

WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION

Minutes from Meeting on January 21, 2025

Members Present: Noreen Bachteler, Rosemary Cleary, Patricia Kiely, Eileen Rau, Mary Reilly,
Beth Rocco, Kevin Ryan, Mary Silverberg, Kaye Straw
Staff Present: Rebecca Sears, Robin Clare, Keren Paquette, Monique Dixon
Absent: Evelyn Mantilla (ITN Central Connecticut)
Guests: Joe Kolczynski, Alexandra McFadden (USJ Student Intern)

The meeting was called to order at 10:05AM by SCAC Co-Chair Noreen Bachteler.
The minutes from the December 10, 2024 Special Meeting and the December 17, 2024 Meeting were approved as written.

Chairs Report

There will be no speaker or presentation today in order for the Commission to have additional time to discuss the upcoming year's agenda and presentation ideas. Noreen is still looking for clarity from Helen Rubino-Turco and the Town's Corporation Counsel Office regarding the recommended switchover to 3-year terms for this Commission and how that will be implemented in the proposed revised SCAC Code. Will the 3-year terms start when each eligible member's current 5-year term is up or start a rotation into 3-year terms sooner? Members expressed their concerns with the delays in this process. Noreen will circle back with Helen for an update and any final recommendations on the phasing in plan. Noreen asked WHSC Director Becky Sears if the Hospital Bed Project information could be put in the next Senior Center bulletin. Becky agreed and Noreen will give her the information following the meeting.

West Hartford Social Services

Keren Paquette introduced Alexandra McFadden, a USJ student doing an internship at the Social Services office. Keren reported that The Camelot apartments under construction at 900 Farmington Avenue are accepting pre-applications from today to January 23, 2025. Interested applicants can apply online at The Camelot website or will have staff available at Town Hall tomorrow from 9:00am – 4:30pm. There will be a total of 44 “affordable” units with 30% of the units being assigned Project Based Vouchers in partnership with the West Hartford Housing Authority and the remaining units will be available to those earning 50% and 80% of the AMI. Expected project completion is targeted for May/June 2025.

Energy assistance remains the top activity for Social Services right now and their office can help with the applications. Social Services was told that Operation Fuel will be reopening for applications sometime in January but they have not yet been notified of exact dates.

The first edition of Social Services' newsletter was published last week and is on their Facebook page. Town funding was approved to hire an ADA Consultant to look at all of the town's facilities regarding their compliance with ADA regulations.

The next round of “Buried in Treasures” classes was started last week at Town Hall with good attendance. Keren offered to provide a presentation on the various programs/services available from their Social Services Department at an upcoming 2025 SCAC meeting with a particular focus on services for older adult residents. Members responded favorably and Keren agreed to prepare a presentation for the February 18th SCAC meeting. Becky Sears asked if a presentation by the Social Services Department could also be presented at one of the Senior Centers in the Spring possibly in the early evening.

Seniors Job Bank

Robin Clare reported that the Job Bank has finished celebrating its 50th anniversary year in 2024. They honored Jim Doran who rejuvenated the organization back in 2013. Currently, there are 983 job seekers compared to 400 job seekers only two years ago. There were 580 jobs listed last year. The SJB's 2025 priorities are to hire a fundraising coordinator; create an advisory council on their aging in place initiative; look for more corporate and remote work jobs; and expansion of the SJB around the state of Connecticut. Robin and Becky Sears launched their "Seniors Rule: Age Like a Warrior" podcast on January 9. It was posted on the West Hartford Senior Centers Facebook page and on the Seniors Job Bank site as well as being available on various streaming podcasts platforms.

Robin reported that SJB no longer accepts transportation requests or driver job seekers and refers them to Evelyn Manilla at ITN who can arrange for the necessary background checks on the drivers. As a result, the need for ITN volunteer drivers has further increased.

Transportation

No report - Evelyn Mantilla was ill and not in attendance at the meeting.

Senior Centers

Becky Sears reported that they are now working on the spring bulletin. The new bus has now been available for over a month on its full schedule, but is being underutilized on the rides between the two senior centers. She will have to weigh the usage vs. the staffing. There is, however, a great demand for events and trips using the bus. The more affordable trips sell out fast and more successful. There will be some upcoming trips to UConn basketball games, men's and women's, where there will be an offering of the bus and tickets at the XL Center in Hartford. May 14, 2025 will be Senior Day and scheduled at the Elmwood Community/Senior Center location. Becky reported that she is finally in a good spot in terms of them adding two more part-time staff at the two Senior Centers to assist in taking their volume of phone calls and in-person program/class registrations. Becky continues to be part of the active discussion with planning for the new Elmwood Community Center/Senior Center/Library. She stated there are plans for some indoor pickleball courts but the exact number not yet confirmed and she would very much like to see space for a commercial kitchen which would help with the Seniors Lunch program and other events. One of her priorities for 2025 is to get the Seniors Lunch Program back up to full offering as it currently operates by CRT 3 days a week and only at the Federation Square site serving about 8 people.

New Business: Ideas for 2025 Presentations and Formation of SCAC Sub-Committees

Suggestion was made to invite Adrienne Billings-Smith, West Hartford Equity Coordinator, to be a SCAC presenter who was recently appointed to the CT Age-Well Collaborative. Kevin Ryan stated that he had recently spoken to her about the Age-Friendly Communities and follow-up is needed by the SCAC on the status of this initiative with the Social Services Department. Another important issue brought up was Pedestrian and Road Safety for older adults. Co-Chair Bachteler stated she will be reaching out to the WH Pedestrian & Bicycle Commission Chair for a possible presentation. Other topics discussed were on social isolation in older adults and when wellness checks are needed. For 2025, the SCAC Older Adults Housing Sub-Committee is ongoing with members Beth Rocco, Kevin Ryan and Mary Reilly. In terms of forming other SCAC Sub-Committees, Co-Chair Bachteler proposed a new Program Sub-Committee to work with her on developing these topics and Rory Cleary and Mary Reilly volunteered to serve with her. Co-Chair Rau agreed to continue to do SCAC Communications with the local public media as needed.

New Business/Public Comment

The next meeting will take place on February 18, 2025.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:07PM

Respectfully submitted,

Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary