 GOVERNING BOARD MINUTES

*To be approved on:* Minutes of the January 25, 2021, meeting

March 15, 2021 Tele-conference

**GOVERNING BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Craig Pedersen, Kings Co. – Dist. 4

Larry Micari, Tulare Co. – Dist. 1

Eddie Valero, Tulare Co. – Dist. 4

Pete Vander Poel, – Dist. 2

**GOVERNING BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Richard Fagundes, Kings Co. – Dist. 5

**COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Ms. Bobbie Wartson, Chair & KCCOA Director

Dan Fox, Vice Chair

Suzann Wray

**STAFF PRESENT:**

Anita Ortiz, K/T AAA Director

John Mauro, Deputy HHS Director

Ms. Jamie Sharma, Mgr., Aging Services

Bonnie Quiroz, Senior Advocate

Christa Cardoza, Admin Specialist, Aging

Israel Guardado, Staff Analyst

Jeannie White, Administrative Aide

Christine Tidwell, Administrative Aide

**GUESTS PRESENT:**

Albert Cendejas, CSET, Senior Services

Raquel Gomez, CSET

Rosemary Caso, United Way, Tulare Co.

1. **Call to Order** – Vice Chair, Supervisor Valero called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. Supervisor Valero announced that Supervisor Fagundes will not be joining the meeting.
2. **Introductions** – Attendance and introductions, as above. Ms. Ortiz welcomed Supervisor Micari as a new Board member. Ms. Sharma called the roll, reading the meeting participant attendee list.
3. **Board Member Comments** – Supervisor Valero acknowledged Mr. Joe Sierra, who recently passed away at age 82 - recognizing his colleague, Mr. Sierra, as a staunch advocate for those who needed a “voice.” Mr. Sierra had worked in many capacities in the community, including as a volunteer fire fighter and flood control liaison with the State.
4. **Public Comment**

* Albert Cendejas reported on senior services including the Home-Delivered Meals (HDM) program, which currently is serving approximately 1,700 individuals. He noted that CSET has also arranged for shelf-stable meals for the HDM clients, which will offer some variety. Additionally, he said that the program is providing meals for about 15 seniors that had been in homeless encampments and are now sheltered at the Lamp Lighter Inn. CSET is also fielding calls for the COVID vaccines, specifically for seniors that do not have access to the internet; CSET staff is helping those seniors to complete the interest form for the vaccine. Regarding the Covid vaccine, Mr. Cendejas said his team is assisting with the 211 phone lines because they are inundated – currently they have a few hundred calls to return and have already helped many clients with the interest forms.

He further thanked both Tulare County and K/T AAA for the additional support given to CSET. It has allowed for additional vehicle purchases and to facilitate needed services. Supervisor Valero replied that he is thankful to the CSET team for being on the front lines. Supervisor Valero also shared that there is going to be a phone line set up dedicated to seniors as a COVID hotline. Information about the hotline will be sent out either today (1/25/21) or tomorrow, in hopes to lessen the strain on the 211-phone line. It will also be put on the CSET website.

Ms. Sharma said that to put into perspective the volume of clients now being handled by CSET’s Home Delivered Meals program: before the pandemic, the program had approximately 400 clients, now it has increased to 1,700 enrollees. And it isn’t expected that the numbers will fall back to pre-pandemic levels any time soon, so there is a need to find a way to make that level of service sustainable. Mr. Cendejas commented that to include all the seniors in need, there are now drivers even going to the Camp Nelson area. Previous to the pandemic, the program had 1-2 drivers, now it requires 6-7 drivers to deliver the meals.

On a different note, Mr. Cendejas reported that CSET will be starting the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) tax services for the year. This year it will be done by clients dropping off information at 5 locales in Pixley, Cutler-Orosi, Visalia, Tulare and Porterville. Forms will be completed along with instructions for drop off. This will limit interaction and ensure social distancing protocols. In answer to a question by Supervisor Valero, Mr. Cendejas said that students will still be involved in volunteer support, but on a much more limited basis, in part because school hasn’t been in session for most of the year. Fliers will be provided with more information as plans are solidified.

* Rosemary Caso of Tulare County United Way thanked the Tulare County Board for the Rental and Mortgage assistance that was made available in 2020, saying over 2000 individuals had been helped. She also noted that the 211information phone line for vaccine information is completely overwhelmed. They have assisted over 600 individuals in the age 65+ category, getting them registered for vaccines. They are also helping callers complete the interest forms to sign up for individuals that are under 65 years of age. Ms. Caso said they are thankful for the opportunity of this partnership. Supervisor Valero reported that Tulare County is slated to receive an additional 13 million dollars in funding for housing and rental assistance. He noted it is not for future use, but for backfill in past rents.

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\*Note: Supervisor Pedersen came into the meeting at this juncture. He apologized for his late arrival, saying he was attending a Kings County Covid update meeting.

1. **Approval of Minutes of October 14, 2020** – A motion to approve the minutes of the October 2020, meeting was made by Supervisor Vander Poel and seconded by Supervisor Pedersen. On a motion and a second, the minutes were approved 4 to 0. No abstentions.
2. **Election of Chair and Vice Chair for 2021** – Supervisor Valero noted that during the past year, Supervisor Fagundes had served as Chair and himself as Vice Chair. Conventionally, the nomination rotation moves the Vice Chair into the Chair position and a supervisor from the alternate county into the Vice Chair position. Supervisor Vander Poel moved to elect Supervisor Valero as Chair and Supervisor Pedersen as Vice Chair for 2021. Supervisor Micari seconded the nomination and the motion carried 4 to 0. **(Vander Poel/Micari Res. No. 21-001)**

1. **Governing Board Meeting Schedule for 2021–** Supervisor Pedersen said if there are not challenges to the meeting schedule, that he moves for adoption and approval**.** Supervisor Vander Poel seconded the motion, which was approved on a 4 to 0 vote. Ms. Sharma will notify the supervisors of any special meetings that might be needed. **(Pedersen/Vander Poel Res. No. 21-002)**
2. **California Department of Aging (CDA) One-Time-Only (OTO) Increased Funding –** Israel Guardado reported that usually K/T AAA receives its OTO funding between November and January. In October 2020, the Board approved a proactive resolution allowing the Director, Anita Ortiz, to accept funding over the conventional 10 percent threshold she is authorized to accept. This was done in case the funding came in between scheduled Governing Board meetings, to allow for quick action. But, since it is already January and the OTO has still not been released, this item is a reminder to the Board that the original resolution was created to cover this fiscal year and has no end date associated with it, so it can still be used. He noted AAAs were expecting that OTO would be released by mid-January, but they have not, as yet, been notified of it.
3. **Health Insurance Counseling & Advocacy Program (HICAP) Amendment #1 (HI-2021-15) –** Mr. Guardado said this is another information item. He said for the HICAP program K/T AAA received additional funding in the amount of $7,461. This amount is comprised of $4,000 increased funding and $3000 carried over from last year. Because the funding increase is under the 10 percent of the total amount of the contract, the Director, Ms. Anita Ortiz, is authorized to accept the amendment funding, which she has done. The amendment is signed and has been sent to the CDA.
4. **Update from Kings Co. Commission on Aging (KCCOA) –** Ms. Bobbie Wartson, Director of KCCOA reported that due to the pandemic, meals needed for the Kings County seniors have increased tremendously and continue to increase. She noted that the Kings Area Rural Transit (KART) has been helping deliver the home-delivered meals and has taken a weekly route. She said food costs have increased by 4 times. Prior to Covid, KCCOA served 338 meals at a cost of $15,800+; in comparison to December, the number of seniors served was 14,091 with a cost of over $80,000. Additionally, KCCOA staff help with the Food Bank the first Wednesday of every month. The number of people partaking of Food Bank giveaways has also increased - up to 991 people served – of which approximately 304 of those are seniors.

The KCCOA Holiday stocking effort delivered 450 holiday stockings to Kings Co. seniors. The Sunset Rotary Club donated gift cards to include in each stocking and each stocking included a certificate for four meals at Denny’s Restaurant.

1. **Staff Reports**

* **Holiday Senior Stocking Project (Tulare Co.) 2020** **–** Ms. Sharma said that the holiday stocking campaign historically has been put together with the help and generosity of many employees and community partners donating items to create full gift stockings for seniors. This year, the effort had to be reimagined due to the COVID-19 risk. Ms. Sharma said her colleague, Ms. Erin Van Duzer took point on the project this year and all Adult Services stepped in to make it possible for the effort to be successful. In a normal year, 500 to 600 seniors are served, but this year the Home-Delivered-Meals Program client list has increased dramatically, increasing the persons served to just short of 1,700. Each client received a lap blanket and a mask with a decorative sticker noting that it was a gift from the Tulare County Adult Services and the K/T AAA. Clients from the Tulare Co. Public Guardian, Adult Protective Services, and the Home-Delivered Meals Program, as well as many homeless seniors, received the gift. Ms. Sharma also noted that the feedback has been positive – clients were appreciative of the gesture and thankful that consideration to minimize the Covid risk exposure was taken.
* **Drive-Through Holiday Meals Provided to Tulare County Seniors –** Bonnie Quiroz, Adult Services Advocate, reported that during the November and December holidays, she had been contacted by several senior housing complexes and community partners to ask if the K/T AAA was planning any holiday meal distribution. K/T AAA approved a Thanksgiving drive-through dinner held at the Bello Vita venue in Visalia. Full hot meals, with all the fixings and dessert pie were provided in to-go containers for the participants to take home. Two hundred sixty-eight seniors were served.
* K/T AAA reached out to its partner, Food Link, to help secure enough food to provide full holiday meals to celebrate the December holidays. The December event served 417 seniors. Ms. Quiroz gave a shout out to all the community partnership organizations that helped make it possible. Ms. Sharma, the Aging Services Manager commented that the event was well organized and efficient – and gave a big “*Thank You*” to Ms. Quiroz for taking the lead on the effort and bringing it to fruition.
* **Digital Divide** **–** Ms. Sharma reported on the digital divide saying that 50 percent of seniors over the age of 75 either do not have internet access, and /or connectivity on devices to use it. There is effort now both locally and at the State level to address this problem. She acknowledged that in Tulare and Kings Counties the problem is even more significant and that more seniors are truly disconnected at this difficult time, noting the difficulty of not being able to use on-line grocery and pharmacy services or to see the faces of the people that are loved and trusted the most. To help rectify this situation, Google has donated approximately 7,500 Google Home Smart speakers to be distributed across the state to all the Area Agencies on Aging. A shipment was distributed recently, and she is working to put in place organizational logistics to get them distributed out into the community. Priority is being focused on seniors that are home bound and/or living alone. She noted that there will be a training component in how to use the device; saying that the device is voice activated and can be used for things one can typically do with a cell phone. First and foremost, will be a lesson on how to initiate phone calls.

The AAA Directors across the state voted when the Cares Act funding came out, to set aside 5% of it and not distribute it to the AAAs so there would be funding available later to address the digital divide. There have been weekly meetings with the CDA over the last 10 months regarding the use of the set aside funding and how best to provide for the seniors. After much discussion, four thousand IPADS will be distributed with pre-loaded “senior apps” including medical, pharmacy and other types of applications useful to the senior population. Additionally, the devices will come with a 2-year pre-paid internet subscription and include a bundled training and technical assistance component. She said there is a methodology for determining how many devices go out to each location based on population criteria. Additionally, there is a Memorandum of Understanding agreement (MOU) with AT&T to be able to purchase even more tablets than the initial statewide initiative would have provided.

Supervisor Valero asked if the technical support will include help with Zoom and similar apps that allow the older population to connect with family and other things. Ms. Sharma answered yes and that the answer is two-fold. She is part of a Statewide work group addressing the digital divide and answers to questions just such as that are being discussed – the many things seniors will need. She said the company that is contracted to do the training will be creating concise, easy to use, one-page laminated instructions on; for instance, “*How to Initiate a Facetime Call”; “How to Initiate a Grocery Order”; “How to Initiate a Zoom Call”*, etc. She said they are working through the training piece, now that the devices have been secured. The company that is bundling the training will be accessible 24/7, so seniors will be able to call in any time to have someone walk them through a procedure. She noted that part of the beauty of having all the devices the same (the same model of IPAD) is that the training will be applicable across the board. Later, there will further assistance in other areas, with other types of devices. Last, but not least, she reported that she and Anita Ortiz had responded to a Suicide Prevention Task Force (SPTF) Request for Proposals to help utilize unspent money that had originally be allocated for in-person training. The proposal they created was on the topic of the digital divide. The proposal included the idea of having suicide awareness and messaging available via the tablets. In working with persons such as Brian Poth at the Source LGBT + Center, specific trainings that happen locally can be made available by means of a partnership. The SPTF awarded the K/T AAA $70,000 to supplement the IPAD purchases of the CDA (mentioned earlier) and additional training. She said she is excited about it, especially to get the devices into facilities and into the hands of the home-bound seniors, saying it will make a real difference in reducing social isolation and increase feelings of connectedness.

Ms. Ortiz thanked her team and staff for continuing to be progressive when it comes to the K/T AAA. She said at times we are not in a position to do more; so, she gave kudos to Ms. Sharma who recognized the opportunity and then made it happen - to participate in the competitive process of submitting a proposal for the SPTF award. She noted that, collectively, K/T AAA is serving one of the most vulnerable populations.

* COVID Vaccinations – Ms. Ortiz reported that 211 has been inundated with phone calls from multiple populations, including seniors. She noted that the digital divide is very evident in the distribution of vaccines. For instance, during recent vaccination events at the Points of Distribution, known as PODs - in helping seniors secure appointments, many do not understand what a QR (Quick Response) code is, and many have no email or smart phone to receive information. The vaccine clinics have shown that there is much work to do to make accessibility more equitable. It was also mentioned again, (as noted earlier by Supervisor Valero) that there will now be a new hotline for seniors.

Ms. Sharma works with a task force on vaccinations and is charged with handling the 65+ cohort. She said that she didn’t want to overlook Kings County in its vaccination efforts and wanted to offer support and collaboration with their efforts - including the sharing of information. Specifically mentioned here was the “*Vaccine Hesitancy*” messaging that has been developed to alleviate fears in connection to the vaccine.

On another note, Aging Services staff are being directed to ask clients if they are interested in completing a vaccine interest questionnaire at the end of each contact. This will help to gather contact information for the vaccine effort and reassure people that they are in the queue for when the vaccines become available. The interest form is also being shared with homebound seniors. Information gleaned from the interest form will also help determine if a client is able to feasibly get to one of the points of distribution; or, if someone is truly unable to travel to a current site, if it is necessary to have a medical “ride along” person who can then administer shots to the truly home bound. Additionally, it will help to determine which communities are going to require new POD locations to be set up.

Supervisor Vander Poel appreciated K/T AAA’s strategizing in that way and gearing outreach to seniors. He noted that the general effort of the County is to put information out to social media and it is often failing to reach seniors.

Ms. Sharma addressed a question from Supervisor Micari regarding the proposed organization of a point of distribution in the Three Rivers area. Dr. David Wood is integral in the effort to put forth this proposal. Ms. Sharma assured Dr. Wood that every proposal is being considered by the HHSA vaccine task force. Supervisor Micari requested further follow up with Dr. Wood to ensure that communication is adequate. Ms. Sharma noted that it has been a logistical challenge to make sure that there are enough doses of each vaccine available for both first and second doses in a timely manner.

Supervisor Pedersen reported that Kings County has also had glitches in the communications between vaccine providers and said that clarity has been lacking between the State and County, causing challenges in distribution. He said the Kings County website does have vaccine information. Additionally, Adventist Health and Aria Health Services will be helping to administer the vaccine in Kings County.

* **Senior Nutrition** **–** Ms. Sharma reported that federally, an additional $175 million dollars has been approved for the Senior Nutrition Program. This is Older Americans Act (OAA) funding to help support the Area Agencies on Aging. She said it does not really meet the need but is grateful the need has been recognized. She said realistically, on a State level an extra 1.2 billion dollars every year would be needed to meet the need.

In closing, Supervisor Valero thanked staff for keeping the Governing Board updated with what is happening “in the trenches”.

1. **Advisory Council Report –** Council Chair, Bobbie Wartson said the Council meetings have been suspended at this time due to COVID, so there are no reports. She noted that Council members Mary Thomas and Marlene Chambers had applied for re-appointment to their seats.
2. **Adjourn –** On a motion by Supervisor Vander Poel; seconded by Supervisor Pedersen, the meeting was adjourned on a 4 / 0 vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Anita Ortiz, K/T AAA Director

Ms. Jamie Sharma, Aging Services Manager (designee)