

COMMISSION ON AGING AND DISABLED

January 4, 2023

Hybrid Meeting - 6:00 pm

MEMBERS PRESENT

Karen Brecher
Mark Frantz
Maureen Lynch
Jerilyn Nagel
Kathleen Sobieski

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

STAFF

James Krupienski
Jaime Trevethian

TOWN COUNCIL LIAISON

David Nagel

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
TOWN OF WASHINGTON, CT
2023 JAN 26 AM 8:39
Town Clerk

I. CALL TO ORDER

Karen Brecher called the Commission on Aging and Disabled hybrid meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Councilor Dave Nagel reported that the Town Council met in a Special Meeting for doing end of the year items that needed to be voted on before the new year came. The Council also finalized the plans for selecting the new Town Manager, and James Krupienski has volunteered to be the Acting Town Manager. The process has started and ongoing; we have selected a recruiting firm that is going through the process of gaining candidates. At some point, it will be narrowed down to three or five candidates that will come before the Council to be interviewed, and then a selection will be made. The process will take quite a while.

IV. STAFF REPORT

A. Program, Service and Reopening Report

Jaime Trevethian reported that the Center remained very busy and productive in December. Many holiday themed activities and events were held, such as various craft classes, a gingerbread house class, participants made door hangings and various cards and crafts. The Center had a special holiday congregating lunch which was extremely well attended. We also had some non-holiday events such as a European History class via Zoom and has a great following. We had an overview of the Connecticut court system which was very well attended. COVID did hit a bit in December and impacted staff and presenters. Two programs had to be canceled due to COVID because they were holiday-themed. The gift shop and the coffee shops continue to operate very successfully. The coffee shop is open on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays for a light breakfast and lunch. The volunteers are very dedicated, do a great job and have quite a following. We are looking at expanding the menu and bringing back some pre-pandemic menu items that were a little cost prohibitive. We don't look to

make a big profit on our coffee shop but do need to cover our expenses and keep prices low. So the coffee shop had some closures in December because of COVID/volunteer shortage, but they did about \$439 which is not bad at all considering a cup of coffee is 75 cents. The gift shop continued to be very successful in December and is open Monday through Friday 10 am to 1 pm. They were open December 1 through December 22 and did \$1,700 for the month, so a lot of Christmas shopping going on there. The gift shop was closed the week between Christmas and New Year's Day as it usually is to reset the inventory and give the volunteers a bit of a break. It is reopened now and we look forward to a successful winter for both.

Staff is continuing to focus on outreach strategies to increase community awareness of the Center, both to the "younger/older" adults as we call it. These are the folks who might not be retired yet, the younger, disabled adults, and also to those who may be underserved and not aware of our services. Barbara Womer, our Program Coordinator and Teri Snyder, our Social Worker visited one of the Senior Housing Units in December and gave a very thorough presentation. We got a couple people signing up for the Center because of that which is fantastic. They plan on visiting all the various Senior housing sites in Town over the next few months as their schedules allow. What we figure at this point is that it is going to be a lot of work just to get some results here and there—if we just get a handful of people from each place that are aware of us that can help spread the word, then we are reaching more people.

Speaking of COVID, we had a booster and vaccine clinic on December 1st in conjunction with the CT Health District—it was open to anybody ages 18 and up. We took about 50 appointments and also took walk-ins. There were over 150 participants, and all the boosters and vaccines were available.

The Bus Trip Committee was very busy and are planning their 2023 trips. They usually don't do much in January and February because often the weather doesn't cooperate, but the trips will resume in March. They have a St. Patrick's Day luncheon at the Aqua Turf planned on March 14th, and they have a trip to the Thomaston Playhouse on May 7th. All the other trips, including some casino trips, are in progress and will be announced soon.

As always, we focus on folks who can't make it to the Center because either of COVID or other upper respiratory illnesses or they're just not comfortable attending or they are unable to attend. We continue to offer telephone-based programs, hybrid and Zoom programs; and a little later in the meeting, I have a proposal for a purchase that can help us with that. Lunch was very busy as it is now, Meals on Wheels continues to increase more and more—the need has been significant; about 1,100 hot meals are delivered each month. About 58 to 63 residents receive Meals on Wheels each day, done mostly by volunteers with just a little help from staff, which is very impressive.

Social Work, Energy Assistance, Renter's Rebate programs are in full swing. Although oil prices have come down a bit, there is still quite a bit of concern with the Energy Assistance and the need this year being quite increased over past years due to the increase in the oil prices, prediction of a cold winter which thankfully hasn't panned out yet, and a reduction in available aid to members through the State. Karen Halpert is our Coordinator for that, and she has worked tirelessly to get through huge piles of Applications. After reviewing Applications and paperwork, she determines eligibility and then sends paperwork to the Community Renewal Team for funding. I had a meeting with State Representative Gary Turco early in December and he did state that there should be some good news coming for that in terms of funding that will be released that will hopefully ease the burden for individuals of all ages this winter, not just older adults.

We began preparing our Departmental budget request for next fiscal year which was due today. It has been submitted, and I can talk about it when it comes up on the agenda.

The Giving Garden is cleaned up for the year.

Window project is ongoing—no updates on that.

We had a broken drain right outside of the cafeteria in the roof that was causing a leak—Town Facilities took care of that.

I had a number of meetings with various organizations and groups for Statewide planning.

V. **OLD BUSINESS**

A. Budget Update:

Jaime Trevethan reported that the Senior and Disabled Center's budget request was submitted to the Town Manager today, along with our Narrative page and proposed Personnel Numbers. Personnel Numbers have not changed. The way it works is that we submit our budget request to the Town Manager. The Town Manager may work with the Finance Department and anybody else to make any changes, and that budget is then submitted to the Town Council for approval. Debate and approval usually takes place in early March. The previous Town Manager has indicated that we try for a zero percent budget increase, so we took that seriously and decreased our proposed budget by \$25 over last year (Grand Total). We made no significant changes to our budget other than changing some line items adjusting to trend. We made some minor revisions to a few small items—nothing adjusted more than a couple hundred dollars either way. We did remove a line item for \$1,000 that was for a Point of Sale system for the main office which is something a previous Commission had charged us with doing because we did find a no cost option through our software, My Senior Center, which is the administrative software we use for membership tracking. There is a no cost point of sale and money tracker that we can use for the main office. It will be available starting our new fiscal year, July 1. So that saves us a little money, and we feel that we are in good shape, in great shape with donations, income streams from the coffee shop, gift shop and donations, along with gym memberships. We feel that we are in a good position to operate efficiently and operate very well with the zero percent increase next fiscal year.

Commissioner Nagel had someone ask about when the consignment shop checks will be sent out, and Jaime indicated that they are done quarterly and checks should be going out this month for items sold.

B. Consideration to Recommend Amendment to Code of Ordinances Section 8-15: Commission on Aging and Disabled Membership, Terms

This is about reducing membership of the Commission from nine to seven members since the Charter changed the ruling. We need to have a discussion and a vote to send to the Town Council to ask them to consider that. So we are asking the Town Council to consider initiating the Ordinance change process to do that because it no longer says nine members in the Charter, and it now says per Ordinance, and the Ordinance says nine members. So we need to amend the Ordinance which is Section 8-16 of the Code of Ordinances. Jaime Trevethan stated that she wrote a draft resolution if the Commission wishes to consider it; someone can read it and second it. The Commission can discuss it or whatever they would like to do. It has the language of what you need to do to refer it to the Town Council. A motion was made to read the resolution: Newington Commission on Aging and Disabled resolution to recommend amendment to Code of Ordinances Section 8-15 Commission on Aging and Disabled membership terms January 4, 2023, whereas Section 8-15 of the Newington Code of Ordinances establishes the Commission on Aging and Disabled and whereas Section 8-16 of the Code of Ordinance states in part that the Commission shall be comprised of nine members and whereas over the past several years, the Commission on Aging and Disabled has struggled to maintain adequate

membership numbers to meet the required quorum of five Commissioners in attendance at its meetings and, whereas on November 8, 2022, the Town of Newington voted to adopt amendments to the Town Charter, including an amendment to Charter Section C-608 which removes language requiring a specific membership number for the Commissioner on Aging and Disabled. Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Commission on Aging and Disabled hereby requests that the Newington Town Council to amend Section 8-16 of the Code of Ordinances as follows: change the Commission membership from nine to seven members. The motion was seconded. Discussion followed, with Karen Brecher agreeing with motion, stating that if only one Commissioner was unable to attend, there would still be a quorum to hold a meeting. Other Commissioners also agreed. A question was asked regarding membership once the Town Council approved going from nine to seven members and more interest was generated, can we go to more members again? Jaime Trevethan stated that an ordinance change process can be accomplished over the course of three Town Council meetings and a Public Hearing. The Commission can certainly ask the Town Council for an amendment to the Ordinance.

A vote was taken in passing the Ordinance: All in favor.

Jaime Trevethan will pass this information along to the Town Council staff. There is an individual taking minutes for this meeting, so we will pass along the minutes and a copy of the approved resolution to the Town Council staff, and then it will be up to the Town Council if or when they would like to take it up. Dave Nagel, speaking for himself as a member of the Town Council, stated that he hasn't heard anyone not wanting to have this happen, so if the process goes along, he thinks the Council would agree to it and then it would have to go through the process of officially making the ordinance possible, but he stated that he did not foresee it being a problem with the Council.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Upcoming Activities

Jaime Trevethan stated that for the new year, staff has some quantitative and qualitative goals. One of our qualitative goals is to focus on our Mission Statement which is to improve the well-being of older adults and adults with disabilities in the community, so they are really framing our upcoming activity planning based on wellness, and our Program Coordinator Barb Womer has gone above and beyond planning programs. In January, we have a Lunch and Learn for mental health awareness and self-care on January 24, we have some art and craft classes which have been very well received since the pandemic, we have a paint class tomorrow that is full, and our gift shop volunteer Rose is doing a card class on January 20. We also are focusing on finances at this time of the year and a class coming up on preventing Medicare fraud. We are starting a new series this week: Achieve Optimum Well-Being at any age where participants watch a series of videos on different well-being topics and then have a facilitated discussion, and brain health classes. We also have something called Relay Connecticut for individuals who are hearing impaired that will help make and receive calls. Additionally, we have a program on birds of prey at the end of the month where we will have someone at the Center from the Audubon Society. As you can see, there are a variety of programs offered for everyone: mental, physical and emotional health, fun, and creativity. It's also almost tax season, and we are meeting next week with the AARP volunteers to get the tax program set up. I anticipate that we will fully operate our volunteer run tax program this year. Last year, we served over 200 simple tax returns free to residents with the assistance of 8-10 volunteers. We are continuing our outreach; our focus this winter is on our Senior Housing, so we will continue planning that.

B. Building Update

Per Jaime Trevethan, not much to report—the window project is still on hold, but the Facilities, Parks, and IT do a good job of keeping us safe, warm and welcoming.

C. Consideration of Upcoming Purchases

Per Jaime Trevethan, she had mentioned this very briefly at the last meeting, we do have a proposal for the Commission to consider either tonight or at the next meeting having to do with equipment to be able to hold hybrid meetings and hybrid programs in the Senior and Disabled Center. Our Commission meetings have been held here in the Town Hall because we don't have a very good hybrid setup in the Senior Center where we have participants online. We do hybrid programs often but the setup is very labor intensive and has some shortcomings for people at home who may not be able to hear or see as well. The Library started to use something called the OWL System, and it is a device for virtual or hybrid meetings or programs. The device sits in the middle of the room (or somewhere in the room), and it has a 360-degree camera, microphone and sound system with up to an 18-foot radius, depending on which equipment you choose. It connects wirelessly to the laptop, computer, tablet or whatever device you are using, and it works with all meeting platforms (Zoom, Microsoft Teams). It has some features where it modulates voice in sound. The camera can zoom or be locked if you wanted to focus on somebody. It has all the same features such as mute and turning camera off and on. It also has 1080p output resolution. We think it will be useful for true hybrid meetings for this Commission, hybrid groups held at the Senior Center. More importantly, it will have more immersive hybrid programs so we can reach people who are homebound or just not comfortable coming in. We can also reach people who are in rehab, assisted living or nursing homes who are members, and we don't want to lose them. If we were doing a program at the Center, we would have the physical equipment set up at the Senior Center—it's all wireless and wi-fi based—but on the user side for those at home, etc., there would be no change; they would just use whatever device they would normally use. So we know the Library has been using it—they had a bit of a learning curve, but it's gone well—but we would like to propose purchasing that system for our use at the Senior Center. The cost (depending on which options you choose, which I would ask IT for their input) would be between \$1,000 and \$1,200 for everything you see on the screen. It's a one-time fee; there's no subscription or anything such as that, and it's a little bit of money, but I think it would be a good, sound investment for us moving forward understanding that hybrid is the way we will be going from now on. Karen Brecher said she loved the idea but asked if there was a maximum number of people that could Zoom in. Jaime stated that it would be determined by whatever platform you used. Jaime stated that the equipment shown would connect to the laptop, tablet, etc. you were using, and the number of people who could use it would depend on the platform you are using. In terms of people in the room, it has up to an 18-foot radius (depending on what we choose) and a 360-degree rotating camera and sound system. So there really is no limit as long as it is in the radius. Dave Nagel stated that as a Town Council liaison to the Library Board, they have used the OWL system in the Community Room and it picks up everyone in the Community Room, and they have more members than this Board. Other than little problems every once in a while, it appears to be working quite well. It didn't take them long to figure out how to effectively use it. According to Jaime Trevethan, right now when they do remote programs, they are just using their laptops which does cause some issues, depending on which devices they use, like speaking directly into the laptop for the microphone to work effectively. We do get some complaints from people who cannot hear well at home. I think this would eliminate that and cause it to be more immersive for people to participate. Kathy Sobieski asked about the portability of the system, and Jaime Trevethan stated that it was portable and wireless. Regarding how many individuals can connect, our current accounts through Zoom allow for 500 individuals or meetings. Commissioner Jerilyn Nagel made a motion that the Commission approve the purchase up to \$1,200 or whatever IT recommends. Motion seconded by Commissioner Frantz. Commissioner Jerilyn Nagel asked if service was included if something goes down. Jaime was pretty sure service was included but was going to look into it before moving forward. A vote was taken: All were in favor. No other purchases requested. Purchase of a new dishwasher will be discussed at next meeting.

VII. NEXT MEETING DATE AND AGENDA

The next regular meeting of the Commission on Aging and Disabled is scheduled for Wednesday, February 1, 2023 at 6:00 pm. Chairperson Karen Brecher will be out of the country on that date, so the concern is that there will not be enough for a quorum. Jaime Trevethan stated that if they don't think they will have a quorum on February 1, 2023 by checking with all Members, then they can cancel the February 1st meeting and schedule a Special Meeting which they often have done. So the Commission will have to wait until it gets closer to see what happens.

VIII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 6:37 pm.