

**HUMAN & COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING
AUGUST 12, 2021, 8:02 A.M.
MINUTES**

1. Call to Order

A. Meeting was called to order at 8:01 a.m. by Chairman Liam Sweeney

B. Attendees –Mayor Shari Cantor, Councilor Lee Gold, Councilor Ben Wenograd, Town Manager Matt Hart, Director of Leisure and Social Services Helen Rubino-Turco and Interim Director of Library Services Carol Waxman.

2. Business Items

A. Meeting Minutes February 11, 2021 – The minutes were approved without objection.

B. Resolution to Accept State Bond Funding – Mr. Hart there is a state grant of \$2.5M being applied to the \$3M purchase of the former Saint Bridget School. The receipt of this funding will allow for repurposing of the \$2.5M previously earmarked in the CIP for this project. A Grant Assistance Agreement needs to be executed with the State and a Council Resolution will need to be made.

Ms. Rubino-Turco spoke on the resolution being created to accept the State's bond funding, which will be presented prior to the September 14 meeting. The funding is coming through DECD as an Urban Act Grant and it requires the Town to have a resolution with the specific language required by DECD before proceeding with the grant. There is other paperwork being filled out in addition in preparation for that. In terms of the timeline for the school's purchase, Corporation Counsel provided an update the closing is still aimed for the end of August. Counsel is drafting, reviewing and approving the deed and related title documents. In addition, there are some encroachment issues for a few adjacent properties being addressed and if they comply, then we may give them a little more time to move the sheds. The hope is this purchase moves forward quickly as the food share distribution at Faxon Library needs to shift to the Mayflower location as the library needs to resume their fall hours; however, this cannot happen until the purchase is completed.

Mr. Hart added there will be a proposal forthcoming most likely next month regarding the format/outline to establish an advisory committee to the Council and administration with key stakeholders, i.e. representatives from the library board and various Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, Senior Center Advisory Committee. A broad cross-section of stakeholders and representatives from the community at large to work with us with the program development and the design stages.

C. Scholarships – Ms. Rubino-Turco provided some background regarding the scholarship fund. The scholarship fund has existed for decades but it is sometimes difficult to raise money for it. The scholarship has not been publicized other than announcing it in the

brochures or literature that there is a scholarship fund available. With the influx of significant funding, this fund will last for up to four years but the publicity of the fund has been increased in the form of articles, Facebook posts, the website, etc. For perspective, from the summer of 2018 through June 2019, there were 55 individuals who requested a scholarship for 63 programs, a value of approximately \$7,500. In 2020, the requests dropped to 38 for 39 programs and it was about \$4900. This year, the scholarship fund began a little late in the year and the funding was not in place until June but we had gone back to anyone who had registered for a summer program to provide them the full scholarship, which is a 75% scholarship and they pay 25%. The number of programs was doubled and the number of weeks of participation was increased. So far this year, approximately \$16,000 in scholarships have been provided. There have been 47 requests for 67 programs. There is currently \$74,000 available in the fund.

Ms. Rubino-Turco mentioned another idea of possibly using the scholarship fund to offer free lifeguard training to residents who are in financial need, encourage leadership from the Teen Center or the HANOC community to take advantage of this opportunity for lifeguard training with a pledge they would work for the department for two years. This would help diversify the workforce, provide job training and help the community help itself.

To apply for a scholarship, a profile needs to be created on RECDESK then go to Community Services to have income verified for eligibility. Next, they have to look through the program guide and pick their number one, two and three programs they are interested in. Then, make an appointment with Leisure Services to get fully registered and they have to pay at that time their 25% of the fee.

Mr. Gold suggested if the scholarship could be used for lifeguard training, perhaps a young entrepreneurial internship program could be implemented that the Town could come along from other towns and target younger people, maybe work in conjunction with other departments where we are helping to cultivate younger people to working in town and staying in town.

3. Communications

Nothing was indicated for communications.

4. Staff Reports

A. Leisure and Social Services Update – Ms. Rubino-Turco provided updates regarding the ARPA programs that were funded. The Fun Fridays at the skating rink were successful, one night had almost 100 people. This was a program within a program where children from HANOC were invited to the rink, were fed dinner and they also got skates and brief skating lessons prior to having the rest of the community arrive for the Friday Night DJ Skate. There were three of these events and a fourth event is planned for September 17. These events are targeted at middle school students and are free to everyone. The Library collaborated with Leisure and Social Services for two concerts, which were held in Eisenhower Park. There were 175 at the first concert and 125 at the second. The funding was also used to support the

Summer Arts Festival. There were over 70 participants. The production of Mama Mia had four sold-out shows with 400 people each.

Ms. Rubino-Turco provided an update regarding the Capital Improvement. Eisenhower pool is the oldest pool being built in the late 60s but it sat unused for 22 months and suffered damage to the filtration system, drainage pipes and storage tank and the condition of the bathhouse is also in bad shape. There is an estimate for the replacement costs of about \$2.45M. This will be part of the plan Mr. Hart will be presenting when he presents the amendment to the Capital Improvement Plan and to shift some programs around, as well as their funding sources. If the timing works out, with this project being fast-tracked, they will be able to select a designer and have it designed by Christmas and then bid and hopefully begin construction next year so the pool will be able to reopen in the summer of 2023. There are other projects that are also underway; Kingfield Baseball Field improvements are underway including expansion of the irrigation system, building a new mound, etc., the Wolcott Park western parking lot is slated to begin August 23 and will take about 6 weeks and the sand volleyball was approved by Planning and Zoning in July. Several vendors have stated the pipeline for supplies was difficult currently and are hoping it will clear up this fall. There are plans to have it go out to bid in the fall or winter and have it be a spring project.

The registration for fall programs started yesterday. The brochure will not be printed and mailed to every household this year. It was found that more people were utilizing the online service but there were a couple thousand copies printed and are available at Town facilities, Leisure facilities and the libraries and some copies will be provided to the public schools in case people want to browse through it. In addition, pools will be closing on August 22 but Beachland will remain open a little longer secondary to allow people to use the facilities and the Pooch Plunge will be held there on August 30. The Veteran's Rink will be closed from August 31 to September 6 to do deep cleaning, melt the ice and repaint the ice. Two events will be held by outside nonprofit partners; Center Street is August 29, the Garden Tour is September 11, Feast on the Farm is September 24. More information will be forthcoming.

Social Services did have a regional panhandling roundtable discussion on July 14 with 20 representatives from a variety of stakeholders in attendance. These included police departments, social services departments, community courts and partners in the nonprofit arena. The discussion revolved around panhandling and poverty in general including ordinances, signage, community education and direct social services to the people. CROG agreed to take this on as a subject and they will host a continued roundtable meeting, which is scheduled for November 9.

Regarding the Federal funding, community development block grants have been received as well as CDBG COVID funds or CV funds and those funds were split into two categories, urgent need which wound up around July 1 and the other was in general to support low and moderate-income individuals and neighborhoods. The urgent need program included the ARCH program or the vaccination program for homebound people, the vaccination line and all of the vaccination programs all over town. An action item coming to the Town Council is one of the projects came under budget and another was over budget, so there will be a resolution to rearrange the allocation of the CV funding that was approved as things were

moving quickly and an amendment for HUD will be needed to tell them the funding has been rearranged. It is not a significant thing but it does need to go to the Town Council. CDBG also covers paving in LMI neighborhoods, which is underway.

B. Library Update – Ms. Waxman reported that all libraries will be back to near pre-COVID hours after Labor Day including evenings at all buildings and full Saturdays at Noah Webster and Saturdays until 2 p.m. at the branches. In compliance with mask mandates, all staff and visitors over the age of 2 must wear a mask at all times in all library buildings. Library programming will continue as remote or outdoors through the fall until conditions are safe to return to in-person programming. All workforce has returned and additional part-time staff has been hired for the increased hours. Several programs are to be completed at the end of the summer or in the fall including a new tech lab. The West Hartford Public Library Kilfoil funding request for \$32,000 was approved to build a new tech lab at the Noah Webster Library. Meetings have been held to discuss future plans for the space that was formerly the computer lab. All public computers have been spaced out on the adult floor to accommodate social distancing and patron privacy.

The new tech lab will offer dual use. There will be the ability to produce podcasts including the use of a Cricket fabrication device to collect different objects, an autoCAD for drafting, video production, studio equipment, editing tools and software and a station for digitizing analog content. In addition to allowing patrons to work with technology, the plan is to allocate the tech lab to offer additional instructional space to offer classes and tutorials in technologies and provide additional study or meeting spaces within the library building. The hope is the lab will be fully constructed and ready for use in October. The Bishop's Corner Library will receive its smart lockers, which will be installed outside the branch so patrons can choose to pick up their materials at their convenience outside of open library hours. A plaque has been installed on the adult level to display the former directors of the West Hartford Library with space for future directors.

The first phase of the Acoustic Panel project has been completed. Panels were installed in the gallery area of the adult floor. Soundlite Acoustic panels covering 565 sq ft have been installed to mitigate noise levels and offer quieter spaces for patrons using computers and studying. A study pod has been purchased with American Rescue Plan Act for Libraries funds totaling \$24,250 and an additional Kilfoil grant of \$8,000 has been applied to that. The study pod is expected in a few weeks. It is a modular meeting room to be installed on-site. It has a louvered roof and is ADA compliant and offers a private study space for up to four people by reservation. Homebound services were resumed on July 27 for those living alone in their own homes or those in assisted-living facilities. The book sale is operating again as pre-COVID and donations for the book sale are being accepted at all library buildings. The Notary Public Services at the Noah Webster Library are hoped to begin again in the fall including offering professional counseling with resume writing and business start-up planning.

The Mobile Foodshare Van continues to visit the Elmwood neighborhood, parking in the Faxon parking lot. Approximately 55 people visit the Foodshare Van when it is there. The Faxon Library is a distribution point for food bags donated by the Fern Street Universalist

Church with 25 bags of food given out each week. The Mayor's Youth Council has chosen 11 candidates and 5 alternates in grades 9 through 12 from public and private schools. Meetings will begin in September and occur monthly. The members of the Council will determine what action plans they want to accomplish in the first year and how they will interact with the Town Council. There has been a robust schedule of programming this summer. The adult programming continues to be remote and 369 people have participated so far this summer. Teen programs have been a combination of remote and in-person with 129 attending. The children's programs have all been held outdoors with 391 attending in all 3 library buildings. They experience visits from zoo animals, hula hoop instruction, outdoor games, crafts and Storytime. The children's programs will remain outdoors through the fall as weather permits and COVID conditions are safe enough to return to normal programming.

5. Future Agenda Items

No future agenda items were indicated.

6. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:18 a.m.

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