

Joint Special Meeting on Affordable Housing:

**Human Services Commission, Commission for Senior Services, and Commission
for People with Disabilities**

Minutes (Remote Meeting), November 15, 2021

Attendance:

Commission for Senior Services: Doris Levinson, Diane Kleros, Merle Spiegel, Claudia Coplen, Sarah Adair, Lee Bollert, and Karen Kleine

Human Services Commission: Beth Selby Bass and Yvonne Senturia

Commission for People with Disabilities: Jim Ross, Stacie Curran, Marina Derman and Diane Johnson

Guests: Jim Marpe (outgoing First Selectman), Andrea Moore (incoming Second Selectman, Kenneth Bernhard, Michelle Perillie (P&Z), Danielle Dobin (Chair, P&Z), Carolynn Olsen (The Saugatuck), Steve Karpel (The Saugatuck), Mickey Herbst, Carol Martin (Westport Housing Authority), Abby Gordon-Tolan, Sharuna Mahesh, Jessica Brahm (RTM), Harris Falk (RTM), James Foster, Virginia Ferrari and Howard Lipper

Staff: Sue Pfister, Elaine Daignault, Kevin Godburn, Kristen Witt, Holly Betts, and Sibel Yorulmaz

Elaine Daignault called the meeting to order and introduced Jim Marpe, outgoing First Selectman, calling him a “champion for Social Services” in Westport.

First Selectman Marpe said he was proud of all the progress made in this area under his watch, particularly the creation of the Commission for People with Disabilities.

Staff Report:

- Kristen Witt reported that the Human Services Commission has been particularly busy, working on energy assistance, holiday festivities for children, and gift cards for needy families.
- Sue Pfister said things were getting back to normal at the Senior Center, with the luncheon program now serving lunch five days a week. There has also been an uptick in program enrollment, and mask use at the Center has been very
- responsible.

- Kevin Godburn (DHS Youth Services) said that activities for youth at Toquet Hall had been very busy. He reported on the iMentor program for health and safety and said that Dr. Erin Weiner would be giving a keynote address on cannabis abuse.

Guest Speaker on Affordable Housing:

Michelle Perillie, Deputy Director of Planning and Zoning and Danielle Dobin, Chairwoman of P&Z Commission. Mary Young, P & Z Director was also present. The presentation focused on the state of affordable housing in Westport. They emphasized that affordable housing is not optional, in fact there is a state statute to have an Affordable Housing Plan and Westport's goal is to meet another moratorium on 8-30G applications which allows developers to seek exceptions to P & Z zoning regulations. Affordable Housing should focus on people, not State Statute 8-30 G housing points. The community is taking a proactive approach by amending Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) zoning regs and offering a diversity of housing types in various locations, including private homes.

Statute 8-30 G goes into effect if the community doesn't meet its 10% affordable housing goal. By year-end, Westport is expected to have 400 affordable housing units. For all new housing developments, 20% is required to be affordable. In 2019 Westport received a four-year moratorium, which extends until 2023, for demonstrating significant progress in affordable housing. The Hiawatha Lane project would lead to a second four-year moratorium.

Cited as good examples of affordable housing:

- 1135 Post Road East: ground floor retail, residential above, modern farmhouse design with a village feel
- 1141 Post Road East: senior housing offering independent as well as assisted living, and memory care
- 136 Riverside: six units for adults with special needs

The West Parish property was also identified as a good potential use of state land to create an all-affordable-housing community.

Carol Martin (Executive Director, Westport Housing Authority), after praising Jim Marpe's good work in all aspects of human services, said they had briefly opened the wait list for affordable housing and had 7,600 applications in two weeks.

Elaine Daignault reiterated how seriously Westport takes the affordable and fair housing laws.

Q&A:

Jim Ross (Commission for People with Disabilities) praised the helpful presentation and asked how efforts were going with regard to people with disabilities. Danielle Dobin explained that they create a pathway to development for this population. She admitted that it's a contentious issue, because larger buildings are required to afford elevators and subterranean parking – again the focus is on people, not points. They work closely with Homes with Hope on intellectual development issues.

Holly Betts asked how many people generally come off the waiting list for affordable housing each year. Carol Martin replied that there were very few, since it's rare for people to voluntarily leave affordable housing.

Diane Johnson (Human Services Commission) asked if there was an opportunity to increase density in housing for people with disabilities at Canal Park. She was answered that the 8-40 J affordability plan is looking into that, adding that smaller projects are really difficult to develop. They rely on the town to declare that more affordable housing is needed.

Public Q&A:

Mickey Herbst mentioned that he had a disabled daughter living in her own apartment, with 24/7 support. Danielle Dobin said the recent zoning changes for accessory apartments would make the situation more flexible, and would accelerate the trend to provide housing for people with intellectual disabilities that didn't extend to entire buildings.

Jessica Bram (RTM) said she was fully in favor of mainstreaming affordable housing. She asked if extra funding could be made available for this type of offsite development. Danielle Dobin replied that funding for offsite housing can be most effective for people who make more than the affordable housing level but still need help.

Elaine Daignault asked whether "workforce housing" could accommodate people who worked in town – teachers, nurses, police – but couldn't afford to live here. Mary Young said the area median income of \$151,000 could be exceeded by 10% for people who work in town, but those housing units wouldn't count under 8-30 G. Elaine asked what Human Services could do to help, saying that the department's request for a housing coordinator was only partially approved in the ARPA request, but adding that they could come back later for additional funding of this position.

Diane Johnson observed that duplex housing was generally not fully affordable but might be better used for workforce housing.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 am.