

MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 29, 2021 SENIOR ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

Chairman Ken Miller called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM at the Little Egg Harbor (“LEH”) Community Center.

There was a Flag salute and a moment of silence for our military and world peace.

Roll call was taken. Board members in attendance were: Ken Miller, Ann Mikos, Linda Cicco, Diane Coyle, Richard Dutton and Maryann O’Neill. Barbara Jo Crea, Liaison to the Township Committee, was also in attendance.

The first speaker was Chief James Hawkins of the LEH Police Department, who gave the customary update on police-related matters affecting the community. He first reported that four new police officers, two of them regular full-time officers and two of them Class II officers, and all of them LEH residents, were hired to fill openings created by retirements, and he then noted that all officers in his Department would soon be wearing body cameras. With regard to the ongoing drug problem in LEH, he reported that his officers continue to make arrests for sales and use of heroin and fentanyl, and for petty thefts by users to fund their drug habits, and he added that a number of those arrested recently for drug sales have been LEH residents rather than outsiders. He then once again cautioned against telephone scams in which seniors have been contacted by someone claiming to be a relative who needs money immediately, an Amazon employee who noticed suspicious activity in the senior’s account, or a representative of a computer-related firm seeking access to the senior’s computer to repair some malfunction. The Chief did not think it was worthwhile for the recipient of any such call to keep the caller on the line while trying to trace the call, or to report the caller’s telephone number as it appears on caller ID to the Police Department, because often such callers are actually not even in this country. He then once again urged residents to make a habit of checking their homes at a particular time every day to be sure that doors are locked, garage doors closed, exterior lights on and other precautions taken. Finally, he reported that his Department is giving high priority to locating a new site for its shooting range, the noise from which can now be heard at houses in nearby Cranberry Creek.

The next speaker was Dr. Melissa McCooley, the Superintendent of the LEH School District and herself a graduate of Pinelands Regional High School. She reported that under current rules relating to the COVID epidemic, all staff members have to provide proof of vaccination or be tested for COVID every Thursday and if a teacher tests positive, the children in his or her class are required to stay home for a period of time, which is disruptive. COVID has also necessitated the use of mental health professionals to assist some children in making the transition back to attending school live after many months of remote online learning. Dr. McCooley then reported that the LEH and Pinelands School Districts had saved a great deal of expense by sharing services, and she added that the savings would be much greater if all districts in the area were consolidated to eliminate the current duplication of boards of education, budgets, and certain services. The changeover could be structured in such a way that it would not result in loss of jobs by any current employees; instead, employees found to be duplicative would just not be replaced in the future and there would be attrition over time. She then explained that each board that wished to join in a consolidation would first have to approve it and an election would then have to be held in which residents of each district involved cast their votes in favor of or against it. She urged that anyone interested in expressing an opinion with respect to consolidation attend his or her local school board meetings and/or contact the board members and/or president.

The next speakers were Jim Hand and Michelle Arnold of Ocean Ride, an Ocean County-funded entity that provides inexpensive transportation for seniors throughout the County both on fixed bus routes that it operates and by advance reservation for medical appointments, errands or even social visits. The charge on the fixed routes is \$1 and pickups and dropoffs are made both at specified stops and at any safe spot along the route at which a rider flags down the bus or asks to be let off. One fixed route, OC6, runs two buses daily in each direction on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays between the Acme supermarket in LEH and the stores along Route 72 in Manahawkin with a number of stops on the way. Ocean Ride has 75 vehicles, all wheelchair accessible, and transports about 450 advance reservation passengers per day. It also provides free transportation, by appointment, for veterans to Veterans Administration facilities outside the County. More specifics concerning its services can be obtained and appointments for pickups can be made by calling 732-736-8989 or 1-877-929-2082.

Barbara Jo Crea then said that this would be the last Senior Advisory Board meeting she would be attending as liaison to the LEHT Township Committee because beginning in January she would no longer be on the Committee but rather would be a member of the Ocean County Board of Commissioners. She said that she enjoyed her long association with the Senior Advisory Board and would be available to be a guest speaker in the future if asked.

There will be no meeting of the Senior Advisory Board during the month of December. The next meeting of the Board will be on Monday, January 31, 2022 at 10:00 AM at the LEH Community Center. All seniors are welcome and urged to attend.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:00 A.M.

*Respectfully submitted,
Richard Dutton, Acting Secretary, LEH Senior Citizens' Advisory Board*