

## COMMISSION ON AGING MINUTES

**March 3, 2014**

**Present:** Commission members Don Gumaer, Helen de Keijzer, Nina Daniel, Bruce Lorentzen, Laura Smits and Peggy Anderson; Senior Center Director Wendy Petty and Program Coordinator Pam Wilson; Social Services Director Charlene Chiang Hillman; and SWCAA liaison Meta Schroeder.

Guests: First Selectman Gayle Weinstein and Woody Bliss.

Helen gave Commissioners an update of plans for the Senior Center space including a new offer from Superintendent Colleen Palmer that includes additional rooms in South House as well as 18 additional parking spaces with the possibility of the Center being able to use the school food service for some meals.

Selectman Weinstein stated that her goal is to find the seniors a permanent location with ample parking. She has some concerns about the Board of Education's position about needing flexibility for their spaces. Gayle discussed other possibilities for a long-term plan for school and town facilities. Gayle asked for a definition of what the Commission means when stating their desire for a "full-time" center. Is it a Monday-Friday 9-2, 9-5? What are we looking for as far as daily hours of operation? Gayle also discussed the budget impact of increasing Pam Wilson's hours. She urged members to attend the Board of Finance meeting next Monday (March 10).

Helen clarified that the Commission has been seeking to expand the Center's hours as well as have the Center open at least five days a week. Gayle suggested that we look into adding an additional part-time person to increase hours and flexibility for Pam and Wendy rather than adding hours to Pam's schedule. Gayle asked what the Center's priorities are. Is it a) more space, b) more hours—it must be done incrementally, can't happen all at once. Discussion ensued.

Woody discussed his letter to The Weston Forum which contains "7 Steps" to improve the Senior Center space in its current South House location. There was a discussion regarding short-term and long-term solutions as well as the idea of a permanent building or designated space.

First Selectman Weinstein left the meeting at 9:55 a.m.

**January Minutes:** Approved by consensus.

**SWCAA Report:** Meta reported that towns have reported problems with long wait times for seniors trying to contact the state's Department of Social Services. Chris Crain, head of CHOICES urged everyone to contact their state representatives and complain about the lack of service in this department. There is a lawsuit pending against United Healthcare for dropping Yale/New Haven hospital from their Medicare Advantage Plan. Pat Knebel explained site visits for current grant site evaluations. Some of the categories for grants include adult care, nursing homes, and health education. Gretchen James, head of the Living Well program announced that the six-week program will be starting at several locations. There is a lack of funds this year for

both Westport and Norwalk's planned "Shred-It Days" that were popular last year. Meta reported that many senior centers in the area are in budget negotiations and most expect their budgets to stay the same or be reduced.

**Social Services:** Charlene stated that at this point she is basically doing crisis intervention. Fuel money is short due to the length of cold weather, with many households struggling to heat their homes. She has a few seniors and others with extensive issues that keep her from being available in her office. Charlene stated that she is a part-time social worker with a full-time caseload and could use an additional part-time Social Worker but understands that this will not be possible in this year's budget cycle. When she started her job she had 45 cases, now she has over 200. Suzanne and Michelle help with many issues but the situation is difficult.

**Senior Center Report:** Pam spoke about the popularity of the "Lunch and Learn" program as well as about a trip to Hyde Park. Nina suggested a series called "Authors, Actors and Artists" that would involve discussions with Weston's many local celebrities. Helen suggested that we might combine efforts with the Arts Commission or local artists' groups to expand the pool of participants.

**Long-Term Care Options:** Nina and Helen attended a presentation in Stamford about this topic and wondered if we should create a forum or series on this issue in Weston. Helen asked for the group's input. Discussion ensued.

**Friends of the WSAC:** Nina stated that there is some confusion about adding parking spaces for the Center. Woody read the memo from Superintendent Palmer to First Selectman Weinstein stating that to make room for the additional 18 spaces, the district would have to find an additional black top area for students to use. Woody sees no reason why we can't have a 5-year MOU with the schools for the Senior Center space. Nina and Woody stressed the suitability of expanding space in South House rather than exploring other parts of Hurlbutt.

Discussion established that the goal at this time is to have the Center open Monday-Friday from 9-3, which adds both hours and a fifth day to current Center operations. Bruce suggested that the Commission craft a motion to be read by Helen at the Board of Finance meeting on Monday evening March 10th. After much discussion a motion was crafted:

"In anticipation of expanded parking and facilities space in the Senior Center location in Hurlbutt's South House, as well as a 5-year MOU between the town and the schools, the Commission on Aging urges the Board of Finance to increase funding in the Senior Center operating budget and the town Capital budget to allow for a 5-day operation with expanded hours."

The motion carried unanimously and Helen agreed to deliver the message to the Board of Finance.

Meeting adjourned at 11:20.

Respectfully Submitted,

Laura Smits