

## WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION

Minutes from Meeting on December 20, 2022

Members Present: Rebecca Hajosy, Noreen Bachteler, Mary Reilly, Beth Rocco, Linda Hanson, Kevin Ryan, Rosemary Cleary  
Staff Present: Keren Paquette, Rebecca Sears, Kevin Farmer  
Absent: Robert Kennedy  
Guests: Guest speakers for the meeting – Joseph Dakers, Town of West Hartford Tax Assessor and Lori Kipperman, Administrative Assessment Tech  
Other guests: Sarah Schafer, John Montano, Marlene Montano

Chairperson Rebecca Hajosy called the meeting to order at 10:04AM  
The minutes of the November 2022 meeting were approved as written.

### ***Chairs Report***

Rebecca Hajosy reported that Bob Kennedy and Linda Hanson will be leaving the Commission after this meeting as their 5-year terms are up (Bob not here this month). Linda was presented with a gift from the Commission. As part of the Commission's look at our charter and mission statement, should we also be considering shortening the 5-year member commitment? Rebecca also reported that she looked into the availability of town money for the Commission to use for materials, etc. and she has confirmed that there is no money available.

### ***Senior Centers***

Becky Sears reported that their holiday programs are in full swing and that the 12 Days of Christmas program and the Hannukah Lunch are happening this week. The Senior Centers will be hosting Breakfasts with the Town Manager on 1/9 & 2/7. Also on 2/7 there will be a home safety program "You Are Your Own First Responder". Rebecca and staff are working on the Spring Bulletin now and will be sent to the publisher at the end of January. Both Senior Centers have modified their schedules and will be closing at 4:00PM on Fridays this winter. She is also doing a staff reorganization between the two centers in order to meet budget requirements. Even though the budget is on a fiscal year that runs July 1 through June 30, the staffing hours calculations run on a calendar year basis. Rebecca has asked her Manager to go back to the pre-Covid budget levels and staff increases are needed. She is still looking to put together more weekend and evening programs for younger adults but doesn't currently have the budget or the staff to add these. The request has been put in for a new Senior Center van but it is still not approved by the town. Once approved, there's a delivery delay, possibly 18 months, for delivery of the vehicle, but the town is aware and on the case. A question from another member - WeHa TV has a new screen with scrolling information – is this something the ECC can use for publicizing events? Rebecca will investigate.

### ***Guest Presenter – Joseph Dakers, Town Tax Assessor & Lori Kipperman, Administrative Assessment Tech***

Chairperson Noreen Bachteler introduced Joseph Dakers, the Town's Assessor since 2009. He has been with the Town of West Hartford for 20 years. Lori distributed a take-away document "Assessment Exemption & Benefit Programs" which lays out all the programs and the requirements. The benefit programs are mostly state programs but are administered at the town level. All programs have an age requirement and income requirements to qualify. The three main programs are: Elderly Home Owner (State), Elderly Home Owner Local option (Town), and Elderly Tax freeze. Joseph stated that the town has 7000 adults 65 years and older and 500 people are on the main 2 homeowner programs and 244 are on the Freeze program. There are also several Veterans benefit programs and Social Security Disability and low-income programs. The Assessor's office would like to get the word out to more seniors in town to take advantage of the programs. Income requirements look at AGI and RMD's and other income. But with the upcoming raise in Social Security benefits, the state income limits for the programs will also rise. Enrollees must re-enroll every two years and the Assessor's office sends out them reminders. All programs can be layered and used simultaneously. February 1 is start of application period. Ideas from Commission members – can the Assessors office put program descriptions in the tax bills that come from the town? Can the Senior Centers put info on these programs into their seasonal bulletins? Can the Senior Centers get brochures to hand out when AARP does their tax preparation program in the spring? The Assessors office will investigate these ideas. Joseph also stated that the town assesses properties every five years, and the next assessment year will be 2026.

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

No report this month.

### ***Transportation***

Kevin Farmer reported that ITN Central Connecticut is in the middle of its annual appeal where 2/3 of its budget comes from. The service is always looking for volunteer drivers (there currently are 24) and board members.

***West Hartford Social Services***

Keren Paquette reported that the Renters Rebate program ended on 12/5/22. The Energy Assistance program has seen applications double this year and is short-staffed so processing is taking a long time. The Town Food Pantry is still distributing curbside. In addition to the pantry, this team runs a lot of Federal food programs with income guidelines, limited slots and a waiting list.

***ECC Advisory Committee for New Community Center***

Beth Rocco reported that the presentation to the Town Council about the new Community Center was on the calendar for the 12/13/22 meeting but was taken off due to the West Hartford Center controversy with the new condos & apartments development on LaSalle. The ECC Committee is hopeful that their presentation will now be at the 1/10/23 meeting. Unfortunately, Beth is unable to attend this meeting.

***Commission Sub-Committee on Charter & Mission Statement***

The Town Clerk's office is updating commission mission statements for all town committees & commissions. Noreen will distribute what these changes are once she gets them from Essie. This commission discussed the 5-year commitment for members, which is 50 years old, and the group voted to change the commitment to 3 years. Noreen Bachteler will e-mail the commission members the other proposed changes that the subcommittee is recommending for a vote at next month's meeting.

***New Business***

Every commission in town is required to prepare an end of year annual report. Rebecca and Noreen will be working on this. This commission would like to add a new section with what this group is advising the Town Council to look at and that the group is looking to take more official positions and actions on senior matters – such as looking at 3 priorities: 1. Need more dedicated space for seniors in the new ECC; 2. Increase the budget for the Senior Centers; and 3. The need for more “senior friendly” housing in West Hartford.

Kevin Ryan spoke on the “Connecticut Age Well Collaborative” that several local towns are now part of. The Collaborative “is a statewide, cross-sector initiative that fosters Connecticut Communities where we all thrive as we grow up and grow older. The Collaborative co-creates, educates, innovates, celebrates, and evaluates best practices, projects, and policies to shape more aging, dementia, and disability-inclusive communities.” This Commission should review the components and advise the Town Council if West Hartford should try to get certified as part of this Collaborative.

The 2023 calendar of meetings was voted on and approved.

Commission's next meeting will be Jan. 17, 2023. The guest speaker will be Kristen Gorski, Economic Development Coordinator for the town.

***Public Comment***

John & Marlene Montano, guests at the meeting, asked to bring up an issue that they could use the Commission's help on. In the Elmwood Community Center gymnasium, which is used for indoor pickleball, there is a large window and at certain times of the day, the sun comes in and blinds the players. It is dangerous. John has been working with the ECC to try to get a window covering for more than a year. The ECC purchased a covering, the ECC custodian agreed to install it, but then the town Facilities department nixed the installation and offered no explanation or alternative. The pickleball community is also frustrated that their idea of using the Mayflower property gym for indoor pickleball has gone nowhere. John asked if this Commission could help them move these ideas along. Rebecca & Noreen agreed to take these issues to Helen Rubino-Turco, the commission's liaison to the Town Council.

The meeting adjourned at 12:20PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary