



*Our mission is to deliver innovative support to lead aging agencies as we work together to promote, protect, and enhance the well-being of older people in Wisconsin.*

## **Advisory Council Meeting Minutes**

***Friday, February 21, 2025 | 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.***

Microsoft Teams Conference Call

### **Attendees**

***Members Present:*** Dave Denomie, Dave Lowe, Valerie Freres, Doris Bakker, Robert Best

***Members Not Present:*** Kathy Gauger, Denise Sweet, Beth Esser

***Others Present:*** Rob Wilkinson, Interim Board Vice-Chair; Cookie Lough, Board Member; Nick Musson, Transportation & Aging Plan Specialist; Janet Zander, Advocacy and Public Coordinator; Rosanna Mazzara, Operations Coordinator

### **Call to Order:**

*Dave Denomie, Chair*

### **Review and Approval of February 21, 2025 Agenda**

***Motion by Dave Lowe, seconded by Bob Best, to approve February 21, 2025 agenda. Motion unanimously carried.***

### **Review and Approval of December 5, 2024 Draft Meeting Minutes**

***Motion by Bob Best, seconded by Dave Lowe, to approve December 5, 2024 draft meeting minutes with the below changes. Motion unanimously carried.***

- Correct meeting start time to 10:00 a.m.
- Chair comments: Dave welcomed all to the meeting and is happy to see everyone and appreciates their commitment to join and participate in the meeting.



## **Public Comment:**

---

None

## **Comments from Chair**

---

*Dave Denomie, Chair*

- I really do appreciate all of your time coming here and even though we are not together often, I'm glad to get to know you and the newer members too. As we go along, I hope that you all feel comfortable with speaking up whenever you feel you need to speak up or you have a question or anything like that. Please do. Even though we have some parliamentary procedures, we're still a fairly informal group and we're not the policy making body obviously for the organization, but we're the Advisory Council and I think that they take us very seriously and it's an important role that we play and as we go into 2025, now with the challenges I think we can see, that are going to be ahead as far as programs and grants. Our people are out there working very hard to help our elders and I think that it's very important that we're all paying attention and taking part as best we can going forward. I plan to go at the end of February to Washington with Janet Zander and a couple of other folks that GWAAR is sending to meet with our congressional representatives. It's important that our voices are heard. Though I'm not looking forward to traveling, I'm going to make the trip and I'm hoping that we can help and make some progress in making sure that things are there for people. These are real human beings out there and they deserve respect and appreciation. They deserve good treatment and respect, I believe, for the work they do and the commitment they make, and I am including all the GWAAR people that are here in the room right now, that are employed in that group, and make sure that they know that. So that's it for me as far as my comments and I'd like to then move on to welcome our new Advisory Council member, Valerie.

## **GWAAR AC New Member Welcome – Valerie Freres**

---

*Nick Musson, Transportation Program Specialist*

- Nick welcomed new Advisory Council member, Valerie Freres, and everyone in the meeting introduced themselves and shared a bit about themselves.
- Valerie introduced herself and explained that she started off her career in assisted living as a caregiver and did that for quite some time. She did life enrichments, then managed communities that were primarily all elderly populations from independent

living. She is currently a Community Development Manager and helps a corporate team that consists of five people right now, and growing quickly, doubling in size over the past year. She travels all over the state and focuses on continuity of care, quality assurance, sales/marketing and leadership development and what is best for my residents and communities.

## **Advocacy Update**

---

*Janet Zander, Advocacy and Public Policy Coordinator*

- I want to start out with the easy stuff in my update to you will be a reminder that aging advocacy day is May 13<sup>th</sup>. We are opening registration on March 10th. So before you meet again, we will be opening registration, and I have a link in that report to take you to our Aging Advocacy Day web page. Please watch for that coming up soon.
- I have some remarks regarding the state session. And we are working on advancing legislation both through the budget process as well as a number of items through the legislative process that don't necessarily have any kind of fiscal appropriation or costs associated with them. In particular, two of the things that we've been working quite a bit on, one is a change to the Alzheimer's family Caregiver support group, state statutes. Currently, that program, which is state tax dollar funded, has income eligibility associated with it. The program for over half of the counties in Wisconsin is used to meet the match requirements of counties federal national Caregiver Support program. Recently, the Administration for Community Living in their review of the Older Americans Act work at the state level, realized that those matched dollars were coming from a program that does means testing, or in other words, has income eligibility. And they said they are not eligible to be used as match, so for a lot of the counties looking for that 25% match, they're now looking, do they have enough match in their county levy? Do they have other sources of funding and for many, they don't. And what that means at the end of the day, is they're unable to pull down those federal caregiver support dollars. And as you all can imagine, there already aren't enough state and federal dollars combined to meet all the needs, much less leaving that money on the table. So, we have been meeting with legislators, and we and our partner at the Alzheimer's Association are trying to get a bill introduced that would alter that statute and make that again eligible to be used as match and continue to provide those services in the state. Last week we had a great breakthrough, and the Senate Health Committee Chair actually has drafted legislation for that, to make that happen. Senator Testin from the central Wisconsin

area has agreed to be second on that. So, we are looking for some sponsors on the assembly side and we hope the goal is to have that bill introduced the day before Alzheimer's Advocacy Day, May 4<sup>th</sup>. We're really excited about that. They understood the importance of doing that.

- The second big thing that we're doing is communicating about that volunteer driver insurance issue that many of you are aware of, that is, drivers being treated as if they were commercial drivers and doing this as a career as opposed to as a volunteer who may or may not get reimbursement for their expenses in the form of mileage and things. I have brought that to my personal representatives, one who is on the Senate Transportation Committee and one who is on the Assembly Transportation Committee, just to see if they understood the issue. Did it make sense? And they were both very supportive and were looking to see if they can help make some introduction for us to the Insurance Committee on the in the state legislature, on the Senate and Assembly side. Those aren't typically committees we work with very regularly and certainly their support will make a difference in terms of us getting on those agendas. So that's the other big piece.
- Tuesday night, the governor released his state budget. The state budget address really focused on the fact that he's calling this the year of the kid, and he shared a lot of things in his state address that were focused on children and families and workforce issues. We expected that given that it was the year of the kid, but we have in fact met with the departments and with the governor's office about the aging network priorities and we're pleased to find many of those priorities are still in the governor's budget. We did in fact find that a number of our things were in the budget, so I'm going to give you a quick overview and then I'll share with you an updated version of what we sent out to the Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network. We know that affordable housing incentives are in the budget, and accessible, affordable housing is a significant issue for older adults. We're actually seeing a pretty big rise in homelessness among older adults. He also put broadband expansion grants in there. There were things to lower the cost of prescription drugs and cap the insulin co-pays, eliminating the sales tax on over-the-counter medications, crisis urgent care observation centers and regional crisis stabilization facilities. These are really important initiatives for those working in dementia fields, mental health arenas, to ensure that we don't have people inappropriately placed in facilities that really aren't trained and able to provide the kind of care that they really need funding for in Adult Protective Services. There are requests for the Board on Aging and Long-Term Care, new positions for ombudsmen and other positions within their agency. Given the growth in the aging population, as well as the growth in the assisted living facility industry, there are funds for falls prevention grants, Alzheimer's disease

grants, and home delivered meal funding. So, a very significant increase in the governor's budget. Not quite the ask, but multiple millions of dollars in each year of the budget. There is funding for guardianship grants and those are dollars that would go to the guardianship support center, recognizing that we are currently spending more than we're receiving and that contract hasn't been elevated in decades. Funding for independent living centers who work very closely with our network to help meet the needs of older adults and people living with disabilities. There was funding for personal care services and respite grants as well. These are just some of the things in the budget. We know that the moment the governor finished his budget address, the Finance Committee met, and the legislature responded. It seems very plausible that they will be starting with their own budget and will not be taking up the governor's budget but will in fact work on creating their own. So now it becomes incredibly important for us to not only advocate for the things that the governor put in the budget, but the other things that were not lifted up in that budget.

- I have done 8 regional trainings in the month of February. Those are a couple of hours long each. I have my last two back-to-back on Monday to help our Aging and Disability Resource Centers get a lay of the land such as in what's happening currently. What's the makeup of the state legislature? Where are we at in the budget process? How does that make up of the legislature influence things? How legislation might move forward and then the same information as it relates to Congress. It's a very close ratio between minority and majority in our members of Congress, particularly in the House, and so that's influencing how they're deciding to move forward with particular budget packages.
- For more details and information please see Janet's written Advocacy Update Report.

### **Executive Director's Report**

---

*Nick Musson on behalf of John Schnabl, Executive Director - Written Report*

- The GWAAR Board has created an ad hoc committee to review the board by laws and make recommendations for the board to consider at their April meeting. This is very important to note. We want to pay attention to the changes to their bylaws and I will talk a little bit about that further down the agenda when I talk about our bylaws.



- Due to a dramatic decrease in rates, GWAAR no longer participates in the program where we contract out with our local entities to perform healthcare assessments for clients of Anthem. The program ended at the end of January.
- In January, the board approved the GWAAR budget for 2025. So we do have an approved budget. GWAAR continues to work with the state as well as Dane and Milwaukee AAA's in regards to how to come into compliance with new regulations that will take effect later this year. The biggest area to address will be regulations around contracts compliance.
- GWAAR is still recruiting for new board members because of term limits. We will be losing 3 members after our June meeting and another member at the end of the year. So if you know anybody that would be a good fit for GWAAR's board, please let John know.
- Oconto County has brought their aging unit back into the county starting in 2025. The aging unit had been located at a local nonprofit for many years. Oconto county is then contracting out with Marinette County Elderly Services to administer their nutrition program.

### **GWAAR AC New Member Sub-Committee – Sheila Check-Moe Advisory Council Application**

*Nick Musson, OAA Consultant- Transportation Specialist*

*Dave Denomie, AC Chair*

*Robert Best, AC Member*

- **Dave:** I'll just quickly mention that that Nick had suggested the idea of having a subcommittee of our Advisory Council, for new member vetting, as he had been doing it for us in the past and doing an excellent job. And there was no problem with that, but I thought it was a really good idea to do that as well. Nick, Bob and I met online with Sheila as a result. We all got a chance to speak with her and to tell her a little bit about the Council and GWAAR. And she had some information regarding GWAAR already, of course. But this was the first time we had done that. It's a little bit of extra time for a council member to be on a committee like this, but I think a good way for us to take a bigger role in how we're put together and how we do so. Thank you for doing that, Nick. And I'll hand it over to you now then.
- **Nick:** We had a new member application, submitted Sheila Check-Moe, and we did have a meeting with her. The information was sent out to the Council members, and I apologize that I didn't give you kind of a full week to be able to review the

materials. I sent it out immediately after that after we met with Sheila and I really wanted to get that information in front of you prior to this meeting because the next time we meet is quite a way off, and I think it's important that we look at this now, rather than waiting until July when we meet the next time. You should have received the application and resume. Sheila resides in the Stevens Point area. She has 27 plus years in social work experience. She's a medical social worker with a home care organization, and she does a lot when it comes to working with older adults. She's also an adjunct professor with the University of Massachusetts Global University and an adjunct professor with Upper Iowa University. And for both those universities, she focuses on teaching social work courses. She has a very interesting background. When it comes to her day job, she provides resource booklets from each of the 70 counties in the central Wisconsin area to home care patients and their caregiver family. Those resource booklets contain a lot of great information that is very valuable. She is also in charge of that resource booklet and providing and maintaining that information. She works very closely with her local ADRCs in the seven-county area and really works to connect patients to those local resources that the ADRCs provide. That's why she's interested in participating in the Advisory Council, because of those connections she has with her clients. She's been in the field of social work for 28 plus years. We had a great conversation with her, and she's very interested in participating on the Advisory Council.

- **Bob:** I think she brings a wealth of knowledge and passion about helping the aging population in our state.

*Motion by Doris Bakker, seconded by Bob Best, to approve Sheila Check-Moe's application and add her to the Advisory Council. Motion unanimously carried.*

## **GWAAR Aging Plan Update**

---

*Nick Musson, Transportation & Aging Plan Specialist*

- I do have some updates for you since the last time we met. The 2025-2027 GWAAR Aging Plan was approved at the board meeting on January 7th and the plan has been submitted to the state and the state is very pleased with our plan. You can find it on our website. Thank you for all your help in the creation of that plan, but with the new administration, we may need to make some amendments to that plan. There are some changes in language such as changing equity and diversity to greatest economic and social need.

- The other update that I wanted to bring to your attention is the 2022-2024 Aging Plan goal update. The document was recently sent out to you, so you can see where we are as GWAAR wraps up on that previous plan. It's easy to refer to each goal. I want to call to your attention, that we use colored text to track where we are in the progress of that goal. Year 2022 is in red text, year 2023 is in blue text, and year 2024 is in green text. This process makes it easy for the Advisory Council and GWAAR to track the progress of goals. We want to keep you up to date on them and will begin doing this as well on the recently completed new plan.

### **Advisory Council Bylaws Sub-Committee**

---

*Nick Musson, Transportation & Aging Plan Specialist*

- Over the last year when we met, we experienced some different situations. One situation is we didn't have a quorum, so we couldn't make important decisions and approval on items on an agenda and needed to schedule another make up meeting to be able to adjust for that. I've been making a list of some things that we need to address when it comes to our bylaws and when it comes to that list. One of them has to do with things like voting or options for voting. I'd like to discuss voting options to see if you can make or want to make some potential amendments. I thought this might be a good opportunity to create a small committee to evaluate these things, put together a more refined list of suggestions to bring back to this Advisory Committee. I also think it's important to note that the board is also revising their bylaws.
- Valerie Freres and Dave Denomie volunteered to serve on this subcommittee. Dave mentioned it could be possibly be called a rules committee if conversations are to do with internal procedural matters. Dave mentioned it a great way to get a little more involved and it helps Nick as well.

### **Future Meeting Topics**

---

*Nick Musson, Transportation & Aging Plan Specialist*

- When we're not working on a three-year aging plan, we have the opportunity to explore other meeting topics out there that are related to older adults. I call these exploratory topics on the agenda that are related to older adults. Exploratory topics on future agendas also provides you an opportunity to learn more about what GWAAR does by bringing in our specialists to give you a presentation. GWAAR does so much more than just the goals that are listed on the aging plan. This is an opportunity to focus on topics





or subject matter that is not in the aging plan and there are also topics outside of GWAAR as well to consider. Some possible topics include:

- Affordable Housing
  - Elder Benefit Specialists
  - Volunteering
  - In-home Services/Care
  - Transportation – especially in rural areas
  - OAA Programs, Caregiving, Nutrition, Health Promotion, Elder Abuse, Transportation
  - Janet’s advocacy and public policy topics
  - Nutrition waiting list
  - Federal and State level topics
  - Valerie will make a list of things she see’s firsthand to present to the group
- Nick will bring up some possibilities at the next meeting but also encourages everyone to reach out via phone or email regarding what they’d like to learn more about.

### **Member Sharing**

---

*All*

- There was discussion of frustration with the job loss occurring with the administration, but we will continue our part to try to meet the needs of those who need it. The United States has a long history of meeting challenges. Dave commented he was just grateful for all those trying to serve and make lives better for those in need.
- Valerie was wondering if it would be helpful to get more people involved in the goals and initiatives of the Advisory Council. There was agreement that there is power in numbers, especially in advocacy and that Valerie should contact Janet Zander to see how she and her colleagues/social connections can help in GWAAR’s causes and advocacy. Rob Wilkinson gave her a few organizations to look into as well. Nick suggested that GWAAR’s Communication’s Director attend an Advisory Council meeting to give a presentation and expand on GWAAR’s communications outreach.
- There was discussion regarding the importance of trying to attend Aging Advocacy Day on May 13<sup>th</sup> in Madison.
- The next virtual meeting is July 18<sup>th</sup>.



- There will be an in-person meeting at the Portage County ADRC on September 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Adjournment: 11:49 a.m.**

---

**Next Meeting Date: *July 18, 2025***

**Future 2025 Meeting Dates:**

*May 13, 2025 - Aging Advocacy Day*

*July 18, 2025*

*September 19, 2025 -In-person*

*November 14, 2025*

**Recorder: *Rosanna Mazzara, Operations Coordinator***