

WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION

Minutes from Meeting on December 17, 2024

Members Present: Noreen Bachteler, Patricia Kiely, Eileen Rau, Mary Reilly, Beth Rocco, Kevin Ryan, Mary Silverberg, Kaye Straw
Staff Present: Rebecca Sears, Keren Paquette, Monique Dixon
Absent: Rosemary Cleary, Robin Clare (Seniors Job Bank), Evelyn Mantilla (ITN Central Connecticut)
Guests: Joe Kolczynski, Parvathi Hosain, Sarah Schafer, Dale Comstock

The meeting was called to order at 10:05AM by SCAC Co-Chair Noreen Bachteler.
The meeting minutes from the November 19, 2024 meeting were approved as written.

Chairs Report

Noreen discussed putting the information on The Hospital Bed Project presented at last month's Commission meeting into the next Senior Center Bulletin as it is such a great resource. WHSC Director Rebecca Sears said she would look in doing so if the SCAC can get her the information by February. Noreen announced that the Town Council on 12/10/2024 re-appointed Beth Rocco to a new five year term on the SCAC until 12/31/ 2029.

Noreen reported on the December 10th Special Meeting which involved reviewing the proposed changes to the SCAC Code. Helen Rubino-Turco, Director of WH Leisure & Social Services and WH Assistant Corporation Counsel Cynthia Lauture attended the meeting in person and presented their feedback and recommendations to the document that the SCAC has been working on since 2023. Attorney Lauture explained to the group that Code and Ordinance are the same and must be voted on by the Town Council. In terms of the SCAC's request, they are in agreement with the change of SCAC appointment terms from 5 years to 3 years to be consistent with other commissions. Helen explained that the terms would be staggered among the current nine members into three buckets and that all members would have the opportunity to renew at that expiration date for a new three year term. They are in agreement with changing the language references in the code from "elderly" or "retired" to "older adults" except in the title of the Commission. It is being recommended that the name of the Commission remain the same as "Senior Citizen" is a defined term in state and federal statutes. Helen stated that they are recommending that a specific age be omitted from the code as the definition of "older adult" is a fluid one. Per Helen, the SCAC is advisory and not an active implementer of programs. She will forward a copy of the corrected revision back to the SCAC for the next meeting. She stated the WHSC Director is the oversight contact for the SCAC. In the discussion with members, Attorney Lauture clarified that the SCAC is allowed to submit letters to certain parties (i.e. West Hartford delegation) relating to the SCAC's mission if the issue has properly come before the SCAC and voted on to do so. On the matter of the SCAC having Sub-Committees, Attorney Lauture stated they can be short-term or ongoing and composed of no more than four members.

Review of Proposed SCAC Code Changes

Co-Chair Bachteler opened the discussion on the recommendations cited in the Chairs Report and a discussion followed by members including a motion made by Mary Silverberg to consider approving the recommendations being made by Helen and Attorney Lauture. However, as a copy of the revised document had not yet been received by the SCAC from Helen since the December 10th Special Meeting, some members expressed hesitation in going forward. WHSC Director Becky Sears was in contact with Helen during the discussion and obtained a copy of the revision from Helen and passed out to members.

Given that there was some confusion and questions by members on how the proposed new 3 year term would be enacted, members concluded that further clarification was needed and it was agreed to have the matter placed on the agenda for the January 21, 2025 Meeting.

West Hartford Social Services

Keren Paquette reported that CRT Energy Assistance received over 10,000 applications so they had to suspend accepting appointments for a while. They will pick back up again on January 6th and people are encouraged to do applications by mail or online. Operation Fuel will be reopening for applications in mid-January for aid. Eversource and CNG are both redoing their programs. The next workshop of “Buried in Treasures” will begin on January 14 at Town Hall and this is a free, 16 week support group to help with clutter and hoarding issues. Monique Dixon will be starting a quarterly Social Services newsletter to be put online and at the 2 senior centers. The town food pantry will be closed on 12/24 & 25 and 12/31 & 1/1.

Seniors Job Bank

No report, Robin Clare was not in attendance at the meeting. *Noreen noted that the SJB was holding their 50th Anniversary celebration later that afternoon and some SCAC members stated they were planning on attending.

Transportation

No report, Evelyn Mantilla was not in attendance at the meeting.

Senior Centers

Becky Sears provided an update on the most recent planning process for the New Elmwood Community Center/Senior Center/Library project. Based on the feedback they have received, the request has been made to the architectural firm for the Senior Center to be located on the first/ground floor of the building. Becky stated that they will have access to more square space than at the present Elmwood Senior Center location and will be more user-friendly and include a fitness center. The Senior Centers new van is now up and running between the two centers with this usage being light to date, however, the van usage for their specific trip programs has been good.

Guest Presentation

Noreen introduced Maureen McIntyre, Executive Director, of the North Central Area Agency on Aging (NCAAA) based in Hartford. This is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that serves older adults over 60 years old and their families as well as disabled individuals in 38 towns. The five “AAA’s” in CT were established from the Older Americans Act of 1965 to give a local approach to dispersing federal funds as the needs of older adults may differ across the regions. The main areas of focus and funding allocation are for: 1) nutrition programs; 2) Medicare/Medicaid/Social Security counseling; 3) social isolation/& caregiver respite programs; 4) housing support and fuel assistance not covered by other programs. Housing-related issues for older adults have now eclipsed the other areas of need in CT. The five CT AAA’s were recently branded together as “AgingCT” (<https://agingct.org>) as a new centralized information hub for services on aging in CT and their new priorities will be on: 1) affordable housing stock; 2) better home care infrastructure; and 3) increasing Medicaid rates which haven’t been increased since the 1980’s. Maureen distributed brochures and her contact info at www.ncaaact.org.

New Business/Public Comment

The 2025 SCAC Meeting dates were reviewed and approved by the members. Noreen will forward this information to members and to the WH Assistant Town Clerk.

The next meeting will take place on January 21, 2025 at the Bishops Corner Senior Center.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:04PM

Respectfully submitted: Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary