

**Commission on Social Services
Minutes September 16, 2010**

Attending: Roseann De Simone, Peg Koellmer, Cathy Pierce, Steve Lanza, Betty-Jo Corridon, Sue Chalons-Browne, Nate Shipp, Beth Mason

The meeting was held at Trackside and was called to order by Sue Chalons-Browne at 5:40 pm.

The minutes of the June 10, 2010 meeting were approved.

Guest Speaker: Jeff Wieser, President and CEO, Homes With Hope

Jeff Wieser succeeds Pete Powell as President and CEO. He has had a long-term involvement with Homes With Hope, having formerly served as a board member and board chairman of the agency. He has initiated a new strategic plan with the two main goals being 1) to define “our community” and 2) to broaden that definition to cover more comprehensively “the 3 Ws” (Westport, Weston and Wilton). The agency has been challenged, along with all non-profits, by the tough economic climate, and showed a first-time budget deficit last year. This year’s budget is \$1.2 million. Major funding sources for Homes With Hope are: government support 20%; faith communities 10%; fundraising events 15%; private grants and individual donations 55%.

In the past year, the agency has served 11 homeless clients from Wilton, a sharp increase over previous years. Funding from Wilton individuals and organizations totaled \$22,000 last year. A number of Wilton volunteers assist in preparing and serving meals at the Westport Gillespie Center and 2 Wilton residents currently serve on the board of Homes With Hope.

Trackside Update: Mark Ketley, Executive Director, Trackside

Mark introduced Brett Beatty, Trackside’s new Program Director, and then filled the commission in on his own extensive Wilton background prior to assuming his new position as Executive Director. He reported that usage has increased in recent months both for daily after-school programs and for “big” events such as band nights and dances. Several initiatives have been undertaken to expand Trackside’s profile and function as a vital community resource, as well as a teen center. The building is now used on a regular basis for driver education classes, SAT prep, tutoring, blood drives, and meetings of various community organizations. Development, funding, and marketing initiatives, as well as the establishment of an endowment program and a student government board are in the works or already in place. Collaboration with community youth groups is happening through programming co-hosted with PeerVention, Peer Connections, Wilton Youth Council, ABC, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. Another current effort is to make the Trackside staff a visible, integral part in the school community through daily in-school visits by Brett Beatty. The members of the commission received Mark’s report with enthusiasm and appreciation for the good results Trackside’s staff and board (chaired by Commission member Peg Koellmer) have produced so far under its “new management.”

Departmental Concerns: Cathy Pierce

The Food Pantry, now located on the lower level at Comstock, continues to be heavily used. A Food Bank Committee, chaired by Peg Koellmer, is being formed to deal with the urgent need for more volunteers to help with food drives, pick-up and delivery of donated food, stocking shelves in the Food Pantry, and publicity and outreach. Commissioners Nate Shipp, Roseann De Simone, and Betty-Jo Corridon have joined the committee. Roseann will mobilize and coordinate volunteers from the High School student service organizations. Peg asked that any volunteers recruited by commission members should contact her directly.

Cathy reported that the Department workload has been very stretched by increased numbers of clients and services needs. She could use help from the Commission with correspondence (thank you notes) and newspaper publicity; Beth Mason and Sue Chalons-Browne respectively have volunteered to assist.

Cathy announced an upcoming staffing change: Allyson Cussen is resigning as Counselor for Youth Services. Colleen Fawcett, Youth Services Coordinator, will increase her weekly hours, and a part-time clinician will be hired to fill the remaining Youth Services hours.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:05 pm.

Next Meeting: October 14, 2010

5:30 pm

AT TRACKSIDE

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Mason
Co-Secretary