



**COMMISSION ON SENIORS  
MEETING MINUTES**

**REGULAR  
(January 11, 2017)**

**The Commission on Seniors convened a regular meeting at City Hall in the Executive Session Room – 301 West 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, Austin, Texas 78701**

**Chair, Janee Briesemeister, called the Board Meeting to order at 12:20p.m.**

**Board Members in Attendance:**

- |                                       |                        |                              |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Janee Briesemeister, Chair</i>     | <i>David Gray</i>      | <i>Emily De Maria Nicola</i> |
| <i>Peter Varteressian, Vice-Chair</i> | <i>Martin Kareithi</i> | <i>Sally Van Sickle</i>      |
| <i>Patricia Bordie</i>                | <i>Fred Lugo</i>       |                              |
| <i>Natalie Cagle</i>                  |                        |                              |

**Board Members not in Attendance:**

- Erica Garcia-Pittman*
- Thomas McDowell*
- Dan Pruett*

**Staff in Attendance:**

Laura Williamson, Austin Public Health

The board introduced themselves.

**1. CITIZEN COMMUNICATION**

- i. No speakers

**2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE OCTOBER 12, 2016 MEETING.**

- Posting should have been for minutes from the December meeting, will be posted for a future agenda
- No action taken

**3. NEW BUSINESS**

- A. Briefing and discussion regarding programming and services provided for seniors by Austin Public Health and identified unmet needs for seniors (Maria Allen, Manager for Neighborhood Services, Austin Public Health and Robert Kingham, Social Services Policy Manager, Austin Public Health)
  - Speakers had to reschedule, will post for an upcoming meeting
- B. Briefing and discussion regarding programming and services provided for seniors by Austin Public Library and identified unmet needs for seniors (Sharon Herfurth, Division Manager, Austin Public Library)

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- Discussion regarding available resources through Austin Public Library
  - Large print and audio
  - EBooks available and make any materials easy to convert to large print
- Walk through of Library website, particularly regarding services that would be interesting and helpful for seniors and families
  - Online learning courses
  - Virtual Library
  - Homework assistance services
  - Newspapers and magazine online subscriptions for local publications as well as publications from around the world
    - Includes access to the Austin American Statesman and the Austin Monitor
- Working toward virtual library and service that would allow residents to apply for a library card online rather than having to visit a local branch
  - Would be particularly helpful for homebound seniors and low-income families with transportation issues
- Texas Book Program is available for participation by those that have a print disability
  - Library sends materials with special player to homes
- Senior living information page on website with multiple resources available
- Recycled Reads Bookstore available on Burnet Road
  - Sells hardbacks for \$2 and paperbacks for \$1
    - Affordable reading materials for Austin residents and reduces Library's impact on landfill by encouraging reuse
  - Books also available for sale at local branches
- Free classes available including:
  - Basic computer skills
  - Tech Time – residents bring in tablets, laptops, and/or phones to receive assistance in accessing and downloading library materials
- Adaptability equipment available at all locations to make computers accessible
- Ongoing outreach efforts and partnerships to sign up library cards at City senior centers
- New book mobile, working toward establishing staff to bring library services to more remote places
- Free tax preparation services through volunteers
- Efforts to collect family stories and history
- Partnering on “My Library Keeps Me Healthy”
  - Austin Public Health provides nurses once a week for social service referrals and health screenings
    - Services currently provided at the Terrazas, Little Walnut, and Central Branch libraries
- Job search lab available with 2 staff members available for job searching and

resume writing available at Carver

- All programs at Library are required to be open to the public and the calendar for room reservations is available online
  - Each location has at least one book club
  - Other programming includes financial planning, movie screenings, care giver support, family game nights, etc. which vary depending on the location
- Commission posed question regarding need for volunteers
  - Volunteers are always welcome and can sign up online to participate in the volunteer program which includes a wide variety of opportunities
- Commission mentioned ongoing process of developing budget recommendations, asked for best staff resource moving forward for questions regarding funding and staff needs
  - Presenter offered to be a resource and provided contact information
- Commission commented on hub needed for seniors to get info as part of Age Friendly Action Plan
  - Discussion regarding potential to work with Library in partnership
    - Karen Baker is the primary contact for the Library website and can be contacted regarding these efforts
- Questions regarding unmet needs for seniors
  - Library staff is looking for resources to fund the book mobile, will look into funding required and relay information back to Commission
  - Eventually would like to be able to offer up to 300 wifi hotspots available for checkout for those that don't have access which would benefit seniors and low-income residents
    - Would cost approximately \$300,000
    - Has been done in other cities

C. Briefing and discussion regarding media relations (Bryce Bencivengo, Public Information Specialist Senior, City of Austin Communications and Public Information Office)

- Chair explained catalyst for requesting this presentation: During previous month a reporter had contacted multiple Commissioners requesting interviews on an issue that the Commission had never discussed
  - Would be beneficial for Commission to discuss together how to handle these situations and get some advice from the City's Public Information Office about practices for working with the media as well as resources available for Commissioners.
- Bryce Bencivengo discusses resources available for Commissioners
  - The Public Information Office is available to give guidance and recommendations for Commissioners if members would like to discuss any issues before returning media calls
- Four elements contribute to the likelihood of whether something will turn into a media story including emotion/conflict, urgency, whether it's unusual, and impact

- The more elements present for a particular issue, the more likely it will become a story
  - Austin is a midsized media market
    - Reporters that are covering local issues may be and often are new to the area
      - Unusual for a large city, but is due to the nature of Austin’s media market size
  - Reporters are looking for facts and details fast
    - Will follow up with interviews with key players to help develop a complete picture
  - Before an interview, best to:
    - Identify key message and define point of statement
    - Develop primary talking points that are clear and concise
    - Prepare for best and worst case scenario; practice will help
  - During an interview:
    - Lose the jargon
    - Use facts and figures to illustrate point
    - Be direct and up from
    - Flag key points
  - Good technique to restate most important point at the end of any interview or conversation with the media
    - Increases likelihood that the preferred statement will be used in the story
    - “I don’t know” and “This is not an issue the Commission has taken up” followed by a referral to other potential resources viable responses for media
    - Talking with media is optional for Commissioners
      - It is valuable for media to hear from Commissioners to have another perspective
  - Commission asked if there are guidelines for speaking to media about issues the Commission has not taken up
    - It is ideal to speak broadly about issues as a whole rather than speaking about individuals or very specific cases the Commission has not discussed
  - Reporters may be up against tight deadlines, which can impact the frequency or tone of media requests
- D. Discussion regarding policies and regulations pertaining to pedestrian and bicycle access to drive-through services
- Chair noted that information has been distributed as part of packets, and that this item was requested by two Commissioners following testimony from Mr. Woodley at the November Commission on Seniors meeting
  - Commissioner Van Sickle was one of the Commissioners that requested the item, and stated that she wanted to understand the issue more
    - Some businesses do have drive-through facilities that at times are not available to pedestrians, primarily fast food

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- Discussion regarding the perspective of safety issue of having bicycles and pedestrians in drive throughs at night when lighting and visibility may be low
  - May not be a safe option
- Concerns about whether directing private businesses in this situation is under the purview of the Commission
- Commissioner Gray questioned why this wouldn't be an acceptable risk when bike lanes are allowed despite potential liability
- Questions arise regarding how much this impacts seniors
  - Some consensus around this issue not being closely related to senior issues or connected to the goals adopted by the Commission
- No action taken

### 4. OLD BUSINESS

- A. Discussion regarding developing recommendations for the Fiscal Year 2017-18 City of Austin budget – Standing item
  - i. Chair distributed draft process for Commissioners to consider
    - a. Discussion regarding utilizing work groups as the primary tool for developing recommendations
  - ii. Ideal to identify relevant departments for each potential recommendation
    - a. Coordinate with Chair, Vice Chair, and Commission Liaison to determine how and whether to work with related departmental staff while developing recommendation
  - iii. Should be flexible on timeline to accommodate ongoing process and interests of Council
  - iv. Conducting special called meetings is always an option as well
  - v. Discussion regarding process for getting items on the agenda
    - a. Ideal to distribute emails through staff liaison to look for a second Commissioner interested in posting any given item
- B. Commission Work Plan – Standing Item.
  - i. No discussion
- C. Updates from Working Groups – Standing Item
  - i. Transportation
    - a. No discussion
  - ii. Housing, Outdoor Spaces and Buildings
    - a. No discussion
  - iii. Social Participation, Respect and Social Inclusion
    - a. No discussion
  - iv. Civic Participation and Employment; Communication and Information
    - a. No discussion
  - v. Community Health Services
    - a. No discussion
  - vi. Age Friendly City
    - a. No discussion
- D. Update on Joint Inclusion Committee – Standing Item (Janee Briesemeister)

- i. Have not met recently
- E. Update on Equity Action Team – Standing Item (Emily De Maria Nicola)
  - i. Upcoming meeting, will report back after

**5. STAFF BRIEFINGS**

- A. Overview of City of Austin Commission on Seniors
  - i. No updates
- B. Discussion regarding time, date, and location for the February 2017 Commission on Seniors meeting
  - i. Boards and Commissions room available for February, but not until 12:30pm
    - Have option of finding alternate location or moving regular start time back half an hour and conducting meeting at City Hall
  - ii. Discussion regarding whether to hold standing meeting in addition to joint meeting with the Mayor’s Committee for People with Disabilities
    - Decision to hold both meetings, and have the standing meeting at City Hall with a start time of 12:30pm

**6. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

- i. Discussion regarding items for joint meeting with the Mayor’s Committee for People with Disabilities:
  - a. Request the Chief Equity Officer, Brion Oaks present if available
  - b. Potential presentation from Capital Metro regarding Connections 2025
    - Would be presentation on draft plan since Capital Metro Board of Directors will not have voted yet on final version
  - c. Discussion regarding working groups for each commission
- ii. Discussion regarding items for standing February meeting:
  - a. Request presentations from Austin Public Health and Austin Parks and Recreation regarding services for seniors and unmet needs
- iii. St. David’s Foundation Strategic Plan presentation, potentially in April
- iv. Staff to include the listing of previous future agenda items on minutes to retain items discussed.
  - 1. Affordable Housing
  - 2. Texas Veterans Commission
  - 3. Hispanic Quality of Life
  - 4. Veterans Affairs Office
  - 5. Google representative
  - 6. State Veterans Services
  - 7. Foundation Communities
  - 8. Austin Energy – Weatherization and home repair
  - 9. Home renovation for seniors
  - 10. Housing and resources for senior musicians and artists
  - 11. Dell Medical School

**ADJOURNMENT**

- Vice Chair Varteressian motioned to adjourn meeting.
- Commissioner Van Sickle seconded the motion.
- Motion passed 9-0
- Meeting adjourned at 2:00pm.