



State of New York County of Broome Government Offices

Office for Aging

Jason T. Garnar, County Executive · Mary E. Whitcombe, Director

Broome County Office for Aging Advisory Council Meeting Minutes April 11, 2022 In-Person

Present: Carolyn Price, Dr. Rick Lacey, Dr. Angela Riley, Rene Conklin, Sally Hoffman, Linda Mackenzie, Amy Pessarchick, Sue Thrasher, Kathy Bunnell, Suzanne Sullivan, Dr. John Kang, Maria Motsavage

OFA Staff: Mary Whitcombe, Director; Andrea Sollitto, Secretary

Welcome and Introductions

- Chairperson Carolyn Price welcomed everyone to the meeting
- Attendees introduced themselves and shared their profession or community involvement
- Carolyn asked for a moment of silence in memory of long-time advisory council member Jo Ann Freer, who recently passed away. Members then shared memories of Jo Ann and her involvement in the community. There will be a memorial service next month; more information will be shared once it becomes available.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

- The minutes from the February 7th, 2022, meeting were approved.

Director's Report

- Mary asked for any questions on the report and offered to discuss the topics in more detail.
- **Age-Friendly Project:** Mary provided some additional explanation of the “Village to Village” model of neighbor support. This model is driven by grass roots organizations and community-based membership. The model is about creating neighborhoods and villages by people interacting with each other to help meet each other’s day-to-day needs. People agree to be part of the village and offer their strengths to others in the village. The model includes social and educational programming, health and wellness activities, technology coaching. Other communities are already implementing this model.
- **Senior to Senior Dinner Dance:** This event will be held at the Johnson City Senior Center on May 20th, with seniors from Johnson City High School hosting local senior citizens. We received many phone calls from seniors registering for the event within the first few days of its advertisement. NYSOFA is interested in sending a representative to the dinner dance. County Executive Jason Garnar may also attend. We anticipate looking at holding similar dinner-dances or dinner only with other school districts.
- **Binghamton University Research Projects:** OFA is working with Dr. John Kang on a study of depression in older women and provided 60 robotic cats and dogs to Dr. Kang. OFA has been distributing robotic pets to older adults to help alleviate social isolation.

We are expecting a large shipment of the pets in the next few months. Mary will provide an update to the Advisory Council once the pets arrive, so that council members can refer people to OFA who may benefit from receiving a pet. Advisory council members can call the OFA at 607-778-2411 and ask to speak to a caseworker regarding the pets. People obtain a robotic pet by working with a caseworker. Mary remarked that NYSOFA has put the robotic pets in as a permanent part of the budget. OFA is also working with engineer Dr. Vipul Lugade and the Engineering and Physical Therapy Departments at BU, which are conducting balance clinics in older adults.

- **Happy Benches:** This project is in progress, with three benches to be placed at Otsiningo Park and two benches to be located at Mountain Top Park in Endicott. The benches each have a sign which indicates that the person sitting on the bench is interested in talking/socializing with others. The Senior Centers will paint an additional bench that will be placed with a sign in the new dog park that will open at Otsiningo Park.
- **AmeriCorps Worker:** OFA hired an AmeriCorps worker who will work with older adults in a variety of ways, including providing friendly visits to help with social isolation, helping with technology needs (using tablets, setting up email accounts, using Zoom, connecting to virtual appointments), and assisting caregivers by providing respite to them. The new AmeriCorps worker is young and enthusiastic.
- **LGTBQ Community:** OFA is hosting a webinar “Impacting Access to Care for Older Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Adults” on May 10th presented by SAGE Inc. of Syracuse. This webinar will provide insight into health disparities within the LGTBQ community, why members do not traditionally participate in senior centers or services, and ways to help reach this part of the older adult population. If you are interested in attending this webinar, please call OFA at 607-778-2411 to register.
- **Housing Caseworker:** Our caseworker works with adults who are identified as homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The program is funded through the Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG). Her caseload is typically 25 individuals at any given time. Some challenges include individuals needing first floor apartments, accessible housing, or housing that allows pets. Also, some of the individuals who need housing are living in condemned buildings or residences with bed bugs. Mary commented that there is a company that reached out to OFA about a month ago that will do clean outs. If a person is at risk of homelessness, the rules around the funding of the ESG grant sometimes allows for clean out.
- **Geriatric Home Program:** OFA recently met with the group of staff from Lourdes who are establishing a program to provide primary care in the home for older adults who are fully homebound.
- **Business Acumen - Caseworkers:** Mary explained that if an agency or organization is interested in having a designated caseworker at OFA, then OFA must have a contract so that we are paid for that caseworker’s time.
Mary commented that it is difficult to attract caseworkers to work with the older population. Many people associate social work with helping children or young adults only, and are not aware of the need to assist older people.
- **Foster Grandparent Supervisor:** We plan to hire a new supervisor in June to replace Vince Fox, who is retiring in July. This will enable the new hire to work with and shadow Vince for a few weeks before his last day.

- **MOW and ADC Space:** OFA has been looking for other locations for Meals on Wheels (MOW) and Binghamton Adult Day Care (ADC). The prospect of locating both programs at the Oakdale Mall is becoming more feasible and the County Executive is interested in the Mall location.
- **Senior Picnics:** We will be holding picnics at the individual senior centers instead of holding one large picnic as in the past. Each center will select its own theme, activities, and vendors to have at their picnic.

Update on Broadband in Rural Areas

- Carolyn Price explained that the Binghamton area was not the only area in NYS to apply for the federal grants (NTIAs). None of the grants applied to by NYS entities were approved. There are barriers in the state that we must overcome.
- She commented how the technology companies need a lot of money to not only install the fiberoptic cable, but they also must pay tax on the cable every year.
- NYS will have approximately \$1 billion available for broadband.
- Carolyn shared that Jason Garnar is supporting the efforts for expanding broadband.
- Carolyn is part of a working group at the federal level looking at the broadband shortages. She explained that she is learning a lot about agricultural needs and that the lack of broadband is a big issue for rural populations.
- The federal government is trying to get ahead of managing food production shortages by implementing precision agriculture – using technology to determine how much fertilizer, water, etc. are needed to increase crop yield.
- Carolyn discussed Elon Musk’s “Starlink” satellite system; home installation costs \$500 and has a \$110 monthly charge. This is another option for internet access, although the costs may be out of reach for many people.
- Fiberoptic is the gold standard of broadband, and it is anticipated there will be about 50 years of upgrades moving ahead.
- Mary remarked that OFA is doing a lot to address local technology needs. A lot of the other OFA’s in NY have not been able to do much with regards to technology needs because many areas of the state lack access to internet services.

Pandemic Related Updates & Discussion

- **Vaccine Line and Vaccines for Homebound:** We are still providing the vaccine line and screening for homebound individuals with COVID vaccine needs. EMS personnel administers the vaccines and boosters to the homebound who meet the eligibility requirements.

Other Announcements from the OFA Director

- OFA is no longer participating locally with the Senior Games. We continue to provide insurance and space at Highland Park for indoor activities including pickleball and volleyball.

Updates from Council Members

- Dr. Angela Riley remarked that the neighborhood near the current Meals on Wheels (MOW) location on Walnut Street in Binghamton needs the activity that comes from the MOW program. She also asked how people learn about the robotic pets as a resource for seniors. Angela voiced concern that there are groups of people who do not have access to information and resources available that other groups may know about. She shared that neighbors in the district that she represents are worried as people are aging. She is supportive of the work that Jerry Willard is doing through the First Ward Action Council. Angela asked Mary about the Age-Friendly project. Mary replied that the OFA is operating the project without funding, which had expired on December 31, 2021. OFA is creating an Age-Friendly report, and staff spends 1-2 hours a week meeting with updates on Age-Friendly. This report update should be available in the next month.
- Kathy Bunnell asked if Mary had any comment on the state budget. Mary replied that the homecare issue did receive some money in the budget but not as much as was hoped. There is still money for unmet needs and the OFA's are advocating for more money for EISEP. Mary offered to bring information forward on the master plan as she receives it.
- Dr. Rick Lacey, a member of the Advisory Council for six years, will be leaving the council and this will be his last meeting. He will be moving out of the area but will still reside in the area for the summer months. He reflected that he has seen three executive directors in his time on the council, and offered praise to Mary. He also commented that MOW has been looking for a new location for several years. He shared he has seen a lot of growth in assisting the aging population of Broome County.
- Suzanne Sullivan discussed technology needs in agricultural areas, giving an example of tractors breaking down in the field and the operators having no internet access to be able to find information on parts or where to get help with repairs.
- Sue Thrasher said she is excited about the prospect of MOW and Binghamton ADC moving into the Oakdale Mall. She described recent mental health outreach, including individuals tabling at the Broome County Library two times, and a mental health walking group at the Oakdale Mall.
- Sally Hoffman shared that she was able to watch some launches of the Starlink satellites while she was in Florida over the winter.

Meeting Adjourned

Motion made by Angela Riley and 2nd by Rick Lacey

Next Meeting

Monday, June 13, 2022, at 12:00pm

We will plan for the meeting to be held in-person at the Broome County Library in the Decker Room.

Advisory Council Nominating Committee

Please email Mary Whitcombe if you are interested in participating on the OFA Nominating Committee. We will need 3 members interested.

There are openings on the OFA Advisory Board. Our group could use some diversity so please consider seeking out colleagues and/or friends who can reflect interests of older adults who are not represented well amongst us. Some recruits must be over 60 years old. Members shall be eligible for appointment for 2 consecutive 3-year terms on a calendar year basis. The highlighted names below have their 1st term expiring on 12/31/22. If your name is highlighted, please let Mary know if you wish to stay for your second term.

Name	First Term Expiring	Second Term Expiring
Lida Bassler	12/31/2022	
Donald Bowersox	12/31/2022	
Kathy Bunnell		12/31/2024
Rene Conklin	12/31/2022	
Sally Hoffman	12/31/2023	
Dr. John Kang		12/31/2023
Dr. Youjung Lee		12/31/2023
Linda Mackenzie	12/31/2022	
Jerome Miklouchich	12/31/2023	
Maria Motsavage	12/31/2024	
Mark O'Dell	12/31/2023	
Amy Pessarchick	12/31/2024	
Carolyn Price		12/31/2024
Angela Riley	12/31/2022	
Suzanne Sullivan	12/31/2023	
Suzanne Thrasher	12/31/2022	
Jerry Willard	12/31/2022	