

The work session of the Mason County Board of Commissioners was held at 7:00 p.m. in the conference room of the Mason County Airport Terminal.

The meeting was called to order by Chair J. Andersen.

Roll call was taken. Present: Krieger, Hartley, Squires, Hull, Bacon, Andersen.
Absent: G. Castonia.

Invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag was recited by L. Squires.

Motion by R. Bacon and seconded by S. Hull to approve the agenda. Motion carried.

Public comment: Annette Quillan, Ludington, noted that she has visited the outlying Senior Centers, which are all run by volunteers. She reviewed the costs reimbursements and dollar amounts for volunteers at this time, noting that volunteers are paying multiple expenses out of pocket.

Lisa Jones, Ludington, feels that the Senior Centers need to focus their attention on transportation issues out of County, and that all of the Senior Centers should offer transportation services, not just the Scottville Center.

Kathy Winczewski, Ludington, said: Thanks to the County Commission for tackling the big issues dealing with senior services today and in the future and for keeping their minds open for creative solutions.

Presentation by Council on Aging:

Mary Bedker, Chair of the Council on Aging, introduced the members of the Council on Aging (C.O.A.) Board for Mason County who were in attendance, Wally Cain District #2, Randy Belair District #3, Kim Halladay District #4, Mary Bedker District #5, Lyle Hanson District #7 (not present). Other providers of senior services include Vicki Collins- Ludington Senior Center, Bill Kearns-Scottville Senior Center, Lois Cole-Meals on Wheels, Sandy Varns-Tallman Senior Center, and Sherry Hasenbank-Free Soil Senior Center. She noted that she appreciated the opportunity to share information about the Mason County Council on Aging Board this evening. She did communicate to those in attendance two items of misinformation that seem to be floating as rumors around the County, 1. The C.O.A. is not building a new Ludington Senior building and 2. The C.O.A. does not want to centralize all activities to the Ludington Senior Center. Further, she noted that all Centers are independently operated.

Kim Halladay, then provided a half-hour slide presentation reviewing statistical information regarding the Seniors living in Mason County that he pulled together with 2020 Census information.

Services provided by the Area Agency on Aging:

Kendrick Heinlein, Executive Director, of the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan (AAAWM), outlined some of the services offered by the AAAWM. Mason County is one of the nine Counties in which the AAAWM provides services for. He noted that the main services provided in Mason County include meals, transportation, and in-home health care; although, AAAWM offers many more services that are not being utilized at this time in Mason County.

Chair Andersen invited each senior service provider to speak at this time.

Ludington Senior Center-Vickie Collins, Director, noted that the goals of their Center are to educate, offer space for socialization, and assist seniors in keeping their body and mind active. She also noted that the Center offers tons of other programs throughout the year.

Scottville Senior Center-Bill Kearns, Director, applauded all who are present to listen to this evening's discussion involving seniors. He feels that the Elected Officials [County Board] must remain in the primary role to fund services for the County to meet the needs of the future and expand. He noted that the Scottville Center provides a broad assortment of services.

Free Soil Center, Sherry Hasenbank, Volunteer Director, feels that the Free Soil Center is one of the best kept secrets in the County. Fifteen members of this volunteer Center were introduced to the Board. This group of volunteers gather to cook all of the meals together and distribute to homebound in their area. The facility allows for use of the gymnasium, arts, kitchen, and is open to all, not just seniors. This Center only receives funding from the County millage to operate, in addition, to what the volunteers provide.

Tallman Senior Center, Sandy Varns, Volunteer Director, introduced **volunteer director, Karla McLouth** as well. The focus in the Tallman Center is to provide outreach, food, medication pick-up, companionship, and grocery shopping. She noted that the Center has been struggling since Covid. The seniors served in this Center are older seniors and require different needs. All services provided are volunteer with minimal funding from the County. She is requesting more help for their Center, as well as staffing. The Center can only be open if she is there to work it.

Meals on Wheels-Lois Cole, the new Director, noted that the Meals on Wheels services over 200 meals a day through their five drivers who make \$15/ per hour.

Greg Surma- Free Soil Township Supervisor, noted that he is proud and grateful for the Senior Center and will continue to support it as much as he can.

Bill Kearns- Scottville, thanked the Board for providing for the Centers and facilities. These Centers make a huge impact on the seniors in the County and he feels the senior population needs to be celebrated.

Senior Services Position:

Discussion ensued regarding the job description. Commissioner Krieger noted that the Board is charged with noting how the millage monies are spent and why. The overall role would ensure that taxpaying dollars are not being misallocated and that there is accountability with the funding.

Commissioners were in agreement with having a part-time, 20 hour per week, employee who reported to the County Administrator. The main focus of this position would be the: Accounting process, inventory of what is going on with current services, collaboration with monthly meetings between Centers with no duplication of duties, and facilitating programming and/or providing assistance.

The proposed job description was thoroughly reviewed and multiple changes made. Administrator Knizacky was instructed to bring the revised job description to the full board at a future meeting to make a decision.

Chair Andersen noted that even though it was a long evening, this was a very important topic of discussion with all entities involved.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Mitch Foster, City of Ludington, had the following concerns: He encouraged the Board to look at other area agencies; Twenty hours a week for a position may not be enough time to perform administrative duties and/or provide services; what will the role of the COA be? And whatever the end result he is happy to have the City of Ludington be a part of the conversation.

He also commented that he did not like to refer to the terms of in-county/out-county that were mentioned at this evening’s meeting. He feels that this language builds unnecessary gaps.

Lynne Russell, Ludington, believes the Board is looking into a golden opportunity and she would hope they all would be willing to share resources as there are lots of opportunities for growth. She requested the Board to not be in a hurry at this time with a decision.

Marie Stycos, Branch, noted she is a one-year transplant to Mason County. She is impressed by the Senior Centers in the area as she has visited them. She noted that the Ludington Seniors are a lot younger than the Scottville Seniors. She congratulated them all on their work and encouraged them to continue to work together.

There was no other business:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:54 PM.

CHERYL KELLY, COUNTY CLERK

JANET S. ANDERSEN, BOARD CHAIR