet. Additionally, there are plans to create areas for healthcare services, aimed at appealing to a new generation of seniors. He informed the public, all the project under that particular grant are to be completed by 2026.

Committee member Howard Snyder expressed that he understood and shared the concerns expressed by the public in attendance. Highlighting that many attendees left feeling uninformed. They stressed the need for clearer communication about meetings and goals. Chair Guskowski suggested prioritizing outreach efforts through promotional campaigns to connect media coverage to the broader narrative of the senior center's goals.

Commissioner Behar expressed the effectiveness outreach efforts from the committee but Milwaukee County in general. He mentioned he recently attended a public hearing, which attracted very few participants. He advocated for better communication strategies to engage the community.

Chair Guszowski returned to the agenda and suggested that the goals might have varying levels of importance and proposed that the committee evaluate which goals should be prioritized. Idzikowski suggested removing the first goal listed on the Senior Center Committee as it is repetitive and appears in the Evidence-based Wellness and Heart Health goals. The committee decided on:

1. Develop public-private sector partnerships to create new senior center facilities combined with other uses, such as housing.
2. Develop public-private sector partnerships to create new programming in senior centers that expands offerings consistent with the MKE HUBS report.
3. Rebrand senior centers and launch an enhanced promotional campaign using a variety of media sources, including culturally diverse outlets, to promote their use, availability, and resources contained within. Create partnerships to assist with rebranding, promotion, and social media marketing.
4. Develop new partnerships with organizations such as faith-based groups, labor councils, retiree organizations, corporations, and academic institutions to recruit volunteers, add programming, and promote participation in senior centers.
5. Expand County-led recreational offerings based at each senior center to include use of park grounds and recreational programming outside of standard programming hours.
6. Receive and consider the Independence First accessibility and accommodation recommendations and prioritize infrastructure updates to implement recommendations.

Cherie Swenson noted that some of these goals overlap and support each other. She emphasizes the importance of rebranding to capture attention and inspire community involvement, particularly encouraging older adults to participate through collaboration with community groups. Overall, she sees a natural collaboration among the goals that were discussed.

#### **IV. EXPLORE THE CREATION OF A SUPPORTIVE BODY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MILWAUKEE COUNTY SENIOR CENTERS.**

Director Idzikowski discussed the challenges faced by the county in securing enough resources for necessary infrastructure changes and programming to modernize senior centers. He mentioned various strategies to obtain additional funding, including grant writing and seeking support from the County Board. A key idea is to pursue a community-based organization that represents participants and can attract philanthropists and foundations for funding. He shared he met with the Parks Foundation's executive director and suggests recommending the establishment of a separate entity to support senior centers, like the foundation supporting parks, while outlining relevant guidelines from the Milwaukee County Ordinance. Idzikowski explained the ordinance that established the Commission on Aging includes a provision allowing for the creation of a trust to secure funding for the area agency on aging. This opens the possibility for establishing a foundation to support their work. He then initiated discussion on the idea, gauging interest in proposing it to the Commission. It was suggested that if there's sufficient support, they can seek expert

opinions on how to structure the foundation, its purpose, and potential members. This conversation is intended to build on insights from other organizations that have successfully pursued similar initiatives.

The committee discussed the financial sustainability of senior centers in the face of potential county budget deficits. There's a recognition that the county may have less tax revenue in the future, which could affect funding for these centers. Although the County Board and executive have committed to supporting them, the long-term outlook is uncertain. Advocates are encouraged to seek additional resources and funding to maintain and enhance programs, facilities, and services for the community. The conversation highlights the need for proactive fundraising and strategic planning to address these financial challenges.

Swenson shared her background in nonprofit work and familiarity with the Parks Foundation. She sees significant potential in the proposed model and suggests that having local philanthropists involved could attract initial funding to support operations before becoming self-sustaining. She emphasizes the importance of focusing on programming and senior experiences to secure future public funding. Additionally, she believes including participants and their families in the exploratory committee will enhance credibility and appeal to funders, ensuring that the needs of those who will use the senior centers are prioritized. She believes that the Parks Foundation's well-crafted materials and branding, likely supported by professional help, could serve as a model for rebranding the senior centers. She suggests that a collaboration between a private nonprofit focused on serving seniors and the Parks Foundation could be beneficial. Swenson took interest in understanding the timeline and effort it took for the Parks Foundation to establish itself, as it could provide valuable insights for the senior centers' initiative.

Chair Guskowski mentioned that Chair Jan Wilberg is working to connect their group with Julia Taylor, a prominent figure in Milwaukee's development scene. They are planning a breakfast meeting with her soon. Swenson explained who Julia Taylor is; she is the former president of the Greater Milwaukee Committee, is recognized for her leadership and ability to connect corporate leaders in the region. She believes her experience and perspective will be valuable, especially as they seek insights and support for their initiatives.

Commissioner Terrence Sr. Moore emphasized the need for more focus on senior centers, particularly in Wisconsin, where attention can be inconsistent. He supports the idea of creating a standalone center but acknowledges the necessity of having a strong team to drive this initiative. He highlighted the potential for Milwaukee to take a leading role in prioritizing older adults, while also suggesting a collaboration with local parks for the first few years to utilize their resources and expertise. This approach would allow them to gather insights before fully separating from the parks. Overall, he stressed the importance of balancing community support with business considerations in this endeavor.

Chair Guskowski ended the meeting acknowledging the valuable points made during the discussion, emphasizing that their goal is to gather direction without pushing a specific agenda. He believes the meeting has helped them refocus on their mission and the people they serve, deeming it a productive session.

## **V. ADJOURNMENT**

MOTION: To adjourn

ACTION: Motion prevailed by unanimous consent (Behar Moved, Moore Second).

Meeting adjourned at 2:58 p.m., The Senior Center Committee meeting will be held on November 1, 2024 location to be determined.

Respectfully submitted,

Christel Colorado  
Executive Assistant

Final