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

# **Advisory Council Meeting Minutes**

# **February 6, 2023**

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

**Present:** *(voting members)* Roger Bennett, Larry Denesha, Joan Howlett, Kathy Skelly, Linda Wilkinson, Brenda Sanderson, Gail Teele

**Present:** *(non-voting members):* Andrea Montgomery, Kelly Zakarauskas, Michael Boprey, Jolene Munger, Jacob Kormanyos

**Public Attending:** None

**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 J.Howlett, seconded by K. Skelly, all in favor. Motion passed.

♦**Correspondence** – None.

**♦Old Business**– None

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

**County Legislator’s Report** – *(Larry Denesha)* Sales tax revenue for 2022 was higher than budgeted. The cost of everything is increasing and it is believed that COVID relief checks are driving the increase. 2023 has a lot of unknowns. We are expecting a reasonably good year. Our county shares sales tax revenue with towns and villages. New York State does not consider biomass to be renewable energy. Senator Gillibrand is on board. 90% tax levy, unfunded mandates. $7.60 per $1000 is the tax rate for 2023. Half of that goes to Medicaid. Andrea Montgomery sent out an advocacy letter urging to fight this. There is solar going through the county which could save money for residents.

**Public Health Report** – *(Jolene Munger)* We are changing how we do clinics. We switched them from Mondays to Tuesdays. We now have clinics on Tuesday and Thursday from 8:30 to 3:30. Starting to collect insurance information to bill insurance companies. No cost to clients. Took down online system, so now people can call or walk in. Working on updating shots to just bivalent. Good chance that vaccines will be annual, similar to the flu. There are talks about combining flu and COVID vaccines. NYS healthcare mask mandates expire on 2/12. Not sure what happens moving forward. National emergency will expire May 11. Probably less than 50% of cases are being reported now, due to home tests. People are still being hospitalized and dying from COVID-19. Hasn’t leveled off yet to be considered an endemic. Still have tests available at the Human Services Building and the Court House. Still doing homebound vaccinations. It is not too late for a flu shot, as well. Shingles vaccines will be free in 2023 for people on Medicare. There has been an extension on the HUD lead grant. Renovations for your home may be covered through this grant through the North Country Housing Council.

**County Council of Senior Citizens Report** – *(Brenda Sanderson)* Have not been meeting during January and February. In the process of trying to plan a ceremony for award winners for the past two years. Tentatively planning for May 6th. Will have refreshments and will tentatively take place at the Canton Methodist church in the basement. Not having a MayFest but may have a picnic at some point in the summer. There may be some new clubs and some old clubs are considering dissolving.

**StateWide Senior Action Council Report** – *(Andrea Montgomery)* Seniorama is back. Will be held on July 24th at the bingo palace. Senior Medicare Patrol Grant renewal which supports Medicare fraud.

**Veterans Services Report** – *(Mike Boprey)* 7600 veterans in our county. Amvets in Potsdam is having an open house on Friday, February 10, from 12-3. They will be doing healthcare enrollment and claims. Still doing many claims. Blue water navy, Camp Lejeune, and Pact Act. There is a gray area about what the VA can do sometimes.

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

**Members Updates** – Jolene Munger and Alexa Backus (Youth Bureau) are doing a QPR – suicide prevention training. They are going to be training people on how to respond and what to refer someone to when they may be suicidal.

**Office for the Aging Report** – *(Andrea Montgomery)* Our holiday gift drive was a success. It seems like we can give more and more every year. We gave out gift cards by mail, instead of gift bags. We receive more thank you cards and letters showing appreciation since we started doing the gift cards. Staffing levels are a concern. There is a back log on civil service exams. We have some staff that have been in provisional positions for over four years. We have openings for a senior account clerk and a program coordinator. We have eight provisional staff including our Medicare counselor. We have seven vacancies in the nutrition program, 1 permanent and 6 temporary. Cannot get anyone to apply. The job is currently a grade 7, which is the lowest grade in the union. The county is on board with raising the rates for these positions but the union won’t agree unless all 40 grades get raises. These positions currently make $13.60 per hour. Minimum wage for NYS is $14.20. The staff do more than just meals every day. Most of the time, they are the only form of socialization for clients, a lifeline to the outside world, and a wellness check each day. Staff or volunteers have found clients deceased before. Our numbers are growing. Had 75 new home delivered meal referrals last month, before COVID we had 25-30. The people over 65 are growing. Inflation is also a factor. Congregate numbers are still low. We are working on what we can do to change that. Grab and Go remains popular. Adding programming at the sites and are currently looking for suggestions. For weather-related closures, remember that clients still have frozen or emergency meals to use. We also do wellness checks on clients, even when we do not go out to deliver. We remind people to check their fuel levels when temperatures are extremely cold. The county has 3 new board members and departments are asked to do presentations to explain what we do. There is an advocacy letter regarding the Governor’s budget. There were no cuts but also no increase for aging services. Can sign the letter for support. $10,000 per year can keep someone in their home, as opposed to $10,000 per month for a nursing home. The state has released a master plan on aging. In 2023, we are partnering with Hospice for the “Roadmap to the End of Life.” Will be rolling out in nutrition centers and community organizations. This should roll out in March. We will be having a Tai Chi class at the Dobisky Center in Ogdensburg. Starting a Caregiver Support Group. Will be joining health fairs, farmer’s markets, community festivals.

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

**♦Next Meeting** – Monday, April 3rd, 2023 at 10AM

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