

# WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION

## MINUTES

June 15, 2021

Members Present: Amy Silverman, Rebecca Hajosy, Robert Kennedy, Noreen Bachteler, Rosemary Cleary, Mary Reilly  
Absent: Linda Hanson, Ellen Phillips  
Staff Present: Gina Marino, Keren Paquette,  
Guests: Sheila Diamond, Gail Crockett, Kevin Farmer, Beth Rocco, Senator Derek Slap

Chairperson Amy Lynn Silverman called the meeting to order at 10:06AM.  
First meeting back in person and held at the Bishops Corner Senior Center.

Sheila Diamond asked that the May minutes be adjusted in the Seniors Job Bank to reflect the foundation's name of Dornam, not Dornan.

The corrected May meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

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

Chairperson Amy Lynn Silverman reported there still is a vacancy on the Commission, which is a Republican slot. No appropriate candidates have been brought forward so far. The question was asked if it could be an Independent and Amy said she would check into that. The Commission will use the meeting room at the Bishops Corner Senior Center as the monthly meeting place from now on. A WebEx setup can be made available for those persons not comfortable being in person. The Commission is looking to do some activity this Fall around end of life issues. More to come on this. Amy gave kudos to Gina Marino for doing such a great job running the senior center programs over the past year and a half through the pandemic. Gina kept our seniors engaged and pivoted delivery of programs on short notice based on the ever-changing rules. Thanks Gina! Amy relayed that Derek Slap will be joining the meeting, but not sure when so some other reports will go first.

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

Keren Paquette reported that the team will be at full staff by the end of this month – the part time social worker started last week, and the full-time person starts next week. As mentioned last month, the police department will be able to hire a crisis social worker that will be part of the social services staff but working directly with the police department. The Town Hall Food Pantry continues curbside only and is now looking for new volunteers. Dial-A-Ride program will be adding new pick-up sites in town starting with the new year on July 1. Amy Silverman asked for numbers around Dial-a-Ride. A Medical escort program re- started recently - the escort picks up the person for their medical appointment, goes in with them, then brings them home. It is not to be used for procedures that require anesthesia. Keren asked if the Commission should invite a rep from the "Way to Go CT" program to one of our meetings. The Energy Assistance Program application deadline was extended into June and today (June 15) is the last day. The Eviction Moratorium state program is set to end on June 30th. UNITE CT's rental assistance program is open for sign up. The mobile application van with computers on board came to Faxon Library and served 11 families and will be in town two more times in June. West Hartford's CHOICES program counselors are still working remotely. A question was asked about MDC water shut offs in town and it was decided that the Commission should put this topic on a future meeting agenda. Question to group about the status of the Fellowship Housing upgrades/build in Bishops Corner since nobody has seen any movement in the area since the approval. Amy pointed out that this is not part of the West Hartford housing authority, it is privately run, but housing should be on a future meeting agenda.

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

Sheila Diamond reported that the Seniors Job Bank is swamped right now, probably double their normal number of requests for people to get work done in their houses along with companion requests. The job bank will have a table at this weekend's Juneteenth celebration. The group is in full fund-raising mode now with a matching grant up to \$10,000 from the Dornam Foundation. Amy asked if the Job Bank has ever thought about charging a fee to the businesses and individuals looking for workers. Sheila said the Board is dealing with this right now. The Board has said no to charging a fee to job seekers. The Seniors Job Bank relies on fund raising and the town gives them free office space. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is working with the Seniors Job Bank to develop new streams of revenue.

### ***Transportation***

Kevin Farmer reported that ITN Central Connecticut is an independent transportation network with 20 drivers. All drivers are volunteers but are vetted with background checks paid by the organization. Last week the board met on safety protocols. Drivers and riders are no longer required to wear face coverings if they are vaccinated, but the rider and driver will decide what they are comfortable with. Riders can now sit in the front seat again if they choose. The ride volume is still at 60% of pre-covid numbers and most rides now are medical as fewer people are requesting rides for hairdressers, restaurants, movies, etc. Kevin pointed out a MarketWatch.com recently ran an article about their program. Any rides that are eyesight related are free of charge. This is funded by the Rotary Club. The general program has a \$40 fee per year, no cash transactions, and no tipping. Drivers can offer general assistance to the rider, but not medical assistance.

### ***Derek Slap, District 5 State Senator – Legislative Report***

Derek Slap reported on the just-ended legislative session and what was done on behalf of our seniors. Derek is part of the Committee on Aging and most of what they got done this session was bipartisan. The committee felt that nursing home legislation needed to be a priority as 10% of all CT nursing home residents died from Covid. Some of the items addressed in the bill are guaranteed PPE, staffing level minimums, guaranteed visitation, guaranteed minimum hourly pay for workers, allowing cameras in rooms, and many others. Also passed was a bill eliminating age discrimination by preventing employers from asking a prospective candidate for their date of birth or graduation dates on job applications. This bill was passed overwhelmingly from both sides and was called out on the front page of the AARP website. The Seniors Job Bank had a significant part in this legislation. The state will continue to phase out the state income tax on social security and pension income to help seniors financially. The personal needs allowance once a person is on Medicaid has been reinstated and the Medicare Savings Program was not cut. Nursing homes are now getting federal money to increase pay to providers to at least \$20 an hour. There were also some reforms around prescription drugs.

Amy then opened it up for questions for Derek:

Sheila Diamond said a big THANK YOU to Derek for his partnership and for his work on behalf of seniors and pointed out that the state's Long Term Care Ombudsman continues to be active.

Beth Rocco: Is anyone at the capitol looking at the state forms online? She recently helped someone fill out a form for affordable housing and it took 3 weeks and had multiple duplications of questions. Derek said that some forms have recently been updated and agreed to follow up with Beth offline. Derek also pointed out that Telehealth will be continuing and new legislation around electric bills getting rid of variable rates.

Amy Silverman: any updates on the UConn property? Derek stated that he does not know who is buying the property or when the sale is going to close. There is a \$20 million bond to help clean up the site. The state polluted the land, so the state needs to clean it up. The town wants to protect the ball fields.

Any update on the town buying the St. Bridget School property? Derek said the town had 90 days to do the inspection and decide whether to move forward and he thinks that date is fast approaching. There is a state bond to help the town purchase the property.

Amy asked Derek if there was anything he wished the state could have done in this session that did not get done. Derek replied that the Husky health program for children was not available for undocumented children. After much negotiation, the legislature's compromise was to add kids to this benefit up to age 8, but not any older. This was very upsetting to Derek.

Derek left his contact information for the group: mobile number (860-519-9672) and email address ([derek.slap@cga.ct.gov](mailto:derek.slap@cga.ct.gov)) and his assistant's e-mail address ([daniela.luna@cga.ct.gov](mailto:daniela.luna@cga.ct.gov))

***Senior Centers***

Gina Marino reported that the Rec Specialist 35 hours a week position at Elmwood has been filled. She re-hiring for the part-time positions which were eliminated during the pandemic. Elmwood is now open Tuesday and Thursday from 9-4:30. These hours are limited because of the expanded summer camp programs. The WH Senior Center is open Monday through Friday. Many activities are taking place in person, some are hybrid and some virtual only. Outdoors programs and the gazebo concerts are happening.

***Agenda suggestions for Future Meetings***

Way to Go CT

The Town Manager

MDC

Town Housing Authority

The next meeting is scheduled for September 21 at 10am at the West Hartford Senior Center.

The meeting adjourned at 12:10pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary