



Northwest Senior Services Board

March 10, 2026

1:00 pm – 3:30 pm

Hybrid Meeting

In-Person Mount Vernon NWRC Office 301 Valley Mall Way, Suite 100 Mount Vernon, WA (360) 676-6749	<u>Join Teams Meeting</u> Meeting ID: 245 219 500 144 37 Passcode: ot2ZG9ZV
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AGENDA

Agenda Topic	Action Required	Time
1. Call to Order Chair – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of guests • Roll Call • Review of January Minutes • Announcements • Public Comment 	Motion	1:00 pm – 1:10 pm
2. Committee Updates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Save Ourselves b. Social Isolation c. Legislative Advocacy d. Outreach 	Information	1:10 pm – 1:30 pm
3. Advocacy Trip to Olympia - Recap	Information	1:30 pm – 1:45 pm
4. Advocacy Trip to DC	Information	1:45 pm – 2:00 pm
5. Social Isolation Coalition	Information	2:00 pm – 2:20 pm
6. Break		2:20 pm – 2:30 pm
7. Executive Director Updates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislative Updates 	Information	2:30 pm – 3:00 pm
8. Updates from Our Communities	Information	3:00 pm – 3:30 pm
Adjourn	Motion	3:30 pm



****Upcoming 2026 Meetings:**

- May 12th, 2026
- July 14th, 2026
- September 8th, 2026 – *Optional lunch prior to meeting*
- November 10th, 2026

Anyone needing special accommodations to participate in a meeting should contact NWRC at least 48 hours in advance of the scheduled meeting.

For more information, please contact the NWRC office at (360) 676-6749
600 Lakeway Drive, Bellingham, WA 98225

Northwest Senior Services Board Meeting Minutes

January 13, 2026

Members Present In-person, via teams, or Telephonically: Lucretia Devine, Shirley Bennett, Georgiann Dustin, George Edward, Jana Finkbonner, Morgan Hendricks, Mary Kanter, Mike Shaw, Jodi Sipes, Laura Castro-Benzing, Stephen Schubert

Members Absent: Carl Bender, Jennifer Lautenbach, Gail Leschine-Seitz

Staff Present:

Amanda McDade, Katie Durbec, Bethany Chamberlin

Guest: Bryan Tidwell, Library Manager on Whidbey Island

Quorum at 1:02 PM

Review of the November 18, 2025, Minutes: Motion made by Shirley Bennett to accept the minutes from the November 18, 2025 meeting and seconded by Georgiann Dustin. **Motion Passed.**

Announcements: None.

Public Comment: None.

Review of Committees & Updates

Georgiann Dustin made a request to the committees to develop some guidelines with a committee purpose and steps they are taking and she encouraged board members to join a committee if they have not already.

Social Isolation – This committee is steadily regaining momentum after the committee lead stepped back last year. Jana Finkbonner brought up the topic of pallet homes for discussion. Pallet homes are single room shelters for the unhoused that are being built in some tribal communities. This has led to some social isolation because residents are missing a common gathering area to socialize.

Transportation grant money is coming in from the federal government. Amy’s place in the Bellis Fair mall was created to combat isolation by bringing individuals with memory loss into the community to be together.

Save Ourselves –Lucretia Devine provided an update that this committee is still meeting regularly. A survey was completed by community members to determine which services were most needed.

Advocacy Trip to Olympia

Bethany and Georgiann provided details about the advocacy trip to Olympia including dates, times, agenda and invited other board members to join for the trip.

Several board members volunteered to attend including George Edward, Shirley Bennett and Laura Castro-Benzing.

Growing the NWSSB

There are openings on the NWSSB for Whatcom, Skagit and Island Counties. An ask was made to board members to keep an ear out for anyone they know who may be interested in joining.

Executive Director Updates

Amanda McDade provided an update on:

- The governing board meeting in December 2025. The 2026 budget was approved, and Amanda is in the middle of her two-year contract through the end of 2026. Indigenous People's Day was added as a paid holiday for NWRC.
- A State Budget Update - The Health Homes program made it into the Governor's budget which is a huge win for the program. Ryan Blackwell and Amanda attended the State of Reform Conference in Seattle and there was a lot of discussion around investing more in this program. The overall budget for the state is still not in a great place, but there is awareness spreading that Health Homes saves money and is worth pushing forward. At the advocacy day next week, we can reiterate what the AAAs do and what services they provide- remind lawmakers what an impact we have- "AAAs are the state's best kept secret" If Health Homes is solidified, NWRC will be able to hire a Clinical Director later this year.
- The Meals on Wheels Contract- NWRC has a few local candidates interested in taking on this contract and we are currently evaluating options.

There was some group discussion around what Health Homes is, how eligibility is determined, and what services are provided to Health Homes clients.

Goal Setting for 2026

Revisiting the 2024-2027 strategic plan. The board packet includes the goal areas for this 3 year period of time. Social Isolation and DEI goals were added to the most recent Strategic Plan. Discussion opened to hear of any ideas or suggestions for the Strategic Plan goals.

Jana Finkbonner suggested 'listening sessions' as a more effective method to connect with tribes. Jana is going to work on getting Amanda some names from our 6 tribes so we can schedule these sessions. Another idea is to send out a survey at an elders meeting.

There was some discussion around the social isolation goal and how it relates to our committee and the social isolation coalition.

In our next iteration of the strategic plan, we will be working to include more tangible goals.

Updates from our Communities:

Georgiann Dustin shared the legislative priorities for 2026 and will send a copy to the group before the trip to Olympia. These include food security issues in older adults, case management, and the end of the Joint Legislative Executive Committee. We also want to encourage support of the dementia action collaborative and the use of age-inclusive language.

A board member shared that the Blaine Senior center is under new ownership by the parks department and there are a lot of changes that the community is adjusting to.

Adjourn:

The meeting adjourned at 2:36PM

Katie Durbec, Agency Administrator

Reviewed and approved by the Northwest Senior Services Board at the March 10, 2026 meeting.

Georgiann Dustin, NWSSB, Chair

Connecting Our Community

A Proposal for the NWRC Senior Social Isolation Coalition

1. The Problem: The "Silent Epidemic"

- **The Reality:** 1 in 4 adults age 65+ are socially isolated, leading to significant health risks.
- **Health Impact:** Prolonged isolation is as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and increases risks for **heart disease, dementia, and stroke**.
- **Local Need:** Highlight that many seniors in our area may not recognize isolation as a problem due to the stigma associated with loneliness.

2. Our Vision: A Coalition for Connection

- **Mission:** To engage diverse stakeholders to increase public awareness and advocate for policy changes that combat isolation.
- **Core Goal:** Move from isolated individuals to a **culture of connection** built on kindness, respect, and mutual service.

3. Proposed Strategic Pillars

- **Screening & Identification:** Use evidence-based tools in routine healthcare and community check-ins to identify those at highest risk.
- **Technology Bridging:** Implement simplified tablets or voice-activated assistants to help homebound seniors stay in touch with family.
- **Meaningful Activity:** Create diverse programs—from **intergenerational postcard exchanges** to culinary adventures—that give seniors a sense of purpose.
- **Peer Support:** Recruit and match "peers" who can provide a "soft approach" to outreach, especially for those who are distrustful or homebound.

4. Implementation Framework

- **Plan:** Identify local resources, existing gaps, and specific underserved populations.
- **Partner:** Collaborate with local senior centers, faith-based organizations, and community partners to market services.
- **Measure:** Collect data securely to detect changes in risk over time and ensure equity in our reach.

5. Call to Action for the Advisory Board

- **Advocacy:** Use your voice to promote policy changes, such as advocating for age-friendly spaces in our community.
- **Leadership:** Model connection values and help destigmatize conversations about loneliness.
- **Endorsement:** We request the board's official support to apply for grants (e.g., [HHS](https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/connection/resources/index.html) or AARP Foundation) to fund initial outreach.
<https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/connection/resources/index.html>