

MINUTES: ADVISORY BOARD ON AGING – Wednesday, June 18, 2025 – 3:00p.m.

Office on Aging, Zoom Platform

Members Present: K. Cooke, A. DiGuardo, P. Drescher, D. Hanley, B. Klein, H. Murphy, J. Parker, C. Patton
Staff: F. Schott, K. Winkowski, **Absent:** V. Bands, M. Brusio, A. Callender, K. Clipp, M. DiDomenico, T. Fitzgerald, S. Haviland, J. Panowicz, T. Poffenburger, K. Proutt, C. Sconion, F. Sirkis, L. Stewart

The meeting opened at 3:05 p.m. via Zoom. Minutes from the March 19, 2025, meeting were approved; the quorum was met on the virtual call.

Introduction: Karen Winkowski facilitated the meeting.

Presentation: N/A

Updates:

Debra Hanley provided updates about the Town of Bel Air's Committee for Seniors and Citizens in Need, formerly known as the Elderly Committee. The committee is chaired by Bari Klein, with Vickie Bands serving as Vice Chair. Meetings are held monthly at the Town Hall in the police department's conference room.

On Tuesday, June 24, 2025, the committee will host a senior luncheon at McFaul Activity Center. In previous years, the town hosted a large volunteer appreciation event at the Armory. While it was a very nice event, it was also costly and time-consuming, with unpredictable attendance. This year, the committee decided to redirect those funds to the residents they serve, and lunch will be served. Karen Winkowski has offered the McFaul Activity Center as the venue.

The Town of Bel Air's Senior Committee has released a survey to better understand the needs and preferences of senior residents. The initial survey was conducted at the G.A.I.N Caregivers Conference, with additional sessions planned for the upcoming luncheon at McFaul Activity Center, and ongoing outreach through other community efforts.

Bari Klein highlighted two key future initiatives: 1. Walkability Study: The committee is exploring ways to improve pedestrian access and mobility for seniors. 2. Food access monitoring: with expected state funding cuts to senior food programs as of July 1, 2025, this initiative aims to address potential gaps in food access.

Debra Hanley shared that the Caregivers Conference, hosted by GAIN, returned to the McFaul Center this year. The layout was adjusted to place speakers at the center of the room, allowing attendees and vendors to engage more fully with presentations. While feedback was mostly positive, some participants felt that the vendor interaction was more limited due to this setup. Attendance was strong, with eighty participants. The committee is already discussing plans for next year, again at McFaul. GAIN itself is undergoing a transition, with many long-serving members stepping back and a new wave of leadership emerging, bringing fresh energy and diverse skills. It's encouraging to see the group maintain momentum.

Karen Winkowski reported the following:

The Office on Aging (OOA) Wellness & Nutrition Team hosts various health and wellness events throughout the year and is currently running a six-week program based on the Blue Zones concept, which explores why certain populations around the world live longer, healthier lives. The response from the senior residents has been positive. This program earned OOA the Program Excellence Award from the Maryland Association of Senior Centers. Starting July 8, 2025, the Blue Zones sessions will be offered in the evenings at the McFaul Center. More details are available on our Facebook page, and flyers will be distributed.

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The Office on Aging received the majority of its FY2025 federal funding. However, a delay was tied to disruption at the federal level. The Administration for Community Living (ACL) was dismantled, with its programs nearly divided across different agencies. The Older Americans Act (OAA), which establishes the framework for aging services, has not been reauthorized. Karen explained that the proposed budget cuts could significantly affect programs for older adults, potentially leading to drastic reductions in critical aging programs, including Adult Protective Services and the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, both governed by the OAA. After extensive advocacy from Maryland's federal delegation and aging advocates nationwide, funding and the prevention of division of aging services were restored. Despite ongoing concerns, FY26 is expected to be level-funded. Staff are now focused on seeking new, sustainable funding and ensuring local flexibility.

OOA is working on multiple grant applications, including a Healthy Aging grant. Most of these are renewals, while some are aimed at expanding sustainability efforts.

Program Highlights:

Housing-Based Health Programs: 13–15 programs run monthly across 13 senior housing buildings, offering health education, fitness classes, and wellness check-ins.

Neighborhood Table Program: This pilot program replaces traditional frozen meal delivery with bi-weekly, nearly ready-to-eat grocery bags provided by ShopRite, serving a total of 468 meals per month at Fairbrook and Abingdon Catholic Charities. We believe this initiative will offer improved nutritional value, increased flexibility, and foster greater engagement with residents.

Evidence-Based Health Promotion: The office has trained staff to deliver in-demand IID health promotion programs. While funding constraints limit free offerings at senior centers, programs continue in senior housing communities and are expanding through new grants.

Software & System Progress: The new client software system now has over 1,100 + enrolled participants. It is being used for data tracking, reporting, and quality assurance, and may soon serve as a case management tool for local housing partners.

Guardianship Program: The Guardianship Program remains active, although we have experienced a slight decrease in the number of clients due to the passing of some individuals. The current caseload is approximately 50, keeping the team busy.

HarGo Rides Initiative: The volunteer-based HarGo Rides initiative is underway to support seniors needing transportation to medical appointments. Although the launch has been delayed due to staffing and insurance issues, it's expected to launch later this year.

In celebration of Older Americans Month, the OOA has launched a campaign to combat ageism, themed "Flip the Script on Aging." Community members submitted stories about defying stereotypes in later life—such as going back to school, traveling, or picking up new hobbies. The top stories were used on posters and displayed at local senior centers, accompanied by celebrations including ice cream socials that attracted strong community attendance.

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A question was raised about handicap parking awareness at the Activity Centers. Karen noted that parking shortages at senior centers, particularly McFaul, are becoming critical. While there's no easy solution, program caps and adjustments to class sizes are being considered. Possible long-term solutions include shuttle options and collaborations with nearby parking lots.

There has been a positive increase in community awareness regarding Medicaid and aging services. Residents are actively asking questions and providing advocacy support, which indicates a growing understanding of these critical systems. Bari Klein inquired whether the board has educational materials to share, emphasizing that keeping the public informed can help them advocate for their needs. Karen responded that the US Aging is a great resource for support in these efforts. The Office on Aging will soon share sample advocacy letters and resources from the US Aging, the national association dedicated to reauthorization and safeguarding services.

Additionally, Ann DiGuardo raised a question regarding public awareness of available services and how to better inform the community about important information. Karen assured everyone that efforts will be made to post vetted resources and information on the Office on Aging Facebook page.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:57 p.m.

Next meeting: Wednesday, December 16, 2025

Respectfully submitted,
Francine Schott, Harford Co. Office on Aging