

WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMISSION

Minutes from Meeting on October 17, 2023

Members Present: Noreen Bachteler, Beth Rocco, Kevin Ryan, Mary Reilly, Eileen Rau, Anne Massucco, Rosemary Cleary, Kaye Straw
Staff Present: Rebecca Sears, Keren Paquette, Monique Dixon, Kevin Farmer, Robin Clare
Guests: From the Community: Jodi Jackowitz, Kathleen Crawford, Denise Kennedy
Presenting Guest: Deepa Mavani, CT Dept. of Public Health

The meeting was called to order at 10:02AM by Noreen Bachteler.
The minutes of the September 12, 2023 meeting were approved as written.

Chairs Report

Noreen Bachteler reported that there are no new SCAC appointments per the Town Clerk's Office and there is one opening needing to be filled by Rebecca Hajosy's resignation. She feels strongly that the SCAC would be best served by having a co-chair or vice-chair and asked again if anyone on the Commission would consider this position. Eileen Rau volunteered to fill this role which would be for the remainder of her SCAC term. Noreen did some investigating based on last month's meeting when the group considered sending a letter to the Town Council about the possible cutback to the Senior Lunch Program (See below update from WHSC Director Sears). Noreen discussed that our Commission would be able to pen a formal letter to the Town Council and/or our State Representatives upon the issue first coming for a vote at a SCAC meeting. Beth Rocco asked if there was any way to do so if the issue required more immediate attention before a next scheduled SCAC meeting and Noreen responded that she will follow-up on this matter with the SCAC's assigned Town Liaison /or Asst. Corporation Counsel .

West Hartford Social Services

Keren Paquette re-introduced Monique Dixon, the newest Social Worker in their Department who is primarily working with seniors. Keren reported that Saturday, October 28 is National Drug Take Back Day being held at the Charter Oak Academy in West Hartford from 10am to 2pm. The items that they will be collecting for safe disposal are prescription medications, vape pens and OTC meds. They are not accepting injectables, needles, epi-pens and IV solutions. Keren distributed a flyer about this program. The Renters' Rebate program ended on October 1 but it is possible for a person to get an extension if you can prove a medical issue with a doctor's form. The Energy Assistance Program administered by CRT is ongoing and they have a CRT rep in the Social Services office to help process the applications which can be done in person, online, by mail, or by phone. As everyone knows, the energy rates are going up quickly and this year the CRT is trying to help more households which may lower the actual benefit. The Farmers Market food program has ended, however the federal government added \$25 to everyone's cards to incentivize participants to keep their cards for reuse next year. The W.H. Food Pantry is low on food right now and has cut back to original guidelines of 1x/month allowance. They are looking for donations and at other resources to help stock it. The Town has hired a consultant for strategic planning for the department moving forward and a questionnaire is being sent out. They are looking at how they deliver services and what services are really needed. SCAC members made the suggestion that Social Services could possibly involve the Senior Centers in order to have the survey reach more older adults and Becky Sears indicated that she has access to Chrome books, Special Events volunteers and also the use of the computer lab at the Elmwood Senior Center. Keren appreciated the suggestion and stated she will get back to the WHSC Director.

Seniors Job Bank

Robin Clare, the Executive Director of the Seniors Job Bank, reported that she has been going to other towns in Greater Hartford to attend job fairs. She recently went to Rocky Hill's "Hire a Senior Day" to increase awareness of the SJB. With an ARPA grant, the Seniors Job Bank was able to hire a marketing person, Lisa Mahoney. They have already seen benefits – a 30% increase in job seekers and a 50% increase in job postings. One growing area is municipalities that are now posting their jobs on the Seniors Job Bank site. Robin reminded the Commission that the SJB is funded by donations and grants only. They recently received a grant from the Rotary Club and are very grateful.

Transportation

Kevin Farmer reported that ITN this past August has now reached a higher ride volume for the month as compared to pre-Covid. Two-thirds of ITN's revenue comes from the community, one third from member fees and ride fees. As always, they are looking for volunteer drivers. Kevin said that they are now advertising in the WHSC bulletin, West Hartford Life newspaper, and Bethany Lutheran Church's bulletin. They would like to get into more places of worship. ITN is currently in their once-a-year fund-raising campaign. The question was asked about if/how they vet their drivers. Kevin responded that they do criminal and DMV background checks and Kevin himself interviews everyone personally.

Senior Centers

Becky Sears reported that she was informed after the September SCAC meeting that the CRT Senior Lunch Program will continue with five days of lunches at both sites and the only change is that there will no longer be kosher lunches at Federation Square. Becky has submitted the request for funding for a new 18-passenger van & driver. The Winter WHSC Bulletin will be sent to the publisher on October 26. Please submit anything you want added by October 23 and a guest complimented Becky on the quality of the Bulletin. Becky has made a request to Jewish Family Services for a support person to help our Jewish seniors who are struggling with the war in Israel.

ECC Advisory Committee for New Community Center

Beth Rocco reported that come December, it will officially be a one year delay in presenting the plans to the Town Council for the new Elmwood Community Center and she had nothing new to report. Beth attended a UConn property planning meeting in late September held at the University of St. Joseph where she delivered a letter of her own asking for more senior specific housing in the development plans.

Commission Sub-Committee on Charter & Mission Statement

Noreen reported that she still needs to send the final revisions to Helen Rubino-Turco.

New Business/Public Comment

Noreen discussed the idea of the SCAC holding some type of Senior Housing Forum in 2024. Before doing so, Kevin Ryan stated it would be important to conduct a housing-specific survey of West Hartford older adults to see what their housing needs are. He stated there needs to be a quantitative look at how many people will be looking for smaller one-floor housing, but not necessarily low income housing, in the coming years in this town.

Guest Presentation: Deepa Mavani, MPH, from the Connecticut Department of Public Health

Noreen introduced Deepa Mavani who has worked as an Epidemiologist with CT DPH since Nov. 2017 and is the current Adult Vaccine Program Coordinator for the agency. She has a Master of Public Health and is now working on her PhD. Deepa presented slides on the latest information on vaccines for older adults. Information rollout on vaccines has traditionally been directed to parents/caretakers of young

children to make sure they vaccinated their children in day care centers and then for starting school and this is historically where most of the funding has been directed. Since Covid however, adults and especially older adults, are now the audience for vaccine advertising. She reviewed the current vaccines now offered for older adults: Covid-19, Influenza, RSV, Pneumococcal, Shingles, and Tdap (Tetanus, Diphtheria and Pertussis). Distribution will continue to be through people's medical provider, pharmacies, and local health departments. She commented that while the updated Covid vaccine has had some hiccups in getting the vaccine out for distribution that the process is starting to get better. For flu shots, there are special options for older adults over 65 including Fluzone high dose, Flu Block, and FluAd. Flu still kills more than 18,000 older adults every year.

There is a new vaccine for RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus). This vaccine is being recommended on a "shared decision-making" basis. Patients and doctors should discuss by looking at risks and preexisting conditions such as lung disease, cardiovascular disease, immune-compromised, diabetes, liver disease, kidney disease, or if you are living in any kind of assisted living or other congregate care community. The question was asked about coverage of this vaccine by Medicare and Deepa thinks it would be covered. Another inquiry was whether the RSV vaccine was going going to be an annual vaccine. Deepa commented that there is not enough data yet to know the future of this vaccine, but as we go through this year and collect more data, we will know more.

Deepa showed the Commission the CT Wiz website, the CT DPH's Immunization Information System, which has a public portal. Individuals who were vaccinated in CT can view their own immunization records and parents/guardians can also access their minor child's records. She offered to forward a copy of her slide presentation from today's meeting to the SCAC Chair and left various handouts for attendees.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 21, 2023 at the Bishops Corner Senior Center. Guest Presenter will be Dorian Long, CT DSS Social Services Program Administration Manager.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:59AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary