

**Westport Commission on People with Disabilities  
Minutes of Meeting  
Thursday January 18, 2024 9:00am  
IN PERSON-Town Hall**

**Attendance:** Jim Ross - Chair, Doug Rivkin (phone), Sharuna Mahesh, Daniel Maya, Stacie Curran, Diane Johnson. Absent: Joe A. HS: Elaine Daignault, Kayla Morgan, Ryan Baylis

9:05am - Chair, Jim Ross - Call to Order.

Motion to approve July Minutes - Sharuna, 1st, Daniel, 2nd - All in favor.

**Human Services Update, Elaine D:**

Budget Season (Fiscal Year July 1st - June 30th) –

- minimal increases due to contractual obligations and staffing costs.

**Senior Center –**

- Outdoor improvements are planned, thanks to a dedicated ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) Fund for Senior Centers.
- Recently approved a new FT Community Relations Specialist to help with significant participant growth over the past year.

**Youth Services/Toquet Hall: Kelsey & Kevin**

- Teen Center is active and also hosts the WPS Transition activities.
- Discussion - Substance Abuse Survey in the Westport Schools grades 7-12 was proposed and approved at a recent BOE meeting. Questions include where they are gaining access to illegal actives, questions around more illicit drug use, questions around digital citizenship - all anonymous. 7th-12th graders - 150 kids in each grade. Data is used to inform prevention efforts.
- New QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Suicide Prevention Training through Westport Prevention Coalition implemented by Kevin Godburn and Margaret Watt- for every Junior at SHS.
- Prevention work - underfunded, Positive Directions is our Local Prevention Council (LPC) and received about \$8000/year from the state – DHS works with PD to facilitate Westport Prevention coalition activities. Additional funding is needed.

**Social Services –**

- Energy Assistance & Renters abatement - programs continue strong.
- Support for clients seeking social services.
  - Elaine mentioned that our 4 FT clinical staff see clients for a variety of reasons offering short term counseling, financial assistance, referral to resources. DHS does not provide diagnosis and treatment; we have both short and long term clients who come for regular check ins and/or to qualify for financial assistance programs.
  - Ryan B, DHS Social Worker - supports job seekers and other clients who need specific resources and may require some mental health supports, help coach & motivate.

- Stacie/Sharuna - discuss Deidre Flores new programs and offering - private therapist in town.
- Discussion around finding small group - that “fits” to work - without discriminating.
- Funding conversations

Elaine D is asking for a 3.3% increase in Human Services Budget- due in part to Union Salary Increase and new full-time position at the Senior Center. Town General fund covers staffing and facility requests. Most programs are state and federally funded (CEAP, SNAP, DSS, etc), other programs like Westport Warm up, CLUB203 and youth/senior center programs are self funded through fees and/or covered by individual donations and grants.

Diane J mentioned the challenge of informing the public of this face. Suggested CPD review the WeCare Westport portal to improve ease of making a donation.

**Action Item:** Review Town Website “WeCare Westport” portal for Donations to explore ways to improve user experience.

**E4E** - need a separate meeting to review its role in future, a committee/executive meeting will be called in the coming weeks.

**CLUB203** - Sharuna: It’s a tremendous success, went thru past couple events, and future ones - partnerships with locations/ facilities in Town, and new ones, relationship with Rotary, - Discussed fundraising - Raising Dollars for Disability for Town , and Mental Health Issues..using the momentum of CLUB203.. Through Human Services, The benefit of access under Town Charter.

(Next to be on Agenda – Affordable/Special Needs Housing & Getting DISABILITY-IN as guest speaker in Spring- make this a Public Forum - we can share this through SPED PTA & CLUB203)

**Adjourned** - 10:25am - Diane 1st, Stacie - 2nd