

Human Services & Commission for Senior Services

Joint Regular Meeting Minutes, October 18, 2021

(Remote Meeting)

Attendance: Bob Fox, Doris Levinson, Diane Kleros, Merle Spiegel, Virginia Ferrari, Lee Bollert, Katherine Rabinowitz, L'Abbed, Yvonne Senturia, Carolyn Olsen, Michael Kogen, Nancy Kail, Beth Selby Bass, Herbert Podel, Jim Ross

Guests: Jim Marpe, Kenneth Bernhard, Claudia Copeland, Sarah Adair, Steve Karpel, Barbara Recker

Staff: Sue Pfister, Elaine Daignault, Kristen Witt, Holly Betts

Elaine Daignault called the meeting to order and noted that no new Chairs have been appointed yet.

Public Comment: Steve Karpel of The Saugatuck, supported by Board President Barbara Becker on the phone, spoke of the successful 26-27 year public/private partnership that had made this senior living complex possible. He noted that additional funding would be necessary to make much-needed renovations. This will be discussed at some future time.

First Selectman Jim Marpe spoke of the grand expansion of the Center for Senior Services on his watch. The emphasis on compassion and support of seniors in Westport has made it increasingly possible for seniors to age comfortably in Westport. This has been particularly important during Covid, and he noted the drive-through lunches and thanked all volunteers who helped with them.

He added that he was proud to have established the Commission on People with Disabilities, and noted the new facilities including restrooms at south Compo Beach that have increased picnicking. He said that the Human Services Department had really stepped up during the Covid crisis, making important connections between people.

Claudia Copeland and Ken Bernhard commented on the excellent job Jim Marpe has done as First Selectman.

Elaine Daignault gave a brief Covid update, noting that the town of Westport still has a mask mandate in place but is cautiously hoping to reduce such mandates as soon as possible.

Kristen Witt spoke of the renters' rebates, which have just finished, and the energy assistance program, which began October 1. She mentioned holiday programs for families in town and an upcoming breakfast for mental health providers focusing on marijuana and youth.

Sue Pfister said the Senior Center was expanding its congregate luncheon program from three to five days a week. The plan is for two seatings at the Thanksgiving meal on November 24 to accommodate all interested parties with the necessary social distance. This approach will be extended to the Christmas and Chanukah meals. She commended seniors for their flexibility as the Center continues to determine the best mix of in-house, Zoom, and hybrid programs going forward.

Elaine Daignault reviewed the Human Services' request for a portion of the ARPA funds, which totaled \$400,000. This includes:

- Homebound nursing services for the disabled
- Expanded mental health programs
- Supplement to state and federal homeowners' and renters' assistance programs
- Transportation assistance, with a pilot shopping bus loop in partnership with the Transit District
- Affordable housing, including a feasibility study for the West Parish/Department of Transportation property, and the hiring of a part-time Housing Administrator

Ken Bernhard asked about the process and guidelines for funding affordable housing. Yvonne Senturia asked how the town holds developers accountable for maintaining the agreed-upon percentages of affordable housing and whether renters continued to fit into income guidelines. She was assured that these numbers were reviewed annually. Lee Bollert, who serves on the Board of Positive Directions, noted how much more the organization could serve the community with increased funding.

The next meeting date is Monday, November 15, 2021 at 10:00 am.