

**HUMAN AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING
JANUARY 10, 2022, 6:00 P.M.
MINUTES**

1. Call to Order

- A. Chairwoman Adrienne Billings-Smith called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Attendees – Mayor Shari Cantor, Deputy Mayor Liam Sweeney, Councilor Alberto Cortes, Councilor Mary Fay, Town Manager Matthew Hart, Director of Human Resources Rick Ledwith, Director of Leisure and Social Services Helen Rubino-Turco and Acting Library Director Carol Waxman.

2. Business Items

- A. Meeting Minutes for October 14, 2021, and December 16, 2021 – Both minutes were approved.
- B. New Elmwood Community & Cultural Center Advisory Committee – Mr. Hart mentioned a memo had been uploaded and briefly went over the memo. In October 2021, staff recommended a 9-member committee comprised of members from different boards and commissions. More recently, Mayor Cantor and Chairwoman Billings-Smith suggested a few additional members. This would bring the advisory committee to a total of 16 members. Once the composition has been affirmed by the Committee, a letter should be sent to the various groups asking them to recommend a representative for review, in addition to soliciting for two Resident-at-Large volunteers. The slate of nominations would be brought before the Committee next month. Ms. Rubino-Turco reported outreach has begun with various boards and commissions and they have expressed interest and were appreciative of being included. Nothing formal has been extended. There have been some offers from the general public. They have been thanked and told we are working on the process. Chairwoman Billings-Smith noted the approval of all Committee members and asked Mr. Hart to begin putting together the letters. Mayor Canter recommended holding on the Resident-at-Large selections until researching those interested to ensure they are representing the Town and not just representing the interest of the groups they are chosen from.

Ms. Rubino-Turco mentioned as a side note 12 proposals have been received for the Functional Program Development and Feasibility study, which has been whittled down to 5 firms, who will be interviewed over the next few weeks. In addition, site visits are continuing.

3. Communications

4. Staff Reports

- A. Library – Ms. Waxman reported the libraries are open. The Faxon branch was closed for one day due to a lack of staff but patrons could be served at the other two buildings. Regarding the latest pandemic protocol, the Library communicates daily with the Health District and the Library continues to offer a variety of virtual programs, which are expected to be available in-person this winter in small groups. All indoor programming has been canceled until further notice or until the positivity rates go down. The Library will be offering Grab-and-Go Craft and online adult, teen and children programs. As the positivity rate is high and the indoor programming has had to be suspended, a toy lending library will be available for the younger children. Families can come and check the toys out, take them home, return them and get new toys. The Noah Webster Library is open for Sunday hours, 12-4, and will be open for 10 Sundays. The Smart Lockers have been a huge hit and people are taking advantage of this service. The Study Pods are available for use for up to four people. These are enclosed glass study pods. The new tech lab, called Study 20 South, will be opening later this month. Staff and equipment are in place. The Library is now associated with Amazon Smile as a charity. Amazon Smile allows Amazon shoppers to designate a charity to receive a portion of their shopping expenses. The donations will go to the West Hartford Library Foundation.

In addition, photographs from a contest held at the Library are now on display on the light poles on South Main Street. The Kindness Project just completed its fifth year. The project entails the collection of hygiene items from the community, which goes to the food pantry and nurses' offices at the high schools and also helps the Fern Street Backpack Program. Two local artists have been hired to curate six art shows at the Library this year. The new Library Director, Laura Irmscher, is due to start on January 24.

- B. Leisure & Social Services – Ms. Rubino-Turco reminded everyone that the fee changes presented at the last meeting will be on the Town Council agenda. There is a \$1 increase recommended for all users of the outdoor pool and the green fees at Buena Vista and Rockledge would be increased by \$1. The Rockledge season passes would increase between 3.2% and 3.8% and Buena Vista between 4.3% and 5%. These increases would offset the minimum wage increase and the increased material costs. There would also be a \$10 increase in the rental for an entire sheet of ice at Veteran's Rink. All of these changes are retroactive to January 1 except for the Veteran's Rink, which will go into effect when the fee change goes in. All other changes would not be effective until later this year. Ms. Rubino-Turco also reported the Westmore Park Outdoor Classroom was reviewed again by the Town Planning and Zoning and was successful. The Northeast Collaborative Architects was selected to design the Eisenhower Pool. They will be subcontracting with Counsilman-Hunsacker, a nationally known aquatic design team, and some local consultants, Bemis Engineering and Macchi Engineers. Another project underway is the silt dredging project at Rockledge. The Spring/Summer Camp Guide is under development. The brochure will be available online and in limited print at various places including the libraries and elementary schools.

Due to the rise in COVID cases, some programs have had to be canceled or curtailed, some Senior Center programs have been delayed or gone virtual. Finally, there has been a rise in complaints to the Fair Rent Commission. A session will be conducted later in January. Sometimes knowing there is going to be a hearing is an incentive for the two parties to come

to an agreement but there are some difficult landlords in town and the Commission is in place to help adjudicate those complaints. Deputy Mayor Sweeney inquired about the remaining inventory of kits and masks available. Mr. Hart stated that some kits are being held for various segments of the population. There have been two distributions to date and both supplies were exhausted quickly. A vendor is being sought to test on a regular basis. The Health Director is meeting with that company at some point this week. Regarding the masks, out of 230,000 received approximately 2500 have been distributed. Ms. Rubino-Turco stated they are being distributed regularly through the food pantry and various facilities. Chairwoman Billings-Smith inquired about an update on the restaurant at Rockledge. Ms. Rubino-Turco reported the restaurant is in Year 5 of an 8-year lease. Due to COVID, they are concerned about their staff. They closed for a while between the holidays due to a lack of staff.

In addition, The Snack Shack is a perennial challenge with finding the right fit because it is seasonal but also every day. Their liquor permit is tied to the restaurant, so it is part and parcel – part of the contract to run the snack bar as well as the beer cart. It is an important amenity but it can be a challenge to operate. There will be a meeting scheduled with them in February to discuss their plan and make some recommendations based on what we have also heard from golfers, the community at large and members of the Town Council.

- C. Town Manager – Mr. Hart reminded the Committee funding was recently approved for a series of municipal projects but others need to be brought forward. He would be reaching out to Mayor Cantor about restarting the Community Engagement process and then the projects would be brought before the Finance and Administration Committee for more discussion.

5. Future Agenda Items

6. Adjournment – The meeting adjourned at 6:47 p.m.

/axb