

# WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION

## MINUTES

NOVEMBER 16, 2021

Members Present: Amy Silverman, Rebecca Hajosy, Robert Kennedy, Noreen Bachteler, Mary Reilly, Linda Hanson  
Absent: Rosemary Cleary, Ellen Phillips  
Staff Present: Keren Paquette, Rebecca Sears  
Guests: Gail Crockett, Kevin Farmer, Beth Rocco

Chairperson Amy Lynn Silverman called the meeting to order at 10:01AM.  
October 19, 2021 meeting minutes unanimously approved.

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

Amy Silverman stated that this will be her last meeting and last report as Chair of the Commission. Amy has been involved with the commission since the late 80's so this is bittersweet. Rebecca Hajosy and Noreen Bachteler have offered to be co-chairs of the Commission moving forward. Motion to approve of these 2 new co-chairs was seconded and approved by the whole group. Question was asked of Amy if the Town Council needs to approve of the new co-chairs and the answer was no. Amy distributed a document with the 2022 meeting dates to the group.

### ***Presentation by Keren Paquette - Understanding Hoarding Disorder***

Keren is part of a team in West Hartford that tries to help people who are hoarding in their homes once it has been reported by neighbors, family, or medical professionals that visit the home. There are 3 components to the disorder: 1. the acquisition of and failure to discard objects resulting in distress; 2. Living spaces cannot be used for the purpose they're meant to be used for; and 3. Distress or impairment in functioning. This is now a recognized mental health disorder and is starting to be studied closer. The clutter is a symptom of the problem, not the actual problem itself which is hard for families of those affected to understand. **Who:** begins in teenage years, worsens over life span, high divorce rate, tend to live alone, tend to have a family history, more men than women, across all socio-economic levels and education levels, estimate is 3-5% of U.S. population. **How:** buying things, saving not discarding things, collecting free things, family things, in some cases – stealing things. West Hartford's "Safe Homes Task Force" was created with representatives from: Social Services, Health Dept, Police Dept, Fire Dept, Animal Control, Buildings, and Planning & Zoning. This is a model that is being used across the country and they focus on "harm reduction", not "clean out". They will look to make sure there's unobstructed doors and windows, minimum 36-inch pathways, accessible water, working plumbing, working electricity and heat, and overall sanitary condition (pests, garbage, etc). West Hartford Social Services runs "Buried in Treasures" workshops and support groups to help treat those affected and their families.

### ***Transportation***

Kevin Farmer reported that the ITN Central Connecticut rider program has seen ride volumes pick up considerably in October. They are now at 80% of pre-pandemic ride volume. Their board has relaxed the mask policy last week making it not mandatory but up to each driver/rider pair. ITN is in their annual appeal period now and uses their mailing list to seek donations.

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

Gail Crockett reported on behalf of Sheila Diamond. The Seniors Job Bank is working on a new database. They currently have 10 job openings. Fall yard work requests have settled down and there is now an uptick in businesses looking for people rather than residential. The group is looking to hire a marketing person to increase their visibility on social media and update their website. The Job Bank recently participated in the West Hartford Job Fair and the currently have openings on their Board. Question was asked of Gail if the Job Bank does background checks on their hires and Gail responded that they do NOT

do criminal background checks – they were advised by their attorney not to. The hiring companies should be the ones doing the checks as part of the hiring process.

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

Keren Paquette reported that Social Services finally had just gotten fully staffed and then recently a part time social worker resigned. A new West Hartford group has been formed – the West Hartford Prevention Coalition. The group deals with abuse and mental health issues including suicide prevention. The town's Food Pantry continues curbside only but is making plans to open to inside visits soon. They will be delivering Thanksgiving meals for the homebound and will be doing a gift card program for children for the holidays. A panhandling task force has been formed in town with Police and Social Services. Dec 7 is the deadline for open enrollment in the Choice Program and Dec. 15 for Access Health Connecticut. No changes to the Dial-a-Ride program.

### ***Senior Centers***

Becky Sears reported that in the last month they have filled 2 positions and are now recruiting on a Rec Coordinator position. The Senior Center Newsletter is going out today and the Winter Bulletin will be going out soon. The Senior Centers have seen a growth in in-person attendance in the past 2 weeks. The first ever Winter Ball will be in January in Town Hall Auditorium. Other upcoming events: Hannukah party December 6<sup>th</sup> catered by The Crown, Hall High Holiday Concert, Valentine's Day Concert, St. Patrick's Day Party. Becky is looking for sponsors for each of these events and they are looking to call back past volunteers and start using volunteer resources again.

### ***New Business***

With the announcement this week of the purchase of the former St. Brigid's School, the Senior Center has been asked to be on the committee to help design the new Senior Center slated for the property. Rebecca Sears has been touring other local Senior Centers that were recently built or renovated to see what things work and what hasn't worked. A question was asked about the Afghan refugees coming to West Hartford and how much is our Social Services team involved? The answer is that the group is coming in with assistance of a group of churches/temples in town (not the town itself) and Social Services gets involved if asked by the supporting groups to help with benefits and access to other aid. The question was asked about the new bill with money for increasing broadband access for underserved communities – will seniors be included in this? The response was that the group should have a legislative guest to answer this question.

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

Suggestions included inviting Helen Rubino-Turco and Matt Hart to a future meeting to talk about the plans for the St. Brigid property.

The group made a formal thank-you to Amy Silverman for her decades of service to the town and its seniors.

The meeting adjourned at 12:01PM. Next meeting scheduled for Dec. 21, 2021.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary