

# WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION

## MINUTES

April 20, 2021

Members Present: Amy Silverman, Rebecca Hajosy, Robert Kennedy, Ellen Phillips, Noreen Bachteler  
Absent: Rosemary Cleary, Linda Hanson, Mary Reilly  
Staff Present: Helen Rubino-Turco, Gina Marino, Keren Paquette, Jennifer Evans  
Guests: Mayor Shari Cantor, Town Manager Matt Hart, Kevin Farmer, Gail Crockett, Beth Rocco, Mary Silverberg, Evelyn Nirenstein, Pamela Hilborn

Chairperson Amy Lynn Silverman called the meeting to order at 10:02AM

The minutes of the March 16, 2021 meeting were approved unanimously.

### ***Chairperson's Report***

Chairperson Amy Lynn Silverman welcomed Matthew Hart, West Hartford's Town Manager who will be giving the group the Town Budget Presentation today. Since Shari Cantor was not able to join at the start of the meeting, Amy asked Keren Paquette to start the meeting with the Social Services Report.

### ***West Hartford Social Services***

Keren Paquette reported that the Social Services staff are now back in the office full time. The public can now come into the office with an appointment. The Town Hall food pantry continues to be very active – about twice the volume as before the pandemic. Dial-A-Ride program is open for applications for the July 2021 to July 2022 year for a \$50 fee, or for the shortened period between now and July for \$35. Energy Assistance Program application deadline extended into June. The Renters Rebate Program received 200 applications by the April 1 deadline. Eviction moratorium state program has been extended through September. UNITE CT has had a large influx of state money for rent and utilities payment help. A mobile van is being put into circulation for the application process.

### ***Seniors Job Bank***

Sheila Diamond reported that the Seniors Job Bank has brought in some new board members and is revamping their database. Spring is normally a time with a huge uptick in requests for workplaces looking for help and that is the case this year as well. But the Job Bank is seeing a gap in skills requested from the companies looking for workers and the pay offered for those positions. The challenge is always finding the right fit.

### ***Town Budget Presentation***

Matt Hart took the group through the deck on the town's fiscal year budget (7/1/21-6/30/22). This proposed budget has already been presented to the Town Council and the Board of Education. With the expected influx of new federal money for local governments from the American Rescue Plan, the town is awaiting the rules on how that incremental money can be spent – town services (\$25 million) vs. schools (\$10 million). These rules are expected to be issued by May 10th.

The PowerPoint presentation was emailed to the Commission member with the call to meeting.

Matt Hart briefly touched on the potential purchase of the St. Brigid School property in Elmwood. The purchase price for the town would be \$3 million and the plan is for \$3 million more allocated for upgrades or demolition of the school building. An inspection of the current building is happening today (April 20, 2021).

Amy Silverman then opened it up for questions from the group regarding the Town Budget presentation.

First question was from Ellen Phillips asking what Shari Cantor and Matt Hart know about the buyer of the UConn property on Asylum. Shari said that nothing has been released yet as to who the buyer is but she is hopeful it will be soon. Matt Hart stated that they are a New England based company, not a Connecticut based company. Matt reminded the group that the Town of West Hartford has no ability to approve or not approve of the sale. But any zoning changes that the developer is looking for will have to be approved by TPZ and the Town Council.

Question from Rebecca Hajosy: concern about jump in real estate market and overbidding on houses and how that might translate to higher taxes in the current tax reassessment process. Matt explained the assessment process is state mandated every 5 years, that the assessed value is 70% of market value, the next assessment is October 2021 which will impact the FY2023 budget. He said that when assessments go up, the mill rate will be set lower to compensate. West Hartford utilizes a mass appraisal process, so it is less affected by individual property or neighborhood fluctuations.

Question from Beth Rocco: The potential for the town to buy the St. Brigid School property – she does not understand why the town would buy a property that is smaller than the one they are trying to replace. She is also concerned about having senior citizens on upper floors in the Elmwood building or this St. Brigid building for safety issues. Mayor Cantor responded that the town is just at the due diligence stage of looking to see if it wants to buy the property. The main driver of the desire to purchase is that the property is adjacent to Beachland Park, the largest park in the town, not necessarily the building itself. If the town decides to move forward, it will be asking for a lot of input from people and stakeholder groups in town. Matt Hart said the property is being inspected today as we sit here and that he is thinking the current building would probably be replaced with new construction that is better designed for the future and could accommodate the Senior Center, a Teen Center, a Community Center and the Faxon Library branch all in one place.

Question from Amy Silverman: Will there be any effect on the town budget from the State of Connecticut wanting to do away with the motor vehicle tax as in the Hartford Courant article today? Matt responded that \$18 million in revenue comes from the motor vehicle property tax so yes, the town would have to make up that money, and the 70% assessment number would probably go up to compensate.

### ***Senior Centers***

Gina Marino reported that the town vaccine hotline continues to be staffed by the library staff. The volume of calls has lessened but the questions that come in are getting more complicated, so the library staff are using the senior center staffer to help answer those questions. AARP Income Tax prep program has serviced 300 people through a drive-up process. This is less than in a normal year due to Covid. New part-time Senior Center employee Susan Sloan has started and there still is a full-time position open in Elmwood. Spring classes started this week, and all are virtual except the line dancing class at Westmoor Park. The fitness centers will be opening on May 3 by appointment only and appointments are filling up fast. The Senior Centers have used money from the CARES act to rent tents to hold pop-up outdoor events. For this upcoming summer, classes and events will be a hybrid of virtual and in-person in the building. They are partnering with University of St. Joseph nursing students for programs at the ECC, most recently doing a blood pressure clinic. Earth Day on April 22 will have programs at Beachland Park and Westmoor Park finishing with entertainment and refreshments at ECC. The Senior Center is launching a new pickleball program at Wolcott Park. There will be an outdoor concert at Hamilton Heights on Cinco de May (May 5). Leisure Services-run summer camps for children have had huge sign-ups already. Gina is using the Constant Contact e-mail list to make sure people know about the FEMA funeral assistance program recently announced - \$9,000 benefit for families who lost someone to Covid.

### ***Transportation***

Kevin Farmer said that most drivers and riders are now fully vaccinated, and they are seeing a large increase in rider volume. For the fiscal year 2021, they have already met their revenue goal – donors have really stepped up! The program is looking to partner with Sunshine Wheels in Unionville which has a dozen vans equipped for wheelchairs. This will give the West Hartford program a referral place for people who need that type of transportation and Sunshine Wheels can refer to West Hartford also.

***Agenda for Future Meetings***

Amy asked for ideas for guests and topics for future meetings. Ideas suggested: Amy Krauss from the West Hartford/Bloomfield Health District with a vaccine update; Derek Slap with what's going on in the State Senate; a report from the Housing Commission; plans for West Hartford's Juneteenth activities for 2021 possibly inviting Adrienne Billings-Smith.

The meeting adjourned at 11:37AM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary