

## Commission for Senior Services

### Regular Meeting Minutes, June 12, 2023

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

**Staff:** Wendy Petty, Kristen Witt, Holly Betts, Tess Gordon (Human Services intern)

**Guest:** Harris Falk, RTM

**Absent:** Elaine Daignault, Bob Fox

Commission Co-Chair Claudia Coplen called the meeting to order, and the minutes from the May 15th meeting were approved. Tess Gordon, a summer intern for Human Services, was introduced. There were no public comments on non-agenda items.

Staff reports:

- Wendy Petty, Senior Center Director, said that registration for summer classes began today for Westport residents and would begin on June 20 for nonresidents. Wendy reported on the recent survey of members, results of which showed a desire for increased outdoor use for the facility, including a row of bird houses and a deer fence. It was also felt that there was insufficient handicapped parking. Wendy is working with Parks & Recreation on these suggestions and is also exploring the creation of a pollinator garden.
- Holly Betts, Senior Center Assistant Director, said that summer classes would begin the week of July 10. During the week of July 3 – a gap between spring and summer classes – there will be a number of special activities. Holly will be giving a class on the history of food and recipes, and some one-day seminars will include a Shakespeare session in the morning followed by preparation of “Posset Pudding” – a popular dessert during Shakespeare’s time – in the afternoon. The Aquacize class will be held at the Longshore pool on Tuesday and Thursday mornings for eight weeks beginning the end of June, and senior lap swim will be available those mornings as well.

Holly said that the new Tai Chi for Arthritis class has been so well received that two sessions will be offered this summer. She added that violinist Heather Hardy would be performing at an upcoming social event.

Holly also reported that a new grant from SWCAA (Southwest Connecticut Agency on Aging) will provide training for Medicare open enrollment, an excellent program. The agency runs Connecticut's home care program, which provides in-home assistance for needy seniors as well as respite care. Marie Allen is SWCAA's Executive Director.

- Kristen Witt, LCSW Municipal Agent for Seniors/Senior Social Worker, reported on the Energy Assistance Program, which has now concluded for the year. There were 260 applications sent to households, of which 225 were completed. Of these, 47 applications were for assistance with oil heat, 6 for propane, 121 for natural gas, and 51 for electric. A total of \$134,070 was awarded through state funding along with an additional \$10,948 provided by the Westport Warm-Up Fund. Kristen added that the Renters Rebate program, which runs through October, was also going well.

On behalf of Human Services Director Elaine Daignault, Kristen reported that Employment for Everyone, a program that helps find employment for individuals with disabilities, was increasingly popular. Club 203 provides social events for these individuals, and its most recent event at the Westport Library was very well attended.

Commissioner reports:

- Claudia Coplen, Housing, reported that she attended the second update on affordable housing, held online and sponsored by the RTM, on May 17. 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 led the discussion, which included 8-30g prospects now that Westport's moratorium has expired, along with updates on the "Fair Share" and "Work Live Ride" proposals.

Claudia also attended the Affordable Housing Subcommittee meeting on May 31. The meeting focused on progress of the town's Affordable Housing Plan. The Affordable Housing Trust is moving forward and is expected to be in place by fall of this year. Town-owned rental properties deed-restricted for affordable housing include 136 Riverside Avenue, Susie's House (managed by Project Return), and the Gillespie Center.

There are also 7-8 private affordable housing developments under construction. The Board of Selectwomen will review other possible developments on town-owned land, and Planning & Zoning will review the need for a new zoning district or a text change to reduce zoning barriers. There was considerable interest in the creation of "cottage clusters," using modular construction and only serving affordable projects for families at 40 to 60 percent of state median income levels. These would be developed on town-owned land, with a maximum size of 850 square feet and requiring off-street parking. Claudia said that Westport needs 156 points to reach the next 8-30g moratorium, and once everything under way (except Hiawatha Lane, which is still in litigation) has been completed, we will be close to meeting that amount. Even one cottage cluster could make a difference.

- Wendy Kleros had no Transportation initiatives to report.
- Doris Levinson, Prevention Coalition and Parks & Recreation, reported that a ban on smoking and cannabis use at town beaches and parks is in the works. The golf course would be excluded, as would parking lots. The request for a port-a-potty at Old Mill Beach has received considerable objections from neighbors. Doris also attended the wrap-up meeting of the Westport Prevention Coalition and mentioned that Narcan is now available over the counter in Westport.
- Sarah Adair reported that she has joined the Tree Board, an organization that provides education about trees and assists the Tree Warden (a part-time position) with his duties. Westport is a "Tree City," having received an award for our initiatives from the Arbor Association. She added that there is currently a need for education about spotted lanternflies, which may become responsible for a possible infestation.

A motion was made and carried to hold no meetings during July and August. The meeting was adjourned at 11:15 am. The next meeting will be held on September 18.