



Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency

BOARD MEETING MINUTES



Wednesday, August 17, 2022 at 6:00pm

Cass County Admin Building: 2nd Floor, 120 N. Broadway, Cassopolis, MI 49031

PRESENT: C. Christopher, M. Franks, G. Moore, M. Underwood, M. Warren, J. Wuerfel

ABSENT: R. Benjamin, K. Lyons, G. Patterson-Gladney

GUESTS: Steve Carra, Michigan House of Representatives, 59th District

STAFF: D. Oleneack, A. Slack, K. Smith Oldham

The meeting attendees stood and recited the SMCAA mission statement.

QUORUM: A quorum was established and the meeting was called to order at 5:58pm.

AGENDA ACTION: Motion made by **J. Wuerfel** to accept the August 17, 2022 Agenda, seconded by **C. Christopher**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

MINUTES ACTION: Motion to approve the July 20, 2022 Board Minutes was made by **J. Wuerfel**, seconded by **M. Underwood**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

OFFICERS' REPORT: **M. Warren** acknowledged Michigan Representative **Steve Carra** as a guest at the Board meeting. **K. Smith Oldham** explained that **S. Carra** had been invited to the Board meeting because the directors had asked for local legislators to attend during their self-evaluation. **S. Carra** thanked the Board for having him present and stated he was looking forward to learning more about Community Action and our work in Southwest Michigan, specifically in Cass County.

C. Christopher had nothing to report.

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS: **a. Fiscal Summary.** **D. Oleneack** presented the fiscal summary for June and July. As of the end of July, this summary is 83% into the fiscal year and the agency is currently at a positive year-to-date balance. She noted that line item Occupancy Costs is over-budget due to the extra warehouse space rented for the City of Benton Harbor Water Distribution program, but that the funds are allocated for this extra cost.

M. Underwood asked why line item Housing Construction and Rehab is only at 12% of budget used. **D. Oleneack** explained that this includes the City of



Benton Harbor Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and CDBG-CV (Coronavirus) programs, and that there are a number of projects in-progress. This percentage should increase before the end of the fiscal year as projects are completed.

J. Wuerfel questioned if there is a delay in revenue. She replied she would expect the Total Revenue expended to be equal or higher than 73% as the Agency is 83% into the fiscal year. **D. Oleneack** said there is more revenue in the budget, such as additional funds from the COVID Emergency Rental Assistance (CERA) programs. To add it to the budget's Grant Income would require the Board's approval, and with how often funds were being added, this would have been happening monthly. She also stated that programs like the COVID Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) were multi-year grants that carried over into this fiscal year, so projecting the appropriations carried over was difficult when the proposed budget was developed in 2021. **J. Wuerfel** said she would like to have the additional funds presented to the Board in the future. She also reiterated that she did not understand why Total Revenue's expenditure percentage was so low. **D. Oleneack** said she would have a better explanation for the Board in September.

A. ACTION:

A motion to accept and place on file the Fiscal Summary was made by **C. Christopher** and was seconded by **M. Underwood**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

b. Programmatic Report. K. Smith Oldham presented the programmatic reports for June and July by combining the service numbers for the two months. There were (225) households serviced with utility assistance, (8) households with deliverable fuel, (20) with vehicle repairs and/or gas cards, (6) with water and wastewater arrearage payments, and (208) households with rent assistance. (3,246) households received food commodities from CSFP, (1,868) households through TEFAP, and (503) households received assistance through SMCAA food pantries. (8) households stayed in the shelter for a total of (374) bed nights and (3) households were boarded in hotels for a total of (59) bed nights.

There were (4) individuals served through DHHS's Rapid Rehousing Consolidated and (7) through Supportive Housing. **K. Smith Oldham** alerted the Board that MDHHS announced they would not be applying for MSHDA's Supportive Housing programs for FY2023. SMCAA will be applying on its own, and the application process is in-progress currently. She will bring more information to the Board as applicable.

The Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program serviced (16) individuals, a decrease as one participant passed away. There are (23) individuals enrolled in the City of Benton Harbor Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), though only (21) actively participated in July. Water Distribution at the SMCAA Self-Serve

Station has increased; we provided (375) households received (2,243) cases of water from SMCAA's self-serve station.

Weatherization has completed (27) jobs this fiscal year. Currently, there are (7) projects that have completed the mechanical aspect of the job and are moving forward with weatherization contractors. There are also (5) deferral projects that the mechanical contractors have completed and are moving into weatherization. These projects should be fully completed in the next few months. There have been no Whole Housing Rehab or Minor Home Repair projects completed this year, and focus has been on completing City of Benton Harbor CDBG and CDBG-CV projects. There are (25) CDBG and (3) CDBG-CV active applications that are in-progress for services right now. Overall, we have completed (23) housing repairs through CARES in FY22 as well.

As of July 31st, SMCAA has serviced 7,061 unduplicated individuals in FY22 compared to 4,629 in FY21. **J. Wuerfel** asked if this increase is due to the increased number of programming or if there are more individuals who need assistance following the coronavirus pandemic. **K. Smith Oldham** replied it may be a mix of both, and **A. Slack** added that the eligibility increase to 200% of federal poverty allows for a new level of clients to apply for service.

B. ACTION:

A motion to accept and place on file the Programmatic Report was made by **C. Christopher** and was seconded by **M. Underwood**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

c. Director's Report. **K. Smith Oldham** presented the Director's Report. Some of the highlights over the past month included:

Legislative Update: **David Bradley** shared that the House passed the appropriations bill for the FY2023 Energy and Water. The FY2023 Labor HHS Appropriations bill, which is our CSBG funds, was pulled from the floor. **D. Bradley** expects at least one continuing resolution and he hopes it will keep eligibility at 200% FPL.

K. Smith Oldham shared a letter from U.S. Representative Fred Upton thanking SMCAA for reaching out to him regarding H.R. 5129: CSBG Modernization Act.

City of Benton Harbor: Bottled water distribution has picked up at the warehouse. The Health Department and DHHS are also starting to hand out and install filters in residents' homes. **M. Warren** asked if these filters must be exchanged periodically, and **K. Smith Oldham** confirmed they do and that residents should be educated on this by the distributors. She also reported the City has replaced over 80% of the lead service lines to-date. Additionally, SMCAA has contracted our host site to be a Water Support Organization, which means Abundant Life will provide workers to bring water cases left outside in the sun and heat into homes. This new project was encouraged by the Governor's office and MDHHS.

Weatherization Expansion: Rumors of the Weatherization (WX) Stimulus continue, and the Bureau of Community Action and Economic Opportunity (BCAEO) would like all CAAs to be at capacity when funding finally arrives. **K. Smith Oldham** has been working to secure more office space, and **S. Klank** has identified additional staff and equipment the department will need for the increased funding. However, **K. Smith Oldham** has informed BCAEO that our Agency projects to be at capacity by the beginning of 2023, rather than an October 1, 2022 timeframe. SMCAA received some start-up funding from BCAEO and we were encouraged to purchase an additional vehicle. A new WX truck was purchased in July.

G. Moore asked if there would be additional WX staff needed. **K. Smith Oldham** replied **S. Klank** has identified (4) additional staff: a coordinator, an energy auditor, another eligibility specialist, and a clerical staff member.

MSHDA MI-HOPE Application: The State is encouraging Michigan CAAs to apply for MSHDA's Michigan Housing Opportunities Promoting Energy-Efficiency (MI-HOPE) Program. MSHDA and BCAEO feel that this would blend well with the Weatherization Program due to program guidelines that restrict our Average Cost per Unit (ACPU).

Completed Certifications: **K. Smith Oldham** announced that the Weatherization department has gained a new BPI-certified Energy Auditor. **E. Pulka**, who has been with SMCAA for over a year, earned his certification in July. He is now moving forward to begin training for his Quality Control Inspector (QCI) license, which is a two-year training program. **K. Smith Oldham** also recognized **A. Slack** for successfully passing her Certified Community Action Professional (CCAP) exam in June and earning her certification.

Events: **S. Klank** attended a Michigan Works! Job Fair with members of the BCAEO Mi-TECH team with intentions to recruit new Energy Auditors and Quality Control Inspectors. Our booth had (12) people stop by with (1) individual reaching out with interest in employment afterwards. That (1) individual was interviewed and hired for the Weatherization department, and will begin his Energy Auditor training in August.

Some other events this summer included staff attending a Migrant Head Start event in Van Buren County, where SMCAA provided food products to local migrant households. **D. Oleneack**, **A. Slack**, and **K. Smith Oldham** attended the CAPLAW Conference in June, and **A. Slack**, **K. Smith Oldham**, and **Y. Vidt** attended the Michigan Community Action (MCA) Conference in July. Both conferences offered a wide array of session topics and networking opportunities.

K. Smith Oldham announced that SMCAA had won the Promise in Action Award from the National Community Action Partnership. This award will be presented at the National Community Action Convention in New York City on

September 1, 2022. The award recognizes (2) CAAs each year for their dedication to caring for and providing services to the community. **A. Slack** wrote our nomination on how SMCAA responds to local community emergencies, including the Berrien Springs Mobile Park flood and the City of Benton Harbor water crisis. **Y. Vidt, K. Smith Oldham, and A. Slack** will venture to NYC to accept the award at the end of August.

M. Warren congratulated the staff of their dedication to Community Action for making awards like this possible. **K. Smith Oldham** agreed that the Agency's achievement of its awards over the past two years were due to the staff's hard work and commitment, even when additional programs and funding became overwhelming. **M. Warren** complimented SMCAA by saying it is the most organized nonprofit organization in Southwest Michigan, and the State and community acknowledge this by the additional funding granted to the Agency recently.

Monitoring: The State's monitoring report is being done differently for FY22. The report, called a State Code Legend, uses a color coding system to identify concerns and findings. BCAEO monitored CSBG, CSBG-CARES, and Weatherization, as well as SMCAA's human resources and administration practices. All administrative activities and Weatherization were green, meaning there were no concerns. CSBG/CSBG-CARES were orange due to (1) programmatic finding and (4) programmatic recommendations. The finding was due to one client file's income calculation being done with FY21 documentation rather than FY22. **Y. Vidt** and her Community Services team corrected this mistake, and the client remained eligible for service so there were no disallowed costs. Overall, BCAEO told **K. Smith Oldham** that SMCAA is in good standing, and our case files were in an orderly manner.

Y. Vidt underwent a review in our commodity (CSFP and TEFAP) programs. There were a couple of corrective actions, which have been completed, and both programs have been approved for another three years. **A. Slack** also received a quality review of the FSS Program. (5) files were randomly selected for review, and all the files passed inspection.

Committee Meetings: **K. Smith Oldham** was asked to sit on the Area Agency on Aging Advisory Council. The Advisory Council advises the Board of Directors regarding the development of a comprehensive and coordinated service system for the aging and adult disabled population of Berrien, Cass and Van Buren Counties. **S. Klank** was asked to sit on the Mi-TECH Training Board. Mi-TECH is under the umbrella of BCAEO, and is the agency that conducts all the Weatherization training and technical assistance guidance.

C. ACTION:

A motion to accept and place on file the Director's Report was made by **J. Wuerfel** and was seconded **C. Christopher**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

d. FY23 CSBG Plan Application. **K. Smith Oldham** presented the proposed FY23 CSBG Plan. This plan is an annual requirement of every CAA and is for our CSBG funding. It serves as a roadmap demonstrating how SMCAA will deliver services, and it also establishes goals and priorities for delivering those services. It covers a number of aspects including tripartite boards, community needs assessment, service delivery, ROMA practices, linkages and gaps in services, coordination and collaboration, community initiatives, data usage, and impact of the CSBG monies on the individuals and families in the community. The allocated amount for FY23 is \$681,770.00.

There were no concerns or questions regarding this grant application.

D. ACTION: A motion to approve the Fiscal Year 2023 CSBG Plan as it was presented was made by **M. Franks** and was seconded **G. Moore**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

e. Personnel Policy Amendment for “Employee and Board Eligibility for Services”. **K. Smith Oldham** proposed a personnel policy amendment. Following a session at the CAPLAW Conference on Board Governance, she realized our Agency’s Employee Eligibility for Services policy should also include Board members, especially because it is a requirement of our tripartite board guidelines for low-income representatives to serve as Board members. She stressed the importance of having a clear policy in place on how to handle Board members’ eligibility for services.

There were no concerns or questions regarding this policy update.

E. ACTION: A motion to approve the Personnel Policy Amendment was made by **C. Christopher** and was seconded **G. Moore**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT: **M. Warren** asked if our guest **S. Carra** had any questions or comments. He thanked the Board again for having him present and said he looks forward to digesting all he had learned from the meeting.

He asked for the Agency’s feedback on a proposal he is developing at the State-level on increasing minimum income. He explained the basis of the proposal, entitled Maximum Feasible Income, which includes the State providing funding for businesses to pay half of a wage up to \$18.00 an hour. **M. Warren** commented to fulfill such a project would require a lot of work with local companies, and **J. Wuerfel** was concerned that many small businesses could not handle the increased wages, ultimately negatively impacting the State’s economy. **A. Slack** stated increased income poses a threat to eligibility of clients who may need assistance, and **K. Smith Oldham** agreed, stating programs like Medicaid could even be affected. **S. Carra** said the hope is there would no longer be a need for assistance to those actively employed and benefiting from his proposed project.

K. Smith Oldham commented on the numerous factors associated with clients needing services from agencies like SMCAA. She emphasized an increase in income for an individual dealing with a medical issue or substance abuse would not nullify their need for assistance from our Agency. Community Action has a responsibility to the community members facing emergencies.

M. Underwood shared her experience at DHHS of clients who become ineligible for services due to increases in income. Those clients begin to flounder being “cut-off cold turkey” from services they have relied on over time, and that struggle leads to increased issues in the individuals’ lives. She suggested any type of assistance to a client that may make them ineligible for another service must be done carefully and with a lot of case management.

S. Carra thanked the Board for their input, and said he gained information he had not previously considered.

OTHER: None

ADJOURNMENT: Hearing no other business, a motion to adjourn was made by **J. Wuerfel** and was seconded by **M. Underwood**. The meeting was adjourned at 7:16pm.

NEXT MEETING: The next scheduled SMCAA Board meeting will be held at the **Van Buren Conference Center**: 490 S. Paw Paw St., Lawrence, MI 49064 on **Wednesday, September 21, 2022 at 6:00pm**.

Respectfully submitted,
Ashley Slack
SMCAA Operations Manager

Reviewed and approved,
Gail Patterson-Gladney
SMCAA Board Secretary