

JUNEAU COMMISSION ON AGING

City & Borough of Juneau

Minutes of Regular Meeting

June 9, 2016

CALL TO ORDER

The Commission met at the Senior Center. Chair VandeCastle called the meeting to order at 1:21 p.m. Other members present were: Eileen Hosey, Mary Lou Spartz, and Brynn Keith. Also attending were Marie Darlin and Dixie Hood.

DECLARATION OF QUORUM; APPROVAL OF MINUTES; AGENDA APPROVAL

It was declared that a quorum of members was present. The minutes of the Commission's May meeting were approved. The meeting agenda was approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the regular meeting on April 14th were approved, with several minor changes.

SPEAKER: SUSAN BUS, SERRC

Susan Bus presented information on the MASST (Mature Alaskans Seeking Skills Training) Program, Alaska's version of the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), which is part of Title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965. Currently there are 22 people placed in the program in Southeast Alaska, 12 of them in Juneau. The goal of the program is to get older Americans with substantial need back into the workforce. To participate in the program, they must be age 55 or older, have income less than 125% of the Alaska poverty level, not currently working, and interested in the program.

Individuals are placed in a work experience position at a host site, which is a government or non-profit agency. The program, which is mostly federally funded, is facing a big budget cut beginning in July, from 150 participants statewide to 99. There is a moratorium on new placements in Juneau, Hoonah, and Angoon. Other Southeast communities hosting MASST workers include Ketchikan, Sitka, Petersburg, Haines, and Kake, all at local senior centers.

Participants work up to 20 hours per week at minimum wage, \$9.75 per hour in Alaska. They can remain in the program for up to four years. These are prized jobs, especially in the villages. A new direction for the program is that now participants must look for work with the goal of moving into unsubsidized employment. The original intent of the program was that it was to be transitional, retraining older people and moving them back into the workforce. The program is a win/win for everyone – the employer, the employee, and the federal government.

In 2015, MASST served 194 older Alaskans. 26 of them obtained jobs outside the program. The average time in the program was 11 months, and the average entry level wage in unsubsidized employment was \$12.80 per hour. Susan noted that the population they serve is a challenging population to work with. 79% of the people in the program had two or more disabilities, and 64% were homeless or at risk of homelessness.

In Juneau, half of program participants are male and half are female. This year 58% are Native, 38% white, and 4% Black.

MASST participants may count computer classes toward their 20-hour week.

The program has occasional “wash-outs,” usually due to lapses into active substance abuse. Some people close out for medical reasons, some pass away, and some leave the state. But most people are happy to continue to participate.

In 2015, the MASST program provided 33,632 hours of work for senior community service organizations, for a value of \$336,000 statewide.

Susan also talked about other services that SERRC (SouthEast Regional Resource Center) offers that can be valuable for seniors. They have offered computer classes in the evenings, with topics changing every month. However, due to funding cuts, these may be canceled. They do have a computer lab which is staffed with someone who can answer questions and help students learn about specific software. In response to a question, Susan said that SERRC still provides GED tutoring and testing.

Beginning in September, a Job Service staff person will be at SERRC twice a month to help individuals enter their resume into ALEXSYS (Alaska Labor Exchange System), the statewide job search data base.

SERRC also offers adult education services, including math and writing classes.

There are English as a Second Language classes at both SERRC’s downtown location and Gruening Park. They are always looking for volunteers to be tutors – call Patty Bowman at 586-5718 if interested.

SERRC offers other classes, which vary monthly, and are featured on a monthly flyer which can be found on their Learning Connection website (www.serrc.org/tlc).

SPEAKER: DEE SHAW, ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

Dee Shaw, planner with the Alaska Commission on Aging, presented information from the ACOA’s latest Senior Snapshot, an annual compilation of a wide range of data pertaining to seniors in Alaska. The Snapshot is the most up-to-date source of data on seniors in Alaska. (It can be found on the ACOA’s website.)

Alaska has the fastest-growing senior population in the U.S. (largely due to an inflated baby boomer age population which arrived during the pipeline boom and stayed on). Our senior population has increased by 60% in the last ten years. (Nevada, the state with the second-fastest-growing senior population, saw an increase of 50% in the past decade.) Within Alaska, the Aleutians region has had the fastest growth of seniors, and the Southeast region has the highest percentage of its population that is age 60 and older – nearly 20%.

Retired seniors contribute approximately \$2.4 billion to the Alaska economy annually, not including health care spending and the earnings of those seniors who are still employed. The cumulative economic impact of all Alaskan seniors is estimated to be around \$3 billion per year, more than

some of Alaska's largest industries, including fishing, construction, or retail. Seniors also volunteer in their communities at a high rate, and contribute caregiving for children, disabled adults, and other seniors. Many Alaskan seniors are raising their grandchildren.

More seniors rely on government assistance than ever before. This rate is increasing by two percent a year. Currently 7.5% of seniors use Food Stamps. While more seniors now need assistance, they are getting less assistance, with more people sharing the same pot of money. Funding for heating assistance has decreased.

Causes of death for seniors in Alaska feature a relatively high rate of accidental deaths. Many of these are alcohol-related.