

WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION

Minutes from Meeting on June 20, 2023

Members Present: Noreen Bachteler, Beth Rocco, Kevin Ryan, Mary Reilly, Eileen Rau, Kaye Straw
Staff Present: Rebecca Sears, Keren Paquette, Monique Dixon, Robin Clare, Kevin Farmer
Absent: Rebecca Hajosy, Anne Massucco, Rosemary Cleary
Guests: From the Community: Liz Kupper, Larry Carr, Jenefer Fredericks, Mary Silverberg, Joe Kolczynski, Judy Small, Marcella Baczewski, William Pickens Sr.
State Senator Derek Slap

The meeting was called to order at 10:05AM by Deputy Chair Noreen Bachteler. Noreen reported that Chair Rebecca Hajosy will not be attending this month's meeting due to illness.

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

Chairs Report

Noreen reported that this is the last meeting before the summer break. Noreen and Rebecca have not yet finished the 2022 SCAC Annual Report and will be meeting over the summer. Noreen recently learned that there is a conflict with the September 19, 2023 meeting as it is scheduled on the same day as the Seniors Housing Fair being held at the Elmwood Community Center. Members were asked to consider moving the meeting to the Tuesday before or after 9/19. Upon discussion, it was decided to move the meeting to Tuesday 9/12/23 with a member vote. Noreen also reported that she had contact with Mayor Shari Cantor regarding today's SCAC meeting which she was unable to attend and the Mayor expressed interest in joining the September meeting. Noreen will email Mayor Cantor to invite her to speak at the 9/12/2023 SCAC Meeting.

West Hartford Social Services

Keren Paquette introduced the new full time Social Worker, Monique Dixon, who recently joined their team. The Social Services department is now at full staff. Keren reported that they have seen a 20% increase in referrals since January, mostly related to affordable housing, financial assistance and eviction prevention. She reported that West Hartford will be getting \$8 million in the opioid settlement over the next 15 years and will be looking to fund opioid-related initiatives/ services including the hire of a prevention specialist. Renters rebate program is continuing with the Town's part-time case manager who is doing more outreach this year; energy assistance program is done for the season and will be starting up again in the fall; town food pantry continues to distribute more and more food and there also is a monthly food commodities program for income-eligible people aged 60 and over. A discussion followed among the group about how to better communicate these services to seniors in Town who may not use the computer including better display on West Hartford's Community Access TV. The Town continues to be in need of more volunteers to assist with their various volunteer programs.

Seniors Job Bank

Robin Clare, Executive Director of the Seniors Job Bank, announced that they have launched their annual donation campaign (SJB operates solely on donated funds and grants). She reported on an exciting workshop being held on Saturday, September 9th, a collaboration between the Seniors Job Bank and the West Hartford Senior Centers titled "Working Into Retirement and Beyond" receiving a grant from the West Hartford Greater Together Community Fund. It will take place from 8AM-4PM at the Bishops Corner Senior Center and is free. The workshop capacity is for 50 attendees and the registration deadline is August 19th. There also will be a follow-up Tech Lab training session related to this workshop on a future date.

Special Guest – Senator Derek Slap, 5th State Senate District

Senator Slap joined the meeting to deliver the highlights of the recently completed 2023 Legislative Session. He distributed a hand-out with a summary of bills passed affecting seniors. He specifically pointed out work in these areas: funding in the State Budget for the Seniors Job Bank; phasing out income tax on social security & pensions; public safety/Vision Zero legislation; gun safety; large income tax cut aimed squarely at middle class and working poor; early voting starting in Fall 2024; debt free community college expansion; budget money for storm water issues around the state; state subsidizing student loan interest for certain professions (teachers, police, fire fighters, nurses, etc); tax savings for people caring for family members at home. He was pleased that there was more bipartisan efforts in this past session. Questions for Senator Slap from the group:

-How will towns pay for staffing the early voting sessions? There is \$9 million in the budget earmarked for this new law.

-Any movement on housing issues? Not able to move the needle on affordable housing guarantees in this session.

-How to have CT DMV be more senior & disability-friendly? Rebecca Sears reported that a statewide senior centers group has been working with the agency to have mobile DMVs at senior centers across the state.

- What is the status of Aid-In-Dying bills? Senator Slap reported that the Public Health Committee advanced a proposed bill but it failed to get out of the Judiciary Committee.

Senator Slap stated he appreciated the speaking opportunity and he and his Legislative Aide Daniela Luna who was also present for the meeting will be following-up on some of the issues raised and getting back to the SCAC.

Transportation

Kevin Farmer reported that ITN is approaching the end of its fiscal year on June 30th and they're not going to make their fund-raising goal. While they don't want to, they may be forced to raise their ride rates for the first time ever in their 10 years of operation. They are continuing to advertise for drivers in West Hartford Magazine with the ARPA grant.

Senior Centers

Becky Sears reported that the Senior Centers have posted for 3 new part-time clerk positions with their additional funding – one for Elmwood and two for Bishops Corner. The Volunteer Luncheon on June 20th was a success and two WHSC/SCAC volunteers attended. The Annual Senior Picnic is being held on July 19th at Town Hall sponsored by the West Hartford Police Officers Union. Rebecca reported that a major goal for 2024 is to increase the diversity of the Senior Centers' members and be more inclusive of differently abled people. A new program will be launching soon called "Parkie Pong" for people with Parkinson's disease. Other upcoming programs: Aug. 20th Yankees/Red Sox game trip has a few seats left; the Vermont Trip is sold out; Dec. 7th trip to Newport Mansions has a few seats left. Rebecca will be further pursuing ARPA funding to be able to purchase a van for the Senior Centers which will overall help address their goals and senior food insecurity issues (i.e. participation at CRT Senior Community Café).

ECC Advisory Committee for New Community Center

Beth Rocco reported no new action has been taken on moving forward with the proposed \$66 million Community Center/Senior Center/Library building. If approved, the plan decided upon would be for the current building on the site to be knocked down and not repurposed.

Commission Sub-Committee on Charter & Mission Statement

Noreen Bachteler advised she had emailed the Sub-Committee's proposed changes to the SCAC Town Code and Mission Statement to the other eight SCAC members on June 14th and received no objection. This review process has been ongoing since last year. If approved, she clarified that the revised Mission Statement would appear on the Town's website under Commissions & Boards and would be a summary of the duties and responsibilities as the full SCAC Code is found under Town Codes. Noreen asked the members to vote yes or no on sending these proposed changes to SCAC Town Liaison Helen Rubino-Turco. All six members present voted yes for Noreen to forward them on as written.

New Business/Public Comment

Beth Rocco stated that she was recently contacted by a resident representing the pickleball players about securing additional indoor space starting in November. Becky Sears reported that West Hartford Leisure Services Manager Marc Blanchard had earlier been brought into this matter and he indicated there would be an additional charge to the pickleball players to cover the Town's costs for providing such gym space as in one of the local schools. On another issue, Eileen Rau voiced safety concerns re: the sidewalk gaps on the Elmwood Community/Senior Center site and Becky Sears responded that she will follow-up with the ECC Facility Supervisor.

The next meeting will be held on **September 12, 2023** and notification of the new date will be forwarded to the Assistant Town Clerk to update the calendar.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary