

WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION

Minutes from Meeting on April 18, 2023

Members Present: Rebecca Hajosy, Noreen Bachteler, Beth Rocco, Kevin Ryan, Rosemary Cleary, Kaye Straw, Mary Reilly, Eileen Rau, Anne Massucco
Staff Present: Rebecca Sears, Keren Paquette, Robin Clare
Absent: Kevin Farmer
Guests: Guest presenters for the meeting – Laura Irmischer, Pramod Pradhan, and Anne Marie Salerno from the West Hartford Public Library
Other community guests: Mary Silverberg, Joe Kolczynski, Carol Blauvelt

The meeting was called to order at 10:07AM by Rebecca Hajosy
The minutes of the March 2023 meeting were approved as written.

Chairs Report

Noreen Bachteler is planning to man this Commission's table at the West Hartford Senior Fair on Wednesday May 10. Any other Commission members are welcome to join her.

West Hartford Social Services

Keren Paquette reported that last month, the Social Services department received a record number of referrals for assistance and service. The majority of these referrals were for housing and utilities assistance. Keren was happy to announce that a new full time Social Worker will be joining her department starting on May 8 . The three social services interns will be finishing their jobs as the semester winds down. The Renters Rebate Program started on April 1 – eligibility requirements are age 65 plus or a disability in addition to income limits. Applications can be done in person at the Senior Centers or Town Hall or online. The benefit max is \$700 for a single person or \$900 for a couple. CRT continues to administer West Hartford's applications for the Energy Assistance program and the application period ends on May 31. This program uses income thresholds only for eligibility, not assets. Operation Fuel has now backtracked on the plan to raise the benefit to \$1,000 due to the number of applications they received. The town's food pantry recently got a large donation of food from the Rotary Club.

Seniors Job Bank

Robin Clare, the new Executive Director of the Seniors Job Bank, reported that they will be collaborating with the Senior Centers to present an education program –“ Working into Retirement”. Date TBD.

Transportation

Kevin Farmer was not at the meeting so no report from Transportation.

Senior Centers

Becky Sears reported that a new part-time Senior Center staffer has been hired and this person has grant-writing experience. The Summer Senior Center Bulletin is being finished in the next 2 weeks and will be available in mid-May. For the upcoming Senior Day fair on Wednesday May 10, there is one open exhibition/table spot left. This Commission will have its own table.

ECC Advisory Committee for New Community Center

Beth Rocco reported that she was the only person in West Hartford who attended one of the open town budget meetings. There was nothing in the presented new budget having to do with the new Community Center and there is no update as to when the Town Council will be asked to approve the project. Beth also brought up to the budget presenters that the Senior Centers need to be better funded including 2 more full-time employees and a transportation vehicle.

Commission Sub-Committee on Charter & Mission Statement

No report

New Business/Public Comment

No report

Guest Presenters – West Hartford Public Library staff: Laura Irmscher, Director; Pramod Pradhan, Community Engagement Librarian; and Ann Marie Salerno, Circulation Supervisor

Laura started by familiarizing everyone with the e-books and audiobooks apps that they participate in: “Hoopla” and “Libby”. She handed out a brochure: “E-Books, Streaming Services, and more available for FREE with your library card”. Laura also talked about the new “Studio 20” at the Noah Webster Library – this is a studio where you can make and edit films, convert tapes to digital files, do 3D printing, use Virtual Reality Goggles, and other technology. There is also a “Tech Therapy” service at the Elmwood Community Center run by Pramod from the Faxon Branch. Pramod talked about how our libraries are more than just a place to read or check out books – they can be places to socialize, get English language help, get access and information on other state and local resources. The question was asked about technology for the visually impaired – yes, all libraries have the “ZoomText Assistive Technology”. Ann Marie from Circulation explained the Homebound Services program that delivers books and materials to home-bound people and about the talking book program for visually impaired. There were many questions and much discussion about the parking situation at Noah Webster – Laura wanted to make sure the group knows that there is ten-minute curbside parking in front of the building for quick visits or book pick-ups, and that the Library validates your garage parking ticket so that it’s free for up to 4 hours. She also stated that your library card can be used at any library in the state and that you can return books and materials from other towns’ libraries at any West Hartford Library. E-books are the only exception to this rule. Examples of fun programs run by the Library: a Cookbook Club, and a Seed Library (collaboration with the West Hartford Garden Club). Discussion about how the libraries can connect with other town services, especially for the homebound and discussion on how the Senior Centers and the Libraries can collaborate more. Laura also brought up that with the new Community Center that will have a new Library, they are hopeful to be able to run more programs in the new space.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary