 GOVERNING BOARD MINUTES

*To be approved on:* Minutes of the July 19, 2021, meeting

October 18, 2021 Tele-conference

**GOVERNING BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Craig Pedersen, Kings Co. – Dist. 4

Larry Micari, Tulare Co. – Dist. 1 (delayed arrival)

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, Adv Council

Marlene Chambers

Mary Thomas

Marianne Osborne

**STAFF PRESENT:**

Anita Ortiz, K/T AAA Director, HS Director

John Mauro, Adult Services, Deputy Director

Dayna Wild, Division Mgr., Adult Srvcs.

Ms. Jamie Sharma, Mgr., Aging Services

Bonnie Quiroz, Senior Advocate

Christa Cardoza, Admin Specialist, Aging

Israel Guardado, Staff Analyst

Hillaree Bennett, MSSP Site Director

Christine Tidwell, Administrative Aide

Lorna Sartuche, Administrative Aide

**GUESTS PRESENT:**

Albert Cendejas, CSET Senior Services

Raquel Gomez, CSET

1. **Call to Order** – Chair, Supervisor Valero called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m.
2. **Introductions** – Attendance was announced by Ms. Sharma who called roll, reading the Zoom meeting attendee list, as above. Ms. Sharma introduced, Ms. Hillaree Bennett, the new Site Director for the Multipurpose Senior Services Program (MSSP). Supervisor Valero welcomed her into the K/T AAA family.
3. **Board Member Comments** – None.
4. **Public Comment**

* Albert Cendejas, CSET, reported that the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program has wrapped up for the season. He said it was a successful season despite the challenges. Taxes were done through 5 primary sites in Tulare County, plus Kings County, helping over 1,500 seniors aged 60 and over with their taxes, which was a record number. In answer to a question from Supervisor Valero as to if students had been part of the VITA team this year, Mr. Cendejas said that mostly the students were attending school from home this year and there was minimal participation. However, in October, presentations will again be made at the schools to recruit interested students.

On another note, Mr. Cendejas said CSET is providing between 1,200 and 1,500 senior meals every day.

Mr. Cendejas also thanked Supervisor Valero and the Board of Supervisors for their help and support in renovating and upgrading the parking area of the Cutler Senior Center.

Raquel Gomez, CSET, commented that CSET is also helping senior residences in Tulare County communities that recently are feeling the result of draught and water shortages. Additionally, she mentioned that many of the Information and Assistance (I & A) calls that have been received are calls about getting help with rental assistance.

* Ms. Bobbie Wartson, Director of the Kings County Commission on Aging (KCCOA), reported on the activities that Kings County observed for Elder Abuse Awareness Month in June. These included the “planting” of purple pinwheels and banner displays in recognition of Elder Abuse Awareness and Prevention month. KCCOA partnered with various agencies, including the Kings Co. District Attorney Victim Witness Office and Kings Community Action. Displays were placed in Kings Co. communities including Hanford, Corcoran, and Avenal. Additionally, several organizations teamed up to adopt a senior for each week of June. “Adoptees’ will receive requested help in areas such as yard or landscape work and home repairs. Ms. Wartson noted that the Board of Supervisors signed a proclamation to recognize June as Elder Abuse Prevention Month. Lastly, she reported that Avenal State Prison had donated over 7,000 dozen eggs from its chicken farm to be used for senior nutrition purposes.

1. **Approval of Minutes of May 17, 2021** – A motion to approve the minutes of the May 17, 2021, meeting was made by Supervisor Vander Poel and seconded by Supervisor Pedersen. On a motion and a second, the minutes were approved 4/0. Supervisor Fagundes was not present.
2. **Contract Authorities for FY21/22** – Israel Guardado said that at its May meeting, provider funding was brought to the Board as an information item. These contracts are in place to distribute CDA funds to the K/T AAA service providers, as listed below. Funding amounts and allocations for KCCOA, City of Tulare, and CSET are determined by the Joint Powers Agreement. Funding distribution to VCRC and VADS is based on the most recent Request for Proposals (RFP) from those providers, with each provider equally receiving half the Respite funding. These are annual contracts with only minor changes, such as updates on definitions or clarification on terms - there are no major changes and are basically straightforward renewals. On a motion from Supervisor Pedersen, and seconded by Supervisor Vander Poel, the motion to accept carried with a 4/0 vote. **(Pedersen/Vander Poel Res. No. 21-007)**

Kings County Commission on Aging (KCCOA) $ 754,589

City of Tulare $ 193,820

Community Services & Employment (CSET) $ 1,349,739

Community Services and Employment TV (CSET) $ 84,344

Valley Adult Day Services $ 84,262

Valley Caregiver Resource Center (VCRC) $ 84,262

1. **Contract Approval for FY21/22 for Valley Caregiver Resource Center (VCRC) –** Mr. Guardado reported that the reason this contract is separate is because the source of the funding is different and comes from a Letter-to-File with Tulare County Mental Health in the amount of $25,000. It is for the operation of the Homebound Senior Social Network (HSSN) program, which provides interaction and a socialization outlet for homebound seniors. It is an annual renewal with no major changes to the program. Supervisor Vander Poel asked if, because of the past year’s isolation, this program had experienced any increase in participation. Mr. Guardado answered that there was not a major increase, and the Governing Board has spoken about this program before – that the utilization is fairly low compared to other programs. The most recent data doesn’t show significant increase, but it does remain steady. On a motion by Supervisor Vander Poel, seconded by Supervisor Pedersen, the motion to approve carried unanimously 4/0. Supervisor Fagundes was not present. **(Vander Poel/Pedersen Res. No. 21-008)**

VCRC Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) $ 25,000

\*MH funding for Homebound Senior Social Network (HSSN)

1. **Approval of the California Health Advocates (CHA) Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) Contract –** Mr. Guardado explained that this is another revenue contract renewal that K/T AAA receives almost every year. This year, the amount is slightly increased to $6,500. In recent previous years it has been $5,000 and has been as low as $3,000. The purpose of the contract is for the HICAP program - to be used for training volunteers toward fraud detection and other uses. Supervisor Pedersen made a motion to approve; Supervisor Micari seconded the motion, which was carried unanimously 4 to 0. Supervisor Fagundes was not present. **(Pedersen/Micari Res. No. 21-009)**
2. **Authorizing Contract Approval to Implement Digital Divide Efforts –** Dayna Wild, Adult Services Division Manager, reported to the Board that at its last meeting, the idea was presented to purchase iPads using the Suicide Prevention Task Force (SPTF) grant money that K/T AAA had received. She said 93 iPads were purchased and staff is in the process of identifying those seniors that are most in need. It was noted that at the last meeting the original plan was to use AT&T to train seniors, but that plan had some hiccups, including the risk of not being able to find trusted volunteers and student volunteers. However, she and Jamie Sharma learned of a program with national renown, called Cyber Senior that offers training throughout the State via Zoom. This is provided at a minimal cost of $75 per senior and the program has good statistics showing its success. Ms. Wild said they are including up to $100,000 toward the effort because this program will also bring what is called a Cyber Senior Community to our community of seniors, which is something that is desired down the road. In this capacity, the company will help find mentors and work with schools to recruit; additionally, the company’s established mentors will be available. This action item requests the Board’s approval and grants permission for the K/T AAA Director to sign for the additional expenses, up to $100,000 for the training and purchase of additional iPads, if necessary. Supervisor Valero asked about seniors that are not already tech savvy enough to even get on Zoom, who would be helping? Ms. Wild explained that the company sends the senior a welcome package with a phone number and specific time that a representative will be calling them. The company initially calls the senior on the phone and walks them through how to get on Zoom; how to open the iPad, etc. – this is all done over the phone. The company meets with the senior client approximately 5 to 6 times and it has found this is extremely successful. Supervisor Valero asked how the agency planned to distribute the equipment equitably between Kings and Tulare Counties? Ms. Sharma answered that this first pilot will be specific to Tulare County as funding came through the Tulare County SPTF. She noted that a pot of money is set aside that is K/T AAA funds, which will be divided according to the 77% (Tulare) / 23% (Kings) division that is based on senior population in each County. These will be distributed to those most in need, noting that in this situation that means those seniors most socially isolated from community life, so it isn’t necessarily based on financial need. She said all the Statewide AAA Directors are excited to work with Cyber Seniors because they are subject-matter experts. Working with them has recently been designated as a Best Practice and a Gold Star way to get seniors trained in technology. K/T AAA has registered with this service, availing our organization of free services, even prior to having a contract in place. The Cyber Seniors organization has free training on almost any topic to help seniors develop digital literacy, plus an 800 number for help. This service will be great support for our local seniors for a very small cost. Supervisor Vander Poel commented on the HSSN program utilization, asking that if the program does not have good utilization, should we continue to devote resources to a system that doesn’t provide results? Ms. Sharma responded that there is effort to re-brand the program and staff is trying to look at ways to improve the buy-in with that program. Additionally, she said that all the senior programs have had to pivot on a dime this past year and programs that weren’t intended to be focused on social isolation have had to focus on it. For instance, meal delivery drivers are now having conversations with meal recipients longer, and delivery visits are turning into wellness checks because the drivers are often the only visitors some seniors see in a day. Social workers are reporting that previously what would have been a five-minute check-in has turned into a twenty or forty-minute call because seniors are lonely and want to talk. Across most of the K/T AAA programs it is reported that the isolation piece is challenging, and people are talking about topics previously not spoken about, i.e., their mental health, feeling depressed, and how isolation from family has made them feel like they don’t have reason to live. This is the reason K/T AAA is working diligently to address the digital divide and get people connected. Plugging in this pilot project and being able to expand it, fills a very real need. A motion to authorize the contract approval was made by Supervisor Pedersen and seconded by Supervisor Vander Poel. Motion carried 4 to 0. **(Pedersen/Vander Poel Res. No. 21-010)**
3. **Cares Act Funding Update (Total funding: $1, 050,932.00) –** This is an information item. Israel Guardado reported on the funding update and how the funds had been distributed, saying in April 2020 the Board had approved Resolution 20-008 at an emergency meeting, accepting the first emergency COVID funding that was released. In anticipation of additional funding becoming available, the resolution also allowed the K/T AAA Director to received additional funding when it became available. The resolution stipulated that staff report back to the Board on the use of the funds, which were distributed (as below), and which included $241,067 being set aside to help remedy the digital divide. Most of the funds were distributed as per the JPA percentage formula. The funds distributed to VADS and VCRC were distributed per the RFPs, wherein the Title III-E funds for Tulare County are divided in half between the two service providers. Basically, the same allocation methodology that is used for normal contract amounts for Area Plan funding, was used for Cares Act funding. Supervisor Valero commented that with these additional dollars, now is the time to be creative and innovative to determine what is working well and not working as well, so money can be invested in the areas that are working.

Kings County Commission on Aging (KCCOA) $ 258,884.59

City of Tulare $ 80,499.85

Community Services & Employment (CSET) $ 380,024.56

Valley Adult Day Services (VADS) $ 45,228.00

Valley Caregiver Resource Center (VCRC) $ 45,228.00

Digital Divide $ 241,067.00

1. **Staff Reports**

* **Senior Nutrition –** Ms. Sharma began by saying that she wants the Board to be aware that K/T AAA has gotten word from CDA that CARES Act money is not going to expire in September 2021, which had been expected, but it is extended to 2022. So, the expiration date has changed. She said that it is anticipated that all the money that is needed will be available to fund the Senior Nutrition Program through the fiscal year. She added, however, that what is known currently is that we have not received any additional funding yet or any initial figures of what the Federal money coming in is going to look like. The Governor has signed his budget, which had a huge increase to Senior Nutrition, but it isn’t known locally what those numbers will be. She said staff continues to watch and analyze it closely, noting the Senior Nutrition costs are astronomical in comparison to before the pandemic and if nothing changes, it is not financially sustainable. However, she reiterated that additional funding is expected to be available, otherwise the program will run short, and decisions will need to be made on whether funding is pulled from other projects and programs to cover it and how to make sure seniors are fed, which is the Agency’s primary responsibility. As soon as there is more information from the State as to what the funding will be, the Board will be informed.
* **AAA Re-Mapping –** Anita Ortiz, K/T AAA Director, reported that Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) may shift and change how they look in the future. She said that previously it was brought to the Board that the idea of re-mapping the AAAs across the State and the conversation has not died down - it remains active at the State level. Three different options for counties and their AAAs are being considered. For K/T AAA because it is a combined AAA with Kings and Tulare Counties, it’s going to look differently, should this change come to fruition. The first option is that nothing changes, which is not likely – there is going to be changes and it is not going to stay the way it is right now. The second option is each county would have its own respective AAA – and not allowing K/T AAA to exist as it does today. It would mean that all 58 counties are responsible for their AAAs. The last option would be a hybrid model of 40 AAAs that would come together but even with that, the third option, it does not allow for Kings and Tulare to be one Area Agency. It would still require a separation. That will mean that for programs like HICAP, MSSP, and Ombudsman – each County would have to have each of those programs separately. Now we are sharing resources with our partners in Kings County, which we are happy to do, and would like to continue to do – continue to co-exist with one another, but the future of the AAA depends on what happens at the State level. It means if K/T AAA is to split, and that is the decision at the State level, that would mean for Kings Co. they would have to implement a HICAP program, an MSSP Program, and a Long-term Ombudsman program. Kings Co. and Tulare Co. would each have to do that alone. Ms. Ortiz said she would like to discuss what the Board thinks; noting that there is an opportunity to provide input and feedback. This can be done via email, or, with the Board’s permission, a letter can be drafted from the K/T AAA Board or from herself as the Director. She commented that she doesn’t know at this point if, “we would be able to steer the ship,” but still thinks it would be a great idea to have our voices heard about what option is preferred. Either as written feedback or a drafted email as well, for the Board’s consideration – she said she would be happy to work with staff to do that or, a letter saying that Kings/Tulare would like to remain combined. Ms. Ortiz opened the floor for questions, noting that John Mauro, Jamie Sharma, and Dayna Wild have all been staying in the loop on this issue. She said it is changing faster than anticipated; saying it came up about 18 months ago, and wasn’t a hot topic, but has since been revisited in December and May and has become a hot topic more recently. She noted that things would change more drastically for Kings County, because Tulare County already has an infrastructure in place.

Supervisor Pederson remarked that he appreciates the current collaboration and it comes down to cost effectiveness. He said the State is good at losing sight of cost effectiveness. He supports the continued unification of the two counties and would urge that a letter is written in that support, specifically talking about the cost effectiveness of delivering these programs, especially the administration and that it will double that effort making less funding available for seniors. Supervisor Vander Poel added that looking at all the redundancy in administration- in having this model that we have used effectively for so long- he doesn’t know why we would change. It basically boils down to “one size does not fit all”. He said maybe it works for L.A. to have their own Triple A, but in Tulare County, combined with Kings County, we can efficiently deliver services – maybe Kings County gets a little more than their fair share or Tulare County gets more than its fair share at times, but together it all balances out over time. He said we are patient, but also need to stand up and be advocates for unique models that have shown they work throughout the State, and we don’t need Big Brother to come in telling us how to do things differently – to fix something that isn’t broken. Supervisor Valero said, “Ditto” to both those last comments; he is in support of remaining as is and, as was mentioned, a support letter can be drafted and sent to those in power.

Ms. Sharma said that, as Ms. Ortiz had mentioned, from a program standpoint, HICAP, MSSP and Ombudsman, would require change, but she said the Supervisors hit on something that she wanted them to also be aware of, the Administrative piece of this is expensive. And there are no extra dollars coming down to stand up different sets of administration; so, from a cost-effective standpoint – that hits the nail on the head. She also said there is a proposed piece of legislation to keep an eye on – (from the C4A Board of Directors) that has $ 2.5 million on the table should the 58 individual AAA model be selected, (making it look like a bribe). She noted that there are counties with fewer than 400 people over the age of 60, so it does not make sense for them to have their own administration. She expressed gratefulness that the Board agreed and to clarify, asked if the Board would like staff to draft a letter for the Director’s approval; and have her send it; or, for a letter to be drafted on behalf of the Board, and have it come through the Board. Supervisor Vander Poel recommended it come from the Board, because the Board will have more power between Kings and Tulare Counties signing onto the effort. Ms. Sharma said a letter will be drafted for the Director’s approval, to be sent to the Board. In answer to a question from Ms. Ortiz, Ms. Sharma recommended that it would be wise to get a copy of the K/T AAA letter into the hands of multiple organization, all the key players: CSAC, CWDA, CDSS, CDA and even C4A, so that it can be utilized by other Triple AAAs that find themselves in a similar situation. She said that our neighbors are in the same boat and many of the Triple AAAs, the people we look up to, are also in danger of being separated. The Board agreed the letter should go to multiple parties and organizations. Anywhere we can plug in our advocacy is wise because this ship is moving and it’s moving very quickly. She said she will draft something today, to get it out.

Also, Ms. Sharma said the Board and other interested parties can attend upcoming Townhall meetings that Aging is hosting in collaboration with other State departments. There are three more Townhalls on this topic, which gives more opportunity for public comment. Ms. Sharma commented that she is typically hesitant to make public comment on behalf of the K/T AAA knowing the rules are stringent from the County; but if this is with the authority of the Board, there are more opportunities to do that. Supervisor Vander Poel volunteered Supervisor Valero to attend the Townhall meetings, to which the Board “voted” Supervisor Valero to be its representative.

* **Digital Divide –** Dayna Wild said that much about this topic was covered in the earlier agenda action item (# 9) regarding Cyber Seniors. However, she noted that K/T AAA is also in discussion with another organization, Senior Planet, that specializes in bringing low-cost internet services to rural communities. Because many seniors, (as well as many other community members) are on fixed incomes, they are starting the conversation around that.
* **Location for the October Governing Board Meeting –** Ms. Sharma brought it to the Board’s attention that the October meeting is expected to be an in-person meeting. Because the Tulare County Board of Supervisors building is scheduled to be under renovation, the location of the meeting will be in the General Services building, 2637 W. Burrel Ave., Suite 200, Kaweah Conference Room, Visalia, CA 93291.

1. **Advisory Council Report –** Council Chair, Bobbie Wartson said the Council meetings and its Area Plan, Budget, and Contracts (ABC) Committee have resumed their meetings.
2. **Adjourn –** On a motion by Supervisor Pedersen; seconded by Supervisor Vander Poel, the meeting was adjourned at 11:03, by a 4/0 voice vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Anita Ortiz, K/T AAA Director

Ms. Jamie Sharma, Aging Services Manager (designee)