

**HUMAN AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING
FEBRUARY 14, 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, Chairwoman Adrienne Billings-Smith, Councilor Alberto Cortes, Acting Town Manager Rick Ledwith, Director of Leisure and Social Services Helen Rubino-Turco and Library Director Laura Imscher.

2. Business Items

- A. Meeting Minutes for January 10, 2022 – Minutes were approved.
- B. New Elmwood Community Center Advisory Committee – Mr. Ledwith went over a letter (uploaded to CivicClerk) that was sent out to 14 stakeholder groups requesting their nominations of a member and an alternate to serve on the advisory committee. The letter was sent out on February 9 and has been well-received with many already nominating members. The search for the two residents at large to serve on the advisory committee will begin toward the end of the month after the diversity of the stakeholder group representatives is known to ensure there is a nice cross-representation of the community. Mr. Ledwith also provided an update on the Program Development and Facility Feasibility Study. An RFP had been issued before the holidays for an architect or design firm to work with the committee on assessing the existing Mayflower facility and evaluate renovation versus new construction options. Twelve firms responded and five of the firms will be interviewed later this week. The hope is to narrow this down to one firm and begin contract deliberations from there. Should everything go on schedule, a meeting with the committee as a whole and the selected firm is possible in March.

3. Communications

4. Staff Reports

- A. Library – Ms. Imscher briefly went over her written report (uploaded to CivicClerk). There was an increase in library usage. When physical circulation is compared to the same time last year, check-outs are up 56%. The staff has noted the volume of people coming into the library is starting to reach pre-pandemic levels in some cases and attendance is up 11% from December. Regarding program highlights, the library hosted a virtual program, “Justice for Ethel Rosenberg”, which was delivered by retired Atty. Robert Meeropol making a case to exonerate his mother, Ethel Rosenberg, who was executed in 1953 for spying for the Soviet Union. There were 120 attendees and this was the highest attendance for a stand-alone event in several years. Ms. Imscher reported cleaning has begun in anticipation of the return of in-person programs, some starting in March and include the Lego Club for kids and ESOL

classes for adults. West Hartford Reads! will be returning this spring and encourages everyone to read the works of one notable author. Acclaimed author Gish Jen will be at the West Hartford Town Hall on April 6 with first come, first seated attendance and registration is available on the website. In anticipation of this, the library will be hosting a series of Gish Jen book discussions in March. The Mayor's Youth Council has been meeting regarding their action projects.

Three members met with Dr. Tracy Wilson in January to assist with the Witness Stones Project and will be providing feedback regarding a field trip video being produced by the Noah Webster House and West Hartford Historical Society. The Youth Council is also working on petitioning Town Council to rename New Street in honor of an enslaved person from West Hartford. The Youth Council is also helping with the QR Code Project using audio files to tell the stories of slaves depicted on the mural outside of the Noah Webster Library. They also created a new town email address for correspondence and publicity and a new Instagram account (myc@westhartfordCT.gov), which will be maintained by the Social Media subcommittee. The Smart Lockers at Bishops Corner continue to be successful with 133 locker pickups in January and of these, 44% were when the library was closed. Studio 20 South, formerly the Tech Lab, will be open for about 20 hours a week with options for morning, afternoon, evening and weekend appointments. The studio is staffed by technicians to provide assistance and instruct patrons on the various equipment available including audio and video equipment, a keyboard, a Cricut fabrication device, a 3D printer, AutoCAD for drafting, a virtual reality headset and a station for digitizing analog content. The studio began its soft launch last week with the full launch will be later this spring.

Regarding community outreach, the library continues to partner with Golden Door, a center for immigrants. The Golden Door Director of Education, Elizabeth Hanlon, is leading the discussions for Building Connections, which is a book club for immigrants. The first session was in January and discussed *Humans of New York* by Brandon Stanton. The Fern Street Backpack program continues for families of middle and high school students at the Faxon Branch Library to pick up food bags during the school year. There are 12 families registered for the program. The program is looking at the possibility of expansion. Finally, a few new resources available to patrons are ArtistWorks and Skillshare. ArtistWorks provides access to self-paced online music lessons, which are taught by established musicians and the library content includes lessons for a wide variety of instruments and skill levels. Skillshare is an online learning community featuring thousands of classes for the creative and curious. Topics include web development, computer programming, art, business, cooking, crafts and design.

- B. Leisure & Social Services – Ms. Rubino-Turco reported registrations began for spring, summer and summer camp programs began on February 1. In the first 30 minutes, there were 3200 registrations and over \$500,000 in revenue in program registrations. In this one day, over \$655,000 was collected, which reflects the tremendous interest in returning to camp and in-person programs. Westmoor Park made up more than 35% of this. There is a new camp page on the website with photos of each camp, which explains what happens at that camp and what the camp is like. Something similar is being planned for the parks which is anticipated to be up and running by April, in time for Earth Day and Arbor Day. Design is underway for the Eisenhower Pool Bath House. Some sites have been visited but trying to

manage expectations with the architect because the first pass-through was too grand. Trying to stay within the budget, maybe have just the basics. A preliminary design may be ready for review in March, keeping with the timeline of putting it out to bid for a contractor in late April or May and have someone in place by June 1. There are numerous capital projects underway, which were discussed at the last meeting with nothing new to report other than some projects that were part of the ARPA request, which were approved at the Town Council meeting in January. In Social Services, there is a relocation that has been dragging on at 415 Prospect Avenue.

Nearly everyone has been relocated. There are still three or four lingering but discussions are ongoing with the landlord and property manager about accepting them back into the site and if not, relocating them somewhere else. The Fair Rent Commission had one hearing scheduled last month with a second hearing scheduled this month. There has not been a Fair Rent Commission hearing in years. The Commission was reconvened with the appropriate training. The Commission is in place to protect renters and landlords and get a fair resolution to a conflict. The West Hartford Prevention Council submitted their annual report for last year, which is included in the package and will be received at the next Town Council meeting. The report mostly covers the work they conducted through a wellness assessment. It was not a needs assessment but a wellness assessment and the focus was on substance abuse, prevention programs, mental health and wellness. They also oversee a grant that is received annually from the Northcentral Region Mental Health Board, which is called Amplify. Last year their focus was on vaping. This year the focus is on vaping and mental health. Regarding the Community Development Block Grant funding, funds are received every year between \$900,000 and \$1M and they are focused on programs for low and moderate-income residents, as well as some of the services provided for adult residents with disabilities, the food pantry and other programs such as the Hillcrest Area Neighborhood Outreach Center.

Two public hearings will be held to answer questions the public may have if they are interested in applying for the funds for next year, starting July 1. The hearings are scheduled for this Friday and next week. It is a promotion opportunity to tell the community these funds exist and if they have an eligible program, they can consider applying. Lastly, they are working on the final grant application process for nonprofit organizations and small businesses. Hopefully, there will be additional information on this in the coming weeks. Celebrate West Hartford will be held on June 11 and 12. It is a wonderful opportunity to reach out to the community at large. Approximately 35,000 people attend this event over the 2-day weekend. It is a great way to share what you do with the community at large.

5. Future Agenda Items

6. Adjournment – The meeting adjourned at 6:39 p.m.

/axb