

Town of West Hartford
Advisory Commission for Persons with Disabilities
Monday, September 8, 2025, 7:00 PM
Elmwood Community Center Auditorium
MINUTES

Commission Members Present: Erin Conneely, Christopher Holley, Kimberly Jacobson, Tara McNeil (Chair), Amy Messinger, Jennifer Searls (Vice Chair)

Commission Members Not in Attendance: Christine Hayden, Brittany Koziara, Joseph Kolczynski, Jason Mirsky, Elisa Neira

Guest(s) Present:

- Cynthia Lauture, Assistant Corporation Counsel, Office of Corporation Counsel, Town of West Hartford

Opening:

Co-Chair Tara McNeil called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm. She shared two items with the committee:

- The Yellow Bill Initiative: Connecticut House Bill 7159 is an act that requires the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles to design and provide yellow envelopes for Connecticut residents with disabilities. The envelopes contain information that aids first responders in helping individuals with disabilities in the event of an emergency to help prevent negative or unsafe interactions. Lawmakers are seeking community feedback as the 2026 launch of the envelope moves forward. Individuals who wish to read the draft of the bill and to provide feedback may do so by accessing the following link: <https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/znPaxdBqB99EcZhQmmvjZg>.
- Tara shared a front-page article in the Hartford Courant about the 30th anniversary of the Gaylord Sports Association, an organization dedicated to promoting adaptive sports (a link to the article is featured in a post on the commission's Facebook page). Tara was featured in the article as an athlete who has participated in the Gaylord Sports Association. Link to the Gaylord Sports Association: <https://sportsassociation.gaylord.org/>.

Meeting Minutes: Minutes from the June 18 meeting were approved.

Speaker:

Cynthia re-introduced herself to the commission. Cynthia reviewed the tenets of allowing public participation in the commission's meeting. After discussion of the options, Kim Jacobsen made a motion to incorporate public comment, including accepting written testimony by members of the public to be read at meetings, into the commission's proceedings. Erin Conneely seconded the motion. The motion was carried and public comment will be incorporated into future meetings.

Following Cynthia's presentation, Jenn Searls made a motion to amend the commission's agenda to allow for public comment. Kim Jacobsen seconded the motion. The motion was carried and the agenda was amended to allow for public comment for the current meeting.

Public Comment:

Two members of the public attended the meeting and offered testimony regarding the difficulties of securing resources to families and individuals who have aged out of the town's resources after the age of 22. Similar challenges were shared regarding activities and resources for parents of kids with special needs during the summer months.

The commission and its guests had some discussion about organizations that support and employ individuals with disabilities. Kim Jacobsen pointed out that October is National Disability Education Awareness Month. Cynthia Lauture suggested the commission reach out to Kirsten Gorski and Lauren Segal to find out what organizations in the community already support and employ individuals with disabilities.

Following the discussion, a motion was made to ask the Communications working group to do outreach to the town's economic development resources. The motion was seconded and carried.

Reports:

Town Staff Report - Suzanne Oslander shared two flyers with the commission and asked for their help distributing the information. The first highlighted program was the State of Connecticut's Department of Social Services' Energy Assistance Program. Residents who need assistance are encouraged to reach out to apply for help at https://portal.ct.gov/heatinghelp/connecticut-energy-assistance-program-ceap?language=en_US.

The second program is a Fire and Falls Prevention Program hosted by the West Hartford Fire Department and Office of Emergency Management, the West Hartford Bloomfield Health Department, and West Hartford Social Services. There will be two events hosted in September at the Elmwood Senior Center and the Bishops Corner Senior Center. The events are free but registration is required. Residents can register by email whsc@westhartfordct.gov or by calling the Elmwood Senior Center at (860) 561-8180 or the Bishops Corner Senior Center at (860) 562-7583. Both events can be found on the Senior Centers' Events Calendar on their website at <https://www.westhartfordct.gov/town-departments/senior-centers>.

Suzanne also reported that the consultants assisting with the ADA self-assessment work the town is undertaking will be back to survey additional town properties and review some of the town's policies.

Education Working Group - Tara McNeil reported that the Education working group was having its first meeting after the commission's meeting that evening.

Programming Working Group - Kim Jacobsen reported on some of the planning work that the programming committee had been working on. Kim Jacobsen and Jenn Searls met to start a calendar of potential activities that the commission could engage in including co-hosting, or sponsoring, a screening of *Crip Camp* at the library in December.

Communications Working Group - Jenn Searls reported that she and Elisa Neira met to map out various strategies for engagement with the public with the goal of increasing awareness of the existence of the commission with West Hartford residents. Jenn shared that a Facebook page and Instagram account have been created for the commission and asked for members to follow, share, and encourage their friends and neighbors to follow the accounts as well. The Facebook page is WH Advisory Commission for Persons with Disabilities and the Instagram account is @whacpd. Jenn asked the commission if they'd be willing to participate in a campaign to introduce the public to members of the commission. Jenn also shared a potential Q&A social media post to highlight the Resilience Guide developed by the Office of Emergency Management and the West Hartford Bloomfield Health Department in support of National Preparedness Month this month.

Ongoing Business: Tara McNeil appealed to commission members for additional participants on the working groups. Christopher Holley volunteered to participate on the Education working group. Erin Conneely volunteered to participate on the Programming working group.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm

Next Meeting: Monday, November 17, 2025 at Elmwood Community Center Auditorium at 7:00 pm.