

WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION

Minutes from Special Meeting on September 12, 2023

Members Present: Noreen Bachteler, Beth Rocco, Kevin Ryan, Eileen Rau, Anne Massucco, Rosemary Cleary
Staff Present: Rebecca Sears, Keren Paquette
Absent: Mary Reilly, Kaye Straw, Kevin Farmer, Robin Clare
Guests: From the Community: Rebecca Hajosy (former SCAC Co-Chair), Liz Kupper, Jenefer Fredericks, Jodi Jackowitz
Mayor Shari Cantor

The meeting was called to order at 10:02AM by Noreen Bachteler. Noreen reported that today's meeting is considered a "Special Meeting" since the date is a deviation from the original calendar of meetings submitted to the Town at the beginning of the year. The September 19, 2023 meeting was cancelled to not conflict with a WHSC Senior Housing Fair which was then postponed to Spring 2024. Mayor Cantor will be joining us at 11:00am. The minutes of the June 2023 meeting were approved as written.

Chairs Report

Noreen welcomed everyone back after the summer break. She reported that Rebecca Hajosy, the other SCAC Co-Chair since December 2021, had resigned in August 2023 from the Commission due to a change in primary residence outside of West Hartford. Noreen and the attending SCAC members thanked Rebecca who was present at the meeting for all her work and she indicated her interest to continue attending meetings as a guest for the foreseeable future. As the co-chair position is now open, Noreen asked if any member would like to consider joining her as a Co-Chair which would be for the remainder of their current term and explained the duties involved. She felt the 2-person Co-Chair set-up has worked out well for the SCAC. She also stated that at least one SCAC member will have their term up in December 2023 in addition to the new vacancy made from Rebecca's resignation. She encouraged any of the guests present if interested should be in contact with the Town Clerk's office and the application to serve on a Commission is also now available to complete online. Noreen indicated that work had been done (with Rebecca Hajosy) on compiling the 2022 Annual Report but not yet finished.

West Hartford Social Services

Keren Paquette reported that referrals to Social Services remain high and pleased that they are now fully staffed. The largest referrals are for housing for all ages and evictions have now started to go up as the Covid assistance has decreased. They work with advocacy groups such as Journey Home to help those people dealing with an eviction. The Town has received money from various opioid settlements and is planning to post for a new part-time Prevention Specialist position. The Renters Rebate program application period ends on October 2nd. The Energy Assistance program will continue to have a CRT rep who sits in Town Hall and helps with the application process through April 2024 for West Hartford residents. Applications start in September and can also be done online, mail or by telephone for the heating season. Karen advised to apply early and eligibility is based on income - both homeowners and renters can apply. The West Hartford Food Pantry saw a slow-down in donations during the summer and is in need of donations. There is also a federal program run out of the WH Food Pantry that distributes EBT cards to be used at local Farmers Markets that formerly was a coupon program. The Volunteer Program is in need of volunteers.

Seniors Job Bank

Robin Clare, Executive Director of the Seniors Job Bank, did not attend this month's meeting due to a conflict. WHSC Director Becky Sears reported on her behalf. The "Working Into Retirement and Beyond" free workshop held on September 9th at the Bishops Corner Senior Center went very well and brought in both young and older seniors. The program was a collaboration between the Seniors Job Bank and the West Hartford Senior Center with about 25-30 attending and the various presenters speaking on navigating the current job market were great. As part of follow-up, an 8 week technology skills series is being planned to offer those interested attendees starting in January 2024 at the Elmwood Senior Center Computer lab.

Transportation

Kevin Farmer was not in attendance – no report.

Special Guest – West Hartford Mayor Shari Cantor

Noreen introduced Mayor Shari Cantor and thanked her for coming to our meeting. Mayor Cantor also thanked SCAC Members for their service. Topics discussed by Mayor Cantor

- Mayor Cantor announced that she was recently appointed as Chair of the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) Transportation Committee. She stated that she realizes how important transportation is to keeping seniors connected to the community and has worked with Kevin Farmer and ITN. West Hartford relies on routes set by the Greater Hartford Transit District (city buses) and would like to see a more direct cross-town (north to south) route so there could be better access between the two senior centers. She voiced support for the important work being done by the Seniors Job Bank which is an important

regional resource. She attended the WHSC Health Fair held in May 2023 at the Bishops Corner Senior Center and commented on how vibrant and impressive the event was with the large participation of seniors and senior service providers.

- Mayor Cantor highlighted some of the developments on the horizon for West Hartford and discussed the following:
- She began with the proposed New Elmwood Community Center project slated for the now Town-owned property at 100 Mayflower Street (the former St Brigid's School). This will be at least a \$40-\$50-million-dollar build and is a huge priority for the Town and something she feels the entire West Hartford community really needs. According to Mayor Cantor, this project must be done right and it didn't make sense to build at the time of peak building costs. She pointed out that unlike other surrounding towns, West Hartford relies 90% on residential property taxes and doesn't have a big corporate tax base. For this reason, the Town Council is sensitive to approving such a big project and why things have moved slowly. CT State bonding will be further needed and resident voices need to be made to West Hartford's CGA delegation. The design model (like one in Rochester, NY) is to be inclusive, intergenerational and more energy efficient with flexible spaces for the building to be used more optimally by the different groups. These big-ticket amenities are why it's so important to continue to have economic development in West Hartford and increase the tax base. She did not report on any action regarding the current Elmwood Community Center and Faxon Library properties. She did mention that the West Hartford Police headquarters on Raymond Road works out of the oldest police station in the state and the Police Chief is pushing for a new building.
- Mayor Cantor spoke of a lot of interest from developers in developing multi-family housing with walkability to stores and restaurants. The West Hartford Inn property is going to be 100% affordable housing with units at 30% AMI, 50% AMI and 80% AMI. The developer of this project is a resident in town and wanted to do a legacy project.
- The Town has received ARPA funds and has put together \$6 million in grants for housing development. So far, none of the developers have come to the Town with a housing project that is specifically for seniors.
- With the recent closure of the Hughes Health & Rehabilitation building on Highland Street, the Mayor wants to look at what the Town can do to incentivize current property owners to have one large senior type housing site. The neighboring buildings includes the Holiday and Canterbury properties.
- Fellowship Housing on Starkel Road was approved for an additional 92 new units and building will start soon.
- Bishop's Corner Area. The Town has been leaning on the business owners to update and develop the overall area to be more walkable and safe, but so far have not been able to get anyone interested in using the ARPA funding. The Big Y recently purchased the Crossroads Plaza and Mayor Cantor is hoping to see changes for safer parking lot usage and walkability for all ages and given that it is also close to the senior and disabled housing sites, senior center and library.
- The former UConn property's most recent proposal is for a micro-center village of mixed use with rental residential units, single family townhouses, an assisted living facility, a small gourmet/organic market and coffee shop. Mayor Cantor pushed the developer to build these townhomes with first floor bedroom suites which would be more attractive to seniors. This project will maintain 40% green space and have 10% to 15% affordable housing. The nearby University of Saint Joseph is interested in housing for graduate students. This overall development is expected to be larger than Blue Back Square.
- Questions/& Comments from the Commission & Guests:
 - From Noreen Bachteler: Is there an opportunity to have a SCAC member involved in an advisory capacity to represent senior housing needs when particular housing developments come before the Town? Noreen stated the SCAC has been studying the shortage of affordable senior housing in West Hartford and would like to work on this issue further with Town officials.
 - From Becky Sears: Becky wanted to emphasize that she continually hears a lot of interest and support from the seniors for the new Elmwood Community Center/Senior Center/Library project and that it will bring new additional program opportunities for West Hartford seniors.
 - From Noreen Bachteler: Noreen raised the issue with the Mayor for the Town to reconsider their decision on being able to use the Mayflower Street property (i.e., Gym area) for indoor pickleball courts given the delay in the new ECC's approval and that the SCAC has had large groups of West Hartford seniors at prior meetings making this request. Noreen stated the Town only has one indoor pickleball court at the Elmwood Community Center and the activity has become very popular with seniors. Noreen commented that she has seen the Mayflower Street property being used for some types of emergency and police training as well as outside for the temporary dog park. Mayor Cantor responded that the building would have to be updated to comply with current safety standards to be used as a public building and that would be too cost-prohibitive with the proposed plan for it to be demolished when new construction takes place.
 - Jenefa Fredericks (public guest). Jenefa asked Mayor Cantor if there was an issue with funding at the Alfred E. Plant building. She has been trying to get simple repairs (i.e. with her oven) done at her apartment. Mayor Cantor said she would get her contact information after the meeting and follow up on her issue.

Senior Centers

Becky Sears reported that CRT notified her last week that their funding was cut statewide by \$1.4 million which will result in reductions in the number of days and seniors served by the senior lunch programs both at the Elmwood Senior Center and at Federation Square. This reduction is scheduled to start on October 1st. Becky said she would forward this information to Mayor Cantor as she had left the meeting. Becky is concerned that this will cause a physical and mental hardship on the seniors who use this lunch service – it is a critical social gathering in addition to the nourishment received. Discussion followed among the SCAC members for the group to send a letter to the Town and/or to our State delegation with our concerns on the impact of the CRT funding cut on West Hartford seniors. The SCAC Chair will look into and follow-up accordingly. Becky said she would be open to finding funding elsewhere for this program. She also reported that she is still working on funding for securing a senior van.

ECC Advisory Committee for New Community Center – No report.

Commission Sub-Committee on Charter & Mission Statement – No report

New Business/Public Comment

Beth Rocco reported that she reached out to CT Attorney General Tong to present on senior scams at a future SCAC Meeting and is waiting on a response from his office. The SCAC will also be looking to have a speaker on adult vaccines possibly from CT DPH or the West Hartford-Bloomfield Health District.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday October 17, 2023.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:20PM.

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Respectfully submitted,

Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary