

Report: Council on Aging Meeting

1.0 Meeting Commencement & Governance

The Council on Aging convened on January 5, 2026, for its first meeting of the year, which served a critical governance function. The board formally reorganized its leadership structure for the new term, a key procedural step that ensures effective stewardship for the year ahead. This reorganization, now aligned with new city-wide ordinances requiring a January election, ensures standardized governance and positions the board for the year ahead.

The meeting was called to order following the standard open meeting law announcement. The primary order of business was the election of officers, with the following individuals unanimously elected:

- **Chair:** Ron Dameka
- **Vice Chair:** Paul Leone
- **Treasurer:** Terry Hilman
- **Secretary:** Kathy O'Brien
- **CEO of the Board:** Michael (Appointed)

Following the elections, the minutes from the previous meeting were formally accepted. With these governance milestones achieved, the meeting transitioned to a substantive review of the Council's financial position.

2.0 Financial Review: Budgetary Pressures and Strategic Funding

The Treasurer's Report provided a critical mid-fiscal-year analysis of the Council's financial health. This review highlighted both the stability of our specialized funds and emerging budgetary pressures in the General Fund that will require proactive management and strategic intervention.

General Fund Analysis

While overall spending from the General Fund is tracking at the expected 50% mark, several key budget lines signal structural challenges that demand attention.

- **Overtime:** This line is at **90% utilization**, a pressure resulting directly from the success of our popular, high-demand evening programming. While this is a positive indicator of community engagement, it creates an urgent need for a sustainable funding solution. The planned mitigation strategy of having salaried staff cover more evening hours is a temporary measure, and a **supplemental budget request** will be necessary.
- **Repairs & Maintenance:** This line is currently approximately **\$1,500 over budget** and is on a trajectory to reach a total expenditure similar to last year's \$17,000. Given the ongoing needs of the facility, a **supplemental budget request** is highly likely.
- **Energy & Utilities:** While appearing healthy at only 18% utilization, actual monthly expenses are **33% higher** than last year. The budget has remained solvent only due to citywide National Grid credits. This

signals a significant future vulnerability, as the budget is not structured to absorb the true 33% increase in energy costs once the one-time city credits are depleted.

- **Office Supplies:** At **75% utilization**, this line is already over budget. It was noted that some of these costs can be absorbed through other available funding mechanisms to alleviate pressure on the General Fund.

Specialized Funds Status

The status of the Council's other key funds remains strong:

- **Gift Fund:** The current balance stands at 96,298.91 **. Of this total, ****25,000** remains formally committed to the future painting project at the new Waterford Street facility.
- **Revolving Fund:** The available balance is 36,880.57 **. The higher actual cash balance of ****57,710.36** reflects the impact of outstanding purchase orders and contracts for future programs and services, which are already encumbered.
- **State Grants:** The FY24 grant is now closed. For the active FY25 grant, the final available balance after accounting for all outstanding purchase orders and salary obligations is **\$27,941.20**.

This financial overview underscores the necessity of the capital project planning and facility management detailed in the next section.

3.0 Capital Projects and Facility Management

This section highlights a critical tension in our current operations: the strategic balancing act between advancing the exciting new facility at Waterford Street and making judicious investments to ensure the safety and continuity of services in our current building.

New Facility Progress (Waterford Street)

Work continues to move forward on the new building, with several key updates:

- **Bathrooms:** The bathrooms are nearing completion. They have been freshly painted, and fixtures are currently being installed.
- **Doors:** The arrival of the new doors is not expected until the end of January, consistent with the previously communicated 8-10 week lead time.
- **Painting Project:** A clear strategy has been established for the large-scale painting project. Due to the project's scale, **professional contractors will be used**, and bids must be solicited in accordance with city policy. While the use of volunteers, Monty Tech, or the Sheriff's Department was discussed, these options were deemed unfeasible. Bidding is on hold pending the completion of other structural work, as painting will be one of the final steps. A priority will be placed on selecting an **age-friendly and dementia-friendly color palette**.

Current Facility Maintenance & Repairs

- **Fire Escape:** The complex repair of the fire escape is now **complete**, and this important egress is open again for general use. The project involved a painstaking 7-hour welding job. We extend our deep gratitude to the **Gardner Fire Department** for providing a critical fire watch during the work, ensuring facility safety.
- **Roof Leak:** An ongoing issue with the rubber roof over the elevator shaft requires a more permanent solution. The root cause is a concave shape that traps water. A previous low-cost repair was unsuccessful.

The required solution is to create a raised structure to properly shed water, a project with an anticipated cost of **"several thousand dollars."**

The management of our physical infrastructure is foundational to the human impact of our work, as vividly detailed in the Director's Report.

4.0 Director's Report: Operational Highlights and Community Engagement

The Director's Report painted a vivid picture of an organization operating at maximum capacity, a testament to the dedication of staff, volunteers, and city partners. Concluding that **"this house rocks all day,"** the report celebrated a period of intense activity, record-breaking service delivery, and deep gratitude for the entire community that supports the Council's mission.

Key operational updates and highlights include:

- **Record-Breaking 2025 Impact:** The Council achieved an astonishing milestone, providing **\$1.3 billion** in tangible insurance assistance to seniors and serving **11,000 unique individuals** through its programs and outreach.
- **Tax Aide Program Success:** Demand for the Tax Aide program remains exceptionally high. On the first day appointments became available, **70 of the 120 initial slots were filled by noon**, signaling an urgent community need.
- **Key Personnel Notes:** Gratitude was expressed for departing City Auditor **John Richard**, whose guidance was instrumental in developing the Center's detailed financial reporting. The Council also shared its collective sympathy for the family of long-time volunteer **Dave "Mo" Morris** upon his recent passing.
- **Community Partnerships:** The Director extended heartfelt thanks for the extensive support received from numerous partners, including city departments (especially the Fire Department), community organizations like the **CAC**, local businesses such as **NRT** and **Wilson Bus**, and a neighboring church that provides overflow parking.

These accomplishments underscore the vital role the Senior Center plays and lead directly to the key actions required to sustain this work.

5.0 Summary of Key Decisions & Action Items

This section consolidates the actionable items and key decisions from the January 5th meeting to ensure clarity on responsibilities and outline next steps for staff and board members.

Key Issue/Decision	Lead/ Responsible Party	Next Steps & Status
Budget Shortfalls	Michael (Director) / Board	Prepare and submit supplemental budget requests for projected overages in Overtime and Repairs & Maintenance .
New Facility Painting	Michael (Director)	Solicit professional bids for painting at the appropriate time, after structural work is complete. Ensure bids adhere to city requirements.
Roof Leak Repair	Michael (Director)	Investigate and contract a permanent solution to fix the roof leak,

		which will involve creating a raised structure.
Tax Aide Program Expansion	Michael (Director)	Continue efforts to incentivize tax aid volunteers to host a "weekend blitz" to expand appointment availability.
New Facility Bids (General)	Michael (Director)	Follow up on potential collaborations with Monty Tech (cabinetry) and the Sheriff's Office, though acknowledged as long shots for major projects.

6.0 Next Scheduled Meeting

The next meeting of the Council on Aging is scheduled for:

Monday, February 2, 2026, at 2:00 PM.