The following are summary minutes of the Senior Programs Advisory Board meeting held on Thursday, January 14, 2021, at 9:10 a.m. via Zoom Webinar in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

MEMBERS PRESENT:
Chair Judy Chavarría, Member-at-Large
Secretary Jo Ann Rodriguez-Haught, Frank O’Brien Papen Center Representative
Dr. Abel L. Chavarría, District 1 Representative
Sharlene Wittern, District 3 Representative
Rick Jackson, District 4 Representative
Etta Kaufman, District 6 Representative
Gabriel Montalvo, Munson Center Representative

MEMBERS ABSENT:
Vice Chair Rudy Alvarez, Eastside Center Representative
Manuel Contreras, District 5 Representative
Cheryl De Young, Benavidez Center Representative

GUESTS PRESENT:
Sonia Saldana, Senior Programs Administrator
Azucena Saucedo, Senior Programs Assistant Management Analyst
K. Lynn Gallagher, Quality of Life Department Director
Jill Aguirre, Quality of Life Senior Office Manager
Sonya Delgado, Parks and Recreation Department Director
Cathy Matthews, Parks and Recreation Landscape Architect
Toni Flores, Recording Secretary

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chair Judy Chavarría, Member-at-Large Representative, called the Senior Programs’ Advisory Board meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. on Thursday, January 14, 2021, via Zoom Webinar in Las Cruces, NM.

II. ROLL CALL: A quorum was ascertained.

III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: This item was withdrawn.

IV. MOMENT OF SILENCE: This item was withdrawn.

V. CONFLICT OF INTEREST: Board members and staff present had no conflict of interest with any item of business on the agenda.

VI. INTRODUCTIONS: Those present via Zoom Webinar were introduced and welcomed.

VII. PUBLIC COMMENT: There was no public comment.

VIII. ACTION ITEM(S):

a. Rick Jackson, District 4 Representative, moved to approve the minutes of the March 12, 2020 Senior Programs Advisory Board meeting. Gabriel Montalvo, Munson Center Representative, seconded the motion. Vote: 7 Ayes. 0 Nays. Motion carried.
b. Sonya Delgado, Parks and Recreation Department Director; and Cathy Mathews, Parks and Recreation Landscape Architect, were introduced and welcomed. C. Mathews reported the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) is commemorating its 50th anniversary with the construction of outdoor fitness parks in every state. This is part of AARP’s ongoing commitment to help people take control of their health as they age. As a result, AARP has chosen Las Cruces as a recipient of the FitLot Outdoor Exercise Equipment. C. Mathews explained she is seeking the Board’s approval on the AARP FitLot Outdoor Fitness concept and is looking for a recommendation from the Board for City Council’s consideration on a location for the fitness equipment. AARP will install the outdoor fitness park equipment and shade structure in the specified location that meets their requirements and upon the City’s agreement.

S. Delgado added that the city of Las Cruces was the only city in New Mexico that was selected for this community project. She stated once the location and the agreement are finalized, then the installation of the equipment will begin. She anticipated the project will begin in late spring.

C. Mathews stated there are certain characteristics that AARP wishes to see in a community and the site location to qualify for the installation of the outdoor fitness park. The community characteristics checklist that AARP wishes to see is that there must be a lack of access to outdoor fitness space or programs, has a high population of multicultural adults 55+ within ¾ mile walking distance of the park, is in an underserved community that may not have the resources to create their own outdoor fitness space, and has a high rate of lifestyle related preventable illnesses like obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease. The requirements for the park are that it must be a park owned and operated by the City of Las Cruces Parks and Recreation Department, located in densely populated communities, have a high foot traffic, and be situated along a trail or bike path that connects multiple communities. In addition, Parks and Recreation staff felt it would be beneficial for the FitLot fitness equipment to be in a park that had access to a restroom, drinking fountain, adequate parking, and a bus stop. She stated Parks and Recreation staff evaluated many parks in the Las Cruces community to make sure that they met the AARP’s community requirements. They verified that the City of Las meets their requirements and qualifies as an underserved community regarding outdoor fitness. Las Cruces is making great strides to correct that, and this opportunity will lead the City in that direction by making more outdoor fitness spaces available to the community. According to the Department of Health statistics for Dona Ana County, the county suffers from high-rate lifestyle related to preventable illnesses. Staff looked at locations that are in densely populated neighborhoods and those that are adjacent or nearby to trails, bike paths and bus stops. They also considered and highly ranked those locations that could be accessible by various modes of transportation.

C. Mathews presented to the Board a diagram of the fitness park and the equipment that will be installed including a shade structure which is essential in this climate. The proposed sites that were considered included: Valley View Park which is adjacent to Munson Senior Center; Hadley Avenue Recreation Complex, Sage Café Senior Center; Four Hills Park, Villa Encantada and Benavidez Recreation Center. She reviewed the Matrix of the possible sites. Parks and Recreation Program staff’s top choice for the project was the Benavidez Recreation Center. C. Mathews explained the Henry Benavidez Recreation Center ranked high on the list meeting all of AARP’s requirements including Parks and Recreation Department’s criteria. She stated staff considered Valley View Park which meets all the criteria. However, Valley View Park already has existing outdoor fitness equipment available. Hadley Avenue Recreation Complex also meets all the criteria, but approximately, two years ago the City completed the installation of an outdoor
fitness facility at Hadley Avenue. Sage Café is less accessible. It has no walking trails adjacent to it. Unfortunately, there is not a bus stop within ¼ mile walking distance of the facility. Also, this year an outdoor fitness gym was installed at the East Mesa Recreation Center which is across the street from the Sage Café Senior Center. Villa Encantada is an excellent choice. It meets all the criteria; however, accessibility to the equipment itself would be very difficult. The park also serves as a retention pond; it has steep slopes and is less accessible without making extensive modifications to that park. The Benavidez Recreation Center is the top choice because it meets all the criteria as outlined by AARP. It is in a correct community, and it does not have any outdoor fitness equipment. It will be adjacent to a trail that is currently in process of being constructed, and there is a bus stop within walking distance of the park. The Benavidez Recreation Center serves the broader community and seniors as well. C. Mathews reported the Parks and Recreation Program Master Plan that was developed two years ago, before this opportunity was even considered, included the plans to construct an outdoor fitness area at this site. Therefore, the Benavidez Recreation Center checks all the boxes. It meets all the AARP’s criteria excellently and also meets the additional criteria that Parks and Recreation wishes to see for this facility to make it accessible, and a true benefit for this community.

C. Mathews stated it is conceivable that Parks and Recreation may not be able to open this facility as soon as it is available due to the Governor's restrictions. However, as soon as the facilities can reopen, then Parks and Recreation will open it to the public. She feels it is important to take advantage of this opportunity regardless of the restrictions currently in place. J. Rodriguez-Hauta stated it is closer to the Mayfield area. She preferred a location closer to Las Cruces. G. Montalvo inquired if the FitLot fitness equipment will be enclosed. C. Mathews stated it is the intention of Parks and Recreation staff that this facility be available to the public during normal park hours. After daylight hours, the park will be closed to the public, and it will not be enclosed. Dr. A. Chavarria stated it is a great idea. It will help seniors because it is very important that seniors keep moving and exercising. After further discussion, R. Jackson moved to approve the notion of the FitLot Outdoor Fitness Park sponsored by AARP and to recommend the Benavidez Recreation Center as location for the FitLot Fitness Park. Motion seconded by Dr. A. Chavarria.

Vote: 7 Ayes, 0 Nays. Motion carried unanimously.

Chair J. Chavarria stated this is great opportunity for Las Cruces. Once the installation has been completed, she suggested Parks and Recreation invite the community to learn about the FitLot fitness park. S. Delgado and C. Mathews were thanked for the presentation.

c. Dr. Abel Chavarria, District 1 Representative, moved to table the nomination and election of the Senior Programs' Advisory Board Officers for 2021 until the Board can meet in person again. Ettta Kaufman, District 6 Representative, seconded the motion. Vote: 7 Ayes. 0 Nays. Motion carried.

IX. SENIOR PROGRAMS ADMINISTRATOR’S REPORT: Sonia Saldana, Senior Programs Administrator, provided an update on the pending Senior Programs Advisory Board action items. She stated in March 2020 Senior Programs staff was in the process of distributing a survey to receive input from the congregate meal program participants on the meal reservation system. However, shortly thereafter Senior Programs closed the centers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and were unable to distribute the survey. Since then, she has received many concerns regarding the meal reservations and people requesting additional information. S. Saldana's
recommendation is to table the action items that pertain to the facilities until the centers reopen again. This way group discussions can be held in person to better explain and clarify proposed changes such as with the meal reservation system, the issues with the parking and the doors at the Eastside Community Center. There was Board consensus to table these items until the centers reopen.

S. Saldana reported that Marilu Darby, District 2 Representative, passed away during the summer. She stated Senior Programs’ centers remain closed to the public due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, staff have been working diligently through the pandemic providing the Grab N’ Go meal services, home delivered meals, case management, delivery of food boxes, distribution of PPE supplies and conducting wellbeing checks.

S. Saldana provided an overview of the services provided during the closure of the centers. She reported Senior Programs continues to provide the Grab N’ Go meals at the centers, Monday through Friday. From March 16 through December 31, 2020, Senior Programs provided 137,691 congregate meals which included the weekend frozen meals for those individuals who did not want to leave their homes. During this time frame, over 217,434 Home Delivered Meals were provided to the homebound clients. She reported an increase in the number of people requesting home delivered meal services. The Home Care Aides were unable to provide home care program services in the clients’ homes. As a result, they have been assisting with other services. They conducted 14,914 wellbeing calls to individuals that are at high risk or individuals that requested to be placed on the call list. They are also assisting with the distribution of the Grab N’ Go meals. S. Saldana stated Senior Programs continued to provide, through the pandemic, Respite Care Services for those individuals who are homebound and whose family members are working. A total of 2,817 hours of family support services have been provided from March 16 through December 31, 2020. Senior Programs also distributed 3,351 food boxes during the summer that were received from the State. In partnership with the Food Bank and Casa de Peregrinos, Senior Programs distributed over 1500 food boxes during the monthly food distributions at each of the centers. The Meal Services Delivery Drivers also distributed food bags to homebound clients identified by the Long-Term Care program as being high risk. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Senior Programs has also distributed over 7,000 masks and 1500 bottles of hand sanitizer to seniors and the public. Senior Programs recently received 500 masks from the Non-Metro Area Agency on Aging and will soon be distributing those masks. Another project that Senior Programs’ staff is working on is assisting with the COVID-19 vaccination registrations.

Dr. Abel Chavarria commented his mother is a recipient of the Meals on Wheels program. The meals are excellent and very much appreciated. He inquired who is helping the homebound seniors. S. Saldana stated if assistance is needed, Senior Programs will reach out to its community partners such as New Mexico Aging and Long Term Services Department, City of Las Cruces Fire Department Mobile Integrated Healthcare Program or Adult Protective Services.

Azucena Saucedo, Senior Programs Assistant Management Analyst, provided a brief overview of grants awarded to Senior Programs for COVID-19 relief and explained how the additional funds were utilized. A. Saucedo stated the additional funds were used to supplement existing funding received from the Non-Metro Area Agency on Aging and City of Las Cruces. With this funding, Senior Programs was able to provide additional services and purchase much needed supplies for the meal programs. Due to an increase in demand for the congregate and home delivered meals, in December 2020 Senior Programs increased the congregate meal program serving days at the
Sage Café Senior Center from four to five days a week (Monday through Friday) and continued to providing weekend frozen meals for both congregate and home delivered meal program participants. Many of the participants were extremely grateful for the services being provided.

She reported the Meals on Wheels program received an additional $148,000. Additionally, Senior Programs received funding for COVID-19 related expenses from the Families First Coronavirus Relief Act (FFCRA) and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES). These are the three main sources of additional grant funding, including local funding. A. Saucedo stated not only has there been an increase in the number of meals served, supplies, and food expenses, but also, a 63 percent increase in donations, which is very helpful for the program to help maintain the current level of services. S. Saldana asked that Board members to please thank the program participants for their generosity, because the donations help offset program costs. A. Saucedo stated overall, the Senior Programs' budget looks healthy and strong. She anticipates there will be enough funding to continue providing the same level of services from now until the end of the Fiscal Year—June 30, 2021.

Dr. A. Chavarria extended his appreciation to the staff at the centers who are providing the Grab N' Go meal services and the homebound meals. He commended staff on the excellent job they are doing.

X. CHAIR AND BOARD MEMBER UPDATES: The next Board meeting will be held virtually via Zoom on Thursday, February 11, 2021 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

XI. ADJOURNMENT: Dr. Abel Chavarria moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:20 a.m.

Submitted,

Toni Flores, Recording Secretary