

Westport Commission on People with Disabilities
Minutes of Regular Meeting
Thursday May 21st, 2020 - 9:00am-10:00am
ZOOM MEETING

Attendance:(Eileen Zhang - sets us up) Elaine D - review instructions for “remote” meeting –
Excused: Jim Ross and Diane Johnson
Present: Marina Derman (will chair meeting), Stacie Curran, Joe Anastasi, Doug Rifkin, Tom Holleman

Present from Human Services: Elaine Daignault & Michelle Bottone
9:00 am - Call to order.

Guests who choose to identify selves: Helen Garten, Lori Laskin, Tom Tarrant, Howard Lipper -

AGENDA - Item 1 - Approval of April 30, Minutes

Tom-1st, Joe 2nd - All in favor

AGENDA Item 2- Continued discussion of P & Z Text amendment change #778

Jim R. asked Elaine to remind the Commission of the group’s decision on voting processes regarding the Commission taking official stances on agenda items. CPD agreed that they would not vote in the moment until everyone felt that they had an opportunity to explore all of the implications, and each member feels prepared to vote on the topic at hand. Public discussions are an essential part of the process.

Helen G serves as the Town Real Estate Consultant; she noted that the P & Z approved text amendment #778, 5-2 vote, last week, there is a discussion of an appeal to RTM

Discussion:

The Commission revisited some of their main questions. Would Town bodies have a voice in the process of choosing which properties are being considered? How will the provider and potential residents be determined?

This proposal is different than an average group home because the Town-owned buildings would have independent efficiency apartments. The project also assists the Town in reaching more affordable housing points.

Joe A: What will be the protocol on how individuals are chosen? Is Assistive Tech. being considered?

Helen G stated that the text amendment has just recently been approved, and there is still a chance that the RTM may revisit the P & Z approvals. There isn’t an RFP or discussion with agencies happening yet. The process will include Fair & Equitable housing processes, and an RFP will go out to determine what agencies might win the contract. There may be a chance that the Commission can get involved in the process, but the discussion is premature right now.

Marina - this is not DDS funded, it will likely be private pay so agencies will probably be screening for compatibility

Public comment:

Howard Lipper - What is the status of these projects and the 3 properties?

There has not been any development or changes to the (3) properties being considered: 136 Riverside Ave, Homes with Hope (North Compo), Adams Academy on Morningside.

There will be public notices throughout the process, including 8-24 requests for use of Town-owned property.

Lori Laskin – Voiced her support for the text amendment stating that she feels it is good for the Town & community. She also noted that it is not yet been determined whether DDS dollars can be used.

CPD will continue to follow this project.

AGENDA -Item 2 Part 2 - COVID-19 on the Disability Community

People with Disabilities who are hospitalized due to COVID are at a disadvantage with current hospital policies that have refused entry to caregiver/loved one when admitted to the hospital. There are civil suits against hospitals that are denying a caretaker to enter. Members voted to write a letter to legislators (see details below), urging them to consider measures for a caregiver or loved one to be granted entry to hospitals in order to reduce discomfort for people with disabilities during an already scary time.

Public Comment:

Sal Liccione.- Wants to bring attention to the proposed changes to downtown during COVID and encourage CPD to advocate for consideration around access issues for those with disabilities.

DHS Staff Comments:

Elaine D. – Community outreach and engagement has been very robust. Thanks to a successful Food Fund Drive, DHS has been fortunate to provide food resources to those in need, including seniors and those dealing with financial insecurity. DHS has been distributing gift cards, groceries, and catered meals through a variety of programs at WCSA and Room 200.

The Social/Emotional and Mental health of residents is of concern as the pandemic continues to limit individuals' ability to connect with others and access resources.

Michelle B. - Loneliness, boredom, frustration - reach out to friends, phone call, limit media exposure, make connections.

Joe A. - STAR has activities online daily (have to be registered with STAR)

Elaine D. - Senior Center & Toquet Hall has a litany of virtual activities available to residents, and Westport Together is actively providing professionally facilitated article discussions for parents and has listed a variety of resources and activities on their websites.

Marina – reminded commissioners that day programs are closed, and agencies are struggling to provide support to families in the absence of person-to-person programming.

Back to Hospital Discussion:
(Discussion)

Motion: To create a letter, from the Commission, In favor of a caregiver accompanying special needs population during hospitalization through COVID. Marina - makes motion, Doug- 1st, Stacie 2nd - Marina will create a letter, and we will all add comments.

Hello Neighbor - New Human Services caller program to combat loneliness and connect residents. Approx. 75 have signed up (both as a recipient and as a volunteer) – CPD is welcome to participate and is encouraged to share the opportunity with others.

10:04 am - Meeting Adjourned