Our mission is to deliver innovative support to aging agencies and contracted partners as we work together to promote, protect, and enhance the well-being of older adults, adults with disabilities, and their caregivers.

Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

Friday, May 15, 2026|10:00 a.m. –11:30 a.m.
Microsoft Teams Conference Call

Members Present: *Dave Denomie, Dave Lowe, Doris Bakker, Bob Best, Tony Omernik, Sheila Check-Moe*

Excused Members Not Present: *Doris Bakker, John Helling*

Non-Excused Members Not Present: *Valerie Freres, Denise Sweet,*

Others Present: *Nick Musson, Transportation & Aging Plan Specialist; John Schnabl, Executive Director; Emily Petersen, Advocacy and Public Policy Director; Rosanna Mazzara, Operations Coordinator*

Call to Order: 10:14 a.m.

Dave Denomie, Chair

Review and Approval of May 15, 2026 Agenda

Motion by Bob Best, seconded by Sheila Check-Moe, to approve May 15, 2026 agenda. Motion unanimously carried.

Review and Approval of February 20, 2026 Draft Meeting Minutes

Motion by Tony Omernik, seconded by Sheila Check-Moe, to approve February 20, 2026 draft meeting minutes. Motion unanimously carried.

Public Comment:

None

Comments from Chair

Dave Denomie, Chair

- Requested a moment of silence for GWAAR Board Chair, Rob Wilkinson who passed on last month. Thoughts and prayers to his family and friends.

Election of Chair

Dave Denomie, Chair

- Dave offered up self-nominations for Advisory Council Chair.

- There were no self-nominations.

Motion by Dave Lowe, seconded by Tony Omernik, to re-elect Dave Denomie to Advisory Council Chair.

Executive Director Report

John Schnabl, Executive Director

- Currently GWAAR is going through some staff fluctuation, with retirements, departures and adding new staff. A few are, but not all inclusive:

    - Amanda Grady, EBS Support Attorney Program Manager, is leaving and Laura Monroe, Benefit Specialist Supervising Attorney, is being promoted to take her place.
    - Angie Sullivan, Health Promotion Program Specialist, is leaving for another position, and Evan Ewing has been hired to take her place.
    - Janet Zander, Advocacy and Public Policy Coordinator, has retired, and Emily Peterson is taking her place
    - A Human Resources and Benefits Liaison position has been created, and Megan Olsen has been hired.

- GWAAR has a new auditing firm, so the Fiscal Department has been busy working with them.

- Spring is the time of Fiscal trainings, so there have been multiple taking place throughout the state of Wisconsin.

- We have an upcoming ACE Meeting on July 8th, in Stevens Point, for the county/tribal aging unit directors. Board and Advisory Council members are welcome to attend. An email with registration information has been sent out to everyone.

Introduction and Advocacy Update

Emily Petersen, Advocacy and Public Policy Director

- Emily Petersen was introduced as GWAAR's new Advocacy and Public Policy Director and she gave a bit of background on herself. Advocacy and public policy issues GWAAR is working on were discussed. Please see Emily's report for all specific details and topics.

- At the end of Emily's update, Dave Denomie suggested making a motion to express our appreciation for Janet's years of service to GWAAR.

Motion by Bob Best, seconded by Tony Omernik, on behalf of the Advisory Council, we'd like to express our appreciation for Janet's years of service in the furtherance of the aging network's goals. Motion carried.

Washington DC Trip

Bob Best, Advisory Council Member

- It was great to be in DC for the 250th anniversary. This was not my first time in DC, but the first time there for advocacy, which was exciting. Unfortunately, we weren't able to actually meet with any of the legislators, but that is not unusual. The aids knew a bit about us and what our issues were and were very cordial. We had very good sessions. Overall, it was a great experience and very fruitful in my opinion.

GWAAR 2025-2027 Aging Plan Goal Update

Nick Musson, Transportation & Aging Plan Specialist

- GWAAR Program Specialists continue to advance their goals outlined in the 2025–2027 Aging Plan and an aging plan progress report will be given at the end of this year.

- The State approved the amendment to GWAAR's 2025–2027 Aging Plan to formally allow up to 25% of Title III-C1 Congregate Nutrition funds to be used for Carry-Out

meals. The GWAAR 2025–2027 Aging Plan was amended and reposted on GWAAR's website.

- Aging Plan Update: GWAAR is preparing for the 2026 Aging Unit Plan annual reviews. We also will start preparing for the kickoff of the 2028-2030 plan cycle. Discussions have started with Tina Abert, Meeting Design and Visual Supports Consultant, to begin preparations for the upcoming 2028–2030 Aging Plan.

- State Update: The State just received notice last week that their aging plan submission was approved. They are now in the process of making revisions to align with the department's communications standards and style/branding guidance. When the edits are complete, it will be posted publicly on their aging page.

- GWAAR consultants continue to meet every other month to stay aligned on aging plan activities at the AU, AAA, and state levels.

Volunteer Driver Insurance Update

Nick Musson, Transportation & Aging Plan Specialist

At the May 12 Wisconsin Association of Mobility Managers (WAMM) Legislative Day, volunteer driver challenges and insurance barriers were a major topic of discussion with legislators, WisDOT representatives, and the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance.

Key Issues Discussed

- Volunteer drivers are increasingly being categorized by insurance companies as "business/commercial" drivers because of mileage reimbursement rates.

- This reclassification can increase insurance premiums significantly, in some cases from approximately $300 to $3,000 annually.

- As a result, many volunteer driver programs are losing volunteers because individuals cannot afford the increased insurance costs.

- WAMM members emphasized that Wisconsin's aging population is growing rapidly, while the volunteer base is not growing at the same pace. Retaining existing volunteers is critical to maintaining transportation services.

OCI Discussion

Tim Cornelius, Deputy Chief legal Counsel, Office of the Commissioner of Insurance

- Joined group to discuss Volunteer Drivers & Insurance.

- He indicated that there are coverage options out there for drivers, but there is a discrepancy in how providers write the volunteer driver policies.

- He acknowledged that the insurance policy underwriters have "a lot of leeway" in how they write the auto policies.

  - I referenced the (denied) open records request he submitted for the insurance provider listing. I also asked if he would be able to get the information he requested if he were to re-write the request.

- He indicated that the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance simply doesn't want to steer customers to specific providers. He is willing to discuss options with us.

  - I stated that we've identified that legislation may be the best way to solve this problem. Can Tim provide any advice?

- He said to work with WI Insurance Alliance and "keep doing what you're doing". Start looking at how volunteer driver programs fit in with personal passenger policies.

- Tim stated that there are options. People "don't want to shop around" – they want to keep the coverage they have.

- Tim committed to facilitating a meeting with WAMM Representatives regarding the volunteer driver insurance priority.

Legislator Feedback

- Representative Tip McGuire was unfamiliar with the volunteer driver insurance issue and requested additional information. He asked about insurance claims in relationship to volunteer drivers. He is very willing to help.

- Representative Joel Kitchens discussed the importance of volunteer driver programs like Door-Tran in rural communities and shared his own experience relying on the program to attend a cardiology follow-up appointment in Green Bay.

- Representative Kitchens also indicated he intends to help WAMM address volunteer driver legislative priorities during the next session.

- Also had a great discussion with Representative Mike Bare and Christian Plata, Policy Director for Senator Smith's office.

Overall Takeaway

- There continues to be strong concern statewide about the sustainability of volunteer driver programs. Insurance barriers, increasing costs, and volunteer recruitment/retention challenges remain significant threats to transportation access for older adults and individuals with disabilities, particularly in rural areas. WAMM continues to advocate for legislative and policy solutions to help stabilize and protect these essential programs.

- Meeting with Emily this Monday at 1:00 p.m. to review the history of the volunteer driver insurance issue and strategize next steps for moving forward.

- Goals for the year:

  - Expand, formalize, and strategically mobilize the Volunteer Driver Insurance Coalition to reduce insurance barriers and protect the sustainability of volunteer transportation programs statewide.
  - Formalize Coalition Structure.
  - Expand Membership.
  - Strengthening Data & Messaging.

OAA Allocation Amounts – 2025-2026 Update

Nick Musson, Transportation & Aging Plan Specialist

- At the last Advisory Council meeting, you expressed significant concern about the lack of advance notification from the state and felt that relying solely on a statement within the State Aging Plan was not sufficient for local planning purposes.

- The AC asked John to follow up with BADR to share this feedback and emphasize that earlier and more direct communication would have been extremely helpful for Aging Units, partners, and councils preparing for the 2026 changes. John did discuss this

issue with the state. The State recognizes that the State Plan on Aging contains quite a bit of new information and does not communicate it in the plainest language. A best practice for BADR would include providing narrower communications and presentations when the network will experience changes of this type. They will work to improve their communication in the future.

Future Meeting Topics

Nick Musson, Transportation & Aging Plan Specialist

- We have a new Health Promotion Program Specialist, Evan Ewing, and I will work on getting him to our next Advisory Council meeting.

- Please feel free to contact Nick Musson at any time with any suggestions.

Member Sharing

All

Tony Omernik:

Our Healthy Aging Coalition in Marathon County is starting to have discussions with the Midwest Senior Empowerment Project, which works primarily in Wisconsin and Michigan. They focus on working with communities and hosting senior summit events, which are focused on bringing seniors together to identify and prioritize, discuss senior issues and actions plans and helping people get connected with advocacy, organizations and entities to advance their mutual advocacy goals. Recently there were events in Stevens Point, Merrill and Elkhorn. Typically, they end up being about a four-hour event where they have a speaker that talks about some of the issues and the a breakout session. We're in the early stages of talking with them and our thought process is if everything moves along and it seems feasible, then the idea would be that we would have an event in Wausau in late September. We would then probably have some type of candidates forum to talk and give candidates an opportunity to tell us what they would do about those issues of concern, and then we would have informed voters in our area in November that would be able to then know who the best candidate to advance the issues they care about and so forth. But I was just curious if any of you have any experience or had anything to do with that Senior Empowerment Project. We have a meeting scheduled in another week or so, with a representative from Wisconsin to talk about all the details and logistics and how it would work and what it would look like here and how the funding would be taken care of. The idea is to bring about 100 people

together. You can look up their website and sign up for alerts and communications from the group.

Adjournment Time: 11:34 a.m.

Next Meeting Date: ***July 17, 2026***

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Future 2026 Meeting Dates:
July 17, 2026
September 18, 2026 – In person at Steven's Point
November 13, 2026

Recorder: *Rosanna Mazzara, Operations Coordinator*