

COMMISSION ON AGING  
January Meeting  
1/12/09

MINUTES

Commission members present: Peggy Anderson, Helen de Keijzer, Terry Hulley, Lois Miller, and Sandy O'Brien. Also present: Weston Social Services Director Charlene Chiang-Hillman, Senior Center Director Jennifer Ruddy and Program Coordinator Krista Hayward, SWCAA liaison Meta Schroeter and guests Louellen Bartholomae, Bruce Missett, Linda Denholtz, and Marcia Hamlin.

Chairman Lois Miller asked Helen de Keijzer to take minutes; and Lois called the meeting to order at 9:20 a.m. Minutes of the previous meeting were approved as written. Lois distributed the 2009 Commission meeting schedule and members list.

Due to scheduling needs, Charlene, Jen, and Krista requested that reports on the Senior Center precede social services reports on future Commission agendas.

Krista announced that a six week watercolor painting class is in place, and that computer classes will again be offered to Weston seniors thanks to a grant by the Weston Education Foundation. Terry Hulley's book group is scheduled to begin again in March. Publicity for Center programs includes announcements at Senior Center lunches and notice in the monthly/bi-monthly Newsletter which is mailed to approximately 500 Weston seniors. Other potential means of publicizing programs were briefly discussed.

The Senior Center budget has been submitted to the Town without an increase.

We noted that the Center does not draw many younger seniors – a common problem. Among other ideas discussed to increase participation of this segment of the community was the possibility of offering intellectually stimulating programming, for example, about current affairs (perhaps to be co-sponsored with one or two local groups).

Programming for the Senior Center lunches was also discussed. Entertainment is often offered twice/month and Bingo once/month. Commissioners suggested that Jen might consider also offering informational programs once/month. Meta Schroeter offered to work with Jen to develop the Center's calendar schedule.

Charlene's social services report began by noting that much of her focus during the past month was on the Holidays. She commented that the Weston Schools, Kiwanis, the Women's League, and other local groups, as well as individual volunteers and donors were all generous in meeting community needs.

Charlene said that more people are using the food pantry than in the past and she is concerned about the deepening economic downturn. She has not seen much change in the level of needs in the senior population but has many new needs among younger

community members and their families. The department's caseload has nearly tripled and she is working with the new Director of Youth Services to meet the demand. She also reported that the last Selectman's meeting, which was attended by interested residents and social service providers, was helpful in focusing attention on the serious and on-going rise in local needs.

Commissioners discussed the possibility of developing a series of programs designed to help people cope with their changing circumstances. Topics might include information on consumer rights, helpful hints on how to conserve resources, save on energy bills, etc. An Economic Crisis Task Force was formed to explore creating such a series and, in addition to Charlene and Krista, Nancy, and Helen volunteered to work on it.

We also discussed the problem of senior isolation. Nursing and Home Care's Peer Counseling program, which supports isolated seniors, was mentioned and Charlene noted that there might be ten to fifteen Weston seniors who could benefit from peer counseling if it were offered free of charge. We will investigate the status and availability of the original program and will also discuss working with the Westport/Weston Health District (WWHD) to develop something similar. Nancy McCormick, Weston liaison to the Health District, will pursue this idea with the District's Monica Wheeler.

Charlene reported that the population of Weston residents who are being served by Weston's Meals-on-Wheels, remains fairly stable – from between nine and twelve recipients.

Nancy reported on her efforts to create a 'Friends of the Weston Senior Center'. Due to the slowing economy, it was decided that she will continue working to establish it as a 501 (C) (3) organization, but that it's actual launch would be postponed for at least six months.

Next, Meta Schroeter, who recently volunteered to serve as the Weston representative to the Southwestern Connecticut Agency on Aging (SWCAA), distributed notes from, and reported on, the December 10<sup>th</sup>, '08 SWCAA meeting. She was enthusiastic about the professionalism of the Agency and said that the meetings offer an important opportunity to share ideas regionally and to learn about available resources. Among other things, attendees learned about SWCAA's legislative breakfasts (a forum for advocacy on behalf of the senior population), and the CHCPE Home Care and medicare part D drug programs. Since Town representatives are asked to give Community Reports, Meta also asked for input on what local information to share at the next meeting. Suggestions included information on: Weston's senior tax programs, the new Economic Crisis Task Force, and the Commission's plans to create Weston's first Senior Services Directory. Meta will explore the availability of a speaker(s) to present a program in Weston, perhaps at one of the informational presentations during a Senior Center lunch.

Helen reported that she is aiming to publish the new Weston Directory of Senior Resources and Services in October/November of 2009. Lois has discussed possible funding with Tom Landry, and guest Louellen Bartholomae raised the possibility of

soliciting sponsorship from a local business/businesses. Among other questions Helen raised for future discussion are: How many copies to print and what kind of illustrations to use in the Directory.

Gordon Green's Dial-a-Ride usage report was distributed, but Commissioners could not meaningfully discuss it without clarification, which will be sought for the next meeting.

Peggy is the Commission representative to the Weston Task Force that was initiated with the help of the Domestic Violence Crisis Center. She and Task Force members Linda and Marcia spoke about the importance of raising awareness of abuse so that seniors are not afraid to ask for help. They also reported that the police have some concerns about neglect in Town. The group will work with Jen and hopes to offer an educational program soon.

Lois reviewed the text of a draft letter to be sent to residents who turned 65 during 2008. It is designed to inform seniors of the existence of Weston's tax relief programs and will be sent along with the Tax Collector's detailed informational pamphlet. A motion to accept the text with changes was approved.

Lois also distributed, and the Commission approved, the Commission on Aging Annual Report.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Helen R. de Keijzer.