

**City of Alexandria, Virginia
Department of Community and Human Services
Social Service Advisory Board Meeting Notes
March 17, 2025**

Present: Ashley Caison, Abby Curran Horrell, Karen Carter (Vice Chair), Ann O'Hanlon, Josh Barnathan (Chair), Shawna Gary, Jennifer Ayers (ALIVE), Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff),

Absent: Maura Miller, Allison Greenleaf, Jordan Nally, Michael de La Guardia, Samantha Pedrosa

Call to Order/Welcome:

The meeting was called to order by Josh Barnathan (Chair) at 7:00 p.m. and SSAB members were welcomed to the March meeting.

Guest Speaker: ALIVE Executive Director - Jennifer Ayers

Food Pantry Process:

- Food Pantry Process:
- Participants will register upon entry. Registration takes about five minutes if it's the first time.
 - ALIVE strives to make the experience as close to grocery shopping as possible.
- Once registered, the family receives a card that has a number on it to be used when shopping.
 - This allows for a more efficient process as there is no need to ask for the same information every visit.
 - Once the card is scanned, it shows how many members are in the family. This determines how much food the family can receive.
 - At check-out, the participant scans the card and weighs the food. The weight is to keep track of inventory.
 - The inventory is kept in a warehouse that is about 12,000 sq ft to keep food as fresh as possible.
- At the end of shopping, staff members provide any additional resources the individual or family may need.
- The pantry hours are Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, 12p-6p (closed 2p-3p), Saturday 10a-2p.
 - The last Saturday of each month, ALIVE provides bags of groceries in the community from 8:30a-10:30a.

Donations:

- Donations accepts donations at their location at 801 S Payne St.
 - Hygiene products, family size laundry detergent, feminine hygiene products, diapers and wipers are the most needed donations.

Funding:

- ALIVE operates with a 2-million-dollar budget that is funded through individual giving, local government funds, federal grants, and foundations.
 - ALIVE has served about 5000 families over the last two years. In the second or third quarter ALIVE will have more information to better assess trends for this year.

Communication:

- ALIVE primarily uses social media such as Facebook and X to engage with communities and share information about programs/services.
- They share information with community partners to distribute to other community members through different avenues, such as Whatsapp.

Programming/Services:

- ALIVE tries to be a connection point for community members and provides various programming.
 - Previously hosted events such as a health and wellness day and know your rights' workshop.
- Financial assistance available for those in need in the amount of \$750
 - Available once every six months for rent, utilities or medical expenses.
 - A little over 1000 people throughout the year financial assistance.
- Furniture is available to provide support for families in need.
 - In the past year, ALIVE has served 280 families.
- The shelter will be reopening soon once renovations are done, and ALIVE is currently in the process of hiring a case manager for the transitional housing.

Concerns:

- Discussion about concerns that may arise due to the federal administration's funding changes.
 - ALIVE fills the gaps that safety net programs have but are not equipped to be a safety net program in itself.

Volunteers:

- ALIVE operates mostly with volunteers. They have a volunteer network of about 1000 people.
- For more information on how to get involved there is a section on the ALIVE-inc.org website.
 - The areas that need volunteer support are the furniture service/logistics and drivers for U-HAUL trucks during food distribution.

Approval of minutes: The minutes of the February meeting were approved with no changes by SSAB members.

Resource Fair Update:

- SSAB members discussed the March 8th resource fair. There were about 150 people in attendance. Resources that were highlighted were food banks and legal aid.
 - The fair was successful in sharing where things are located and providing people with information on how to get involved at the local level.
- There will be more resource and job fairs hosted in each jurisdiction of Northern Virginia to support the federal workforce in the area.

DCHS Update: Lesa Gilbert

- The budget process starts with the City Manager releasing his proposed budget, then there are work sessions to understand reductions or additions, staff answer questions from the Council (informed by public comments provided by community members), add/delete sessions, then after this process, the budget is adopted in May for the fiscal year to begin July 1.
- There was a budget work session with the council that included HR, OPA, Health Department and DCHS.
 - This session focused on city investment in affordable housing, homelessness or eviction prevention.
 - The City invests about \$2 million dollars, which includes shelter, older adult rent relief, and eviction prevention programs.
 - DCHS requested \$300 thousand to support the food hubs which served 11 thousand families or 48 thousand individuals in the past year.
 - DCHS presented the food security coordinator position.
 - There was a food security landscape study that was done, and now strategic planning is taking place and will be implemented.

Open Discussion

SSAB outreach updates:

- Josh Barnathan (Chair) emailed the equivalent of SSAB in Arlington and is waiting to hear back.
 - By the next meeting, Josh Barnathan (Chair) will update SSAB on efforts.

SSAB employer of choice efforts discussion:

- There will be a step increase for all non-bargain employees.
- The City did an analysis and will be giving one-time retention bonuses to the positions deemed to be the highest risk of departure.
- The City will increase the individual benefit amount that employees can access for education and professional development.
- The City discussed the creation of employee resource groups as a form of retention effort.
- Additionally, there will be \$50 thousand allocated to use as hiring bonuses.

- It will be allocated on a position-by-position basis for the most difficult positions to fill.
- There will be a \$500,000 compensation analysis study done citywide.
 - There are 550 classifications and the City is seeking to find a way to simplify classifications to be better able to assess competition.
- Employee engagement survey to gauge employee satisfaction.
- As of January 31st, there is a 12% vacancy rate. However, there is no clear break down by department.

SSAB shared space:

- SSAB members discussed the setting up of a Google Drive.
- Discussion about where team-building activity can take place for non-SSAB-related work.
 - Josh Barnathan (Chair) will send around a poll to schedule a time with the board.
- SSAB members discussed the employee appreciation efforts. Abby Currell will buy \$10 gift cards based on contributions received, will schedule with Lesa for distribution of Dunkin' Donuts again, and thank you cards.
 - Ann O'Hanlon will email that to Karen Carter (Vice-Chair) and then will send it to Abby Currell to have for the drop-off.

Upcoming events discussion:

- Alexandria city council town hall. Sat 3/29/25 1:00-3:00 at Del Pepper Community Resource Center
- City Manager Budget Pop Up. Wed 3/19/25 6:00 - 8:00 PM at Del Pepper Community Resource Center
- FY26 BUDGET BONANZA! Thu 3/20/25 11:30 - 1:30 PM at Market Square in front of City Hall
- Housing Affordability Advisory Committee. Thu 4/3/25 7:00 - 9:00 PM at City Hall, Room 1900
- Meeting with Vice-Mayor Bagley 3/25/25 1:00 - 1:30 Virtual
 - Abby Currell and Josh Barnathan (Chair) will be at the meeting and provide updates during the next SSAB meeting.

Upcoming Speakers Suggestion:

SSAB members expressed interest in hearing from Volunteer Alexandria.

Upcoming meeting dates (third Monday of the Month)

- Monday, April 21
- Monday, May 19
- Monday, June 16

Meeting adjourned: 8:35pm