

**Tri-County Opportunities Council
Board of Directors Meeting
August 22, 2024**

Chair Harmon called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

The membership recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ms. Jacobs, Board Secretary, took roll call. A quorum was present.

Members Present: (In-person participants are bolded)

Sue Britt, Kim Dahl, **Stephanie Foes**, Lynnae Garrett, **Al Harmon**, **Marcia Heuer**, **John Hockstadt**, **Tom Howes**, **Julie Jacobs**, **Betty Johnson**, **Lisa Johnson**, Betsy Kinder, **Ron Kleppin**, **Kenneth Krogulski**, Michael McEmery, Inga Neuner, Linda Pennell, Ronald Preston, Juanita Randklev, Becky Rich, **David Torres**, **Marissa Trumper**, **Jeanne Vargas**, and **Derek Whited**.

Members Absent:

Reed Akre, Charlotte Balensiefen, Susan Bursztynsky, Robin Camplain, Mary Cork, Bernene Dahl, David Ditzler, BJ Holocker, Kristy Jones, Brad Lindstrom, Sonjia Martin, Ginny McPerryman, Denise Russell, and Laura Watters.

Others Present:

Rachael DeSpain, Dawn Kanzler, Brandi Newell, Tammy Saenz, and Neddie Watts.

Minutes:

The July 23, 2024, Board minutes were previously sent to all members for review. Mr. Hockstadt made a motion to approve the minutes, which Ms. Lisa Johnson seconded. A roll call vote was called, and the motion carried. Mr. Howes abstained.

Financial Report:

The June 2024 Financial Reports were provided to the membership for review prior to tonight's meeting. Mr. Kleppin made a motion to accept the June 2024 Financial Reports and file them for audit. Ms. Jacobs seconded the motion. A roll call vote was called, and the motion carried.

Special Guest: Roger Pavey, IACAA President/CEO, shared information with the membership on the Low-Income Discount Rates (LIDR) that will come into effect on October 1 for Illinois residents.

Fiscal Report: Dawn Kanzler

Ms. Kanzler reported that the ending book balance for July was (\$91,014.94). A balance of \$599,333 was owed on the line of credit to Sauk Valley Bank as of July 31, 2024. She explained that money is flowing slowly from the state because of their year-end rollover process and a glitch with the Grantee Reporting System (GRS) for some grants. She expects the cash will flow again in September.

The cyber policy was renewed with BCS, effective September 1, 2024. The annual premium increased by \$84 to \$7,206.

Program Reports:

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG): Neddie Watts and Jaime Vos

Ms. Watts reported that on August 6, she mailed out a copy of the Community Action Plan (CAP) and Community Needs Assessment (CNA) for the Board to review. Discussion followed. She requested Board action to accept and submit the 2025 Community Action Plan and Community Needs Assessment to the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Ms. Vargas made a motion to accept and submit the 2025 Community Action Plan and Community Needs Assessment to the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Mr. Kleppin seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Additionally, she stated that a copy of the 2025 CSBG Work Programs was included in tonight's Board packets. She apologized for not changing 2024 to 2025 at the top right-hand corner before printing them. She informed them that these programs will begin January 1, 2025, if approved by the State. All programs were continued from the previous year, revised, or new based on the Community Needs Assessment. She reviewed the two new programs: Water/Sewer Payment Assistance Program and Community Resource Rally.

The Office of Community Assistance (OCA) will conduct Comprehensive Monitoring of the 2024 CSBG Community Services Block Grant program from September 24 to 26, 2024. This review aims to ensure that your agency is operating effectively and in compliance with the applicable statutes, regulations, and policies. The Program Specialist, Jessica Becker, will also attend the Board Meeting in Sterling on September 24.

Foster Grandparents: Brandi Newell

Ms. Newell and her Assistant Coordinator, Jeffrey Newcomer, traveled to Baltimore from July 29 to August 1 to attend the AmeriCorps Seniors Convening. The convening was sold out, with 1,300 attendees. AmeriCorps Seniors staff, peers, and partners shared meaningful information in break-out sessions designed to educate attendees and enhance programs funded by AmeriCorps Seniors.

Soon after their return from Baltimore, eight new volunteers attended orientation. Following four days of training, the program held a back-to-school in-service for all volunteers.

All of their returning volunteers have been placed in classrooms for the new school year. Some will begin after Labor Day, but the majority are already serving. Four of their eight new volunteers have also been placed in classrooms. They currently have 49 volunteers serving and continue to seek opportunities for the remaining four.

Early Head Start/Head Start Program: Rachael DeSpain

Ms. DeSpain shared that August is an exciting month. During the first two weeks, the program welcomed part-year staff back, acknowledged full-year staff's summer efforts, and brought everyone together for professional learning opportunities. Staff received a balance of training and showed great enthusiasm for the upcoming year. The program is still searching for passionate individuals who want to work and grow in early childhood education. While significant gains in hiring have occurred, they remain understaffed.

The program focuses on locating, interviewing, and hiring staff for the second Streator Early Head Start Center-based classroom. Once staffed, a timeline to open and provide in-person services will be developed and quickly executed. The Spring Valley Head Start classroom will be moving to a new location. They are thrilled about entering the school district's elementary building, having a more child-focused space, working with new landlords, and collaborating with school district employees to highlight their work further and support our shared students and their families.

The Office of Head Start has begun issuing letters outlining the results of the full enrollment initiative, which saw over 75% of Head Start programs throughout the nation enroll following the pandemic. Programs are getting notified of forced enrollment reduction directives and funds that will be recaptured. There are opportunities to challenge the Office of Head Start's decision, and the program will consider such if necessary. As of August 15, 2024, the program has received no notification. (Our program's full enrollment initiative ended in February of this year)

Emphasis on locating, attending, and bringing awareness to Agency services during community events remains a top priority. Members were encouraged to offer any information regarding upcoming community events in their area.

Final Rule: The newly revised Head Start Performance Standards went into law today. She will provide a handout that outlines the changes and their potential impacts on the program. No additional funding will be issued at this time.

In tonight's handouts, Ms. DeSpain provided copies of the 2023-2024 Self-Assessment/Program Goal Document, an enrollment status report, the register of vacant positions, and an updated non-federal Board report. Members were asked to encourage interested candidates to visit the Agency website at www.tcochelps.org or call 1-800-323-5434. In conclusion, Ms. DeSpain reminded Board members to fill out the In-Kind/Volunteer sheet for any time spent reading over materials previously handed out.

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP): Tammy Saenz

Ms. Saenz shared that the LIHEAP program ended on August 15, but they can continue to accept missing documentation for incomplete applications until the 23rd of August. As they wrap up one program year, they are also preparing for the new program year, which will begin on October 1. October is a priority

period for older adults (60 and older), disabled individuals (receiving disability benefits from Social Security), families with children five or younger, and imminent and disconnected households.

Staff remains busy with PIPP re-certifications, organizing and filing applications, doing inventory for the intake sites, and ordering necessary supplies.

Current programs that are continued include the Neighbor to Neighbor program (customers must have Jo-Carroll utilities) and the Nicor Aide Program, which allows up to a \$250.00 payment to Nicor. The customer must have a past-due balance. If the customer is disconnected from Nicor, the payment must be enough to reconnect, or the customer must pay the difference before they can receive the \$250.00.

Weatherization/Housing Program: Wayne Thompson's report was given by Ms. Kanzler

Mr. Thompson has been in Springfield and Champaign the last two days attending utility company meetings and testing at the Training Center. Next week, he and Ms. Vos will attend the National Community Action Partnership's Annual Convention in Seattle, WA.

Mr. Thompson stated that the 2024 Weatherization Programs HHS (Health & Human Services) & State funding portions will be winding down with a September 30 end date. They have all those carryover funds already allocated to jobs. The DOE portion was complete as of June 30, and the Weatherization and Fiscal Department completed the closeout process for the DOE grant and submitted it to DCEO (Dept of Commerce & Economic Opportunity) prior to the August 14 deadline.

The Weatherization Department has received the approved HHS, State, and DOE grants for 2025, so there will be a seamless budget transition.

They continue to work on the rental units at the Victor Meadows Senior Living Apartments in Princeton, and two more buildings have been completed. As with the other units, the residents received new furnaces, central air conditioners, water heaters, refrigerators, LED lighting, R-60 attic insulation, low-flow shower and sink aerators, etc. These items are all Energy Star-rated and, in most cases, well above the efficiencies required to be Energy Star-rated items. These customers will no doubt also see substantial savings on energy bills as well as increased comfort.

They continue working on setting up the new Weatherization system (IWX) for Weatherization applications, assessments, and work orders. There have been a few setbacks, but they are finally getting past most of the system's bugs and are now entering applications and beginning to create work orders.

President/CEO's Report: Jill Calkins' report was given by Ms. Kanzler

Ms. Calkins reported that the only current Board vacancy is for Whiteside County, Category C. If members know of someone who may be interested, they can either have them contact her directly or provide her with their contact information.

She asks that members complete the annual self-evaluation by August 30. The link to the online survey was provided in tonight's handouts and emailed to members who provided their email addresses. If members desire a printed copy, they should let her know, and she will provide them with a copy along with a self-addressed stamped envelope. After August 30, she will compile the results and provide them to the Planning/Evaluation Committee for further discussion and consideration.

She reminded the membership that this is an important process in ensuring that the Board is fulfilling its duties and responsibilities and that appropriate processes are in place to ensure that the Board is giving due diligence to planning and oversight over the organization. Essentially, no one directly oversees the board, so it's vital that they take an annual objective look at themselves as individual directors and how they function as a group. It is a bit lengthy, but each section is essential. If unsure about a question, just mark "Don't know." She thanked the nine members who had already completed the survey.

Old Business:

There was no old business at this time.

New Business:

There was no old business at this time.

Next Meeting:

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 24, 2024, at the Wesley United Methodist Church, 2200 16th Avenue, Sterling, IL., at 6:00 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 7:14 p.m.