

St. Johns County Civic Roundtable Minutes
March 8, 2021

Submitted by Maureen Long, Recording Secretary

The meeting was Via Virtual Zoom Teleconference Meeting. It opened at 12:03 noon by **Vice Chair Lisa McGlynn**. After the Pledge of Allegiance was recited guest speaker **Becky Yanni Executive Director of the St. Johns County Council on Aging** was introduced. **Ms. Yanni** has held her position as Executive Director of Council on Aging since 2013 and considers it an honor to serve, lead and advocate for the older residents of our community.

The COA has been helping older adults live with independence, dignity, respect and inclusion for 45 years. She and her staff see a need for a continuance of that mission by expanding programs and opportunities throughout the county to accommodate the changing needs of this rapidly growing population.

When social distancing began back in March 2020 due to COVID-19 concerns, it was understood that older adults were most at risk for developing complications from the illness. and Council on Aging (COA) was required to temporarily shut the doors of its senior centers in St. Johns County. No one at that time could predict how long these protective measures would remain in place.

She explained how at the Council on Aging they had to adapt their Senior Services last year, on **3/13/2020 due to the pandemic COA had to close all 5 of their centers**. Thinking it was going to be a temporary situation, and reopen in a few months, never imagining it would last a year in time.

They knew they had to reshape their services, in this population feelings of isolation can lead to a decline in health. These experiences can lead to chronic loneliness, and with COVID-19 dramatically increasing social isolation and critical health vulnerabilities, there was an urgent need for COA to improve social connections to improve health and well-being.

They went from serving lunch in the dining room, to delivering all the food by **Meals on Wheels** because seniors began staying at home.

Beyond the threat of the virus, isolation and loneliness are very real dangers to their health and well-being. Lack of physical activity and mental stimulation also threaten to diminish health. How to maintain a connection was going to be difficult. COA was committed to finding available resources in creating new ways for seniors to maintain their connections and stay active. These new online services include caregiver support groups, programs for those suffering from dementia, virtual memory support classes, and video courses through COA's River House Presents.

Working with **ElderSource** and **Uniper**, a private company that made a donation to ElderSource, to provide devices, a TV Kit with a small receiver box, camera, and an easy-to-use remote control with an embedded microphone. It provides at-home, TV-based and mobile-based solutions for care and social engagement. Interactive health and wellness, live and interactive classes and lectures that help older adults to live a healthy and active social life from the comfort of home, enabling our aging to stay active and to combat loneliness. These online resources offer online classes specifically for older adults were available at no cost. They were able to have a certified yoga instructor through the ElderSource provide free half an hour virtual yoga class.

The **Integrative Memory Enhancement Program - IMEP** combines the mind, body and brain to boost cognitive abilities and minimize the progression of memory loss or dementia. Encouraging social interaction and dialogue that help members feel connected, were available through **Uniper**.

Luckily with the successful implementation of St. Johns County's vaccination we can see the light at the end of the tunnel. We have adapted one program after another and plan on offering our IMEP and other services in-person at two locations, with plans to expand the program to more locations over time.

We have a planned process for a staged reopening of our senior centers, in the interest of the well-being of our participants, and have begun this process with a trial reopening of two of our senior centers. There will be a gradual reopening of the other senior centers in the next few months. More details on our reopening plans will be announced soon.

On March 23rd, the new **COA Center at Flagler Health+ Village at Nocatee** through a partnership with Flagler Health+. Advance registration for programs is required as class size is limited. While plans to reopen proceed, we continue to offer many online program resources and options. The COA e-newsletter delivers the latest news and updates every Monday morning via email. Those with questions can contact us at 904-209-3700, to answer questions and forward your feedback to the administrative team.

Ms. Yanni answered questions from members and attendees.

Vice Chair McGlynn introduced our new member **Albert Syeles, President at the EpiCentre Alliance**.

Mr. Syeles gave us a PowerPoint presentation from the **St. Augustine EpiCentre Alliance** on their plans to build a \$40-to-50 million facility, including the cost of the land, that will serve the local arts community and be a venue for outside acts.

He explained the nonprofit group has been working with **Vavarde Strategic Funding** to develop a business plan, and the group is focused on gaining investors across the country with Vavarde's help.

The St. Augustine EpiCentre Alliance is searching for land and is considering about 10 sites all outside of downtown, **Vavarde President Eric Becher** said. Research showed that parking and congestion would have posed problems downtown. The group wants the facility to be up and running in the next five years, it will have a **1,700-seat concert hall, a 1,000-seat theater and a 500-seat black box**. In addition, there will be a rehearsal hall, space for a restaurant, convention facilities, exhibit space and offices. Income for the property would come in part from renting space to performing arts groups in town, a restaurant and other individuals and organizations.

Other performing arts groups and organizations that are part of the EpiCentre Alliance and plan to rent space include **EMMA Concert Series and A Classic Theatre**. The EpiCentre Alliance also wants to partner with local governments, which will give them access to more grants, donors and investors.

As an example, Syeles stated that it will be a great venue to hold our SJC Graduations. The nonprofit expects to bring in \$2 million to \$4 million a year to cover operations and to be a self-sufficient venue.

*EpiCentre's Powerpoint Presentation can be found [under March 8, 2021 Approved Minutes as EpiCentre's Presentation.](#)

General Roundtable Business:

First order of business is the approval of February 2021 meeting minutes. A motion was made, seconded, minutes approved as written. Treasurer's Report was given, a balance of \$1405.02 in our account was reported. Dues for membership have begun to come in with a total \$550.00, if you have not paid your dues, please do so.

Janet Patten, Government Affairs Chair reported the State Legislative Session will begin on March 2 for the next two months.

State:

Short Term Rentals: We received an update from **Rep. Cyndi Stevenson's assistant Shorty Robbins**, who reported that **HB 219 concerning vacation rentals** was read 3/2/21 didn't seem to be moving, no committee hearing, Cyndi had not supported Vacation Rental Bills in the past and was not supportive of this one, it has not gone to the floor. Shorty will keep us informed if it comes to Cyndi's Committees.

- The Governor has budgeted \$50 million for the **Florida Forever Program**. Florida has the largest acquisition monies and is being a model for other States.
- There's been a repeal for the **toll roads project** and to redirect the \$132 million planned budget.
- **\$750 million has been budgeted for upcoming bills.**
- The **Comprehensive Plans** for Local Governments Powers have been cut.
- There are 831 new residents each day in Florida.

County:

ShortTerm Rentals: SJC BOCC postponed any new ordinances for the next 60 days. Commissioner Waldron recommended that 2 new enforcement officers are needed for the existing ordinances the county has.

Bed Tax: Commissioner Whitehurst will bring up the one cent increase of the Bed Tax on the next agenda. **Commissioner Smith** questioned how the increase would be used? There must be a super majority to pass a one cent increase.

Lamp Program: The first reading of the draft Ordinance will be at the 3/16/21 SJC BOCC Meeting. Nominations for **LAMP Board** have been circulating.

COSA: Fish Island Update: The construction of **Gate's Express Car Wash** is at a standstill with the city. Due to dispute of species of certain trees on site, City Staff is consulting with third party arborist/botanist to determine species of trees. This may result in a requirement for PZB approval for significant tree removal.

John Pilecki, Education Chair reported on the **March 3rd, 2021 SJC School Board meeting.**

Academic Service Update:

- The State adopted the **Benchmark for Excellent Student Thinking**, replacing the previous curriculum known as **Common Core**.
- There will be **Summer School Available** here in SJC: Reading for the Young and Math for the Older Students
- **Assessments** may differ at the end of the year.
- Now through **December the Covid safe practices will stay in place.**
- **Virtual or In-Person learning, students and parent will have to pick one or the other, this will help teachers be able to teach better.**
- **Social-Emotional Learning Should/Emotional Education** should Be Priority due to the COVID-19 Crisis in 2021-2022.

Health Care Committee Report:

Barbra Olsen spoke on the Health Care Committee and how the intersection of acute care, its scope of importance, and areas of expertise. 80% of seniors have been vaccinated by Firemen & EMT's in SJC.

Vice Chair McGlynn went around the "room" for discussion/new business.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:42

The next Meeting will be on, **April 12, 2021** at 12 Noon via Zoom Video Conferencing, with **President Joseph G. Joyner of Flagler College** as our guest speaker.