

WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION

Minutes from Meeting on November 19, 2024

Members Present: Noreen Bachteler, Kevin Ryan, Mary Reilly, Kaye Straw, Beth Rocco, Mary Silverberg, Rosemary Cleary, Patricia Kiely
Staff Present: Keren Paquette, Monique Dixon, Rosemary Gunning
Absent: Eileen Rau, Rebecca Sears
Guests: Approximately 10 guests from the community attended for the presentation on "Services You May Need As You Age" by Christie Huebner, MS, from Hartford HealthCare Audiology Services and from Andrea Giudice of The Hospital Bed Project

The meeting was called to order at 10:03AM by SCAC Co-Chair Noreen Bachteler. Eileen Rau, Co-Chair was absent. Mary Silverberg welcomed and introduced the two guest speakers for the presentation on "Services You May Need As You Age".

Christie Heubner began the presentation and has 40 years of work experience in the audiology field. She gave an overview on hearing loss in older adults and the types of treatment. Presbycusis is defined as age-related gradual hearing loss. It is present in 1 in 30 people over the age of 60 and 1 in 2 people over the age of 80 and can be caused by exposure to loud noise, diabetes, circulation problems and by genetics. Routine hearing testing is not part of the normal medical testing for older adults and is not covered by Medicare or private insurance without a doctor's order. This is unfortunate considering that hearing loss can affect cognitive function and mental & social well-being, and that early hearing loss is much easier to treat. She explained that there are three types of hearing loss: 1. Sensory Neural – which is permanent; 2. Conductive - which is from a blockage and is treatable; and 3. Mixed - which is a combination of #1 and #2. She showed some examples of hearing aids on the market today. Regular Medicare insurance does not pay for hearing aids; some Medicare Advantage plans do. All hearing aids sold in CT are subject to a 30-day trial period where you can get your money back if you are not satisfied. "Over the Counter" hearing aids are now sold in many stores. These can be appropriate for mild to moderate hearing loss and are self-fitting. These are significantly less costly than those sold by major hearing aid companies. There are now Bluetooth hearing aids that can stream the sound from your phone or other devices directly into your ear. In addition, there are two types of implantable hearing devices for those not receiving benefits from hearing aids: 1. Cochlear Implants - candidates are evaluated by a doctor and the implants are paid for by Medicare. They are surgically implanted, and it takes weeks or even months for your brain to adjust to the sound. 2. Bone anchored Implants – these are for single-sided deafness or to those with Mixed Hearing Loss. These are also surgically implanted and send vibration directly to cochlea; and are also paid by Medicare. A short Q & A was done and the group was invited to look at her hearing aid examples and take information materials.

Andrea Giudice introduced the "The Hospital Bed Project", a non-profit organization founded in 2019 based in Amston, CT which serves Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts. She describes it as a "match.com for hospital beds" and assists those facing barriers to affordable accessible hospital beds. They take donations of gently used electric, semi-electric and bariatric hospital beds, refurbish them, and in turn offer them for sale or rent at a reduced, affordable price on a short or long term basis. The cost includes delivery and set-up in homes for patients coming out of the hospital or from rehab. The wait time is typically within 3/4 weeks and is done at a huge cost saving from retail buying or renting one. The Commission was in favor of having this program advertised in the West Hartford Senior Center Bulletin in the future.

Chairs Report

The minutes of the October 15, 2024 meeting were approved as written.

Noreen Bachteler reported that the results of the June 25, 2024 Housing Program Survey were sent to the Town Clerk's Office as an attachment to this Commission's October meeting minutes and can be viewed via their online website. She attended the Town's Social Services Open House on October 23 at the Elmwood Community Center where members of the public were able to give feedback on the 2025-2029 five year Consolidated Plan and CDBG funding. She noted that Mary Silverberg also attended. Noreen then asked if Manager Keren Paquette could speak to their next steps at a future SCAC meeting. Noreen stated she had received an email late yesterday from Helen Rubino-Turco in response to the SCAC's proposed changes to the SCAC's Town Code which Helen had reviewed with Corporation Counsel. Noreen will forward this email to all Commission members by tomorrow and cited that there was agreement to change the member's term from five to three years (though the start date for this is unsure) and for more updated language to using "older adults" vs. elderly/retired however, there was not a recommendation for inserting a specific age reference in the SCAC Town Code or with a name change for the Commission. All ordinance/code changes are subject to the approval of Corporation Counsel per Helen's email. Noreen asked members be prepared for a future discussion on this matter after they have reviewed Helen's latest email as to their reasoning and recommendations. The process would then follow for the proposed changes to go before the Human and Community Services Committee for its review and then on to the Town Council, and set for a public hearing after 30 days.

West Hartford Social Services

Keren Paquette reported that their office is mainly dealing with programs/questions regarding energy use/ and cost and what assistance is available. So far, CRT has not provided a resource person to assist as they usually do to help with the applications for heating assistance and the processing times are now much longer. There's been an unprecedented number of applications for assistance. The ways to apply are: online, mail-in paper application, walk-in or appointment at the Hartford CRT office. Keren is hearing that available appointments are very limited. Operation Fuel opened their application process at the end of September and went through their budget in 2 weeks. They will opening up again in January 2025 and this program has higher income limits than CRT. Eversource and CNG have new programs this year and also are reporting more need than ever. Both also protect against shut offs in the winter if person is below certain income level. The Renters Rebate program has closed and a total of 639 applications were processed this year. The town will not be doing their own holiday gift card program this year but will be consolidating/distributing through local non-profit agencies and the West Hartford school system.

Seniors Job Bank

Rosemary Gunning attended for Robin Clare and reported that they need more employers to match with their over 1,000 job seekers. In 2025, they will also be launching their new "Aging at Home" project where they will focus on finding contractors, lawn care workers, etc and those who can do housing adaptations in order for seniors to remain living in their own homes.

Transportation

Evelyn Mantilla reported that they have recently added two new volunteer drivers and they are now in their annual fundraising period. Evelyn attended the Annual ITN America Meeting in Maine and they recently had a celebration for former ITN Central CT Director Kevin Farmer's retirement.

Senior Centers

Lisa Hanse attended for Becky Sears and reported that the December through February Bulletin will be released this week. The new Senior Center 18-seat bus will start its regular Monday/Wednesday/Friday runs on Dec. 16 to designated stores and there will be a "Meet the Driver" event on Nov. 20. Bus rides will be at no charge between the two senior centers however, there will be a ride fee for special outing type of events.

New Business

Noreen Bachteler reported that the 2025 SCAC meeting dates need to be submitted to the Town Clerk's Office and she will email a draft of proposed dates to members for their review. She also asked for a future discussion to include identification of possible SCAC Subcommittees and also setting the protocol for another member to conduct the monthly meeting should both Co- Chairs be unavailable.

Kevin Ryan proposed having a meeting dedicated to discussing the SCAC's mission & plans for 2025 and the proposed SCAC Code changes prior to the next scheduled December 17th meeting. Members voiced their favor in doing so and a motion was made and approved for SCAC Co-Chair Bachteler to schedule a Special Meeting either on December 3rd or December 10th for these discussed purposes. Members will be emailed the date and location once arranged for the Special Meeting and an agenda will be filed with the Town Clerk's office and forwarded to members.

Public Comment – None

Next meeting will be on December 17, 2024 and will have an 11:00AM presentation by Maureen McIntyre, Executive Director, of North Central Area Agency on Aging.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:12PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary