

WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMISSION

MINUTES

September 20, 2022

Members Present: Rebecca Hajosy, Noreen Bachteler, Robert Kennedy, Mary Reilly, Beth Rocco, Linda Hanson, Kevin Ryan
Members Absent: Rosemary Cleary
Staff Present: Keren Paquette, Rebecca Sears, Kevin Farmer, Linda Guzzo
Guests: Speaker, Rick Ledwith, West Hartford Town Manager
Mary Silverberg, Joseph Kolczynski. Persons with Disabilities Commission
Approximately 35 guests from the public in attendance – their names are recorded on a separate sign-in sheet.

Chairperson Rebecca Hajosy called the meeting to order at 10:05AM
Rebecca then called upon Keren Paquette to give the Social Services report due to her having to leave the meeting early. See Keren's report below with the other department reports.

Guest Presenter – Rick Ledwith, West Hartford Town Manager

Co-Chairperson Noreen Bachteler introduced Rick Ledwith who became the Interim Town Manager in February of 2022 and was unanimously appointed full time Town Manager in June of 2022.

The Town Manager gave the following updates on what's going on in town right now:

- The New Elmwood Community Center/Senior Center/Youth Center/Library project update.
The purchase of the 100 Mayflower Street property with former school building is complete. Now the town is working with Tecton Architects to evaluate their 3 options for the project: 1. Reuse existing building with a large addition, 2. Build new building in an "L" configuration with Library upstairs and Gym facing Mayflower Street, and 3. Build new building in a linear configuration with Community Center upstairs and Gym facing Beachland Park. The town has been coordinating Functional Program & Feasibility Study meetings with Tecton staff and there are two upcoming meetings open to the public for ideas and input on 10/6 (Virtual via Zoom) and 10/26 at the Elmwood Community Center. Once these meetings are over, the expectation is that there will be a feasibility presentation to the Town Council in November. There is a link from the West Hartford Library website to the New ECC info website with all this information and an open e-mail to send ideas – newecc@westhartford.gov. Town Manager Ledwith reported that during the expected 3 +year process of this project, all current facilities will remain open until the new facility is completed. It has not yet been determined what will happen to the current ECC building and Faxon Library once the new site is finished and open. He reported that the Bishops Corner Senior Center and Bishops Corner Library will remain open when the new building is completed.

Questions from the room:

- Has there been a traffic study done since Mayflower is a narrow street in an established neighborhood? The Town Manager reported that the expected plan is for there to be two entrances to the new site – one from Mayflower Street and one from South Quaker Lane through Beachland Park. He advised that a new bus route has been negotiated with CT Transit that will drop riders off at the new ECC. He reported that Helen Rubino-Turco has applied for funding for a new Senior Center van via the American Rescue Plan Act. Also, EV charging stations are being proposed for the site. He also noted that a temporary dog park received recent Town Council approval and will be opening in a few weeks at the 100 Mayflower Street site and will remain there until building construction starts.

A question and issue voiced by several guests was the increasing popularity of pickleball and whether the gym at the 100 Mayflower Street building could be utilized to make additional indoor pickleball courts until there is actual building construction given the current shortage of indoor courts at the existing ECC The Town Manager cited the 6 new outdoor Buena Vista courts however stated that he will take this issue back to appropriate town staff.

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- Other comments from the room concerned the lack affordable housing in town and the Town Manager was asked if the current ECC building could be developed into affordable housing units. He stated that the town would be considering whether to hold onto the property or look to sell to a private developer. When that time comes, he stated there would be public hearings for town residents to have input. Chair Rebecca Hajosy remarked that the February 2023 SCAC meeting will have a presentation regarding affordable housing plans in West Hartford. A question was raised concerning the status of the plans for the former UConn property. The Town Manager stated that the property was sold again a year ago to a developer who wants to remain anonymous for now – being referred to as West Hartford LLC. Conversations are ongoing between the town and the developer as to the best use of the property. In the meantime, the owner has secured the old UConn buildings because there were trespassers getting in and vandalizing, and they are taking care of the lawns according to the town’s specifications.
- Another question from the room had to do with the Fern Street bridge that has redirecting cones near Fern Park. The Town Manager reported that the bridge was deemed unsafe by the State, and it is slated to be fixed in 2023. The Town Manager closed out his hour presentation in addressing the current multi-family housing projects underway and a few other town highlights: There is currently a 97% occupancy rate in multifamily housing in town which is prompting the current development projects in town. Approved multi-family buildings include: 2 projects on Farmington Avenue between Trout Brook and North Main, a mixed use project with 64 high- end condos and 18- 20 apartments behind Lasalle Road on the corner of LaSalle and Arapahoe which is currently a large parking lot, a mixed use development on the current site of the Ashley Furniture store on New Britain Avenue in Elmwood, and the latest proposal for 172 apartments at 950 Trout Brook on the site of the current Children’s Museum, Most of these projects will have a percentage of units dedicated to low-income renters.
- A road project has been started on New Park Avenue to do similar traffic calming work as has been done on North Main Street – 4 lanes going down to 2 with turning lanes in the middle.
- New tennis courts at both high schools are currently under construction.
- The town has hired a firm to assist in “Revisioning West Hartford Center” – to make it more walkable, more bike-friendly and safer.

Chairperson’s Report

The minutes of the last meeting on June 21, 2022, were approved as distributed. Rebecca Hajosy reported that Kevin Ryan is now an official member of this Commission – welcome Kevin. That leaves one remaining open position as of today. However, it was reported that Linda Hanson and Bob Kennedy both will be ending their tenures in December of this year, so there will be three open positions as of December. Given the number of guests at the meeting this month, Rebecca and Noreen encouraged the guests to stay for the regular business part of the meeting and that anyone who is interested in possibly joining the Commission should be in contact with the Town Clerk.

West Hartford Social Services

Keren Paquette reported that a new Assistant to Helen Rubino-Turco will be starting on October 4th. Their department also has 3 interns this semester from UConn School of Social Work. The town’s Food Pantry is continuing with curbside distribution and is distributing more food than ever due to the inflationary cost of food. The Renters Assistance Program deadline is Sept. 30th. West Hartford once again has an energy assistance state program CRT point person in the department who is bilingual and available to help navigate these programs for town residents.

Seniors Job Bank

Linda Guzzo reported the Seniors Job Bank will be partnering with the Senior Centers on the “The Next Path Center” to be held at the ECC. This program will help boost technology skills with training for our seniors to make them more marketable. The SJB has 4 new board members from many walks of professional life.

Transportation

Kevin Farmer introduced ITN Central Connecticut for the guests and explained their business model and they provide rides for seniors over 60 and visually impaired adults in 15 towns in Central CT. Riders pay an annual membership fee and affordable rates for their rides. As a volunteer driver, you use your own car and can earn credits to use for your future transportation needs. While ITN may not be able to help everyone who comes to them, they try to match people with similar services offered elsewhere.

ECC Advisory Committee

Beth Rocco is the SCAC's representative on the New ECC Advisory Committee. She has been actively involved in the scheduled meetings with the Tecton group. She reported that Tecton had asked the committee representatives respectively for a list of their 5 Must-Haves for the NEW ECC; The 5 that she communicated on behalf of the SCAC were: A dedicated entrance for seniors with a covered portico; Senior Center offices close to that entrance; Senior bathrooms with raised toilets; Great room near the kitchen for meetings; & Dedicated Gym space from 9am-5pm daily year-round including the summer. Some of the Nice-to-Haves that were discussed – Table Tennis space, Outdoor Patio, Green Space. Beth has done research on other nearby town's senior centers' sizes and town budgets dedicated to seniors and how many seniors they service. She presented a document with this information to the Commission. The numbers are eye-opening and this information will be discussed for future action.

Senior Centers

Rebecca Sears reported excitement about the launch of the “The Next Path Center” in partnership with the Seniors Job Bank. The WHSC are trying to add programming for the 50 & older and those still working residents that would be offered in the evening and on weekends with a focus on fitness and continuing education. Rebecca reported that in the recently completed fiscal year, the two Senior Centers successfully provided a total of 388 instructional programs and they hope to grow this number in this next fiscal year. They are hoping to eliminate and/or reduce membership fees in 2023 (currently the fees are \$15 for residents and \$40 for non-residents). The Fall Senior Bulletin is now available – and one event to highlight is the October 4th Candidates Luncheon at the BCSC.

Agenda for Future Meetings

The next SCAC meeting is scheduled for October 18th at the BCSC. The tentative agenda is for a guest presenter on new or proposed changes in CT voting laws.

The meeting adjourned at 12:16PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary