

WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMISSION

MINUTES

October 18, 2022

Members Present: Rebecca Hajosy, Noreen Bachteler, Robert Kennedy, Mary Reilly, Beth Rocco, Rosemary Cleary, Kevin Ryan
Members Absent: Linda Hanson
Staff Present: Keren Paquette, Kevin Farmer, Liz Buczynski

Chairperson Rebecca Hajosy called the meeting to order at 10:07AM

Chairperson's Report

The Minutes of the last meeting on September 20, 2022 were approved as distributed.

Rebecca Hajosy discussed the Minutes of last month's meeting and the large number of guests.

Rebecca Hajosy reported that Mary Reilly has agreed to serve a second term with the Commission. Thank you Mary. That leaves one remaining open position as of today. However, it was reported that Linda Hanson and Bob Kennedy both will be ending their second terms in December of this year, so there will be three open positions as of December. Rebecca and Noreen encouraged members to actively look for anyone who is interested in possibly joining the Commission.

Rebecca Hajosy reported that there is no guest speaker this month as we were unable to get either of the Town's Registrars of Voting due to their schedules at this time of year and will use today's time to catch up on reports, etc. since last month's meeting ran over.

West Hartford Social Services

Keren Paquette introduced Liz Buczynski, the new Assistant to Helen Rubino-Turco, who started last week. She was also in attendance and discussed her prior employment at the United Way and her role with the town. The CRT worker helping with Energy Assistance that was recently hired has resigned and thus they are looking for someone to take on that position. The Renters Rebate ends this month unless there is a medical exception, which extends it until December. Energy Assistance is going on now and in addition to the regular program, there are matching payment programs. The State of CT awards and automatic approval if on SNAP and other government programs. The town's Food Pantry is continuing with curbside distribution and is still in need of food. The Volunteer Services Coordinator, Barbara Roberts, is recruiting for the food pantry, medical escorts, grocery shopping, etc. She is trying new efforts to recruit from Senior Housing complexes in West Hartford. Liz Buczynski pointed out that 211 and State of CT DSS website both have listings of energy assistance programs.

Seniors Job Bank

No Report. Linda Guzzo was not present.

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. They are at 87% of their pre-pandemic usage and majority of rides at this time are for medical reasons. Free rides are given for eye appointments through a national Regeneron Pharmaceuticals grant. Riders pay an annual

membership fee (\$40 for an individual and \$60 for couples) and affordable mileage rates for their rides at less than half of market value. Those qualifying as low income can receive up to 4 free rides/week and do not have to pay the annual membership fee. As a volunteer driver, you use your own car and can earn credits to use for your future transportation needs. They are in the process of their annual capital campaign.

New 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 has come out with one new design and she passed out copies and the group discussed the pros and cons of the plan. Concerns with the new proposed design included: insufficient amount of space solely dedicated to the senior center areas; use of common areas by summer camps and their impact on senior programming; limited parking spaces; the amount of space allocated to the library (being there is a main library and another branch library in town); no windows or skylights in the allocated interior rooms; no offices looking at the dedicated senior entry, and most of all, the idea that compared to nearby surrounding towns, the physical size of our Senior Centers and the budget allocation to seniors in West Hartford appears far below that of these nearby towns based on the data collected by Beth so far. This led to a discussion regarding forming a Sub-Committee to look into this issue (*see below under new business) The last public meeting regarding the Tecton concepts is set for Wednesday, October 26th, from 5:00PM to 8:00PM at the Elmwood Community Center. A number of Commission members indicated they will be attending the October 26th meeting with the formal presentation starting at 7:00PM. Beth reported that her last scheduled ECC Advisory Committee Meeting is October 27th. Given these articulated space concerns, Deputy Chair Bachteler spoke of the new opportunity as well as the need for more coordination of activities between the senior center and the branch library. She also stated that the West Hartford Town Manager at the September 18th SCAC Meeting mentioned that he was open to continuing the New ECC Advisory Committee following the Town Council's action on the feasibility study for ongoing communication purposes with the various stakeholders.

Senior Centers

Rebecca Sears was holding an event (Entertainment Showcase) today at Town Hall and thus there was no report. However, the SCAC did discuss and understood that the event was held to raise additional money for the operation of the two senior centers. Members questioned the sufficiency of the senior centers budget given the number of seniors residing in West Hartford as compared to data collected on nearby towns.

New Business:

The Commission voted to set up a new Sub-Committee to work with Town officials and other groups (i.e. AARP) to collect and analyze data and more specific numbers relating to West Hartford older adults over 55. Beth Rocco, Mary Reilly and Kevin Ryan volunteered to serve on the Sub-Committee. The Commission discussed how the numbers from the 2020 census and other data gathered by SCAC member Beth Rocco were eye-opening in that West Hartford appears to show a lower-than-average amount allocated per senior over 65 and that the size of the Senior Centers is also well below that of surrounding towns. It was however indicated that that the numbers gathered by Beth Rocco represent those 65 and older versus the age 55 and older group used by West Hartford Senior Centers. The plan for the Sub-Committee information would then be utilized by the Commission to set forth an official position to the Town Council on recommendations for increases in budgeting and other new resources for West Hartford's seniors. The economic benefit/stimulus of retaining seniors in the West Hartford community were discussed with new ideas and partnerships to be considered. Chair Hajosy discussed the aging and different needs of the "Baby Boomers" and having the Town strengthen its alignment in its budget and resources with the growing National and State models of "Aging in Place". The Sub-Committee will keep the SCAC Chair apprised of their activities and progress.

Agenda for Future Meetings

The next SCAC meeting is scheduled for November 15, 2022 at the BCSC. The tentative agenda is to request a guest presenter from the Town Council Human & Community Services Committee.

The meeting adjourned at 12:05PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca A. Hajosy for Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary (absent)