MCCOA 30 October 2027 Retreat
Chair's Opening Remarks for Participants

If you compared the notice on public participation, comment, and dialogue today versus what was being posted previously, you will see there are revisions to provide greater clarity to all participants.

Public Participation:
The public may attend this meeting in person only. No remote option is available. This is a change in our past approach of only offering hybrid meetings and we anticipate we will use this approach for our community outreach meetings.

Respectful Dialogue:

- The Commission on Aging encourages respectful dialogue that supports freedom of speech and values diversity of opinion. Commissioners, staff, and members of the public are expected to remain civil and courteous and to refrain from questioning the character or motives of others participating in the meeting.
- The County requests that speakers avoid threatening, profane, or abusive language that may disrupt, disturb, or otherwise impede the orderly conduct of the Commission meetings.

Public Comment: Members of the public may comment on any agenda item during Commission's consideration of that item. The Commission Chair will invite public to comment after discussion and voting items and before final Commission deliberations. Each speaker will be allotted time for comment as determined by the Chair, generally 2 minutes.

While not part of the formal notice process on the agenda, I would like to briefly discuss the need for active listening and potential actions that can cause distress in a meeting:

Active Listening: Actively listening show the person that you hear what they are saying and you understand the other person's perspectives, emotions, and needs. It helps build rapport and trust, which are the two most important aspects that prevent misunderstanding while finding common ground during communication. Letting another person know that their concerns have been heard a critical part of the process to gain acceptance, compromise or a resolution.

Actions that cause distress in a meeting: They typically fall into three categories: disruptive behaviors, poor communication, and structural failures that can heighten anxiety, cause frustration, and diminish psychological safety for the participants.

Disruptive Behaviors

- **Aggressive interruptions:** Cutting people off mid-sentence, talking over them completely or talking down to another person.
- **Public reprimands:** We need to be respectful in how we express ourselves. Calling out an individual's mistakes or criticizing them in front of the entire group does create stress.
- **Multitasking openly:** Checking emails or text message while others speak.
- **Side conversations:** Whispering, messaging, or mocking others privately during a presentation or discussion.

Poor Communication & Atmosphere

- **Blame shifting:** Weaponizing the meeting to find scapegoats for a problem or issue rather than focusing on solutions.
- **Passive-aggressive body language:** Eyerolling, heavy sighing, or crossing arms defensively when certain people speak.
- **Dismissive language:** Shooting down new ideas immediately with phrases like "that will never work" or "we tried that already" or "we already decided".

- **Dominating the floor:** One or two individuals monopolizing the entire conversation without allowing others to input.

Procedural & Structural Challenges

- **Staying focused on agenda:** Meetings should stay focused on the task at hand, off agenda discussions are not really important to the meeting or they would have been on the agenda.
- **Bringing up the same point over and over again:** If you have additional points, they are welcome.

Marin County's demographics are shifting, and very shortly older adults will represent over 40% of Marin's population with the number of older adults over 85 years doubling. Those changes are going to shift the existing support structure as well as planning for services and support as we move into the next decade.

Our focus today is to clarify our roles and relationships, determine what we see as successful outcomes, identify key topics and actionable goals to support older adults, older adults with disabilities, and caregivers based on the following foundational principles:

- **Collaboration:** Building and fostering partnerships within the community and agencies to strengthen stronger collaboration, partnership, support, engagements, transparency, understanding, and actionable outcomes.
- **Transparency**: Supporting systems and processes that are data based, sustain transparent decision-making processes, and share metrics and progress with all stakeholders.
- **Enhancing Outcomes**; Strengthening program performance tracking, data collection, and information sharing to increase data-driven decisions that enhance actual outcomes for older adults.
- **Communication**: Establish consistent processes for the clear exchange of information on current issues, concerns, priorities, and activities to support older adults with government agencies and their representatives, organizations who are supporting older adults, and the community by:
    - Expressing our message simply and directly without adding confusing or unnecessary details,
    - Choosing precise words, sticking to the main point, ensuring our core idea is easy to grasp,
    - Utilizing active listening to understand and respond to insights and comments from others.
    - Recognizing the older adult segment has distinct segments that may require special consideration and adjustments to successfully reach each segment with clear, concise, concrete, complete, understandable, and relatable communication.
- **Goals and action plans are clearly defined and actionable**:
    - Specific: Clear, distinct, and unambiguous targets.
    - Measurable: Trackable metrics that show concrete progress.
    - Attainable: Realistic and possible to reach given your resources.
    - Relevant: Meaningful objectives that align with broader goals.
    - Time-bound: Set within a strict deadline or timeframe

Please note the agenda for our November general meeting has changed and will focus on discussing what input for the County's Strategic Plan.

Today we have an exceptional opportunity to explore the best ways to promote the well-being of older adults in Marin County and have the right structure in place to support older adults, older adults with disabilities, and caregivers. I want to thank you for being part of this ongoing effort to ensure older adults' needs are supported and funded today and going forward. Thank you as well as our guide today, Barry Phegan, for being a part of this important discussion and commitment process.

Respectfully,

Lauren Elkin

Lauren Elkin
MCCOA Chair & City of Novato Representative