

## COMMISSION ON AGING

11/3/08

### MINUTES

Present were Lois Miller, Peggy Anderson, Helen de Keijzer, Terry Hulley, Sandy O'Brien, First Selectman Woody Bliss, and Director of Social Services Charlene Chiang-Hillman and Senior Center Director Jen Ruddy.

Lois called the meeting to order at 9:25 a.m.

Minutes from the 10/6/08 meeting were unanimously approved without change.

Monica Wheeler, Community Health Director of the Westport/Weston Health District, dropped by to give Commissioners invitations to an upcoming program on suicide prevention. The event, 'The Road to Preventing Suicide', which is being co-sponsored by the St. Vincents Behavioral Health Services/Hall-Brooke and the W/W Health District, will be held on November 18th at the Coleytown Middle School in Westport. The program will feature a presentation by Dr. Eric Caine which will be followed by breakout groups, facilitated by mental health professionals, discussing what next steps can be taken within the community to combat this profound public health problem. Program organizers are seeking participation by a wide variety of community leaders as well as school and social service professionals.

Ms. Wheeler also announced that there's a new Health District Director, Mark Cooper, and a new health educator, Ms. Ormand with whom Jen might work to develop local programming for the Weston Senior Center.

In the context of the current economic slowdown, Woody Bliss encouraged the Commission to reach out to Weston seniors about local property tax relief options. (This year, 21 seniors qualified for the tax freeze program, 78 for the tax abatement program, and 13 for the tax deferment program). Outreach is key to increasing participation and Woody suggested developing a potential mailing list of Westonites 64 and older. Sandy O'Brien will discuss this with Charity and Sharon Shattuck and the Commission will stay focused on this issue.

Note: Lois announced that Meta Schroeter has volunteered to represent the Commission at SWCAA meetings. The next meeting is scheduled for November 13<sup>th</sup>.

Charlene began her social services report with a brief description of the Independent Transportation Network (ITN). The new Coastal ITN will be a 501c3 private non-profit regional network. If they come through, a \$50,000 grant proposal to the State of Connecticut, and a \$30,000 grant proposal to the Coastal United Way would form a strong funding base toward the estimated \$150,000 start-up goal. Charlene hopes we can find someone from Weston to join the organizing committee.

Charlene said that there has been a doubling of the number of local families seeking services to meet basic needs. She is working on fund raising and announced that the Weston Women's League will be supporting Weston Social Services and the Food Pantry among others this year.

Charlene announced that the Food Pantry is up and running thanks to the cooperation and flexibility of a number of individual and group volunteers as well as Town Boards and Commissions.

Domestic Violence Crisis Center has recently broadened its focus to include abuse of seniors – including financial and psychological abuse.

Charlene spoke about her planning for the traditional Holiday Basket program and feels she now has sufficient support to meet this year's needs. She also spoke of preparations for meeting the fuel assistance needs of local residents through our Connecticut State grant and the Weston Warm Up Fund.

Weston Senior Center Director Jen Ruddy began her report informing Commissioners that Yoga classes have been held at the Center while Norfield has undergone renovation and that parking on Wednesday (a day not originally scheduled for Senior Center activities) has been a challenge. While the yoga classes will likely resume at the Church as soon as the space is again available, nonetheless, as general programming expands in the Center, it will be helpful to build a mutually supportive relationship with the Hurlbutt community.

Jen said she hoped that renovations at the Norfield Church will be completed in time for the annual Thanksgiving senior luncheon and commented that returning to Norfield for this special occasion would be particularly welcome.

Jen announced receipt of a Weston Education Foundation grant for a computer education program and hopes to hire an instructor soon. Jen also reported that among other participants in various programs, approximately 15 people have regularly been attending yoga, and 7 to 8, painting classes. Terry Hulley's Book Club has needed to change meeting dates due to changes in the timing of a trip to Radio City Music Hall. (Jen noted that the cost of trips may become an issue for some of our senior residents and said that she hopes never to turn anyone away for financial reasons). The Book Club meetings are popular and have been rescheduled.

Lois again emphasized the importance of outreach and Jen and Commissioners brainstormed about ways to get word of Senior Center activities out into the community. Ideas included creating a flyer that might be mailed with future tax bills, regularly putting notices of activities on Weston's cable access channel, putting copies of a Center flyer and/or the Newsletter at appropriate area physician's offices, pharmacies, and local businesses in addition to at Town Hall and the Library where they are already available.

Review of the Dial-a-Ride report led to a discussion of the desirability of having the number of people utilizing the Dial-a-Ride service each month included in future reports. Lois noted that the \$16,000 Connecticut State grant applied for by Tom Landry has come through and Lois will ask Tom to publicize the job of back-up driver.

Lois attended the Coastal United Way's Aging Successfully program held in October. She reported on the featured ITN program. She described program basics and ITN materials were passed around. Helen, who attended an organizing committee meeting the next morning, reported that local and regional organizers appreciated the accessibility of ITN founder Katherine Freund who attended to answer an array of logistical questions. As previously noted by Charlene, the Coastal ITN organizers are already well on their way, and hope to establish a local program in 2009.

Our first Directory of Senior Services was reported on by Helen who handed out a draft Table of Contents. (Woody, Charlene, and Jen were each given a copy and asked for their feedback). The handout reflected the discussion at a meeting held on October 28<sup>th</sup> at the Senior Center.

The idea of surveying Weston seniors about the Directory was suggested by Meta Schroeter who offered to help. Charlene suggested the subject of the survey be broadened to include other questions of interest in meeting local senior needs - and wants. Helen will speak with Charlene, Jen, and Meta before holding a second special meeting tentatively scheduled at the Senior Center for 9:30 a.m., December 9<sup>th</sup> to discuss next steps.

Lois announced that another Cemetery Committee has been appointed by the Board of Selectmen. As in the past, Terry will be Commission representative to the Committee.

Lois became aware that Commission on Aging member Helene Weatherill who recently moved out of Town, will be in Weston to attend a music program at the Library next weekend. At the event, Lois will present Helene with a card and small gift thanking her for her years of excellent service to the Commission.

After a unanimous vote of Commission members, the December meeting was changed from January 7, the first Monday of the month, to the following Monday, January 12. The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Helen de Keijzer