

Regular Meeting
Active Adult Center Advisory Board
May 20, 2025

A Regular Meeting of the Madison Heights Active Adult Center Advisory Board was called to order by Chair Salley, May 20, 2025, at 1:00 p.m. at the Madison Heights City Hall Building at 300 W. 13 Mile Rd., Madison Heights, MI 48071.

Present: Bessler, Mowry, Patton, Ratliff, Salley, Smith, Topping and Quigley.
Also Present: Center Supervisor Cowan, Center Specialist Parker, Councilor Wright.
Excused: Ballantine, Juska-Svoba.

19-01. Minutes.

Motion by Ms. Mowry seconded by Ms. Patton to adopt the minutes from the Regular Meeting of April 15, 2025.

Yeas: Bessler, Mowry, Patton, Ratliff, Salley, Smith, Topping and Quigley.
Nays: None.
Excused: Juska-Svoba.

19-02. Meeting Open to the Public.

None.

19-03. Staff Report.

Ms. Cowan updated the Board on programs that are coming up including lunch and learns, trips, classes, parties, a picnic and community concert.

19-04. Maintenance Requests

Ms. Cowan stated when Mr. Ballantine comes back next month, he can update the group on the punch list and maintenance list items.

19-05. Budget Requests

Ms. Cowan stated she will bring up AAC Staffing Concerns under New Business.

19-06. Unfinished Business.

Ms. Cowan reminded Board members that the summer beautification drive around would be Monday, July 21. We will meet at the AAC at 10 am, drive around and then go to lunch after.

19-07. New Business.

Ms. Cowan and Ms. Parker spoke to the Board about staffing concerns.

Ms. Cowan stated that every month she lists what's coming up as far as programming at the AAC but keeps the behind-the-scenes workings to staff to figure out. Now with a more informed board, some members volunteering in the office, helping with other normal staff duties and asking more involved questions, she wanted to address the Board together, explain the staffing concerns and why everyone has been noticing cutbacks on programming at the AAC.

Ms. Cowan stated she has worked at the AAC for 22 years, starting out at the front desk, moving to assistant, and now working as the supervisor, and that even though she is the only supervisor ever in the building, she is not a department head. She stated that since she started working at the AAC it has been grossly understaffed. The former supervisor, and now she has been asking every year for help or at least a plan to better staff the AAC to no avail. For a long time, there was just one full time staff, a couple part time staff and 5 volunteers. We finally got the assistant position reinstated as full-time (thanks to the Board) and have gotten a minimal amount of part time hours added here and there over the years, but it's not anywhere near enough, like receiving a band aid to treat a broken and now infected leg. The work of two full-time front desk staff is now spread between three part-time staff and four volunteers, which doesn't work. Staff and volunteers are regularly messaging each other on days off to ask questions of what happened the day before. When we state to the administration this isn't working, we are told we need to train our staff and volunteers better or leave a log where one staff member or volunteer can leave notes for another, which we have replied, if we had time to do this we would, and it still wouldn't fix the situation. For years the City has treated the symptoms of the disease of the AAC being understaffed, offering suggestions such as we should cut back on transportation, stop doing the newsletter every month, don't offer so many programs and so on. And then when we cut back a little, we are asked why our revenue has dropped so much, seniors leave and go to other senior centers, and we aren't offering much to the community. But no one has worked with us to fix the real issue that we are grossly understaffed and spread too thin. Ms. Cowan stated that you cannot tell me that in 22 years some kind of plan could not have been made.

Ms. Cowan stated the AAC is most comparable with the Library, since we have a building, we are open to the public, we offer programs, and have office work. However, we are severely understaffed even compared to the Library, table below.

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	Full time staff	Part time staff in building
Active Adult Center	2	3
Library	4	17

Ms. Cowan stated that she does the same work as the Library director, but she is on the same level as her assistant and Ms. Parker does the same work as the Library assistant, but in comparison is below the third highest staff at the Library.

Ms. Parker asked why does the Library have so many more staff with no revenue coming in? Why are we under DPS when we work as a standalone department like the Library? And why does no other department use volunteers for main staffing, but we are expected to?

Ms. Cowan stated that the AAC is only around 2% of city's budget. We are supported by millage money, SMART money, our own revenue, and fundraising monies, and at the end of the year we always have monies left that transfer into the General Fund. The City is receiving \$83,458 from SMART this year, of that \$69,849 was allotted towards wages for all our part time staff. SMART covers all part time staff wages. Why can't we put the additional \$13,609 towards a full-time position?

Ms. Parker stated that looking at other communities who have lower tax rates than Madison Heights they have many more staff at their senior centers, 20-40 staff in the office, and their community offers more like a farmer's market, a senior center and a community center, a splash pad and so on.

Ms. Cowan stated when a driver quit this year, she was put in the impossible situation to decide between replacing the driver or putting those hours at the front desk. She chose the front desk, but only received about nine extra hours a week, which is no real help. And then driving suffered, so now both the front desk & driving are understaffed and suffering. She stated as she mentioned staff tries to adjust and we plan less programs, then seniors leave and go to another city and City administration asks where our revenue is. Then we add more programs, staff gets exhausted and then sick, takes time off and we have even less coverage. We have been twisting ourselves in knots trying to figure out a solution but there is no solution besides giving us more full-time staff and more part-time hours. Staff is tired. We are tired of not feeling heard, not being seen, and being overworked. And we are tired of giving solutions and trying to figure out something that is simply above our pay grade. While the budget might not have allowed for additional staffing this year, what about the 21 years before this?

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Several Board members asked how the City can come up with funding for other things they want, for instance the 11 Mile Road diet, staffing other departments, pickleball courts and all the free programs at the Library. They added if they can get creative to come up with funding for these things, they can figure out a way to come up with funding for the AAC to be adequately staffed.

Ms. Cowan stated if anyone hasn't heard- Ms. Faulkner resigned, which is a direct result of staffing issues. Board members who didn't know were very upset at the news. Several Board members asked what the response was when Ms. Cowan told Mr. Ballantine that Kat resigned, and Ms. Cowan stated he asked when her last day was and if she gave notice or just walked out. Several Board members were upset at the question and stated that "Kat (Ms. Faulkner) would never do that". Ms. Parker stated if City administration had a plan, Kat would have stayed.

Ms. Cowan stated they need the Board's help encouraging city administration to staff the AAC, and not in the future, but with next year's budget. We need two full-time staff added for the front desk, and we need to keep all the part-time hours we have now to be moved to drivers.

Councilor Wright had handed out a Council Update paper to all in attendance, which included info on water and sewer rates going up, the City's new cart only trash hauling program, the Older Michigianians Day trip and the City's new citywide communications strategy which included a note stating that the City is merging the Recreation, Active Adult, and Library newsletters into a single quarterly publication.

Ms. Cowan stated she heard from the Communications Department and now Councilor Wright about the AAC newsletter being combined with Recreation and the Library and being changed from 12 times a year to 4 times a year, and that no City administration (including her supervisor) had asked her or even told her that this was going to happen. She also asked why since 800 copies of the newsletter were given free to the AAC each month, with no charge to the City, was this being cut?

Ms. Parker added that the newsletter is again not the issue, that she can get the newsletter done in two days, if need be, that it's not about the newsletter being too much, it's about being better staffed, and not being pulled away from her office all the time to handle things at the front desk, with it being understaffed.

Ms. Bessler asked Councilor Wright if the plan is to eliminate the AAC and make this a community center, because that is what it feels like. Other Board

members and staff agreed. Councilor Wright stated that is not the plan, and if there ever was a plan to do that, he would not endorse it.

There were other offshoots of the conversation including the Lansing trip, which Councilor Wright suggested the AAC get more involved in. Ms. Cowan stated the Lansing trip has always been a difficult program to handle. Councilman Soltis has asked the Board several times to pay for the trip out of its fundraising account. The other issues have been council and mayoral candidates using the trip to further their runs for election (which as part of the AAC bylaws isn't allowed during any AAC program), and Councilman Soltis booking too many people for the bus provided. This year there were a plethora of issues including not being told the correct place and time to have the driver bring the bus, Councilman Soltis not knowing where to tell the driver to park, him not telling the group where to go for lunch or to meet legislators, the setup of the trip causing the group leader from the Towers to have a petition filed to have her fired for only providing 20 seats on the bus, and most importantly pulling a driver away from taking seniors to dialysis and other doctor appointments, which Ms. Cowan stated is much more important than going to Lansing for the day, and again another impossible situation to be put in. Board members agreed that Council members didn't know where to go or how to direct the group and that the leader of the Towers group had to find out info and help the rest of the group figure out where to go. They also added they didn't like that the AAC budget was used to offer the bus, fuel and staff for the trip.

Councilor Wright stated he had a hard out at 2:20 pm, which was nearing.

19-08. Treasurer's Report.

Ms. Cowan supplied the April 2025 treasurer's report copies and went over some items on the report.

Motion by Ms. Patton seconded by Ms. Quigley to approve the April Treasurer's report.

Yeas: Bessler, Mowry, Patton, Ratliff, Salley, Smith, Topping and Quigley.

Nays: None.

Excused: Juska-Svoba.

19-09. Council & Administration Updates.

Councilor Wright stated that the City's budget has lots of different moving parts and he would support us in any way he could. He would take what was talked about today to heart and try to get us some answers. And he told Board members to email him any questions or concerns they have.

Councilor Wright passed out a post card with a QR code so the Board members could give input on the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Several Board members stated they don't have a phone that can scan the code and don't have a computer or even an email address, so they couldn't go to the website to give input either. Several members stated that is another reason why the monthly printed newsletter and the senior center staff are so important to them, because they help them with things like this.

Board members stated they were glad that staff made them aware of what's been going on behind the scenes with staffing, that they knew staffing wasn't great, but didn't understand the full spectrum. Board members had a discussion on what to do, and they decided they would go to Council meetings to ask City administration and Council for a plan to better staff the AAC, with next year's budget.

19-10. Adjournment.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:25 pm. Our next meeting will be on Tuesday, June 17, 2025 at 1:00 pm.

Jennifer Cowan
Active Adult Supervisor