

Meeting Minutes

Date: January 8, 2025

Time: 6:45 PM

Location: Elmwood Community Center

In Attendance: Mark Linabury, Bruno Venero, David Ware, Alana Butler, Eva Jacobson, Pramod Pradhan

Guest: Liz Buczynski

1. Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 6:50 PM.

2. Introduction of New Members

- **Eva:** A lawyer specializing in family and immigration law.
- **Dave:** A retired attorney with expertise in business and corporate law. Resident of West Hartford for 25 years and involved in human rights and social justice work.

3. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes: The meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

4. Revised Mission Statement: Mark read the revised mission statement.

5. Introduction of Liz

- Mark invited Liz as part of our efforts to explore partnership opportunities and increase awareness of the group's work in the town.
- Liz Buczynski is the Assistant Director of Social Services for the town of West Hartford.
- Background: Grew up in West Hartford, previously worked at United Way, and recently took on this role.

6. Presentation by Liz

- Focus on housing and homelessness, as highlighted by a United Way report showing a high cost of living (\$100k+ annually for a family of four).
- **Resources:**
 - Newsletter and brochure distributed.
 - Five social workers on staff, divided into Social Services and Community Outreach.
 - Case management
- **Programs and Services:**
 - **Juvenile Review Board:** A state restorative diversion program handling ~50 cases/year. They would prefer more police referrals.

- **Youth Services Bureau:** Programs and counseling for youth mental health; collaborations with schools.
- **Social Work Police Liaison:** Established via the Police Accountability Act; Police officers make referrals to the social worker when they encounter situations requiring social service expertise. Social workers provide in-service training to officers and respond to police referrals.
- **Senior Services:** Dial-a-Ride program (medical and grocery trips) contracted out with trained staff.
- **Energy Assistance Programs:** CRT and Operation Fuel offer support for high energy costs.
- **Town That Cares Fund:** Provides food pantry funding and emergency assistance for rent, food, clothing, utilities, etc.
- **Food Pantry:** Drive-up service since COVID, delivering 13,000 bags of food annually with income eligibility requirements.
- **Collaboration:** Engagement with other town departments, such as the Veterans Commission, to explore overlapping initiatives.

7. Universal Declaration of Human Rights Celebration

- **Overview:** Scheduled for next Wednesday (January 15) at 5:30 p.m.
- **Highlights:**
 - 33 participants reading the Declaration in 22 languages (up from 19 last year).
 - Partnered with the United Nations Association.
 - Event recorded by West Hartford Community Interactive.
 - Copies of the Declaration provided; 150 attendees expected.

8. New Business

- **Vacancy:** One vacancy remains.
- **Vision Zero:** Mark will discuss Vision Zero with the town manager and its impact on the elderly.
- **Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month (February):** Discussion on inviting a community educator from Interval House to present on Teen Dating Violence.
- **Hamden Commission:** Noted that Hamden is starting a similar commission.
- **Gendered Language in Town Code:** Discussed the use of masculine language in the town code and the potential for a letter to adopt gender-neutral terminology.
- **Pride Representation:** Proposal to invite someone from Pride for future discussions.