Commission on Aging

Town of Weston, Connecticut

Minutes: Monday June 1, 2020 at 930AM

Present: Commission members Bruce Lorentzen, Helen de Keijzer, Richard Wolf, Francine Goldstein, Alison McElhone, Terry Castellano; SWCAA liaison and Senior Center Director Wendy Petty, Social Services Director Allison Lisbon, and special guest Jonathon Luiz, Town Administrator

Note: This meeting was held via Google Meet Video Call due to Coronavirus pandemic

The meeting convened at 9:34 AM.

The minutes of the last meeting (May 2020) were discussed and approved.

Jonathon explained that several months ago the Board of Selectmen reviewed the benefits under the senior tax relief programs in order to determine the continued need. They appointed Woody Bliss as Chairman of the Weston Tax Relief Committee. He and two others on the Committee have made recommendations for changes to the Board of Selectman. On Thursday 6/3 there will be a discussion about changing the town ordinance at the Board of Selectman meeting . The conversation the Board of Selectman has had suggests eliminating the abatement program and offering only tax deferment. The Board of Selectmen may not be in favor of the money saved going towards the Senior Center. Helen clarified that the money saved would also be for senior social services. Jonathon indicated that, based on conversations, the Board of Selectman was not in support of this. Allison asked if there would be a public vote on this issue. Jonathon stated that the ordinance was adopted by the Board of Selectman and will be changed by them. The public will be allowed to comment on what is presented by the Board of Selectman.

Helen said she was curious as to how many people, considering the current situation (COVID-19 pandemic), are late in submitting the tax deferment request. Jonathon knew of just 1 person, off hand. He stated the Town generally does not allow late requests/applications given the process. Helen and several others indicated their disagreement. Fran stated these are extraordinary times and seniors are most affected. We should give them leeway. Terry stated the psychological impact due to COVID-19 has been astronomical. Weston, of all towns, should be known for having compassion. Many of the Commission on Aging members voiced the need for the Town to be flexible on this issue. Richard asked that the board submit their proposal to the Commission on Aging.

Roy was up next. He has been delivering food three times per week. Donations have been from SWCAA, the Weston Food Pantry and the Weston Field Club. There have been no medical runs. Wendy stated he hasn’t gotten approval to do these yet.

Richard reported no new facilities updates since the last meeting. Jonathon is getting ready to accept bids on the ramp entrance project. Hopefully the budget will be approved. Richard is also on the Facilities Optimization Committee and stated that the Senior Center is among the buildings considered in their discussions. Wendy asked if the Food Pantry is also discussed. No per Richard. Can send message to Gayle Weinstein. Allison said there is lots of construction on way to Food Pantry which makes getting there difficult. Allison recently toured the Wilton Senior Center Food Pantry. It is run by seniors which works out well. Wendy said we are in need of a Senior/Social Services building. Richard wondered if Hurlbutt building could serve this purpose. He asked that Allison and Wendy let everyone know what their needs are.

Helen asked when the Town Update Public Hearing is? Richard said it is Saturday 6/6 from 9AM to 12PM. Can go to Weston Today website and check in. Richard indicated discussions would include proposals for the commercial center, municipal buildings.

Allison said though she is not a voting member of the Commission on Aging, she is concerned about the upcoming Selectman Hearing. Specifically, that people won’t be able to zoom into the meeting. She is suggesting the meeting be delayed until they are able to do a live meeting. People who will be affected by these changes should be able to speak out. Bruce said this is a good point. Allison said if someone is presently receiving tax relief they will be grandfathered in under the old tax relief rules. Currently these are 1 million in assets, will be lowered to 750K in assets, income 49K. The new tax relief program will eliminate abatement. It would only have tax deferment, but eligibility will be different.

Allison knows of 1 senior resident who was late in applying for the tax relief program. She’s had very difficult circumstances. Her need is great. Richard suggested going right to the First Selectman to discuss this. Everyone was in agreement.

Allison gave the social services update. They are still working to ensure homebound seniors are getting food.. On Mondays SWCAA grocery bags are delivered to 25 Weston seniors. Every other week the Weston Food Pantry has curbside pick-up or delivery by Roy. The Weston Field Club generously donates 15 packages of raw meat per week. Social services also receives donations from Viv’s Veggies, as well as eggs from local families with chickens. Allison has also received coupons from Ambler Farm to purchase food at their farmer’s market on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Allison has been receiving more requests to assist with other costs, especially electric and fuel. She states that with the resident tax bill there will be a request for donations to the Weston Social Services Fund donations. She is working on changing the fund to enable electronic deposits.

The department has been very busy. The main focus is ensuring everyone has food. Social Services and the Food Pantry have received donations from individuals and from many organizations including SWCAA, United Way, Weston Field Club, Viv’s Veggies and the Salvation Army. Curbside food pick-up is on Wednesday, and Roy has delivered the rest. Social Services has given away more than 150 grocery gift cards recently.. Richard asked if the State provides any assistance. Patient can apply for SNAP but application takes a while to process.

Wendy gave the Senior Center report. Activities continue to be held by zoom. Regional Senior Centers are discussing reopening plans for the fall.

The zoom meeting adjourned at 10:44AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Alison McElhone