

Commission on Aging

Monday, April 15, 2013

Present: Jeanette Perlman, Peter Cohen, co-chairs. John Jenner, Lorna Barrett. Chair of the Housing Commission: Steve Roffwarg. Beth Trott, director of social services. Suzette Berger, coordinator of the senior center. Lynne Gomez, clerk.

Minutes: Minutes of the March 18 meeting were approved with one grammar correction.

Director of Social Services Report: Beth reported that she and Suzette will be at an annual meeting of Senior Center directors on May 17. Beth reported that if the new town budget is passed, Suzette will become the coordinator of the senior center. Beth reported that she will be getting assistance from 2 social service students in the fall. One will be from West Conn and one will be from Fordham University. Beth said her current intern, Cindy Merritt of West Conn, will be leaving May 2.

Coordinator of Senior Center Report: Suzette discussed her programming for the coming months. She is working on cooperative programming with the JCC, Naromi and the Library. Jeanette mentioned her recent meeting at the Center for Compassionate Creativity. Suzette announced a program called "National Drug Take-back Day." Suzette mentioned that one of the topics at the upcoming Senior Center Directors' meeting is "How to get your board on board." Suzette requested that COA members assist actively with the budget process. Recommendation: one member of the COA become the point person for the budget. Budget work should begin in earnest in January. Suggestion: invite the state COA representative to a coming COA meeting. Jeanette Perlman offered her assistance in one of the main goals of the Sherman Senior Center and Social Services, which is to further separate the two organizations into distinct agencies. Suzette also expressed interest in getting the Friends of the Center up and running.

Grant writing: Jeanette emphasized the existence of grant funding for help with the senior center. Suzette mentioned the audio situation at the senior center and Pat Bailey's suggestions for an inductor loop.

Housing Commission: Steve R. presented an update on the senior affordable housing project. The Housing Commission was hoping to get onto the town budget referendum on May 11, but it was not possible. Steve said getting approval from the townspeople to take a lease out on the property is the next step. Steve noted the delays in the project. He said Planning and Zoning want this project. Steve asked for help from the Commission on Aging in communicating the importance of the project, in communicating the lease information, and generally in speaking to townspeople about the facts of the project. Steve discussed a flier under development that could be used to disseminate information.

John Jenner noted that, organizationally, it would be beneficial if the Housing Commission would take the lead in publicity and direct the COA in concert with its strategies. Suzette noted that the Senior Center could put a human face on the issues of senior affordable housing. She said she knows people who have been forced to leave Sherman and who suffer from no cell services, etc.

Publicity ideas included: letters to the editor, the aging advocate, use of statistics, etc.

Steve emphasized the fact that taxpayer money will not be used for the housing. Steps going forward include: securing site control through a lease agreement, securing state and federal funding for the project, establishing a not-for-profit entity that would oversee construction and manage the units. Steve said the Housing Commission looks to the COA for support in all the steps. However, currently it seeks the support of the COA only in securing the lease agreement, in order to move forward.

Jeanette noted that if the people of Sherman don't create affordable housing for its seniors, someone else will do it. If an outside developer creates it, it will no longer be under control of Sherman. She added that Sherman is highly visible to investor eyes.

In conclusion, Steve outlined the process for the lease vote to go to referendum. Target is a July referendum. The lease vote is simply asking the town to give the Housing Commission permission to explore the chances of getting federal and state funding for its project. The COA was invited to attend the Housing Commission meeting tonight at 6 p.m. at the Senior Center.

Discussion followed on whether Sherman was a compassionate community. Based on its support for senior housing and support for the senior center, is it compassionate?

Motion to adjourn: 10:10 a.m.

Next meeting: Breakfast meeting on Saturday, May 18 at 8:30 a.m. at the Senior Center as part of the planning for a Volunteer Fair in the fall.

Next meeting: Regular meeting: May 20 at 8:30 a.m. at the Senior Center.

Submitted,

Lynne Gomez, Clerk