

October 12, 2024

Commission for Senior Services

Regular Meeting Minutes, September 16, 2024

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

Staff: Holly Betts, Elaine Daignault, Wendy Petty, Kristen Witt

Guest: Joe Anastasi (Human Services), Harris Falk

Commission Co-Chair Claudia Coplen called the meeting to order at 10:00 am, and the minutes from the August 19th meeting were approved. There were no public comments on non-agenda items.

- Holly Betts, Senior Center Assistant Director, introduced Joe Anastasi, the Senior Center's new Program Specialist. She reported that registration for the new term had just ended, after a very busy two weeks. Classes at that time were 75 percent filled, with a ratio of about 50/50 residents and nonresidents. A number of new members who had recently moved in with sons or daughters in town had attended many one-time events and joined in cafe lunches but hadn't generally signed up for classes yet. There are a total of 92 classes, mostly in-person and some hybrid, and just one remaining Zoom-only class taught by Chris Goldbach.

The 2024 Parkinson's Optimism Walk is to be held on September 21 at Sherwood Island State Park. Holly is to be honored at that walk for the Center's major efforts to help people suffering from Parkinson's disease, and the Commission congratulated Holly on this honor. The Walk to End Alzheimer's will be held on October 27 at Calf Pasture Beach in Norwalk.

The Senior Center is hosting a Club 203 social event on October 16 from 6:30 – 8:00 pm featuring bingo. Macaroni and cheese dinners will be donated by the Center's lunch vendor.

- Wendy Petty, Senior Center Director, reported that the recent registration had seen a lot of new members joining and immediately signing up for classes. There has been a 10 percent increase in new members this year, on top of a 25 percent increase last year. Some classes have been

increased in size, and others now offer two sections. Wendy emphasized the importance of out-of-town members in enabling the Center to keep offering so many classes. Merle Spiegel thanked Wendy and the Center for accommodating many of the Y's Women's monthly special interest committee meetings.

Wendy added that the Senior Center's Garden Club, formerly led by Jason Wilson, will now be led by Claudia Coplen, with assistance from Diana Andrews and Joe Anastasi. Wendy complimented Wendy Kleros on the excellent job she has been doing as Curator of the Art Rooms. Art will be rotated every two months. Ten people are now studying stained glass.

- Elaine Daignault, Human Services Director, said that the original Senior Center building was opened in 2004, with the expansion completed in 2019. Because the Center relies partly on federal funding, it is required to accept out-of-town members. She reported that the new Outdoor Sanctuary would be dedicated the following day, September 17, and would honor the Schacter Family. The original garden area had been dedicated to Sue Pfister's mother.

Elane noted that special disability awareness training would be held at the Westport Library on October 22. An effort is being made to open more employment pathways for people with disabilities.

Elaine briefly discussed Human Services role on the Town's Emergency Management Team and that her team is constantly undergoing training in order to be ready for natural or manmade disasters. To that end, Westport Human Services (DHS) is partnering with Weston Human Services to enhance the State of Connecticut's Disaster Behavioral Health Response Network in Fairfield County. Westport will host a half day training for those interested in joining the response team on October 8th. The initial session will cover psychological first aid with instructions on how to become a certified team member. One doesn't need to be a clinician to participate. A second 20-minute online information session will be held on September 25, with training scheduled for October 8.

- Kristen Witt, LCSW Municipal Agent for Seniors/Senior Social Worker, reported that the Renters' Rebate Program concludes at the end of September. The Energy Assistance Program gets under way on October 1. Some state changes will limit access of the Human Services Department to award levels, as the state Department of Social Services is taking increased control of the program. Town Social Workers will help applicants collect necessary paperwork and get signatures on the

documents, and then hand off the application to the Alliance For Community Empowerment, who are hold the contract for our region with DSS to process applications. The value of having Westport's Human Services involved is this is how they learn who is in need in the community and avoids clients having to tell their stories to several people to receive services and supports. This won't change Westport approach to service, it just limits access to town social workers receiving award letters/amounts for future assistance needs.

Commissioner reports:

- Claudia Coplen, Housing, said there had been no meeting for months. She reported that 122 Wilton Road has a Certificate of Occupancy and will be managed by Millenium Property Management. There are 18 units including one, two, and three bedroom apartments, some carrying vouchers from the state. Five apartments will be at market rate, the rest affordable. This will give Westport many moratorium points, as will the refurbishment of Project Return. We are getting closer to another 8-30g moratorium. The Hiawatha Lane project is currently stalled. Claudia added that the Gillespie Center renovation is looking great, with more usable space. Additional funding brings the cost of the renovation to \$1.73 million, and the work will be completed in spring of 2025. Meanwhile, Trader Joe's is providing fresh fruits and vegetables for the food pantry.
- Doris Levinson, Parks and Recreation, had no report.
- Wendy Kleros said she would no longer have time to cover Transportation for the Commission, in light of her new work as Art Rooms Curator. She will continue as Co-Chair of the Commission. There was no Transportation report.
- Teri Klein, Human Services Commission updates, mentioned that the next Emergency Management meeting would be held on September 21.
- Sarah Adair, Tree Board, reported that another sapling giveaway will be held on Saturday, October 5 at Jesup Green, including pumpkins and face-painting.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 am. The next meeting will be held on October 21, 2024.

Respectfully submitted, Merle Spiegel