

# WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION

## MINUTES

October 19, 2021

Members Present: Amy Silverman, Rebecca Hajosy, Robert Kennedy, Noreen Bachteler, Mary Reilly, Linda Hanson  
Absent: Rosemary Cleary, Ellen Phillip  
Staff Present: Rebecca Sears, Mark Blanchard, Keren Paquette  
Guests: Sheila Diamond, Kevin Farmer, Beth Rocco

Chairperson Amy Lynn Silverman called the meeting to order at 10:01AM.

The Minutes of the September 21, 2021, meeting were approved unanimously.

Chairperson Amy Silverman welcomed Rebecca (Becky) Sears, the new Facilities Director for the West Hartford Senior Centers.

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

Amy Silverman reported that the Commission is still down one person, a Republican position, and will be down another after she moves out of West Hartford in December. She has contacted Essie Labrot to remind her of this. Essie indicated she will see if anyone has expressed interest after the upcoming election. Amy said that the Commission may have Co-Chairs. Previously Rebecca Hajosy had expressed interest and said she is still interested if there is a Co-Chair. Noreen Bachteler volunteered to work with Rebecca. Amy will meet with them to discuss what is involved in the position with confirmation of Rebecca and Noreen taking place at the November meeting. The Freedom of Information Act presentation from the town is available on YouTube.

### ***Rebecca (Becky) Sears***

Rebecca introduced herself and spoke about her background as a therapeutic recreation specialist, and in community relations and marketing and connecting with seniors. As an advocate for seniors, she underscored how important it is for people to continue to be educated, to explore and learn and be challenged. One of the focuses important to her is mental health which is especially difficult for seniors to discuss. After having had 2 years of isolation imposed by the Covid 19 pandemic, people are leery about "re-entering" the community. Over the next six months, she would like to stress "brain health" in the programming at the senior centers. The issues the senior centers are facing include getting people back to the centers (transportation); staffing – a number of part-time key positions are open now; orienting 6 new staff; planning for the re-integration of volunteers; planning for full programming by spring, including more entertainers who are not yet comfortable with performing for groups. There was a robust discussion about ventilation in the buildings, Covid booster information, the Little Boutique at Elmwood, uses of other rooms at Elmwood and the Wi-Fi there. Becky welcomes the suggestions of the members.

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

Keren Paquette reported the department is fully staffed. The new social worker who will be working with the police department will speak at a future Commission meeting. A Prevention Coalition has been formed to make use of grant now available to the town See this link about the meeting: <https://we-ha.com/west-hartford-prevention-partnership-seeking-members/>

The town food pantry is continuing and working on how to bring people back into the building. Dial-a-Ride is operating fully using town and CDC Covid guidelines. Membership is slowly increasing. Barbara Roberts is actively recruiting volunteers. CRT energy assistance person is in the office and taking applications for the winter season. Renters Rebate program ended but extensions can be requested. The Choices counselors are available by phone. There is a housing crisis because of evictions, the storms, landlord issues, low stock. Senior subsidized housing has a 1-2 year wait. Keren will work on putting together a program on housing for the Commission.

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

Sheila Diamond gave some background information about the organization. They are getting lots of business requests for workers and not enough workers to fill the jobs. There are about 450 job seekers in the data base. The organization sees the word “seniors” as a public relations challenge. The board is considering charging a fee to businesses and non-profits for its services.

### ***Transportation***

Kevin Farmer reported that ITN Central Connecticut is an independent transportation network with 20 volunteer drivers that serve 15 towns giving rides to mostly age 60+ riders, 24/7/365. The membership fee and charge for a ride are reasonable. Free rides are available to low-income West Hartford residents (covered by a grant from the Rotary) and for all eye appointments (covered by a Regeneron grant). The ride volume now is at about 60% of pre-pandemic levels. Drivers and riders both are required to wear face coverings. The annual appeal which happens once a year is coming up. Volunteer drivers are always needed.

### ***New Business***

None

### ***Agenda for Future Meetings***

At a future meeting, the members may want to review and discuss the wording of the Commissions’ description: “The Senior Citizens Advisory Commission studies the conditions and needs of elderly and retired persons in the town in regards to housing, employment, health, recreation, and their general welfare and comfort. The commission analyzes public and private services provided for the aged and retired.”

Ideas for future guests/presentations: Public Works information on upcoming snow removal season; Police Department on recent car-jackings and more visible panhandling around town; housing issues; hoarding.

The meeting adjourned at 12:01PM. Next meeting scheduled for November 16, 2021.

Respectfully submitted,  
Amy Lynn Silverman, Chair and Acting Recording Secretary