

## **WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION**

Minutes from Meeting on May 20, 2025

Members Present: Noreen Bachteler, Rosemary Cleary, Patricia Kiely, Eileen Rau, Mary Reilly, Kevin Ryan, Mary Silverberg, Kaye Straw

Staff Present: Rebecca Sears, Monique Dixon, Robin Clare, Evelyn Mantilla

Absent: Beth Rocco

Guests: Mayor Shari Cantor, Ronda Guberman, Gayle Kataja, Mary Jo Riley, Stefanie Theroux

The meeting was called to order at 10:00AM by SCAC Co-Chair Noreen Bachteler.

The meeting minutes from the April 15, 2025 meeting were approved with one correction. SCAC Member Mary Silverberg pointed out that in the Transportation section, the yearly membership fees for ITN Central Connecticut should be clarified as follows: \$40 for an individual, \$65 for a couple with a \$5.00 pick-up fee and \$1.50 per mile charge.

### ***Chairs Report***

Noreen Bachteler asked for a motion to add a Seniors Job Bank report to today's agenda as it was inadvertently left off. This motion was made and approved by the SCAC. She stated that last month's Commission meeting with the presentation on "Pedestrian and Road Safety for Older Adults" is available for viewing on WHCI and was also nicely featured by Channel 8. The CT Age Well Collaborative ceremony for the 2025 Wellspring Award that West Hartford received (along with Newtown and Wethersfield) will be held on June 11 at the New Britain Museum of American Art and she has forwarded the invite to SCAC members. For the June 17 Commission meeting, she would like for the group to share the feedback received at the SCAC Senior Day table and Co-Chair Eileen Rau suggested that time be also used to plan for the remainder of this year's SCAC meetings so there will be no guest speaker. Noreen explained that today's Commission meeting will have condensed reports due to the presentation on "Age-Friendly Communities" from 10:30AM to noon. She informed that the location of today's scheduled ADA Community Conversation was changed to the Bishops Corner Senior Center beginning at 12:30PM and this will be an open discussion session with the ADA Consultant for the public to give feedback on their ADA-related needs and experiences in relation to West Hartford's public facilities and programs. Noreen expressed that these ADA conversations are very timely and would be important in the overall process for West Hartford becoming designated as an Age-Friendly Community.

### ***Senior Centers***

Rebecca Sears reported that over 350 people attended the Senior Day on May 14 at the Elmwood Senior Center and feedback from attendees and participating providers was great! The sign-ups for spring and summer programs have been going very strong. The Summer Bulletin is now available online and registrations have already started. Rebecca stated that she has been working with the Rising Star Café at A.I. Prince Technical High School of Hartford to provide senior lunch meals and she has a contract with them for 2 days/week to see how it works out. They have a commercial kitchen and she stated positive experiences when using Rising Star in catering past events.

### ***Transportation***

Evelyn Mantilla reported that ITN Central Connecticut's digital campaign that was recently launched has brought in 32 leads for volunteer drivers in the first four weeks. Though they may not all result in actual volunteers, she feels it's a good start.

### ***Social Services***

Monique Dixon reported that residents can still apply for energy assistance until May 30. Applications for the Renters Rebate Program have started and appointments are available to apply in person at Social Services or at senior housing sites until September 30. Farmers Market coupons for seniors will start June 1 and can be used at Farmers Markets all over the state. The West Hartford location is now in the Town Hall back parking lot on Saturdays and Sundays. Dial-a-Ride renewals will start on July 1 for \$65/year and there is a \$50 pro-rated fee until then.

### **Seniors Job Bank**

Robin Clare reported they have 327 jobs currently posted. SJB is a private non-profit organization and do not charge any fees. As she was not in attendance at the April 15 SCAC meeting, Robin corrected the March 18 SCAC minutes that stated the SJB had received a \$100,000 grant which was an error. She clarified that several towns they serve received a \$100,000 grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and the SJB will be applying for some of this money from the various towns that they operate in.

### **10:30AM – Noon: Presentation on “Age-Friendly Communities”**

Kevin Ryan of the SCAC opened the presentation with slides introducing the concept of “Age-Friendly Communities” which was developed in 2010 by the World Health Organization. An Age-Friendly Community is a place that adapts its services and physical structures to be more inclusive and receptive to the needs of its population to improve their quality of life *as they age*. Kevin presented an overview of the eight interconnected domains that were identified by the WHO for communities to focus on improving: Housing, Transportation, Outdoor Spaces & Buildings, Civic Participation & Employment, Respect & Social Inclusion, Communication & Information, Community Support & Health Services and Social Participation. AARP has taken a leading role in assisting states and local communities with best practices and technical support in the process for a town /city in becoming designated as an Age-Friendly Community. Kevin reported that West Hartford has now begun its first step on this journey and he is part of a Town advisory group including Liz Buczynski, Monique Dixon and Rebecca Sears of Social Services and Adrienne Billings-Smith of the Office of Community Engagement who were all in attendance. He cited that West Hartford’s population of people over 60 years nearing 27% is making this a vital initiative and it will be a multi-year, multi-faceted effort with community participation being important throughout all the various stages (Enrollment; Community Survey; Action Planning; and Implementation of the Plan). Kevin then turned the program over to WHSC Director Rebecca Sears for introduction of the invited guests that have gone through the process of becoming designated as an Age-Friendly Community for them to share their experiences and some of their key steps and findings with the group. Those guests were:

- Ronda Guberman ,Senior Center Supervisor and Gayle Kataja, Commission on Aging Chair - Town of Glastonbury
- Stefanie Theroux , Coordinator of Senior Services - Town of Cheshire
- MaryJo Riley, Thrive 55+ Active Living Center Supervisor - Town of Groton

WHSC Director Sears facilitated a series of questions with the guests on how each town approached the process of becoming an Age-Friendly Community. The population of Glastonbury is approx. 36, 000 (26% over 65 yrs.), Cheshire approx. 29,000 (34% over 60 yrs.) and Groton is approx. 38,000 (23% over 60 yrs.) All conducted community surveys-online, paper and in-person. They held round tables involving residents and public and private partners. They spoke of the need to be flexible in the action planning – not taking on all 8 domains at once. In one town, they used a consultant with grant funds to do a huge survey and also had Aging Commission members chair the sub-groups. They all agreed that completion of the project has been beneficial to their communities both in terms of physical gains (i.e. increased utilization of senior services, more # of benches with some sponsored by local businesses, better accessible street designs, grants from AARP and other sources) and also increased recognition/ focus on senior needs (i.e. having an “age-friendly lens” to issues at Town meetings). Volunteer activity has increased and more cross-intergenerational promotion of town projects. They discussed the importance of keeping the momentum going via Facebook, Instagram, senior center newsletters and regular meetings with town officials. In closing, WHSC Director Sears thanked all the representatives for their participation and helpful information given in the “Age-Friendly Communities” presentation for West Hartford.

The next SCAC meeting will take place on June 17, 2025.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:50AM

Respectfully submitted,  
Ann T. Visgilio, Recording Secretary  
Noreen Bachteler, Co-Chair