

## Northwest Senior Services Board Meeting Minutes

**March 10, 2026**

**Members Present In-person, via teams, or Telephonically:** Mary Kanter, Carl Bender, George Edward, Georgiann Dustin, Jana Finkbonner, Mike Shaw, Morgan Hendricks, Shirley Bennett, Lucretia Devine, Jennifer Lautenbach, Gail Leschine-Seitz, Stephen Schubert, Jodi Sipes

**Members Absent:** Laura Castro-Benzing

**Staff Present:**

Amanda McDade, Katie Durbec, Bethany Chamberlin

**Guest:** Grethe Cammermeyer, Marianne Bender, Michael Johnson

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**Quorum at 1:05 PM**

**Review of the January 17, 2025, Minutes:** Motion made by George Edward to accept the minutes from the January 17, 2026 meeting and seconded by Jennifer Lautenbach. **Motion Passed.**

**Announcements:** Amy's Place is hosting "Miles for Memories" in the Bellis Fair Mall in Bellingham on March 28<sup>th</sup> at 9am. All are invited to attend.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Committee Updates:**

**Save Ourselves**

This Committee continues to meet and get materials together. They have been working steadily on their mission statement and collaborating with different groups for funding, volunteers, and resources. They have decided on an honor-based sliding fee scale for membership, and they are still deciding on what types of memberships will be offered. Lucretia provided an overview of the Save Ourselves mission for the newer board members.

Georgiann Dustin asked the Save Ourselves Committee if they would like additional support and help from this board, but right now they are just focusing on their island before involving additional counties.

**Legislative Advocacy**

The NWSSB had a successful advocacy trip to Olympia. There was a detailed plan for speaking to legislators and it went really well. The biggest ask was for Health Homes funding. Advisory Board member George Edward shared his personal story with the legislators of his father receiving Meals on Wheels and how that helped combat social isolation.

Bethany extended a thank you to all board members who receive our advocacy alerts and respond to them.

## Outreach

The whole board is a part of this 'committee'. A general reminder was shared that NWRC would love to come out in person and present our services to any organization or social group.

### **Advocacy Trip to DC:**

Bethany Chamberlin is traveling to Washington DC next week for the US Aging Conference and shared some of topics that will be covered including the USAging budget, Medicare, and aging policy updates. At the end of the conference, she will join other AAA reps from Washington State to meet with elected officials.

### **Social Isolation Coalition:**

Bethany Chamberlin shared her ideas for revamping the social isolation committee to increase involvement and action among members. She asked our board if there are additional members interested in combatting social isolation through monthly meetings and starting small programs. This could include phone calls to older county residents who are socially isolated.

There were ideas shared by the board to utilize students, churches/pastors, and social groups from senior centers to make some of these calls. Another idea is hosting a meal at a community space for neighbors in a specific area.

Bethany will start a monthly standing meeting for interested members to join.

### **Executive Director Updates**

NWRC is still growing and there are many new hires coming on board. We are preparing for WA Cares, so we've made several hires specific to that program (Benefits navigator, ADR and a Supervisor). We have also hired several behavioral health clinicians.

In Skagit, Nutrition is the big topic and is taking up a lot of our director's time. There are meetings with mayors of the various towns within Skagit County. The county had, up until this year, been running all senior nutrition themselves and can no longer afford to do this. It will end on 6/30/26. There was a very high standard set by the county that is difficult to uphold. NWRC has some contingency plans for the scenario of no organization taking on the contract by 6/30.

The legislature and the governor are aware of Health Homes and it is in both the House and the Senate budget. We are very hopeful that when we hear news on Thursday, it will be funded through the rest of the budget cycle.

The Federal government is currently conducting a Medicaid fraud audit in Minnesota. Washington State just received a letter of warning stating they are about to do the same here. There is some focus on Medicaid Transportation, Substance Use Disorder treatment, and home/community-based services.

This will take a lot of staff and time from the state

Foundational Community Supports for supported employment have come to WA State and we have started a Supported Employment program at NWRC in Skagit. Clients on Medicaid will need to meet the federal work

requirement and we will now have a way to help people who want to work find jobs. Supervisor Chelsie Brann will come to our next board meeting to talk to us about this program.

**Updates from our Communities:**

Jen Lautenbach shared that the Parks and Recreation department in Whatcom County is working to bring together elected officials from each of the cities to talk about senior services, what those look like throughout Whatcom County, and opportunities for collaboration.

There was some discussion around senior centers and the difference between senior centers and AAAs. AAAs provide services that the senior centers can utilize and run out of their centers. AAAs do not fund or run the senior centers themselves. Each senior center is operated and funded independently, often by their county/city.

Cold weather shelters are closing in two weeks for Skagit County.

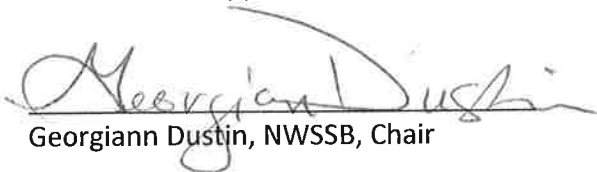
There were some questions raised about Whatcom Council On Aging's (WCOA) partnership with San Juan County to help fund nutrition dollars. There is no current known threat to that relationship and WCOA continues to grow.

**Adjourn:**

**The meeting adjourned at 2:52 PM.**

Katie Durbec, Agency Administrator

Reviewed and approved by the Northwest Senior Services Board at the May 12, 2026 meeting.



Georgiann Dustin, NWSSB, Chair