

COMMISSION ON AGING

Review and Long-range Planning Meeting

Minutes

June 5, 2017

Present: Commission members Helen de Keijzer, Don Gumaer, Bruce Lorentzen, Allison Lisbon, and Dale Robinson, Senior Center Director Wendy Petty, Dial-a-Ride Driver Gordon Green, SWCAA liaison Meta Schroeter, Westport Weston Health District Representative Monica Wheeler, and guests Lois Guberman, Joe Ryan, Jane Hutchinson, Terry Castellano, and a Westport student intern who came with Monica.

The meeting convened at 9:27 a.m.

Minutes of the May 1st meeting were approved by consensus.

SWCAA: Meta reported on the May 10th meeting. SWCAA's Pat Knebel is developing a comprehensive plan designed to support the Southwest region as the baby boomers continue to retire across the country at the remarkable rate of approximately 10,000/day. The plan has four areas of focus: supporting community services with resources and information; building awareness of available services and supports; assisting older adults and their families to access/receive services and navigate relevant systems; and, advocating on behalf of seniors. Director Marie Allen explained that State budget constraints will produce serious pressure on senior programs and added that it's likely that homecare programs will be capped and that there is no hope of increasing Medicaid payments to providers. As a consequence, more and more agencies are now dropping Medicaid. Meta also mentioned that new Medicare ID cards (without social security numbers) would be issued over the next two years starting in the spring of 2018.

Dial-A-Ride/Transportation: Helen first noted the accomplishments of the past year, including delivery of the Center's new excursion bus, delivery of the new Dial-a-Ride van, and relocation of Gordon's office from the Social Services office in the Town Hall Annex to the Senior Center, which has been helpful to both Wendy and Gordon.

Gordon gave out his report and commented that he had provided transportation to veterans back and forth to this year's Memorial Day Parade. He said that while medical trips were down this period, Senior Center trips were way up, especially on lunch days. Runs for groceries were also gaining in popularity. It was noted that the Dial-a-Ride service flyer could be updated and distributed at various in-town locations; Allison will investigate.

Discussion turned to ongoing needs. In addition to always keeping in mind the potential usefulness of expanding the range of service to include accommodating seniors whose medical appointments are outside of our existing service area (e.g., in Fairfield), the most important need remains securing adequate, stable back-up drivers. Discussion ensued about alternative approaches to finally accomplishing this goal. Helen recently discussed some ideas with Town Administrator Jonathan Luiz and it was decided that Wendy and Bruce would work with him on plans to address this issue, if possible, by next fall.

Lois talked briefly about the outstanding service she knows Gordon provides and everyone expressed appreciation for his hard work and kindness.

The desirability of more flexible, expanded senior transportation options was also discussed. It was noted that Allison, who has been volunteering to help Social Services Director Charlene Chiang-Hillman as a volunteer coordinator for the past few months, has so far been able to find helpers to meet senior requests.

Department of Social Services: Charlene was unable to attend the meeting. Allison and Helen had spoken with her beforehand and Charlene said that she thinks the two biggest challenges to seniors living in Weston are transportation and suitable housing. She also said she sees a great need for more PR to help younger people in Town understand the benefits of making Weston an inclusive, welcoming place for seniors.

Allison reported for Charlene on various Department of Social Services programs and commented that they are running smoothly. She added that one current area of focus is reviewing requirements to help older homeowners plan appropriate home modifications in order to age-in-place safely. It was also noted that the issue of how best to reach out to seniors (and their families) when they do not want help, even when they clearly need it, remains especially complex and challenging. Discussion ensued.

The total number of seniors approved for Weston's senior tax relief programs in the year ahead was not yet available from the tax collector, but will likely exceed 50. It was noted that each year the vast majority of those applying for senior tax relief, apply for, and receive, the tax abatement. Discussion ensued about two topics concerning the abatement program that have been raised over the past three months. First, the possibility of encouraging seniors to shift from abatement to other programs and downsizing the amount of funds the Town would absorb each year potentially by some \$100,000 with the idea of redirecting those monies to the Center to augment it's hours, staffing, etc. (Helen had asked the First Selectman about, and had been reassured that, those seniors currently on the program would be grandfathered in were such a change to be pursued in the future.) Second, the issue of how many years a senior should be living in town and have paid taxes before being eligible for the program was raised and some felt it could be made longer than one year. (Helen had asked Charlene about this and was told that everyone currently on the program has been here for more than five years.) Terry Castellano, who had served on the Commission on Aging at the time the abatement program was instituted, added historical perspective to the discussion. She shared that Richard Miller, who spearheaded the program into being, had done so in part to address State pressure (on all Towns) to create affordable housing, and because he and others thought it was a positive thing for the Town and its seniors.

Weston Senior Activities Center: Helen noted the many accomplishments of the 2016–2017 fiscal year, including a successful staff transition following the departure of Pam Wilson; the installation of new Center entrance landscaping; the expansion of facility air-conditioning; the delivery of the new excursion bus and Dial-a-Ride van already noted; updating of the Center's website and newsletter; and, the significant growth of programming and senior participation in Center activities, including the numbers of people attending the Center's popular Wednesday

lunches. Helen noted that the current five-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Town and the School Board allowing the Center to be in South House expires in about two years. She commented that it may be possible to renew the MOU but noted that planning to secure continuity and Center stability should begin soon.

Wendy noted that there would be a break from the Classic Car Show this year and Bruce commented that the Friends would be exploring other ways to raise funds. Regarding staffing, the Town's budget for the upcoming year includes a very modest increase in hours per year for Wendy and Carla. Wendy noted the on-going importance of expanding the Center's hours of operation and staffing (it is still only a part-time senior Center).

The idea of our website's blue color being echoed on the cover pages of the newsletter was raised, as was the subject of newsletter sponsorships. Discussion ensued and it was decided that no advertisements or appearance of endorsement would be allowed.

The potential value of having a trained social worker at the Center for a set period each week to serve as eyes and ears assessing needs/wants was discussed next. Dale and Helen have reported in the past on the potential usefulness of a Senior Village-styled initiative for Weston. It would entail having a potential staff member (a Senior Resource Advocate) at the Center to help, among other things, with coordinating of volunteers and vetting of service providers. Allison, who is a social services professional, commented that she might volunteer to visit the Center somewhat more regularly beginning in September, likely on lunch days, in order to listen and learn, become more well known in the senior community, and to offer some brief "did you know" presentations as well. The hope expressed is to discover within a few months the potential importance of such a part time presence. If it proves useful, the next step could be to institute a pilot program (perhaps temporarily funded through the Elderly Assistance Fund), which in turn could lead to a more permanent position being funded by the Town. Fundraising ideas, including soliciting of legacy gifts, which will be investigated by Bruce, with help from the Friends' Treasurer Woody Bliss, were also raised.

Commission related business: Helen mentioned that, having served the maximum eight years as allowed by Town Charter, she will not be continuing as Chairman after December. She urged everyone to begin thinking about their role on the Commission, and about particular goals they would like to see accomplished going forward. She also commented that the P&Z is beginning work on the new Town Plan of Conservation and Development, that a survey is likely to be a part of the update process, and that the Commission should be thinking of questions, including about senior housing issues that would be helpful to include in any survey and/or in any charrette and/or focus group assessment efforts.

Meeting adjourned at 11:20 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Don Gumaer

Approved: September 5, 2017