

WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION

Minutes from Meeting on January 17, 2023

Members Present: Rebecca Hajosy, Noreen Bachteler, Mary Reilly, Beth Rocco, Kevin Ryan,
Staff Present: Keren Paquette, Kevin Farmer
Absent: Rosemary Cleary, Rebecca Sears
Guests: Guest speaker for the meeting – Kristen Gorski, Town of West Hartford Economic Development
Coordinator
Other guests: Larry Carr

Chairperson Rebecca Hajosy called the meeting to order at 10:05AM

The minutes of the December 2022 meeting were approved with 2 changes: “Boards and Commissions” to replace “committees & commissions” in the section titled “Commission Sub-Committee on Charter & Mission Statement”. In the New Business section, Kevin Ryan’s mention of the “Connecticut Age-Well Collaborative” should include “This Commission should advise the Town Council to pursue the “Age-Friendly West Hartford” initiative. Also in questions – has the new bus for the WHSC been approved or not? Noreen said she would follow up on the status of this issue for clarification.

Chairs Report

Rebecca Hajosy reported that she and Noreen have discussed the format for the SCAC’s 2022 Annual Report but it has not yet been completed due to busy schedules and illnesses. The plan is for this report to be reviewed by the Commission before submission to the SCAC’s Town Liaison. Rebecca also reported that the Seniors Job Bank is still without a Director so it is doubtful that anyone from that organization will be coming to our Commission meetings for the time being. An update from our last meeting – the windows in the indoor pickleball court at the ECC have been covered with a frosted paint.

Senior Centers

No report this month as Becky Sears was not in attendance. Noreen reported that the Senior Centers Bulletin will be published at the end of February for the March/April/May time frame.

Guest Presenter – Kristen Gorski, Town of West Hartford Economic Development Coordinator

Kristen has been with the Town’s Economic Development Office since 2016, and before that in a similar role in Bristol. She reports up through the Town Manager’s office. Her job focuses on business support and commercial development support, mostly helping businesses find available space in town to lease or develop to move into and also provides similar assistance to local non-profit groups. In the past year and a half in West Hartford, there has been more housing development activity than ever before seen. Most of the new developments are multi-family housing that is leasing at market rates, though her office is pushing developers to hold aside at least 5% as “affordable”. “Affordable” qualification is based on income that is up to 80% of “Area Median Income” which for West Hartford is \$83,000 for one person. Based on state and town laws, they can only encourage this, not make it a requirement in a development contract. Kristen also wanted the group to know that all new housing developments need to be ADA-compliant, so all have elevators which also makes them more accessible for seniors.

The major developments their office is work on right now are:

- The UConn property on Trout Brook & Asylum. The proposed plans are for the east side to be used for development of 400 housing units and the west side for mixed commercial use with some type of medical setting plus some additional housing units.
- 900 Farmington Avenue/West Hartford Inn project: 44 housing units planned - the current attached restaurant space will be demolished, and a 4-story addition will be put onto the current hotel building. 80% of the units will be held out at affordable rates and 20% at market rates.
- Arapahoe & LaSalle corner in the Center – this development will have commercial space on the ground floor and 25 apartments above.
- Parking lot behind Union Kitchen/Avert on LaSalle – this will be a 58-unit condo building with parking underground for 180 cars. Parking spaces will also be allocated for employees in the Center and public parking.

The Commission asked Kristen if any of these buildings will have dedicated units for seniors and tried to emphasize that not all Seniors in town require affordable housing, just more accessible housing. She said they do not. Then the question was asked about buildings like the Plant School and Faxon where seniors live and Kristen explained that those are run by the West Hartford Housing Authority, a nonprofit that is not part of Town government. They have a Board of Directors, and their 16-year Executive Director is retiring soon so she suggested it would be a good time to align this Commission with their group. Kristen also said that as part of the American Rescue Plan funds, their office has access to 6 million dollars that can be given to Developers as loans or grants to help develop a project in West Hartford, as long as 80% of the units will be designated as affordable housing. Any developer can apply but developing properties in a census tract that doesn’t already have a lot of affordable housing will get the priority. The Commission also brought up to Kristen the concept of retaining the current Elmwood Community Center and Faxon Library buildings once the 100 Mayflower project is built, and keeping them to develop into age-restricted senior housing.

Kristen said that the future of those buildings is uncertain but now is the time to bring this idea forward to the Town Council before any plans are made for these two properties.

West Hartford Social Services

Keren Paquette reported that their Manager of Social Services, Astrid Calderon, has resigned so they are looking for her successor. There is also a part-time Social Worker position open. The Energy Assistance Program is still taking applications. Keren also reported that Operation Fuel has increased their aid amounts to \$1000 twice a year from what used to be \$500 once a year. The Town's food pantry is also participating in the Federal "Commodities Supplemental Food Program" where clients receive a box of food once a month which is distributed out of St. James Church. In April, the Renters Rebate program reopens registration.

Seniors Job Bank

No report this month.

Transportation

Kevin Farmer reported that ITN Central Connecticut has launched on a new software program and is currently in their annual fundraising campaign right now. ITN has also received some American Rescue Plan funding from the Town to be used for advertising for new volunteer drivers.

ECC Advisory Committee for New Community Center

Beth Rocco reported that the presentation by Tecton to the Town Council on the new Elmwood Community Center which was on the calendars for the 12/13/22 and 1/10/2023 Town Council meetings was taken off those agendas. The Chairs commented that this might have been due to the Town Council's attention to the recent critical pedestrian safety /traffic incidents. Beth will continue her follow-up and keep the Commission posted.

Commission Sub-Committee on Charter & Mission Statement

Noreen took the Commission members through the proposed changes to the SCAC Town Code and updated Mission Statement. The Commission unanimously approved the new draft. Noreen will now email this document to SCAC Town Liaison Helen Rubino-Turco for her review, input and advisement on next steps.

New Business

Noreen informed the group that the Town's website now has an online application for any resident interested in volunteering to serve on any of the Town's Boards and Commissions. The SCAC has three openings. Rebecca brought up that the SCAC needs to decide if it wants to be represented at the "Celebrate West Hartford" event in June. The Co-Chairs will reach out to other Commissions and the Senior Center Director to see if tables can be shared since they have a cost associated with them. The deadline is in April. Kevin Ryan asked if we could get a speaker from the West Hartford Housing Authority to come to our next meeting. Rebecca told the group that we have Bette Marafino, President of the CT Alliance for Retired Americans, already scheduled for the February meeting so it would have to be March at the earliest. A request was also made by Beth to have the guest speakers begin at 10:30AM or 10:45AM if possible so the business items can first be done.

Commission's next meeting will be Tuesday February 21, 2023.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary