

September 30, 2014

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Disability Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes, September 30, 2014

The Disability Advisory Committee (DAC) met on Tuesday, September 30, beginning at 1:30pm, at the Cowlitz County Administration Building, General Meeting Room. The meeting agenda is attached.

Attendees were:

Amy Hair, Cowlitz County Chief Deputy Auditor
Bernie Altman, AARP and NAMI
Regina Beer, Cowlitz County Elections
Ardell Burns, Services for the Blind
Judy Chamberlin, Community
Steve Chapman, Lower Columbia College Disability Support Services
Sarah Clark, CAP RSVP and SHIBA
Doug Hooper, Agency on Aging and Disabilities
Mary McCarthy, AARP President
Tina McCully, Catholic Community Services/Volunteer Chore Services
Lisa McGowen, Cowlitz County Assessor's Office
Mary Kate Morgan, Lower Columbia College Disability Support Services
Janeene Niemi, Cowlitz County Assessor's Office
Susan O'Connor, Wahkiakum County Elections
Marjorie Pitcher, Community
Haley Ruffe, Cowlitz County Elections
Susan Schwartz, Community
Sunnie Smith, PCAP
Sharon Weinhold, Disability Outreach Coordinator
Carla-Jo Whitson, WA Traumatic Brain Injury Resource Manager
Linda Wilson, DAV, Longview
Paul Wilson, DAV Van Coordinator

Welcome and Introductions. Everyone was extended a warm welcome. The attendees introduced themselves and identified the organization or group they were representing. Five people were attending for the first time.

Note from Audrey Jolley. Audrey Jolley, who moved to Arizona after the last meeting, emailed the group to let us know how she is doing. She is doing well, enjoying being near her sister and family, trying new activities like attending a bull riding roundup and experimenting with new western foods. She is trying to teach her dog, Horizon, to wear doggie tennis shoes so she doesn't burn the pads on her feet. Audrey says she is now a registered voter in Arizona. She wishes everyone on the committee the best!

Presentation/Discussion

The topic of the meeting was “*Things that Help.*” Voting is important! People are not as likely to vote when they have major distractions in their lives – financial, health, and family issues. The people tend to focus more on the distractions rather than on voting.

Our speakers – Lisa McGowen and Janeene Niemi – from the Cowlitz County Assessor’s Office, gave an interesting and informative presentation on two topics that can help people who have financial and medical distractions in their lives: the Property Tax Exemption Program and Gatekeeper Program.

Property Tax Exemption Program. Washington State Law provides property tax benefits to senior citizens and persons with disabilities. The eligibility criteria:

- At least 61 years old before the end of the application year or unable to work for 12 consecutive months due to disability.

- Owner and occupant of a single family dwelling, mobile home, a unit in a multi-unit or cooperative housing. Temporary stays in a hospital, nursing home, boarding home or adult family home are allowed.

- Combined disposable income may not exceed \$35,000 for application year (including income of spouse and/or co-tenant)

- Claim should be filed with the County Assessor’s Office during the assessment year. Renewal is required every four years.

The benefit is graduated for incomes between \$25,000 and \$35,000. Approximately 3,500 residents in Cowlitz County benefit from this program.

Deferral of Property Taxes. In addition to the Property Tax Exemption Program, retired homeowners at least 60 years old or disabled and unable to work for 12 or more months may defer their property taxes and special assessments up to 80% of the equity in their home. The combined disposable income may not exceed \$40,000. Declaration to defer is done annually.

Handouts were provided that give more details about these programs. Residents who are interested and qualify for these programs should contact the County Assessor’s Office at 360-577-3010.

Gatekeeper Program. This program assists vulnerable people (people who are elderly or disabled) who need help but may not be able to get it for themselves. Anyone can be a Gatekeeper, county workers, bank tellers, grocery store clerks, transit providers, and anyone else who may have contact with vulnerable people. If someone has a concern about a vulnerable person, they should encourage the person to contact the Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities or make the call for the person if the person does not seem willing or able to call themselves. Things to look for could include disorientation and forgetfulness, confusion concerning money matters, hostility, person who is vulnerable and living alone, bruises, fidgeting, poor hygiene, and difficulty speaking or moving. Calls are confidential and specialists will assess the person’s needs and help them find resources that may be needed. The Cowlitz and Wahkiakum County assistance number is 360-577-4929 or 800-682-2406.

Elections Update. General Election. The General Election is on November 4. Ballots will be mailed on October 17. Accessible voting equipment, the eSlate, will be available on October 17. The last day to register online or by mail is October 6; the last day for new registrants to register in person is October 27. The voters' pamphlet will be mailed on October 13, and is available on the elections website at www.vote.wa.gov/cowlitz.

A question was raised as to whether the eSlate was mobile. The eSlate has been taken for a few scheduled hours to assisted living facilities, senior centers and other locations where there are a number of people who would like to vote on the eSlate. Mary Kate and Steve asked if it could be brought to Lower Columbia College. The response was yes.

Other Opportunities.

Mary Kate Morgan and Steve Chapman mentioned an event called "Trials and Tribulations of Living with Asperger's Syndrome" on October 9, 6pm at Lower Columbia College. A flyer of the event and other events being held during October for Disability Employment Awareness Month was emailed to all attendees after the meeting.

Regina Beer said the Elections Office is gearing up for the General Election.

Amy Hair talked about several legislative changes that will be in effect in January 2015.

Ardell Burns said her office for the Services for the Blind also serves Cowlitz County.

Marjorie Pitcher discussed some of the classes being offered at the Kelso Senior Center.

Doug Hooper talked about care coordinating and transitioning for elders. He mentioned a Senior Prom that was going to be held on September 30.

Tina McCally said they were getting ready to make their Christmas baskets. The baskets include hygiene items and special donated items, but no food.

Sarah Clark said presentations on Medicare were being given for people turning 65.

Carla Jo Whitson provided information about traumatic brain injury, which is the second largest cause of disability in the country.

Judy Chamberlain talked about difficulties with the phone system for hearing impaired.

Sunnie Smith discussed the formation of Bikers Against Child Abuse (B.A.C.A.) in Cowlitz County. B.A.C.A. takes a stand against all forms of child abuse and forms bonds and provides support to children in need.

Susan O'Connor remarked that preparations also were underway in Wahkiakum County for the General Election.

Mary McCarthy said the AARP Board is meeting and will be electing new officers. The General Meeting is next week and everyone is invited. Anyone 50 or over can join.

Bernie Altman remarked that NAMI ceased to exist as it was previously configured, but is now aligned with three counties and is called NAMI of SW Washington.

The meeting adjourned at 2:35pm.

Sharon Weinhold
Cowlitz County Elections

**Disability Advisory Committee
Meeting Agenda
County Administration Building
3rd Floor Meeting Room
Tuesday, September 30, 2014
1:30 – 2:30PM**

Welcome

Introductions Around the Room

Note from Audrey Jolley

**Presentation/Discussion – Assessor’s Office Staff
“Things To Help!”**

Property Tax Exemption Program

Gatekeeper Program

Elections Update, General Election

Salute to the Disability Advisory Committee

Other Opportunities Around the Room