

Commission on Social Services

Town of Wilton

Minutes of February 14, 2013 Meeting

Attending: Betty Jo Corridon, Roseann DeSimone, David Graybill, Peg Koellmer, Judy Mabley, Theresa MacCallum (guest observer), Cathy Pierce, Virginia Smith, Christine Tenore (guest observer), and Judy Zucker

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Peg Koellmer at 5:04 pm.

The minutes of the January 10 meeting were approved.

Commission Business:

Food Pantry: Cathy Pierce discussed changes in the Food Pantry. The Pantry will now be closed on Friday, since there has been much less usage on that day. Volunteers have been collecting food donations from the Lower Fairfield County Food Bank in Stamford and obtaining nearly-expired perishable food contributed by stores such as Trader Joes. They also buy perishable food at cost from the Village Market and shop for sale items at Stop and Shop.

Judy Zucker will contact Jen Caraluzzi from Caraluzzi's Markets to discuss the possibility of their contributing gift cards for Food Pantry clients.

There was discussion of the Wilton Kiwanis Food Collection bin at Stop and Shop. The bin tends to fill to overflowing, and Kiwanis needs to schedule regular pickups. An additional problem has been that a lot of the donations have been expired and/or opened packages that the Food Pantry cannot accept. Moving the donation bin from Stop and Shop to the Comstock lobby would eliminate the need for pickups. It was also suggested that a notice be posted on the food bin stating that foods that are outdated or opened cannot be accepted.

There was discussion of pre-purchasing food gift cards from Stop and Shop and having them available at locations such as the YMCA and local churches. Donors could purchase the gift cards, which the Food Pantry could give to clients to buy fresh produce, milk, and meat, items that are not always available at the Pantry.

Gift-Giving Program: The Commission reviewed the holiday gift-giving program that is administered by the Department of Social Services and coordinated by Lauren Hughes. The program has grown since its inception: 116 children were served in the 2012 holiday season. Running the program has taken increasing amounts of staff time, and the concern was expressed that in the future there may be inadequate funds to run the program as in the past. Some organizations also may

not like being asked to donate to the holiday gift program when they already have made other financial contributions to local programs. Concern also was expressed about the value of some of the individual gifts. Some neighboring towns with similar programs have put a dollar limit on gifts, but, thus far, Wilton has not done this. Funding for gifts comes from civic organizations, the Wilton Community Assistance Fund, local businesses, and private individuals. Families that receive gifts are known clients of the Department of Social Services: they submit a wish list request in September, the Department shops for gifts, and these are distributed to parents in December. Some individual donors are matched with specific families. It was noted that some individual donors have contributed generously to assist individual families, and some donors have reported that they are pleased to be able to help in this manner.

Suggestions for addressing some of these issues included putting a dollar limit on individual gifts and using volunteers to assist Lauren Hughes. Perhaps individual donors could be assigned to several recipient families and not just one. There may be a need for better central coordination so that local organizations and nonprofits do not feel overburdened by too many requests for donations. It may be useful to clarify the role of the Wilton Community Assistance Fund in funding the holiday gift program.

Liaison Reports:

Wilton Commons: Wilton Commons will be hosting a tour for legislators on Saturday, February 16.

Senior Center Advisory Council: Judy Zucker report that she has submitted a statement of requests for extending the life of the Comstock facility. She noted that many of the building's systems are old, e.g., the boiler is from the 1950's, the fire alarm system is old, and there is no sprinkler system.

Other liaison reports were tabled until the March meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 6:18 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Virginia Smith, Co-secretary