

WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION

MINUTES

June 21, 2022

Members Present: Rebecca Hajosy, Noreen Bachteler, Robert Kennedy, Mary Reilly, Beth Rocco, Rosemary Cleary
Absent: Linda Hanson
Staff Present: Rebecca Sears, Kevin Ryan, Keren Paquette, Kevin Farmer, Linda Guzzo
Guests: Kathleen Crawford, Margaret P., Mary B.
Guest speaker for the meeting: Kate Farrar – Connecticut State Representative from West Hartford

Chairperson Rebecca Hajosy called the meeting to order at 10:03AM at the Bishop's Corner Senior Center. The minutes of the May 17, 2022 meeting were approved as submitted.

Chairperson's Report

Rebecca reported that there will be no Commission meetings for July or August as it is the usual summer break. Rebecca also reported that she is still investigating whether this Commission has a budget, and could we use money to get materials such as what was discussed following the ECC Senior Day where the Commission had a table with no signage.

West Hartford Social Services

Keren Paquette reported that the state-funded Renters Rebate program is in full swing. The program has income eligibility limits (assets not counted), and is for those over 65 or disabled. West Hartford Social Services is processing the applications on behalf of the state. The open enrollment period is April through September. The max benefit is \$900 and is based on income from your 2021 tax info.

The town is waiting to receive the federal government's Farmers Market coupons for 2022. Once the town procures them, they will be distributed through the town's food pantry.

Dial-a-Ride program is now renewing clients and accepting applications for new clients. The max rides in the program are three per week, though you can file for exceptions.

The State of CT Energy Assistance program has been extended to the end of June (it usually ends in April).

The town Food Pantry remains open 3 days a week and is still drive-through. Based on food prices rising so quickly, the pantry is now giving out more food per person.

Water Assistance programs – there are multiple town programs with different eligibilities to help people pay their water bills.

The town's Medical Visitor and Grocery Shopping programs are both back up and running.

West Hartford Housing Authority recently re-opened the wait lists until July 1 to get in the lottery for housing options in town. Given the growing housing issues in our town, the question was asked if this Commission wants to take a more action-oriented approach to help solve this town-wide problem. Co-Chairs decided it will be discussed further this Fall.

Seniors Job Bank

Linda Guzzo, the new Executive Director of the Seniors Job Bank, reported that calls are increasing from younger seniors needing to get back into the workforce. They've also seen that the Job Bank's participation last month in the ECC Senior Fair has created a lot of new contacts.

Transportation

Kevin Farmer from ITN Central Connecticut thanked Becky Sears for placing an ad in the Seniors Newsletter – it's already getting results. Kevin and Beth Rocco are working together to get the local Ophthalmologists aware of what they do – offering free rides for people for vision appointments - in the hopes that some of these doctors' practices will help ITN by donating.

Senior Centers

Becky Sears reported that the summer concert series starts tonight (June 21, 2022) and on July 7, the weekly dances start. They decided to move ahead with the dances even though the Covid rate hasn't gone below 5%.

CRT lunches – the person currently running them is retiring and Becky is waiting to see if there will be a replacement. The numbers have recently been low anyway, so she doesn't know what the future holds for this program.

Fall day trips – instead of using a 3rd party, Becky is planning to start running these directly through the Senior Center.

Becky is looking at starting a new program – “Memory Café” – which would be a safe space for dementia patients and their caregivers.

Presentation – Legislative Update from Kate Farrar – State Representative from West Hartford

Kate is one of three state reps from West Hartford, and the newest one. In addition to her state legislative responsibilities, she is an employee of Connecticut FoodShare.

In the legislative session that just ended, CT paid down more debt than we have in decades, there's more dollars in the rainy-day fund, enacted the largest tax cut in the history of the state, and passed a budget that is giving relief where it's most needed.

The areas of tax cuts that Kate feels will most help seniors: an increased property tax credit for seniors, a cap in the car tax rate for certain towns including West Hartford, moving up the date of dropping state taxes from pensions and annuities fully in 2022, suspension of the state gas tax until December, and all buses running free of charge.

Voting changes: The state legislature, based on the success of the absentee ballot process during Covid, is looking at some of the voting laws in CT and how strict they are compared to most other states. This fall there will be a question on the ballots in CT asking if the people want early voting added to the state's constitution. If they do, then the legislature will look at the specifics. A new law was passed where sickness, disability and caregiver status can be reasons to request an absentee ballot in the state going forward.

Kate opened the room for questions: question was asked about UConn draining state funds from the last 2 Presidents who resigned but are still getting paid based on their contracts. Kate stated that she and some other legislators are outraged by these contracts and will push for a change.

A guest in the meeting relayed an issue she and her neighbors are having with the MDC. Kate asked the guest to contact her office and she'd look into it further.

Other issues discussed: Over age 50 retraining & computer skills for employment, UConn hospital being a financial drain on the state.

ECC Advisory Committee

Beth Rocco reported that there is a first meeting with the architects of the new Community Center and the advisory committee scheduled for June 30th. Becky Sears also added that the architects are taking requests and recommendations on a form you can fill out at the Senior Centers.

New Business

Nothing reported.

Agenda for Future Meetings

There are no meetings for July and August and nothing definite on the calendar yet for a topic or presentation for September.

The meeting adjourned at 12:09PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary