

COMMISSION ON AGING
JUNE MEETING
6/1/09

MINUTES

Commission members present: Ernie Albin, Peggy Anderson, Louellen Bartholomae, Helen de Keijzer, Terry Hulley, and Lois Miller. Also present: Weston Social Services Director Charlene Chiang-Hillman, Senior Center Director Jennifer Ruddy and Program Coordinator Krista Hayward, SWCAA liaison Meta Schroeter, First Selectman Woody Bliss, WWHD Director Mark Cooper, and Dial-a-Ride driver Gordon Green.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Miller at 9:20 a.m.

Peggy Anderson made a motion to accept the minutes of the May meeting as written, Terry seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

Mark Cooper came to the Commission meeting to introduce himself, provide information on services of the WWHD and to listen to new program/outreach ideas. New ideas for Weston seniors included developing a Peer Counseling program and creating presentations on strategies for staying healthy, maximizing independence, and awareness/prevention. The Yellow Dot, Triad, and File of Life programs were also discussed. WWHD Director of Community Health Monica Wheeler, already works in various ways with Charlene and will be working on the expansion of programming.

Woody announced that Friday was the close of this year's tax relief programs and said that the programs came in under the available dollar limit. He reported that the abatement program continues to be by far the most heavily subscribed, that usage of the deferment program has increased, though only modestly, and that the freeze program has the fewest participants. There was a brief discussion of ways to improve publicity for the programs and it was tentatively decided that a timely letter should be sent to all Weston seniors next year.

Krista, Senior Center Program Coordinator, announced that she would be leaving her job this month. Commissioners were sorry to hear the news and thanked her for her outstanding service to Weston seniors. Charlene announced that Nancy McCormick, already actively involved in Senior Center activities, will take over the position.

SWCAA Report:

Meta, who has been attending Medicare training classes, reported that she will be receiving her certification as a Medicare counselor soon. She will be volunteering through the Weston Senior Center for four hours a month to answer questions about Medicare, Medicaid, etc., and, from November 15 – December 31, she will devote extra

hours to support open enrollment for seniors in the government mandated Medicare part D senior drug insurance program.

Meta announced that the Southwestern Connecticut Agency on Aging has completed its state-mandated four-year Area Plan up-date. The extensive report is available at www.swcaa.org. She also reported that because budgets are being cut, towns and cities are facing cutbacks in services while the demand for services is increasing. Many senior centers do/are planning fundraisers.

Other items in Meta's report included: 1) future development of senior center activities is being planned in several area towns utilizing focus groups, surveys (as in Greenwich), and/or a boomer advisory committee (as in Stamford); 2) the ITN Central CT has received funding from SWCAA and United Way and can now get underway; and 3) the AARP Tax Program had great success in the towns in which it was offered.

Social Services Report:

Charlene's report began with comment about the flurry of activity in her office and the dramatic nature of some of the needs she is seeing in the community, e.g., families losing their homes. Charlene also reported that numerous shut-off notices are still being received by seniors and families in town and that she is continuing to provide monetary help.

Unfortunately, Charlene said that the Weston Food Pantry has been systematically robbed by out-of-town residents. The police have recommended a card-swiping system to control the situation and Charlene and Pantry organizers Betsy Peyreigne and Teri Gaberman are exploring how to establish one. Charlene sees the change as necessary although she hopes that instituting new procedures won't deter those in need from accessing the Pantry.

Charlene said that the area social services' Economic Crisis Task Force has presented its second and third programs in Wilton. The former focused on mortgages and the latter on affordable health insurance. (The programs have been drawing around 30 – 35 attendees with few Weston seniors participating.)

Mel Bremmer is serving as a Weston volunteer liaison to ITN, but the organizing group is hoping for additional Weston representation. Ernie will continue to investigate the possibility of Heady funds being used to support ITN. With considerable start-up monies in place, the group expects to have the program running in 2010.

Charlene, as in previous months, commented that the LINKS (Westport/Weston At Home) organizing group is still also looking for help from Weston volunteers. (Charlene had wanted to establish a Weston Helping Hand volunteer program – matching volunteers to those in need of services, but the need to vet volunteers is presently beyond the capacity of her office.) If LINKS can be established, it will help meet a real need though would not necessarily be able to provide any fee-free services.

Senior Center Report:

Jen reported that various Senior Center programs are on-going and that, among others, the book group run by Commission member Terry Hulley is going very well. There is a cookout planned for this week's senior lunch, a farewell party for Krista next week, and there will be a bring-your-own picnic run by Krista at Sherwood Island on June 22nd.

There was considerable discussion about the need to expand the reach of the Senior Center Newsletter to include all Weston seniors on – at least – a quarterly or twice/year basis. Logistical issues and funding/sponsorship options were discussed. Jen and Nancy will consider details and discuss them at the next meeting. Commissioners are unclear what funding may already potentially be available and Lois will consult with Tom Landry about all reserved funds designated for the benefit of Weston seniors.

Jen had the idea of creating a new Newsletter feature on volunteer opportunities for seniors which was heartily endorsed by Commissioners.

Friends and Directory Reports:

Lois and Helen gave a brief summary of the May 18th discussion of the Friends of the Senior Center and the Weston Senior Resources/Services Directory.

Dial-a-Ride Report:

Gordon will report on both May and June at the next meeting.

The next Commission meeting is scheduled for Monday July 13th.

Terry made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Louellen seconded it, and with unanimous approval, the meeting was adjourned by Lois at 12:20 p.m.

Submitted by Helen de Keijzer