

COMMISSION ON AGING AND DISABLED

February 8, 2023

Special Hybrid Meeting - 6:00 pm

RECEIVED FOR RECORD  
IN NEWINGTON, CT

2023 FEB 15 AM 11:09

  
Town Clerk

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT**

Karen Brecher

Mark Frantz

Maureen Lynch

Jerilyn Nagel

Kathleen Sobieski

Elaina Starr

**COMMISSIONERS ABSENT**

None

**STAFF**

Jaime Trevethan

**TOWN COUNCIL LIAISON**

David Nagel

I. **CALL TO ORDER**

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

II. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

III. **REQUEST MADE FOR AMENDMENT OF AGENDA FOR INTRODUCTION OF NEW MEMBER**

Motion made and seconded. All were in favor. Motion carried. Introduction of Commissioner Elaina Starr. Other Commissioners and staff introduced themselves.

IV. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Councilor Dave Nagel reported that Councilor Sharon Braverman has resigned from the Town Council and Carol Anest has been appointed her replacement. The budget process has just started, and all Departments have submitted their requests, but the Council has not received anything yet. The Board of Education also had a meeting where they presented their initial budget.

V. **STAFF REPORT**

A. Program and Service Report

Jaime Trevethan reported that the OWL system that the Commission approved the purchase of last month is on order and should be here any day now. Once it arrives, we will get it set up and practice with it before the next Commission meeting, so we should be back at "home" (the Senior and Disabled Center) for the March meeting. This will be extremely helpful moving forward for when we do Hybrid programs, presentations and meetings so people can join from wherever they are. The Center continues to move forward, and the month of January has been extremely busy—the winter has not slowed us down at all. Everyone should have received the January Monthly Report earlier today. We did a number of successful programs in January to hit all of the different types of improving health and well-being in many different areas including a Lunch and Learn about Mental Health Self Care, a

discussion on Relay Connecticut services which helps those who are hard of hearing or have difficulty speaking with communicating over the phone. We had an (ongoing) presentation about Achieving Optimum Health at any Age, a class on strategies and how to do Crossword and Word Search puzzles, several craft classes and a presentation on birds of prey that was very well received. Another thing we brought in was Pickleball, a paddle sport that is a cross between tennis, badminton and ping pong. It's played in a gym, and you use paddles and a wiffle ball. It's a great sport, very easy to learn, can be played at any fitness level, and can be very competitive. We have had it for a while, but we brought it back, and it grew so quickly in popularity that we are now playing pickleball three days a week, two sessions a day (and they fill up). Today we actually had an instructor come in for a Pickleball for Beginner's class, and we will need to do another class to get everyone else in. Pickleball provides physical activity as well as social interaction. The Gift and Coffee Shops continue to operate successfully. Our Gift Shop sales were a little slower in January, but we are looking at strategies for getting in some more consignment appointments in and getting in some different items and changing the inventory a bit. We continue with our strategies to increase community awareness at the Center where we are putting together a packet that will go to all the senior housing communities with everything we do, and we are going to invite them one by one to visit us at the Center for a special program and a tour and some snacks to let them know what we do. Bus trips are selling like hotcakes, and we have a 3-person volunteer group who plans the (day) bus trips, many of them administered by Friendship Tours. They go all over Southern New England. Some are in Connecticut and some go out of state. They also go to New York—there is a Hudson River cruise coming up. The St. Patrick's Day luncheon at Aqua Turf is sold out, and we have about four or five other upcoming trips scheduled out through August that are selling very well. When we receive the OWL system, we will be able to expand our Hybrid programs—we have them now, but we are going to be able to do more once we have the technology to do so: Our goal is that whenever we have an in-person program, like a speaker or a lecture or a class, we can offer it Hybrid, so you can come into the Center and participate or you can log in from home, because we will have the technology to do so. You will still be able to participate in programs, which is very important, particularly if we have people that are recovering from an illness or hospitalization. We may have very active members who are temporarily in a rehab situation or hospitalized and they still want to participate, and we don't want to lose those people and have them lose touch, so this is a great way to keep people in touch. The other thing I wanted to bring up was our in-person congregate lunch program, which has been reopened for eight months now, and it has grown tremendously since the holidays, about 50 percent in daily attendance. Before Christmas, we were averaging about 25 to 30 people per day, and now we are getting 40+ people every day, sometimes 45 or 50. We are seeing that really growing, which is great—we want people in eating lunch for nutrition and socialization purposes, and for volunteer work; so great, let it keep growing. Dial-A-Ride continues to be very busy. We can still use a part time driver; that position has been vacant for quite some time. Tax appointments through the AARP tax aid program are underway (started last week). Each Thursday from now until April 14<sup>th</sup>, we have 6 to 8 (depending on the day) volunteer tax preparers who are IRS certified and trained who will prepare simple tax returns for free. It's really open to anybody by appointment, but the focus is on those ages 50 and up or who would have a hard time paying for tax preparation elsewhere, but we don't turn anyone away as long as they have an appointment. Appointments are full through March 23<sup>rd</sup>, and we just have a handful of appointments left in those last few weeks. It's always a successful program, and we continued doing it remotely and by fax and phone calls during the pandemic, and now everyone is back. It's a great thing.

A couple things that we did in January: a lot of meetings—the Age Well Collaborative is a group that provides resources and collaborates resources around the State. They are partnering with the Connecticut Council of Municipalities (CCM) to get the word out about services available to older adults, and I am working on that with them. Also, there are a lot of meetings and discussions coming up about that. The United States Department of Health and Human Services had reached out to us

before Christmas because they wanted to interview us for their Physical Activity Guidelines for American's Mid-Course Report because we have set such a great example in engaging older adults in physical activity. So, they have a report that they do, and they speak to different people and gather information from them. I had that interview on January 17<sup>th</sup> with the people from that agency, and we talked quite a bit about tailoring physical activity to various levels of activity and various levels of athleticism or experience or comfort level for people. We talked about fall risk balance assessment, how the fear of falling is a risk for people to not actually physically challenge themselves. We talked about other types of health such as Mental Health and Mental Wellness and Emotional Wellness and how we address that with everybody and how we reach various people in various ways. So that interview went very well. I don't know when it will be published; they are sending me drafts and asking for pictures, so when it is published by the Department of Health and Human Services, I will submit it to you for review. Our Program Coordinator Barb Womer continues to be fantastic in coming up with a great variety of special programs and reoccurring regular programs that really hit all of those dimensions of wellness that we like to hit every month and really work hard to keep people connected, active and healthy. Another thing we have coming up is the AARP Safe Driving course. Next Wednesday's half day course may be full (cost is \$25). It helps older adults brush up on their safe driving skills and may also help earn a discount on your auto insurance.

#### B. NCOA Vaccine Uptake Initiative Grant

Jaime Trevethan reported that the National Council on Aging (NCOA) is releasing a pretty significant amount of grant funding nationwide to municipalities, to senior centers that are non-profit, to other organizations for basically getting the word out or helping older adults who wish to get vaccinated for COVID or the flu—help them get vaccines. That doesn't mean that we are going to use the money to hold vaccine clinics, although the Health District does regularly hold vaccine clinics in our building, but what it is essentially intended to do is to spread factual information to people who wish to get vaccinated. It is intended to provide assistance to people making vaccine appointments who need to do so maybe because they don't have access to a computer, or they have difficulty speaking and can't call on the phone, or need transportation to go to a clinic or medical facility to get a vaccine because they have transportation challenges. We can even put together a team (perhaps with the Health District) to help get homebound individuals vaccinated, a population that is hugely underserved right now because it is very difficult for them to get out, and very few places will go and vaccinate people who are homebound. Homebound people still need to be vaccinated because people are coming into their house, so it is important. The grant amounts could be up to \$50,000. Too much for us to do at the Newington Senior and Disabled Center, so Jaime has contacted the Central CT Health District because they are the ones that administer our COVID and flu vaccine clinics, and they are experts at this, so I have a meeting on Friday. What we are going to do is bring in the Health District towns and see if the other three senior centers are interested. If they are interested, I intend to take the lead on the Application for this. The Application deadline is March 1<sup>st</sup>, but we will do so with the input and guidance of the Health District and basically how they think that we can do this type of project to get the word out. This is actually intended to have a measurable result to get vaccines into people's arms. It doesn't mean we are giving people the shots, but it does mean we put out an education campaign to everyone over the age of 70 in the Town, and we found out that 200 people got boosters. We don't have a goal, but we do have to provide measurable results for this grant. It's very significant, and it's more than we could properly do by ourselves, so I do want to team up with other surrounding area towns and work on that. The CERT team was assisting the Health District and has been extremely helpful—we have had numerous COVID vaccine clinics at the Center going back to the very first days when vaccines were first available to the public and there were age restrictions. Each time a new (age) group became available, we held a clinic with the Health District. They administer the shots and bring the medical professionals, but we did all the appointments and logistics, and the CERT team was remarkably helpful.

A question was asked about the role of the Commission in terms of having a sense of where the grant money is going in terms of proper fiscal management of that money. Obviously, we don't know how much of an award we would get, if any, because it is a competitive grant and anybody throughout the country may be applying for it. If we are awarded funding, it would go through the Town Finance Department. The Town Finance Department would administer it according to their accounting practices that they would follow for any kind of grant funding, but I will certainly keep the Commission in the loop and however we decide to spend it, we will definitely keep the Commission well informed of how the money's being spent and whatever direction we decide to go in conjunction with the Health District in terms of spending the funding that we receive. Last night, Jaime Trevethan attended a public forum at the library in terms of energy assistance and energy costs. Some of our State Representatives were there along with representatives from the Community Renewal Team, who is our funder for our Energy Assistance Program for Operation Fuel. There were people there from PURA, AARP, DEEP and EnergizeCT.gov. They gave a presentation about why energy costs are so very high right now (including your electric bill and supplier rates) and oil prices and oil supply. As you know, we have been experiencing a serious backlog of energy assistance funding in Applications. We handle the Application process—we have one very dedicated, very, very busy employee who handles all the Applications for energy assistance. We do not allocate the funding or determine eligibility, but she does help them fill out the Application. She helps to determine who will be eligible, but the decision isn't ours. She also gathers the paperwork, holds all the appropriate meetings and then goes to the Community Renewal Team for actual funding, and there is a significant backlog for many reasons that are out of our control and theirs, including a delay in the start of the program statewide. So, the meeting last night was discussing why we are in the situation we are in, why energy costs are so high, and what people can do about it (various resources). It was informative, and I believe it is available on Facebook, and there is a link that I can find and send to everyone when it is available for viewing. There are some technical things in there, but I think the discussion of resources available and how to get help if you need it is important. We will continue to address the issues with people who can't afford their heating bills or can't afford to put oil in their tank. What I have said at every public forum when I have the opportunity to say so is "don't wait" if you think you may have financial difficulty with your utilities. Typically, the Application period for assistance opens up anywhere from August to October. It was on the late side this year due to delays at the State level. So, if you are looking at your household over the summer and realize you are looking a little short with winter coming up, reach out to us or Human Services then. Try not to wait until you are out of oil or facing shutoff, but things happen; things aren't always planned, so if you are out of oil or facing shutoff, call us--don't be embarrassed--and we have resources to help. A question was asked if there was a stigma in town that people are either embarrassed or ashamed or afraid to ask for help. Jaime answered that it certainly is a stigma, not unique to our town or any age group, but we do see it with our older adult population in the Senior Center and Human Services where people think that they can handle whatever situation is in front of them; and then, unfortunately, it gets away from them to the point where, okay, now we're facing the choice of putting oil in my tank and have heat, buy groceries or fill my prescriptions. So, I don't know if there is a great way to overcome that stigma other than to continually reinforce that there is nothing to be ashamed of. We are here to help. So, we would address your issues: let's get you set up with the Food Bank or Meals on Wheels, let's see about Energy Assistance--let's see if we can get you caught up on your energy bill, that type of thing. So, I really encourage anybody who is in that situation. It's confidential, so please just reach out, even if you just have a question, even if you're not sure if you're in a situation that may be dire or may turn into something, just give us a call, reach out; we are always here.

**VI. OLD BUSINESS**

**A. Budget Update:**

Per Jaime Trevethan, Councilor Nagel had given an update on the budget process. Jaime and Administrator Coordinator Josie Aux met with Acting Town Manager James Krupienski and Finance Director a few weeks ago to review our Departmental budget request—our budget request is very close to being flat to last year's budget per instructions from Town Administration. Major changes were: we removed a line item to purchase a point-of-sale system for the Main Office because we have found that the software that we use for the program registrations, membership data, etc. actually has a point-of-sale system in it that is part of our system now. It will become available on July 1<sup>st</sup>, and it's part of what we already pay for that program, so it's no additional cost for us to use that as a point-of-sale service in the office moving forward. So that was about \$1,000 that came out. We also moved around a few programming things to line things up the way they should be in terms of what we are spending in our various programming and supplies; but overall, we had almost no change to our overall budget. So, we reviewed that with the Acting Town Manager and the Finance Director. As we explained in the past, the next step is that the Acting Town Manager does that with all the Departments and then he submits his recommended budget to the Town Council who then deliberates and sets the final budget in April.

**B. Commission Membership**

Jaime Trevethan stated that the Commission passed a Resolution at the last meeting to recommend to Town Council to look at an Ordinance to reduce the number of members on the Commission from nine to seven so that we will not have as many issues with the quorum moving forward; and right before this meeting, the Acting Town Manager indicated that's going to go on the next Council agenda for consideration. That is a process that takes a couple of meetings, and I believe a Public Hearing (at least it used to). If that whole process passes, then there is another process for posting it and putting it in the paper, and then it becomes effective after a certain date after it is posted. So that's moving forward. At the next meeting, I will have an update as to how that went with the Town Council. The Resolution written by Jaime has been passed along to the Town Council.

Commissioner Brecher asked whether or not the door counter was being used. Jaime Trevethan stated that it has not worked since pre-pandemic, when Dianne Stone was Director. So, Jaime will get with IT and see if we can get that up and running again. Dianne Stone had a lot of trouble using it, so maybe we can see what the library is using. They have one door and we have three doors, so that makes a big difference. Jaime stated she will get on that and get back to the Commission.

**VII. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Upcoming Activities**

Jaime had already discussed this. The February Connection newsletter is out. There is a Random Act of Kindness week in February (13<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup>). We utilize that as our overall theme for programming in February. So, on the 13<sup>th</sup>, we have a program called Cultivating Kindness in your own Self Compassion, we have a Mardi Gras celebration on Friday, we had a wonderful program today—it was a Mediterranean style cooking demo that was extremely well attended and went over very well. We also have some Valentine's Day craft classes coming up. We are continuing our European history series that has been going on for a long time now with a retired Carnegie Mellon Professor (via Zoom), and it's fantastic. So that continues. We have an intern from CCSU (Vanessa); she is a 4<sup>th</sup> year Psychology student who is brand new with us. Vanessa will be doing some programming with us. She is interested in both social work and the programming component and perhaps working with older adults when she graduates and goes forth with her career. She is doing a

weekly class where people get together and have coffee and snacks and listen to music, do crafts and color. It's a very basic program, but it really brings people together and gets you out of the house and talking to people--combat social isolation--get to do something creative, and just a nice thing she is doing. Our Program Coordinator Barb Womer is doing a weekly program that is Achieving Optimum Well Being at Any Age, which is a video-guided program, so you watch a video on a particular topic involving aging and then she facilitates a discussion after the video. We are looking again on how we are going to frame up programming this spring and summer, including perhaps bringing back our Expo which has not happened since 2019 and how we are going to the bigger things, such as our Volunteer Dinner and everything else, so we are busy—a lot of things coming up.

#### B. Building Update

We had an issue with our hot water heater. It went out, and it affected the side of the building where the Exercise Room and the wood shop is—that end of the building. Facilities was excellent in coming out immediately to take a look at it and determine parts needed. Within a few days, the parts came in, and Facilities did fix it. We closed down the restrooms that were across from the wood shop for a couple days because there was no hot water for people to wash their hands appropriately, so we just directed people to the other restrooms around the building. And then they fixed it, and it was fine. I guess that's just a component of an aging building; but for the most part, our systems work extremely well. We took some precautionary steps for the very cold weather we had on Friday and Saturday including checking out the building over the weekend, making sure the heat was circulating, making sure no pipes were frozen, and we had no problems. So, everything is going well in the building. The window replacement project which I think started in 2019 looks like it is finally moving forward. There is a pre-bid meeting coming up; it's all being handled by Town Engineering and Facilities Departments, as well as the new Administrative Director. I will get more information on that after the meeting which I believe is being held on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, and then I will have more information for our next meeting.

Commissioner Brecher asked if the Veterans still meet at the Center for coffee, but Jaime said they no longer meet there because prior to our reopening after the pandemic, they started meeting at the Veterans' Hall. We reached out and told them they were welcome to come back, but they said they liked it there at the Veterans' Hall, which isn't to say we aren't going to do any Veterans' programs. We did do the Veterans' Day Ceremony, and we are working with some of the folks in that Veterans' group to do some Veterans' centered activities in the coming months. But they like their new home, so they don't need to come back and use our Conference Room.

#### C. Consideration of Upcoming Purchases

Jaime indicated that the dishwasher was low on the priority list for Facilities right now, with a lot of other things they have going on, so she will follow up with them. Where we got stuck on that was whether or not we had the proper electrical capacity to handle the dishwasher in that area of the building. They were going to send someone over to look; I just need to follow up so they do so. No other purchases for the Commission to consider tonight. Thank you for approving the purchase of the OWL system at the last meeting. Next meeting, I may have some purchases regarding the garden because the garden volunteers have started to meet and plan for the spring, so I will have to see if they have anything they want regarding that.

D. Determine Next Meeting Date & Agenda

The regular meeting of the Commission is typically the first Wednesday of every month at 6:00 pm, usually at the Senior Center, but we have been over here. So, if we have a quorum on the 1<sup>st</sup>, we can keep the meeting date; otherwise, we can cancel that meeting and do it on a day that works for everyone else. Now we have a little wiggle room because we have another Commission member—that's really nice. Everyone indicated that as of right now, they would be available on the 1<sup>st</sup>. The meeting would be back at the Senior Center as long as the OWL system that we ordered is in place and ready in time. Jaime will let everyone know well ahead of time.

**VIII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Councilor Nagel state that regarding the Budget, the Town Council gets their first look at it on March 1<sup>st</sup>, and we don't have a meeting until March 14<sup>th</sup> to begin looking at the different sections of it. According to this draft copy of our budget schedule, Saturday, March 25<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 am, many Departments are going to be presented to the Council, and the Senior and Disabled Center is on that list, and it's the third in line according to this draft to have the Acting Town Manager present what was agreed upon with each Department. Jaime will not be able to be in attendance on March 25<sup>th</sup>, although she will try to keep an eye on what's going on and have a member of the Senior and Disabled Center staff in attendance at the budget meeting. The Acting Town Manager has indicated that he does not need us to present, but I will make sure that someone has their eye on it. Our budget is so straightforward that I don't have a lot to deliberate or discuss, so hopefully it will go well.

**IX. ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting adjourned at 6:45 pm.