



## Senior Center Committee September 6, 2024

Senior Center Committee members convened in person and online on Friday, September 6, 2024. Members and attendees joined the meeting in person at the McGovern Senior Center as well as online via Microsoft Teams.

### **Members Present:**

Eugene Guskowski, *Commission on Aging, Chair*  
Mark Behar, *Commission on Aging*  
Ramona Dick-Williams  
Kent Mayfield  
Ted Rehl,  
Howard Snyder,  
Crocker Stephenson

### **Members Excused:**

Terrence Regan Moore Sr., *Commission on Aging, Vice-Chair*

### **Members Excused Continued...**

Amber Miller, *AARP, Commission on Aging*  
Alice Steuck Konkel,

### **Staff Present:**

Christel Colorado, *ADS*  
Daniel Idzikowski, *ADS*  
Jill Knight, *ADS*  
Carrie Koss Vallejo, *ADS*  
Emily Petersen, *ADS*  
Cathy Wood, *SOA*

### **Attendees from the Public**

Denise White  
Regis Welsh, *Director of Development & Marketing*

## MINUTES

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

Chair Gene Guskowski called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m. Christel Colorado took attendance; a quorum was present.

### **II. WELCOME NEW MEMBERS**

Chair Guskowski welcomed two new members, Ramona Dick-Williams, and Crocker Stevenson to the committee.

### **III. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF AUGUST 2, 2024, MEETING MINUTES**

MOTION: To accept the August 2, 2024, meeting minutes.

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

#### **IV. JOHNSON CONTROLS NEIGHBORHOOD GRANT WITH MILWAUKEE PARKS FOUNDATION**

Director Idzikowski introduced Rebecca Stoner, the executive director of the Milwaukee Parks Foundation, highlighting the foundation's strong collaboration with Milwaukee County parks. The foundation plays a crucial role in raising funds and volunteers to support the park system. One of their recent successes involved partnering with the Johnson Controls Foundation, which resulted in funding for neighborhood improvement projects in resource-challenged areas of Milwaukee. This initiative aims to enhance community infrastructure, particularly in areas like McGovern Park and the Amani neighborhood.

Rebecca shared more details about the foundation's work and the successful grant proposal with Johnson Controls. Rebecca shared they are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization focused on improving the park system. Their mission is to create a thriving, safe, and vibrant park system, emphasizing the importance of intergenerational activities, particularly for seniors. The organization has four strategic priorities: leveraging philanthropy for equitable amenities, raising awareness of park activities, building community partnerships, and advocating for sustainable funding solutions, especially given the county's long-standing funding challenges.

Their main initiative, "Seeds and Sprouts," focuses on both park infrastructure and community engagement, ensuring that improvements are complemented by active community involvement. Since its establishment in 2021, the organization has invested nearly \$1.9 million in over 26 projects across 40 parks, particularly in areas with high equity needs. More details on their impact can be found on their website. Rebecca also highlighted their partnership with Johnson Controls, which provided \$300,000 for the "Healthy Parks Healthy Neighbors" initiative, aimed at enhancing existing efforts in McGovern Park. The initiative has four main goals:

- **Trail Activation:** Improving the maintenance of trails, crucial for active users like the senior center's walking group.
- **Intergenerational Park Activities:** Investing in community events, such as basketball tournaments and fitness programs, to foster engagement across age groups.
- **Conservation:** Hiring a trail work crew to maintain over 125 miles of trails and address maintenance needs.
- **Sustainability:** Securing additional funding to ensure ongoing community involvement in park planning. She announced a \$50,00 gift from an anonymous donor for park planning in McGovern, emphasizing the importance of including community voices in decision-making.

Accomplishments so far include trail clearing and reforestation efforts, the establishment of a McGovern Friends group for community input, and various

enhancements to the senior center. The speaker emphasized the health benefits of parks and the importance of making them safe and welcoming for all, particularly seniors.

**V. PROGRAMMING IN THE MILWAUKEE SENIOR CENTER RFP (Discussion Item)**

Director Idzikowski updated the committee on the status of programming for the Milwaukee County Senior Centers, noting that the County had received no responses to the open RFP. As a result, they are now exploring contracting options outside of the RFP process. Members of the committee asked if the current vendor had responded. Idzikowski shared that in a letter, the organization indicated that it would not be financially prudent for them to respond to the RFP due to the funding parameters and the increased expectations outlined in the new program guidelines. The County is exploring alternatives since no proposals were submitted, including the possibility of a different operator or the county taking over the operation of the Senior Centers. They are currently assessing costs and need to finalize a decision by January 1, as the current contract ends on December 31.

Commissioner Behar expressed confusion about the programming responsibilities of the organization Serving Older Adults (SOA), which oversees all activities in the five senior centers, including meal site supervision. Idzikowski noted that the current vendor did not continue its operations, programming would halt after January 1st unless an alternative operator is found, or the county takes over. He highlighted the potential to split meal site supervision and programming into separate contracts, as this has been done in the past.

Behar suggested volunteer coordination of institutions of higher learning, who may be interested and willing to do programming in particular areas at the centers. Idzikowski stated, while there are individuals from universities involved at various levels, there isn't a dedicated staff person for coordination. There has not been a dedicated staff member for coordination and public partnerships, which was recommended in the Hubs report. While there were hopes to fund this position through ARPA funding, it turned out that the available amount was less than expected, preventing progress on this initiative.

Regis Welsh, the new Director of Development and Marketing at Serving Older Adults of Southeast Wisconsin, emphasized that in his five weeks on the job, he has identified the need to improve community awareness of their organization, which has been perceived as underwhelming. He brings extensive experience, having served on various boards, and being involved with the MACC Fund. Waid notes that they have begun reaching out for grants and have successfully secured additional funding recently. He highlighted the importance of having effective management at their facilities and mentions the variety of activities available for

seniors, including a wood shop. He addressed they did not have a response to the RFP proposal, hence there was no response.

Committee member Howard Snyder expresses frustration over the lack of response to the RFP, highlighting that the contractor's silence has left the county confused about their intentions—whether it was a strategic decision or a genuine withdrawal from the contract. Snyder emphasizes that a clear communication, such as stating they couldn't accept the contract due to financial constraints, would have been more transparent.

In response, Program Planning Coordinator, Carrie Koss-Vallejo clarified that the contractor (SOA) did send a letter before the RFP closed, indicating they wouldn't participate due to fiscal concerns. However, because there was potential interest from another agency, the county couldn't comment publicly until the RFP process was completed. Project Manager Policy Advocacy, Emily Peterson explains that during the open RFP process, they could not comment on the letter or discuss it with other potential vendors due to Milwaukee County rules. She clarifies that these restrictions are in place to comply with state and federal statutes, not specific aging rules, emphasizing the importance of adhering to these regulations during procurement.

#### **VI. COMMITTEE EXPANSION DISCUSSION**

Agenda Item was tabled.

#### **VII. UPDATE ON SENIOR CENTER DEVELOPMENT/CONSTRUCTION PROGRESS**

Agenda Item was tabled.

#### **VIII. AREA AGING PLAN SENIOR CENTER GOAL SETTING**

Program Planning Coordinator, Carrie Koss-Vallejo explained that they reviewed the goals from the recent area plan and identified which ones to prioritize this year. Feedback from the Advisory Committee highlighted that the previous goals were hard to measure, prompting a focus on specificity regarding measures and timelines. They aim to refine draft goals based on today's discussion, ensuring the content is relevant and comprehensive. After this, the goals will be presented to the Advisory Council and the Commission on Aging, with staff synthesizing overlapping goals from various committees. Koss-Vallejo anticipates that the Senior Center Committee will have goals that align with those from the Service Delivery Committee due to their interconnected nature.

Policy Manager, Emily Petersen shared with the committee; that there will be public hearings in late October for community input on the provisional goals after they've been reviewed by the Advisory Council and Commission. These hearings will take place at the Washington Senior Center and the Franklin Public Library, with an additional virtual option for those unable to attend in person. A flyer with details about the dates, locations, and links will be distributed soon, providing the public with a final opportunity to share their feedback on the goals. Koss-Vallejo explained that during a recent committee meeting, they reviewed and voted on various goals, sometimes merging, or refining them. They aim to discuss each goal thoroughly, and if necessary, table any that require more time.

The committee discussed the first goal related to health equity, focusing on enhancing blood pressure monitoring and heart health education program in partnership with American Heart Association. The goal aims to expand existing blood pressure monitoring initiatives from one center to all five county senior centers, emphasizing culturally competent care.

Key measurements for success include:

- Expansion of Blood Pressure Monitoring: Implementing monitoring programs in all senior centers.
- Tracking Participation: Measuring how many individuals use the blood pressure monitoring facilities and comparing these numbers to overall center attendance.

Challenges identified include the need for improved community awareness of these programs. Current outreach methods—like newsletters and flyers—have been inadequate, particularly within the African American community.

Suggestions for better communication include:

- Utilizing local churches and grocery stores for announcements.
- Posting information in senior dining sites and community centers.

Committee member Kent Mayfield also highlighted the importance of collaboration between the area aging plan and the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) to enhance public awareness and service delivery. There are concerns about overlapping responsibilities and funding issues, suggesting a need for more integrated communication strategies. Overall, while the goal is focused on health equity, effective measurement and community engagement are critical for its success.

Koss-Vallejo moved on to the next goal, centers on enhancing accessibility at Milwaukee County's senior centers, with a strong emphasis on implementing recommended infrastructure updates. The committee proposes shifting the focus from merely considering accessibility improvements to actively finishing them,

using a recent assessment as a template to prioritize changes for the five county-owned centers and Wil-O-Way. This approach aims to hold the committee publicly accountable for ensuring that all senior centers are fully accessible to older adults with disabilities. Additionally, there's an acknowledgment of the need for clarity regarding the committee's oversight role, as it does not currently represent all municipal senior centers. The goal includes identifying funding and prioritizing specific accessibility projects at each center, reinforcing the importance of community engagement and consistent communication to support these initiatives.

The committee's next goal focused on communication and collaboration goals related to senior center development and accessibility projects. There was a clear frustration regarding the use of the term "explore" in the context of partnerships for new facilities, as members felt it implied a lack of progress and urgency. Instead, they advocated for more decisive language, like "activate," to reflect the ongoing efforts and commitments made by the County Board. Members emphasized the importance of addressing community concerns about new developments, highlighting that feedback should encompass potential objections, not just desires.

The committee discussed scheduling another meeting, before the October 11th date. Options included the last Friday of the month, although that day conflicts with the Commission on Aging meeting. There was concern about accommodating the upcoming Advisory Committee meeting on September 25th, which needed ample participation to ensure important topics could be covered. The possibility of meeting the morning before the summit on September 13th was also mentioned.

To facilitate their objectives, the group considered holding Zoom meeting prior to September 25th to discuss the RFP and senior center contracts. While there were concerns about compliance with open meeting laws, the idea was to create a revised version of their documents based on feedback received, allowing members to prepare in advance. This approach aimed to streamline the decision-making process and ensure everyone was on the same page moving forward.

## **IX. ADJOURNMENT**

MOTION: To adjourn

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

Meeting adjourned at 2:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christel Colorado  
Executive Assistant