

Town of Sherman
Commission on Aging at the Sherman Senior Center
Monday, November 15, 2021 at 4:00pm

Members Present: Lynda Lee Arnold (Chairman), Janet Wey (Vice Chairman). Commissioners: Juan Garcia, Ed Hayes, Rick Hudson, Sheila McMahan, Jeanne McRoberts, Art Von Plachecki, Carol Sperling

Members Absent: (N/A)

Also Present: Suzette Berger – Senior Center Coordinator, Lynne Gomez - Social Services Director

Clerks: Ruth Chen Byrnes, Christine D. Aruza

The meeting was called to order at 4:05 PM by Chairman Lynda Lee Arnold.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion to approve the minutes of the regular monthly meeting of October 18, 2021 by A. Von Plachecki

Seconded by J. McRoberts

Vote For: Passes

Senior Center Report:

S. Berger advised the Senior Center has received official designation as a focal point for all aging questions and resources for the town and this part of this county. This is an important designation for the Sherman community. It required an application process and letters of recommendation submitted by First Selectman Don Lowe. It encompasses the Senior Center and Social Services and all of the resources they provide including transportation, nutrition, etc. The designation is valid for three years.

In addition, S. Berger indicated there is an increase in meal delivery requests. She and her staff are now serving 25 seniors which includes just the Senior Center clients. With respect to programs, they are continuing to organize activities in small groups with the pandemic up and down. The center remains conservative with smaller groups with a variety of different activities. Planning extends through February. Some of the programs are going later because it is safer to start later in the winter with road conditions and then will change in the spring.

The Senior Center will again host the Holiday Window event this year. S. Berger wishes to thank Janet and Sheila for accepting the commission to do one of the windows. All windows have been adopted by different groups in town as of this weekend. It is a great way for the community to find out where the Senior Center is and it is inter-generational. They have encouraged families to do it together over the holidays with Thanksgiving and Hannukah coming up before Christmas.

Families are getting together over the holiday vacation and talking with their grandparents about the countries they came from and it is tying it in nicely.

S. Berger shared that transportation is a challenge. The Senior Center delivers meals 5 days a week for 1-2 hours per day on back roads and needs reliable transportation before it is an actual emergency. Her recommendation is to trade-in the current vehicle for a newer used Subaru or smaller car with all-wheel drive (AWD). S. Berger would like to know if it can be added to the budget. This has been raised with the Board of Selectman for the past couple of years. R. Hudson inquired about the year and mileage of the current vehicle in use. S. Berger advised the current vehicle is a 2009 model with approximately 50-60k miles and was purchased used. [Note: mileage confirmed by S. Berger = 89k]. Friends of the center participated and others helped pay for the current vehicle. R. Hudson further inquired about the running maintenance costs and repair expenditures for the vehicle. S. Berger will obtain a running total of all from Giddings Garage this evening. J. McRoberts asked about how gas is reimbursed. S. Berger advised the town currently receives a municipal grant for transporting the elderly and disabled. This covers costs for the drivers, gas and maintenance. Discussion ensued about potential use of federally granted pandemic funds to the town to obtain a reliable replacement vehicle. At present the Senior Center has three part-time drivers that all use the same vehicle to assist Sherman's seniors to deliver 25 meals per day. The group noted used car prices are rising due to chip shortages and the inability to deliver new vehicles. Should get clarification from D. Lowe and Liz LaVia about the pandemic funds and possible utilization.

Clarification was requested about the drive-thru date for the Holiday Window event. Dec. 9 is the actual drive-thru event for senior attendees that are picked up. People that attend will receive gifts. They are gathering donations to provide as gifts. Extra donations will go to Home Bound to be delivered. The event will extend into January for the whole community to attend. Last year visitors came with their entire family. The theme this year is, "Holidays Around the World" which will offer diversity. S. Berger shared they have a grandson who is having a conversation with his grandfather who came from Cuba and is learning about his travels here and another window will feature origami from Japan.

Social Services Report:

L. Gomez advised they are in the midst of Medicare open enrollment efforts. Efforts will continue through December 7th. This allows plan participants to update their plans and do comparisons to obtain savings through changes. To-date they have booked 25 hours of appointments. In addition, Social Services is working on energy assistance applications. These are complex applications however there are several seniors participating. L. Gomez stated grants used to pay oil vendors on behalf of individuals in the program are significantly higher this year. This year's Thanksgiving turkeys will be handed out next week to seniors in need. Social Services also put up signs for the holiday gift drive with information on how to sign-up. It will also be placed in the papers next week. L. Gomez also noted that the eviction moratorium has expired and to keep in mind those at risk especially given the low inventory of Sherman rentals.

Feasibility Committee Report:

D. Lowe was unable to attend and provide an update on the proposed new senior center. R. Hudson offered to provide an update. R. Hudson shared that Ray Kelly prepared a preliminary sketch of the anticipated building. Multiple sites have been under review. The committee looked at the proposed Town Hall site first. The proposed center is approximately 4,700sq feet occupying one level with an additional 1,000sq feet for an outside patio. There will be a covered entryway.

Findings with respect to the Town Hall site indicated it will be impossible to do with the hillside. Additionally, the site location will not accommodate any potential future expansion should it be required. It is the Feasibility Committee's belief Volunteer Field is the best solution for a suitable site. The committee is in unanimous agreement to shift the focus to Volunteer Field as a priority. Members of the committee include: D. Lowe, C. Sperling, E. Hayes, R. Hudson, A. Von Plachecki, Ray Kelly and Karen Cardillo who is the chair.

There was a subsequent inquiry regarding reimbursement for the engineer. R. Hudson advised the engineer will be paid a very modest amount from the entire allocation. C. Sperling asked if the parcel behind the IGA market is still under consideration as a potential site. E. Hayes and R. Hudson indicated it was likely unworkable as wetlands that would pose substantial problems in addition to anticipated lack of parking.

Next steps to include First Selectman D. Lowe meeting with Mike Hatcher of Westchester Modular Homes to go over his proposed site plans. A regards R. Kelly's sketch it includes two additional pages with drawings of component rooms to assess appropriate square footage. The Volunteer Field site can accommodate future expansion as may become necessary with a growing senior community in Sherman. Mr. Kelly's services are a volunteer gift according to R. Hudson but will inquire about his willingness to attend the Westchester Modular Homes meeting with D. Lowe should he wish to include him. [Note: R. Kelly to meet with Mike Hatcher in place of D. Lowe].

E. Hayes indicated D. Lowe will wish to hear from this commission if they give approval to move forward on the Volunteer Field site. It should also be stressed that the center will not be funded solely by an independent individual.

There was inquiry if the 4,700sq feet would include requested wish list items, room for Social Services, external site requirements, and address long-term needs. The list includes many requirements but should not be considered complete and members were encouraged to submit items for consideration.

Motion by A. Von Plachecki for the Commission on Aging to take a vote that it concurs with the Feasibility Committee that the principal location be the Volunteer Field site and it agrees to move forward to devise plans for that location. S. McMahon seconded. All members unanimously voted in 'aye' in favor of the motion.

Discussion moved on to proposed funding allocations for the new center. All members were in concurrence that it should not impose a bond matter for the town or result in increased taxes for Sherman residents. Funding should be a mixture of private donations from select benefactors (with recognition) and funds as available from the town treasury budget allocation for capital improvements or reserves.

Additional discussion centered on assuring the new center will be ADA compliant. The architect has primary responsibility for ADA compliance however the recommendation was made to include L. Gomez on plan reviews for governance on this matter.

Proposed New Business:

- Recommendation made to publicize the recent designation of the Senior Center and the growing value the center brings to senior residents of the community. R. Hudson to connect S. Berger and L. Gomez with a reporter on the Town Tribune.
- L. Arnold to determine if D. Lowe needs the Chair of the Commission on Aging in attendance at the upcoming Board of Selectman meeting.
- R. Hudson to scan rendering by M. Kelly and email to commission members within 24 hours.
- J. Wey advised creation of a sub-committee (Advisory Work Group) to assist with fund-raising efforts as the commission cannot engage in these endeavors.
- L. Arnold to handle administration of the COA email box and handle incoming inquiries.
- Calendar review and agreement to call special meetings as needed to address ongoing new Senior Center matters.

L. Arnold then read into the minutes for informational purposes a communique from the CT Bar Association indicating its official support for CT legislation ‘Aid in Dying’ for the terminally ill. S. Berger further offered that new legislation recently signed into law requires she and her staff be mandatory reporters.

Final commission discussion raised by A. Von Plachecki centered on his discussion with Dr. Jeff Melendez on inter-generational programs between senior residents and school youth in the form of volunteer classes on various subjects (e.g., how to run a business, photography, etc.). Should be pursued for follow-up.

Adjournment:

J McRoberts moved to adjourn the meeting at 5:15 p.m.

R. Hudson seconded the motion.

Vote for: Unanimous.

Respectfully submitted by Christine D. Aruza
Next meeting: Monday, January 17, 2022, 4:00PM at the Sherman Senior Center