

WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION

Minutes from Meeting on February 21, 2023

Members Present: Rebecca Hajosy, Noreen Bachteler, Mary Reilly, Beth Rocco, Kevin Ryan, Rosemary Cleary, Eileen Rau (new member), Anne Massucco (new member)
Staff Present: Keren Paquette, Kevin Farmer, Robin Clare (new SJB Executive Director)
Absent: Rebecca Sears
Guests: Guest presenter for the meeting – Bette Marafino, President of the CT Alliance for Retired Americans
Other guests: John & Marleen Montano, Dale Comstock, Lioned & Jodi Jackowitz, Karen Lurie

The meeting was called to order at 10:03AM

The minutes of the January 2023 meeting were approved as written.

Two new members of the Commission were welcomed to their their first meeting – Anne Massucco and Eileen Rau. Also introduced was Robin Clare, the new Executive Director of the Seniors Job Bank who just started her new position last week. The group did introductions around the table.

Guest Presenter – Bette Marafino, President of the CT Alliance for Retired Americans

Chairperson Noreen Bachteler introduced Bette Marafino, President of the CT Alliance for Retired Americans. There are 38 member states in the Alliance and it was formed 15 years ago. The Alliance is a nationwide coalition of community-based and retired union organizations working to advance public policy that protects the health and economic security of older Americans. The “tentpoles” of the Alliance include health care, economic security, affordable housing and long term care. For the Connecticut Alliance, the members include state employees, UAW workers, NEA and other teachers’ unions, electrical, plumbing and pipe fitters’ union.

Bette told the group that she would be meeting with Congressman John Larson later today to discuss his proposed bill the *Social Security 2100 Act* that he’s planning to introduce into Congress this year which includes eliminating the “Windfall Elimination Provision” and the “Government Pension Offset” in the Social Security system which was enacted the 1983. This is when a person, i.e teachers who didn’t pay into Social Security are unable to get their deceased spouse’s Social Security benefit because of their own teacher’s pension. Changing this rule is a priority for the National Alliance for Retired Americans. Bette reported that in the Connecticut General Assembly right now, the Committee on Aging is working on staffing issues in nursing homes – bills that address staff training requirements, increasing staff pay minimums, and requiring air conditioning in all residents’ rooms. Bette left copies of handouts on the following topics: An Introduction to the Alliance & Mission Statement, Position Paper on Expanding Social Security, Position Paper on The Social Security Fairness Act, Factsheet: Inflation Reduction Act and Prescription Drug Prices, Position Paper: Protecting the Right to Vote, Position Paper: Lowering the Price of Prescription Drugs.

Chairs Report

Rebecca Hajosy reported that the Commission’s two new members have been vetted and appointed by the Town Council. Rebecca and Noreen have not yet started work on the 2022 year-end report for the Commission due to illnesses and time restraints. Rebecca reported that for Celebrate West Hartford on June 10-11, 2023, Becky Sears has offered for our Commission to share the use of their Senior Center’s table and also provide the SCAC with a table for the Senior Day Fair on May 10, 2023.

West Hartford Social Services

Keren Paquette reported that she has been appointed the Manager of Social Services for the town. With this promotion, Keren’s Social Worker full time position is now open. This position will remain specific to services for older adults. The Energy Assistance Program – CRT has found someone to work out of the West Hartford Town Hall to help process West Hartford applicants through their system. Keren also reported, as she did last month, that Operation Fuel now has more money to grant to applicants - \$1000 grants two times per year. The town’s Food Pantry continues to give out more and more food as food prices spike. Beth Rocco said she had heard that the Food Pantry to be relocated to the proposed new Elmwood Community Center will not have refrigeration capability which others stated would limit certain food donations. Keren stated that a factor may be that there are regulations on storing rules regarding foods that need refrigeration.

Seniors Job Bank

Robin Clare, the new Executive Director, is now in her second week on the job. She is in the process of learning their online system especially how the application process works. Robin reiterated that the Job Bank covers towns in the greater Hartford area including West Hartford.

Transportation

Kevin Farmer reported that ITN Central Connecticut is learning some of the challenges with their new software. Funding for the rides program is funded at 1/3 from rider fees and 2/3 from community support. ITN will be doing some advertising for additional volunteer drivers in a Turley publication with the American Rescue grant money they received.

Senior Centers

Becky Sears was not in attendance at the meeting due to illness. Kevin Ryan reported that the new Senior Bulletin has been published ahead of schedule and many new programs are launching, including a new Pickleball page.

ECC Advisory Committee for New Community Center

Beth Rocco reported that a price tag of \$66 million has now been announced to the Economic Development Committee and the Town Council by Tecton for the new Elmwood Community Center/Senior Center/Library. The size of the project is 82,000 square feet. Beth has a copy of the itemization of the costs if anyone wants to look at it. There is a link on the town's Library page to view plans and blueprints.

Commission Sub-Committee on Charter & Mission Statement

In January 2023, Noreen submitted the Commission's proposed changes to the SCAC's code and mission statement to SCAC Town Liaison, Helen Rubino-Turco, Director, of Leisure & Social Service. On February 17, 2023, Noreen had an in-person meeting at Town Hall with Helen and Attorney Cynthia Lauture, West Hartford Assistant Corporation Counsel to review and discuss the proposed changes including using age 55 for consideration of an "older adult" and the new name for the Commission. Noreen reported that they concurred with the proposed change of the SCAC member term from five to three years. Attorney Lauture said she would send Noreen some examples of mission statements from other towns' commissions to look over. Noreen advised them that the current SCAC wants to move forward in the process and will reconvene the sub-committee to assist in reviewing the additional information.

New Business

John & Marleen Montano, West Hartford residents, reported that they were able to meet with Rick Ledwith, Helen Rubino-Turco, and Mark Blanchard from the town recently to again request reconsideration of any possible use of the 100 Mayflower property gym for indoor pickleball. They presented research they had done showing West Hartford last in Senior Center spending for seniors 65 and over as compared to 11 other nearby towns. They also presented data showing Senior Center membership fees and pickleball fees in these other towns as compared to West Hartford. SCAC Members were given copies of their research

Rebecca advised the Commission that members are respectfully required to attend the FOIA training at 6:30pm on 3/2/2023 or 3/6/2023 that is being conducted **virtually** by the West Hartford Office of Corporation Counsel and the Town Clerk. They will explain the rules for running Commission meetings, how and when they are scheduled, preparation of the agenda, when we have to submit the minutes, etc. Rebecca will forward the meeting invitations/ links to members once received. The question was also asked if the SCAC minutes could be attached to the Senior Center's weekly e-mails so that seniors may have more ready access to this information. Noreen said she would look into the possibility of doing so with Town Clerk Essie Labrot.

Speaker for the March meeting will be Jill Corrado, the Interim Director of the West Hartford Housing Authority & Trout Brook Realty Advisors. The Commission will try to have more housing-related guests as that is our focus for the year.

The meeting adjourned at 12:00PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary