# **St. Lawrence County Office for the Aging (OFA)**

# **Advisory Council Meeting Minutes**

# **November 7, 2022**

**Meeting called to order:** 10:00 AM by Roger Bennett, Chairman

**Present:** *(voting members)* Roger Bennett, Russ Backus, Larry Denesha, Joan Howlett, Matt Manierre, Barb McBurnie, Kathy Skelly, Linda Wilkinson

**Present:** *(non-voting members):* Andrea Montgomery, Kelly Zakarauskas, Michael Boprey, Carly Zimmermann, Chiara Delosh, Jacob Kormanyos, Barbara Hardiman

**Absent:** Gail Bisonette, Vicki Clark, Jolene Munger, Brenda Sanderson, Gail Teele

**Public Attending:** Myrtle Regan

**Meeting Location:** HSC

**♦Introductions** –Meeting brought to order by R. Bennett. Opened with Pledge of Allegiance and Moment of Reflection. Welcome and introductions.

**♦Guest Speaker** – None

**♦Public Comment** – None.

♦**Approval/Minutes** – motion to approve minutes by K. Skelly, seconded by R. Backus, all in favor. Motion passed.

♦**Correspondence** – None.

**♦Old Business**– There will be no more monthly reports, as we now put them in the Peerplace database.

**♦New Business** – Updates as follows in reports below.

**Members Updates** – *(Russ Backus)* Executive director is retiring in January, has had 40 years in the field. Reports staffing issues, direct care staff getting considerable amounts of money to join force; *(Matt Manierre)* Mentioned email scams through PayPal. Mentioned that people need to refresh their memories on what a real email should look like. *(Barb McBurnie)* Reminder to not click on any links in a questionable email.

**County Legislator’s Report** – *(Larry Denesha)* The 2023 tentative budget was announced. There are no changes. The tax rate for 2023 drops 5.2%. For 2023, it is $7.60 per $1000. For 2020, it was $8.28 per $1000. For 2021, it was $8.19 per $1000. For 2022, it was $8.02 per $1000. The tax rate has lowered or stayed the same for the past 6 years. We now have the lowest tax rate per 1000 since the 1980’s. We are under the tax gap and the sales tax revenue has gone up. Roughly, half of our sales taxes are shared with municipalities.

**County Council of Senior Citizens Report** – *(Linda Wilkinson)* Currently meeting monthly, lunch is being served at the meetings at midtown.

**StateWide Senior Action Council Report** – *(Barb McBurnie)* Still actively meeting. Dropped off pocket calendars with helpful hints and Medicare information inside. Asked about sending them out to Home Delivered Meal clients. The mobility manager of Volunteer Transportation came to the last StateWide meeting. Reminder to vote, mentioned that the issues on the table are social security and Medicare. It is important to know the views of elected officials. The StateWide convention went well and they had many good speakers. Medicare open enrollment has started and the most important thing is “buyer beware”. Medicare advantage plans don’t always mention income eligibility. The ads and the mail sound great but if you don’t ask the right questions, you may end up with something you don’t want. Ask lots of questions and the call the Office for the Aging with questions. Company sponsored insurance is usually better than something off the open market. Advantage plans are local networks. Call your doctor and ask if they are a participating provider for plan. Linda Wilkinson mentioned going to the Ogdensburg Command Performances with the mobility manager. They would like transportation to go to these events. Premier buses cost about $1800 just to back out of the garage. School buses are an option, however, schools have a shortage of bus drivers so these are not available.

**Veterans Services Report** – *(Mike Boprey)* VA sped up claims process. They moved exams to a contractor. VA medical center is there for care. The exams are no longer done at the medical centers. More conditions are being added for claims, such as, Camp Legeune and Blue Water Navy. The office cannot recommend an attorney but can let clients know on a personal level to seek council. There is a class action lawsuit, which is separate from the VA. Tier 1 is presumptive and tier 2 is non presumptive. VA claims regarding Camp Legeune will be offset. The government gets a payout. The Pact Act is substantial. If you have a cancer of any time, as a veteran, visit the Veterans Services Department. New clinic in Potsdam has a rep in the office once a week. Claim numbers are going down, due to that.

**Public Health Report** – *(Carly Zimmermann)* COVID numbers are now updated once a month. We have a medium transmission level, currently. COVID vaccinations are available at the Public Health clinic. You may walk in or make an appointment online or call the office. Moderna, Pfizer, and JYNNEOS available.

**AARP Report** – *(No Rep)* No Report.

**Office for the Aging Report** – *(Andrea Montgomery)* We have a lot going on at the Office for the Aging. We have two new staff, Jacob and Barbara. We will be hiring a NY Connects Coordinator and a Senior Account Clerk. We have 7 provisional employees who all took their civil service exams on Saturday. All of them need to score within the top 3 and they all mentioned that the tests were quite difficult. We have a record number of nutrition referrals. We have a 40%-50% increase in services. We also have a staffing shortage at our nutrition sites. Staff are leaving due to burnout and wages. Many of the workers were disappointed that they weren’t included in the health care worker wage raises. The nutrition workers’ salaries are hard to live on, especially with inflation. The nutrition workers are a grade 7 and grade 13 for civil service and the union will not agree with pay raises for them unless the county raises all grades. The workers are part time and they receive benefits and retirement, however, the pay is $13.42 per hour. We are working hard with the county administrator. The staff cannot afford to pay their bills. Hiring 2 permanent aides and 5 temporary aides. Holiday season is going to be tough with 1 temporary. We have had critical shortages in Morristown. Clients have had to use frozen meals twice last week, due to not enough help at the site. We have been working with Ruth and the union. We are now offering mileage pay for 90 days to staff who needs to move to a different site. We have done a huge outreach for volunteers. We have contacted local churches and community groups asking for help. We currently have a waitlist of 60 people that we can’t serve currently due to not enough staff and volunteers. We also have our Grab & GO and Sit & Stay programs up and running. They have been open since August and the numbers are not growing very much. Senior groups can meet in our nutrition centers and we will provide meals. Open enrollment has begun. We did over 10 presentations throughout the summer and the fall. Heap also opened on November 1st. Emergency heap will open on January 3rd. We are worried about seniors on a fixed income and how they may get through December. We posted the income guidelines in our Mature Living newsletter. Heap eligibility is more than most people think. SNAP eligibility has also increased. Senior awards are going to be held at Mayfest in 2023. The winners were Myrtle Regan, Brenda Sanderson, and Jerry Mahoney.

We have many events that have been happening and are coming up. We had a film screening for All the Lonely People at SUNY Canton. The film makers were there and NYSOFA. We had a Durable Medical Equipment Day with Clarkson University. They had tune ups for equipment and diabetic foot screenings. The EAP had a health fair that was very well attended. We have a public hearing to go over funding on November 15th at 10AM. Comments and notes will be sent to the state. November 16th we will be having a Long Term Care Council meeting at 2PM through Zoom. December 13th we will be having our staff holiday party at 130PM. We are also putting together a holiday gift drive for seniors. We are accepting financial contributions for gift cards.

We also offer vaccination assistance, we are putting together a caregiver support group, computer classes with SLU, Tai Chi and Walk with Ease. We have a new thing in our office called Elli-Q, which can help clients with medication management, depression and loneliness, and many other things.

**♦Adjournment** – Motion to adjourn by R. Backus, seconded by J. Howlett, all in favor. R. Bennett adjourned meeting.

**♦Next Meeting** – Monday, February 6th, 2022 at 10AM

*(Electronic Meeting Minutes respectfully submitted by Kelly Zakarauskas)*