

COMMISSION ON AGING  
February Meeting  
2/2/09

MINUTES

Commission members present: Ernie Albin, Peggy Anderson, new member Louellen Bartholomae, Helen de Keijzer, Terry Hulley, and Sandy O'Brien. Also present: Weston Social Services Director Charlene Chiang-Hillman, SWCAA liaison Meta Schroeter, and First Selectman Woody Bliss. (Note: Senior Center Director Jen Ruddy and Program Coordinator Krista Hayward were unable to attend the meeting).

Acting chairman Sandy O'Brien asked Helen de Keijzer to take minutes and called the meeting to order at 9:20 a.m. Ernie made a motion to accept the minutes of the January meeting as written, Terry seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

Woody announced that a new tax freeze bill has been introduced in the Connecticut State Legislature and that he has been getting many calls about Weston's own tax freeze program which is one of the first in the state. Progress of House Bill #5045 can be followed at [www.cga.gov](http://www.cga.gov).

Woody also announced that he will be submitting his town budget to the Board of Selectmen on Tuesday night, February 3<sup>rd</sup>. Expansion of the position of Dial-a-Ride driver from part- to full-time is the only new addition to the budget that has a direct effect on Weston seniors. Woody left the meeting early due to other commitments.

Charlene said that attendance at the Senior Center and at the senior lunches at Norfield has been steady. Sandy encouraged Commissioners to sign-up to attend the lunches in order to introduce ourselves, socialize, and talk with seniors about their interests and concerns. Louellen noted that she already attends once/month with the Newcomers Club, (though she is working) and Meta attends frequently – whenever she is available.

Charlene spoke about the on-going and rising needs in the community. She is meeting with a number of social service providers, involved volunteers, and Superintendent of Schools Jerry Belair to discuss what can be done to help people manage their changing circumstances. Children at all levels in the schools are exhibiting signs of increasing stress.

In addition to the pressures on families and children, it's clear that Weston seniors are now also increasingly effected by the economic downturn. In some instances, their income has been reduced by diminishing dividend and interest income, and in some cases their children and grandchildren who have lost jobs and/or homes of their own are moving in with them. (Sandy noted that cable channel 12 had a story on the Weston Warm-Up Fund and showed Kiwanians' chopping wood in support of local seniors).

Charlene is working together with service providers from Westport, Wilton, and Fairfield to develop a regional Economic Resiliency Fair to be held in March. It is envisioned as an all-day event with participants from a broad range of agencies. She hopes that it will be possible to get a United Way of Coastal Fairfield County grant to support this regional effort. To follow-up, Charlene hopes to organize local programs focused on particular issues later in the year. As her work with this group of professionals is essentially fulfilling the mission of the Commission's own Economic Crisis Task Force as conceived at last month's meeting, our Task Force will not be activated.

Charlene also mentioned that she had requested a \$10,000 line-item for the Social Services Fund in her budget proposal to the First Selectman. She noted that Westport and Darien both have this kind of commitment in their town budgets.

The line-item was removed from the First Selectman's proposed budget by Woody but may be discussed at Tuesday's presentation of his budget to the full Board of Selectmen. Commissioners felt that we should become more informed about the issue before discussing it further. Two issues, among others, to be considered are the burden on tax payers and the need for oversight of the expenditures from the fund when town monies are involved.

Next, Meta distributed notes from and reported on the last Southwestern Connecticut Agency on Aging (SWCAA) meeting which was attended by approximately 25 people. A new initiative was announced for a Senior Center Forum to meet three times a year. The Forum meetings, dates to be announced soon, are being designed to foster the sharing of information, programs, and ideas between representatives from 14 SWCAA towns and cities in the region.

Meta's report included a brief discussion of a Greenwich survey to explore senior wants and needs for their senior center (see [www.greenwichct.org](http://www.greenwichct.org) and click on the golf cart). She noted that it has been determined that the Boomer generation is quite different from the current older senior population in this regard.

She also reported on the strong interest in "At Home" programs which have been established in several Fairfield County towns. Charges for membership, program characteristics, and offerings vary from town to town.

Other items mentioned in Meta's report: Fairfield has a strong Elderhostel program which offers local lectures and classes, and trips; Wilton had a successful memory assessment program that will be repeated; SWCAA will offer a five-week Medicare D training for volunteers and professionals in April (call Chris Crain for more information); and Bridgeport is conducting a domestic violence survey of seniors to determine the extent of abuse (both physical and psychological) in the community. Meta will give contact information about the survey to Peggy for Weston's Domestic Violence Task Force.

It was noted that the group organizing the Westport/Weston LINKS initiative is hoping for a grant that will enable it to establish a pilot program. Charlene commented that, if

possible, LINKS would likely want to utilize the regional Independent Transportation Network (ITN) program which is also currently being organized and seeking grants.

Ernie has asked Gordon to refine the information available in future Dial-a-Ride reports.

As a follow-up to last month's meeting, Helen reported that she had investigated Nursing and Home Care's Peer Counseling program which supports isolated seniors and was told that it is only available to clients/patients who are utilizing Nursing and Home Care/Mid-Fairfield Hospice services. Since, during the January meeting, Charlene noted that there are Weston seniors who could benefit from peer counseling if offered free of charge, Nancy McCormick will speak with Monica Wheeler of the Westport/Weston Health District (WWHD) about developing a similar program.

Helen reported that she is working on the Weston Directory of Senior Resources and Services and hopes to have a brief presentation for next month's meeting. Meta said she had been sent three Directories (from Darien, Wilton, and Westport) after mentioning our project at the SWCAA meeting and will forward them to Helen.

Terry and other Commissioners requested a copy of the final letter about the existence of Weston's tax relief programs which was sent out last month by Lois (along with an informational pamphlet) to residents who turned 65 during 2008.

Terry made a motion to adjourn, Peggy seconded it, and, without objection, the meeting was adjourned at 11:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Helen R. de Keijzer.