

DRAFT
Town of Darien
Commission on Aging
Regular Meeting
January 18, 2011

ATTENDANCE: Joseph Pankowski, Chair; Jennifer Geddes Vice Chair; Amy Squyres, Tom Valentino, Ron Heinbaugh, Mary McCarthy; Charlie England

ABSENT: Pat Morgan, Robin Woods

OTHERS ATTENDING: Olive Hauser (Director of Social Services), Beth Paris (Darien Senior Activities Center Coordinator), Jayme Stevenson (Selectman, Selectmen's Liaison to COA), David Campbell (First Selectman)

Acting Secretary: Joseph Pankowski, due to absence of Anne Hohlweck, Recording Secretary

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting opened at 9:03 a.m.

Mr. Pankowski welcomed Ms. Stevenson as the new Selectmen's liaison to the Commission.

APPROVAL OF DECEMBER MINUTES

Ms. McCarthy moved to accept the December minutes; seconded by Mr. Heinbaugh. Motion approved unanimously.

SENIOR CENTER REPORT

Ms. Paris reported that she is providing program surveys to people who are coming to the Senior Center, as well as sending some out by mail. She believes the information she obtains will help validate what she is seeing in terms of use of the building and provide information for programs going forward. As an example, some seniors are looking to play Wii video games, so that they can exercise in an untraditional way.

Ms. Paris also reported continuing maintenance issues at the Senior Center. She noted that the circular motor on the boiler failed and it had to be replaced by a new motor. The "door closer" on the door between the Library and the Movie Room fell apart. Ms. Paris was able to jerry-rig the door for a few days until maintenance came to fix the problem.

Ms. Paris said that she has also done other small repairs, including on a window that was letting water come in, and noted that she is glad that she is a “carpenter’s daughter.” See attached Senior Center Report for more information.

SOCIAL SERVICES REPORT

Ms. Hauser reported that the Department of Social Services is reaching out to seniors in a variety of ways, including with the fuel assistance program. She is able to give seniors some support with food coupons, as well as some gift cards which are left over from a very successful pre-Christmas drive. Newspaper articles, as well as efforts from a school parents’ group, allowed for a large number of food coupons and gift certificates for the holidays being donated to her department. With recent weather conditions, Ms. Hauser says that she and her staff have been making numerous calls to seniors and disabled individuals to make sure that they are OK. Fortunately, no seniors have had issues as of yet.

Some of our seniors have difficulty with shoveling their sidewalks. Thus, Ms. Hauser said her department is coordinating with Aging in Place and Andrew Winter, who heads “Shoveling for Seniors” at the high school.

Ms. Hauser is also trying to promote the “home goods closet.” She is going to specifically target low-income seniors to come once a month to pick up personal items, such as paper towels, dish soap, etc. Ms. Hauser said they are assisted with bringing said items to their cars. Mr. England asked about a possible delivery service, which Ms. Hauser said is possible, but not necessary at this point.

Finally, Ms. Hauser noted that Inta Adams, of her office, is helping seniors fill out the necessary paperwork with respect to Medicare Part D. This is a vital service, as the forms are confusing and Ms. Adams can spend up to two hours with just one senior helping him or her determine the best way forward.

OLD BUSINESS

With David Campbell in attendance, the Chair asked Mr. Campbell for a report on the current status of the Senior Center and the possible move to the Board of Education’s current space at the Town Hall.

Mr. Campbell noted that the Building Committee is currently interviewing five architects. Indeed, as the COA met, the Committee was out reviewing buildings already constructed by these architects. This is the reason for the absence of Ms. Woods (who is a member of said Committee) from today’s COA meeting.

Mr. Campbell said he expected the architect to be selected in the next 10 days. He or she would be hired to do plan renovations on the old library on Leroy Road and for the drawings necessary to retrofit the Town Hall space for the Senior Center. The next step, Mr. Campbell said, is for the Board of Finance to approve funds for design development, then this project would move to the RTM to request bonding, with the latter possibly occurring as early as March 28. Mr. Campbell said that this may occur as early as the March 28 meeting.

The current plan, according to Mr. Campbell, is to do the work first at the old library so that the Board of Education can move there late in the fall. The Town Hall space would then be renovated. The Senior Center's move to the Town Hall could occur as early as September, 2012, if all goes well. "The nice thing about this project is that it's all inside—it's commercial remodeling," Mr. Campbell said. "It's not dealing with planning and zoning, parking lots or exterior work. It's just putting up walls, new flooring and new ceilings in existing buildings." Mr. Campbell noted that this was an excellent time to be doing interior work due to the fact that so many contractors were looking for such work in our down economy.

Ms. Squyres asked Mr. Campbell what roadblocks he was expecting in the process to approve his plans. Mr. Campbell believed that the primary objection would be due to budgetary concerns and the belief among some that things can simply stay the way they are.

To counter the budgetary argument, Mr. England noted that the current low interest rates meant that this was a great time to do bonding. Mr. Campbell agreed. The Police Station's \$15 million bond is going forward, which has already been approved. Weed Beach has been approved for \$2 million and is looking for a \$3 million bond. The bond for the Senior Center/Board of Education project will be \$4 million. In addition, the Town will be looking to refinance existing bonds to take advantage of lower interest rates. The \$4 million bond would also include funds necessary to make room at the Town Garage for some of the Board of Education materials currently being housed at the Town Hall, Mr. Campbell said.

With respect to the idea that we could "do nothing," Mr. Campbell noted the high costs of maintenance at the current Senior Center and the fact that there is a great deal of underutilized space at the Town Hall. As one example, he noted that the Town Hall's gym is used at night, but has very limited usage during the day because sounds in the gym bother members of the Board of Education. After the Senior Center moves to the Town Hall, the gym would have significant usage during the day, plus you would have parts of the Senior Center used at night.

Mr. Valentino wondered whether the Town should sell the old library building. Mr. Campbell said the old library would work well as an office building and that's what it will become. Ms. Stevenson noted that, if the Town were to sell the building, the Town would lose \$1 million on the sale. She also noted that, when originally surveyed, the neighbors of the old library said that the most acceptable use of the building would be for office space for the Board of Education

The final phase of his plan, Mr. Campbell said, was to raze the current Senior Center and to have new senior housing at the Edgerton location. He said that a group comprised of Jenny Streeter, Carolyn Murray and Bob Calve are studying senior housing all over the state. He noted that they are not doing a lot in a public setting until they know that this land will actually be available.

Ms. Squyres noted her concern with the use of the term "shuffle" and said that we should be emphasizing the better usage of town space when pushing for the move of the Senior Center to Town Hall. Mr. Campbell agreed. "We would get senior housing, a new Senior Center, and would utilize all of our space," Mr. Campbell said. "We currently have 40,000 feet of space we're not using."

Charlie England asked about the "garden homes" on the Post Road. Mr. Campbell noted that Richard Freedman is converting office space into small, affordable condominiums. This project is trying to provide more low income housing for people in Darien. Similarly, Mr. Campbell said, the goal of the new Edgerton Street housing will be to target the seniors who receive tax abatements and others who have lower incomes. There is a hope that Darien residents will get some form of priority within the parameters set forth in the fair housing rules, Mr. Campbell said.

A discussion then ensued about the proper spot in town for the new senior housing. Ms. Paris and Ms. Hauser noted that the Stop & Shop & Walgreens were favorites of seniors currently using the Senior Center and this would likely continue for the residents of the new housing. Ms. Stevenson said that, thanks to the new Whole Foods Market, traffic on Leroy Avenue has greatly increased, making crossing that road more hazardous. Thus, according to Ms. Stevenson, the old library site may not be as pedestrian-friendly for senior housing as once thought.

Mr. Campbell said that he's pretty passionate about seniors because they've been overlooked. He noted that schools are important, but the thing he likes about the Senior Center is that "it gets people out of their homes, they're happier and they're safer. They get exercise." Mr. Heinbaugh noted that they also receive a warm, good home-cooked meal.

Ms. McCarthy noted that this discussion was extremely helpful and that she would like the communications subcommittee to meet to discuss updating the “talking points” on the Senior Center project. All agreed.

Mr. Pankowski asked Ms. Paris about the status of her video presentation. She noted that her daughter had finished the project and gave a description of the same. Mr. Pankowski said that he would use this video in a presentation to the RTM when that body meets to discuss the funding of the move of the Senior Center in the spring.

Ms. Stevenson noted that there is still a feeling in the community that the Senior Center does not have a lot of people using the facility. Ms. Paris reported that her latest numbers were that there were 437 separate residents of Darien who used the Senior Center and 132 folks from out-of-town. Ms. Paris is in the process of updating these numbers.

Ms. Stevenson thought the updated numbers should be included in a letter to the editor prior to the RTM vote. Mr. Pankowski said that, after he receives the information from Ms. Paris, he would write a letter to the editor that would appear in the town newspapers in early March.

ADJOURNMENT

Given the late time, Mr. Pankowski asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Heinbaugh so moved, seconded by Mr. England. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 10:10 a.m.

The next meeting of the Commission on Aging will take place on Wednesday, February 16, at 9 a.m. in Room 119 of the Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph Pankowski
Acting Secretary

Attachment: Senior Center Report

Darien Senior Activities Center
Commission on Aging Report
January 19, 2011
Respectfully Submitted: Beth Paris, Center Coordinator

Renewal and New Membership Drive is underway. We have included a Program Survey form this year to gather information on reactions to current programs and ideas and suggestions for new programming. We will start 2 new programs this month: **Artist's Alive** which is a window into the artist's life and their unique painting style then participants will try their hand at each artist painting style. The second program - **The Beauty an Art of Calligraphy**- which will be a combination of painting and ink calligraphy utilizing the written word to create a personal quote or poem. January is also the month of the annual Senior senior Prom with Darien High School students. This year our theme is "At the Hop" We have a great DJ and performer to encourage dancing and conversation we are sharing the set up and refreshment responsibilities with the kids. This is always a great time for both groups to enjoy together...

Ongoing Work in Progress: Speaking with area Center Directors regarding
Tours and Architect Info
Researching Stats and Trends
Compiling Policy Manual
Membership/Survey
Monthly Newsletter
Publicity

Building Projects: Boiler Maintenance
Replaced Circulator Motor*
Repair Door Damage*
Managing leaks*
Heating Protocol
Re- Organizing Craft Room Closets and Gift Shop

January Program Highlights: 1st Hoot Owls Entertainment
2nd Flower Arranging Darien Garden Club
2nd Blood Pressure
10th Low Vision Program-Vision Dynamics
Presenters
11th Financial Seminar on Retirement
Funds Going Further
By Morgan Stanley-Smith Barney
12th Center and Town CLOSED-Snow
17th Closed Martin Luther King Day
18th Artist Alive* starts
18th Beauty of Art and Calligraphy* starts
24th Pantomime Presentation
26th Senior Senior Prom
31st Crime Prevention Lecture

Meetings SWCAA Advisory Meeting cancelled due to snow storm January 12,
2011 January 20th meeting w Gretchen James SWCAA Program Coordinator

Building Issue Details:

Door between Library and Movie Area- closer fell off hinge bringing down molding and interior of door frame. Chard of wood and nail were exposed as well as stopper mechanism hanging down to door knob. Luckily this was discovered in the morning when I was opening up. This is the door the Arts Center utilizes for after school and Saturday programming...

Motor on one of the boiler circulator (that heats gym area) failed-replaced with a new rebuilt motor to fit needs and specifications of the Center's older boiler

Various leaks throughout building due to snow loads. During the 2 most recent storms front window (which as been rotted for quite some time) has increased flow of water that overflows to the carpet. Sue Swiatek has had a window repair contractor in that estimates this is a roofing issue determined any repair would incur the same damage, however something needs to be done in the meantime. Sill is rotted and framing continues to rot which is a concern regarding window stability and integrity. Have lined window and floor with absorbent disposable material. Receptacles in required areas to collect water as needed.

In November during a wind and rain storm an upper interior window in the library latch was not secure. Wind took that window opening it and closing it several times until class broke-chards in and out of the building. We were fortunate the one person in the library was in the far end of the room. There were about 30 folks in the Movie room attending a lecture. Public Works and Parks and Recreation staff were on the scene in minutes to secure the room and clean up before class let out...