

WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION

MINUTES

April 19, 2022

Members Present: Rebecca Hajosy, Noreen Bachteler, Robert Kennedy, Rosemary Cleary, Beth Rocco, Linda Hanson
Absent: Mary Reilly
Staff Present: Keren Paquette, Rebecca Sears, Kevin Ryan (WHSC Intern), Kevin Farmer, Sheila Diamond
Guests: Margaret Ackley, Medicare Broker/Advisor presenting today "Understanding Medicare Concepts"

Chairperson Rebecca Hajosy called the meeting to order at 10:05AM. The meeting was held in person at the Bishop's Corner Senior Center. The March meeting minutes had 2 changes: National Drug Takeback Day is in April (not September); and Beth Rocco's former medical title before she retired was Ophthalmologist (not Optician). With these 2 updates, the minutes were approved.

Chairperson's Report

Rebecca Hajosy reported that Sheila Diamond will be leaving the Commission as she has resigned from the W.H. Seniors Job Bank. Noreen presented Sheila with a plant from the group and all thanked her for her service. Beth Rocco, who officially joined the Commission last month, will start giving monthly updates from the new Elmwood Community Center Advisory Committee that she now sits on.

Presentation – Margaret Ackley, Medicare Broker/Advisor presenting "Understanding Medicare Concepts"

1st Topic: Margaret explained IRMAA – Income Related Monthly Adjustment Amount. This factor looks back 2 years at total family income, including 401K distributions, to determine if you need to pay additionally for Medicare Part B and Part D. This rolling 2-year look-back period surprises a lot of people and is one of the most poorly communicated and understood part of the Medicare equation. Everyone has a right to appeal their IRMAA. Retirement, for example, is considered a legitimate life change and your IRMAA amount can be appealed based on you retiring. The appeal is filed with Social Security, not Medicare.

2nd Topic: Connecticut Medicare Savings Programs: These are funded by the state (state funding year-to-year) and not available in all states. If monthly income is below certain limits (this does NOT include assets in CT), the state will pay your Part B premium and reduce the cost of your medications. Even lower income people can qualify for QMB (Qualifying Medicare Beneficiary), where the state pays for Part B and pays all Medicare deductibles. Once you qualify for QMB with Medicare, then you can apply for a Dual Advantage Plan with extra benefits and get a grey card.

3rd Topic: Medicare Choices: Margaret would never recommend solely just having Medicare Part A – too many gaps. Part B covers all gaps with a \$233 annual deductible. She says people should consider 2 choices: 1. Medicare Supplement and/or Medicare Part D with private drug coverage in which you pay little out of pocket and get no extra supplements (she calls these "old fashioned plans") or 2. Medicare Advantage Plans (Part C) which combines Parts A & B and builds in Part D drug plan (she calls these "all-in-one plans"). These can include dental coverage, vision coverage and hearing aids.

Margaret provided hand-outs which include an example of a really good Advantage plan that her clients have been very happy with. She also pointed out that Connecticut is a "Guaranteed Medicare State" – does not ask about pre-existing conditions and does no medical exam to receive Medicare. This is not the case in most states.

West Hartford Social Services

Keren Paquette reported, as a follow-up to Margaret's presentation, that the Choices Advisors in West Hartford are really good at navigating Medicare choices and provide year-round service for West Hartford residents.

Social Services has seen increased referrals from the social services police liaison.

Keren passed out a flyer for a group of programs all happening on April 30: National Drug Take Back Day (drive-through), Wellness Resource Fair, and QPR Suicide Preventing Training. The April 30th site is at the Charter Oak International Academy at 425 Oakwood Avenue in West Hartford.

The West Hartford Food Pantry remains curbside, nobody going in the building. A question was asked if there are plans to move the Food Pantry and/or Social Services offices into the new Community Center once it's built? Keren did not have any information but this issue will likely be considered by the new Elmwood Community Center Advisory Committee.

The Renters Rebate Program started on April 1 – applications were mailed to previous applicants but if anyone knows of others that need it, please refer them to her, as they are seeing more evictions lately.

Seniors Job Bank

Sheila Diamond reported that this is her last meeting as she will be moving on to other opportunities. Her last day with the job bank is April 29. Linda Guzzo will be the new Executive Director and she was formerly in Workforce Development at Capital Community College. Linda is a West Hartford resident. The new Senior Job Bank database is up and running. It is cloud based and has its own tech support department. There is now a job posting portal where you can view all the open jobs at any time.

Transportation

Kevin Farmer from ITN Central Connecticut reported that in March, they were back to pre-pandemic rider volume. ITN is looking to expand its free low-income rider program outside of just for West Hartford residents. They are looking at how to do this and how to fund it. ITN will also be relooking their income thresholds. Their annual appeal is still \$10,000 short and it looks like they may not be making their goal this year.

Senior Centers

Becky Sears reported that the tax prep program just wrapped up and was very successful.

The recent "Spring Fling" event had a jazz band, catered dinner with 3 sponsors was well-received and had 60 attendees.

May 11 is Senior Day and there is still some space open for vendor tables.

The Center has put future dances on hold for now until covid positivity rate once again goes below 5%.

The next quarter Bulletin goes to publish next Friday April 29.

Becky is working with Starbucks to start a new food rescue program for the senior centers. The Trader Joe's program became unreliable, and the Senior Center wants to better regulate the food. This new Starbucks program will be Mondays Wednesdays and Fridays.

Volunteers continue to come back to our programs and working in our office.

Becky and others continue to look at other towns' Senior Centers around the state for ideas and best practices going into the new center planning.

ECC Advisory Committee

Beth Rocco reported that the committee hasn't yet had its first meeting. There are now 12 or 13 representatives appointed to the committee.

New Business

Noreen Bachteler reported that this Commission has a new subcommittee on reviewing the SCAC Town Code and Mission Statement. Noreen was joined by Becky Sears and Gail Crockett on April 12th and will be bringing any suggestions to the Commission before sending on to Helen-Rubio-Turco and the Town Council for official action. The next subcommittee meeting is scheduled for May 12th at Bishops Corner Senior Center

The Commission is still looking for 2 more members who must be from a minority political party.

Agenda for Future Meetings

Our next meeting on May 17th will include a presentation on the new “Elder Justice Hotline” by AAG Sandra Arenas and Attorney Lara Stauning of the CT Dept. of Aging & Disability Services. Information on this meeting will also be sent to neighboring senior centers.

For the June meeting, we will look for a legislative session report from one of the West Hartford legislators.

The meeting adjourned at 12:14PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary