

May 25, 2023

**Commission for Senior Services**

**Regular Meeting Minutes, May 15, 2023**

**Revision I**

**Attendance:** Sarah Adair, Claudia Coplen, Diana (Wendy) Kleros, Doris Levinson, Merle Spiegel

**Staff:** Wendy Petty, Kristen Witt

**Absent:** Holly Betts, Elaine Daignault, Bob Fox, Teri Klein

Commission Co-Chair Claudia Coplen called the meeting to order, and the minutes from the April 17th meeting were approved with one correction. There were no public comments on non-agenda items.

Wendy Petty & Diane Kleros thanked the staff and Commission members for attending the lovely Volunteer Appreciation reception on May 9. She noted that the pianist for the event had been excellent.

Staff reports:

- On behalf of Human Services Director Elaine Daignault, who was on vacation, Kristen Witt, LCSW Municipal Agent for Seniors/Clinical Supervisor, reported that there would be no update on the Commission for People with Disabilities this month.

Kristen reported that there were two more weeks until the Energy Assistance program for renters was completed for the year. There were more new people applying for assistance, and many evictions are anticipated. Kristen explained that Human Services had no control over actions of the Housing Authority, which is run by the state, although we do appoint Board members to the Authority. Evictions are expected for non-payment of rent as well as added people living in apartments who are not on the lease, which is not allowed in public housing. Doris Levinson asked if there is anything we can do about this issue, considering that even an adult child living in public housing to care for an elderly parent could be grounds for eviction. Kristen said we could raise awareness by attending

Board meetings of the Housing Authority and voicing concern. The discussion was put on hold pending input by Elain Daignault.

- Wendy Petty, Senior Center Director, said that registration for summer classes would begin Monday, June 12 for Westport residents and Tuesday, June 20 for nonresidents (since June 19 is a holiday). Classes will begin on July 10, a week later than usual. The Senior Center has received a new grant for Tai Chi for Arthritis. The Center is also working on guidelines for using remaining ARPA funds for various projects. These funds have a two-year window and must be used for Covid-related purposes. A survey is planned to address the best use of outdoors areas and how to bring more people back to the Center now that the Covid pandemic has ended.

#### Commissioner reports:

- Claudia Coplen, Housing, reported that she would be attending a second update on affordable housing, sponsored by the RTM, which will be held online on May 17. Scheduled to lead the discussion are State Senator Ceci Maher, State Representative Jonathan Steinberg, Planning and Zoning Commission Chairwoman Danielle Dobin, RTM Planning and Zoning Committee Chairman Matthew Mandell, and Westport Housing Authority Executive Director Carol Martin. Discussion will focus on plans now that Westport's moratorium under the 8-30g affordable housing law has expired in early March. It will include discussion of several controversial bills designed to create more affordable housing across the state, including the "Fair Share" and "Work Live Ride" proposals.
- Wendy Kleros, Transportation, said that a lot of transportation initiatives will depend on whether Norwalk joins with Westport as part of Coastal Link. The Wheels 2 U budget has been restored for 2023-24. Kristen Witt commented that she hopes Door to Door transportation, which currently covers Westport south through Greenwich, would extend north to Bridgeport as well.
- Doris Levinson, Prevention Coalition and Parks & Recreation, reported that the Coalition is aggressively pursuing ways to expand education about cannabis. One store in town has been selling marijuana in candy formulation without a license and to underage customers. Westport has police funding to curb this type of abuse. An upcoming Coalition meeting will feature a Yale University doctor talking about increased anxiety in adolescents. She added that more legal drugs are now being prescribed for young children.

- Sarah Adair reported on the Common Ground meeting held at the Westport Library on May 2, which was well attended and not contentious. The consensus seemed to be that if you could find one thing to agree on with someone of another party or affiliation, you could start from there to find a solution. Claudia Coplen added that the Planning and Zoning Commission used to have very contentious meetings. After a series of events including a lawsuit, new Commissioners were elected to restore civility to that Board. Kristen Witt praised the boards of the Senior Services Commission and the Commission on People with Disabilities for working collaboratively and bringing important information to the attention of staff.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:10 am. The next meeting will be held on June 12.