

**TOWN OF DARIEN  
COMMISSION ON AGING  
REGULAR MEETING  
JANUARY 17, 2024**

**ATTENDANCE:** Joe Pankowski, Chair; Marcia Cleary, Tom Dempsey, Peter Eder, Mary McCarthy, Jim Metzger, Susan Kostin and Suzanne Okie

**OTHERS:** Ali Ramsteck, Human Services; Chris Jones, At Home in Darien  
Beth Paris, Mather Center; Jon Zagrodzky, First Selectman

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Pankowski called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. A quorum was present.

**MINUTES - December 20, 2024**

The following corrections were requested: Please replace this paragraph on page 4:

Correction to meeting minutes: New Business

Mr. Eder reported on a newly formed Connecticut Collaborative to End Loneliness. This effort is being supported by an initiative launched by Senator Chris Murphy. Mr. Eder noted that this program is not only geared to seniors, but also to youth, as loneliness is a major cause for mental health issues connected to depression and isolation. Also, Mr. Eder announced that the Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection is establishing a registry ... Bring Me Back Home Support ... for those folks having memory loss or are subject to wandering. It is one of the first statewide efforts in the country and is patterning on an established San Francisco effort. Also, the Alzheimer's Association Connecticut Chapter is a source of providing information and resources.

**\*\* MS. MCCARTHY MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF DECEMBER 20, 2023 AS AMENDED.**

**\*\* MR. EDER SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Presentation:

Jon Zagrodzky, First Selectman of Darien, will discuss the town issues he plans to address following his election in November

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Mr. Zagrodzky provided an outline of his role as First Selectman and outlined the objectives for 2024. He outlined the government of an RTM and spoke about how various boards and commissions work together in collaboration within the scope of their roles and authority.

He spoke about the acquisition of Great Island and the three school renovations that represent over \$250 million in debt service for the Town. He reported that he has requested that a formal presentation by the Board of Finance to be developed to provide the Town complete information on how the Town is managing this debt.

He credited the Town staff and many volunteers that are a tremendous asset to the business operations of the Town along with providing valuable input for the public voices to be heard. He fielded questions and comments from the Commissioners throughout the presentation.

There was discussion on the impact to seniors and the efforts on communication and outreach and consideration of tax relief programs to help seniors stay in their homes.

Mr. Pankowski thanked First Selectman Zagrodzky, for his thorough presentation and encouraged all to watch the full presentation on Channel 79.

### **MATHER CENTER**

Ms. Paris read her report as follows:

\*\*\* See attached report for more legible version

Commission on Aging Report  
Darien Senior Programs at Mather Center  
January 17, 2024  
Respectfully Submitted: Beth Paris, Director

January schedule is full with varied programming and entertainment. Activity Assistant Scott Benda is also interested in running some ongoing classes which will add to the weekly schedule. In February we are looking to implement a Focus Group which we hope to culminate into an activity Center that we can include all members to participate in and lend opinions, ideas and creative suggestions too. Mark your calendar February 21<sup>st</sup> 12:30.

**Health and Wellness:** Christine Burns, RN- Information Session on UTI's; Monica Marcollo Registered Dietician RYNA- Mediterranean Diet for the New Year; Stephanie Riggio, PA-C Functional Nutrition; Dr. Jeffery Kay, Veterinarian- Pets for Older Adults; D. Laura Espinoza, Audiologist- How to Keep Your Hearing Healthy; Matter of Balance 8 Week Course Fairfield University School of Nursing, Monthly; Monica Keating Meditation for Stress Management; WEEKLY 14 Exercise Classes

**Educational & Academic:** Art Gottlieb LCSW- Presentation on Martin Luther King; Campbell Harmon- Actor Life of Edgar Allan Poe; Chris Connelly Technology Specialist- iPhone Accessibility Class; Mary Beth Mason, Darien Library-Computer Basics; Randy Blosio Home Watch Management- Aging Safely at Home; Mark Albertson, Historian- Update on the Middle East; WEEKLY: Writing Class; Italian Culture and Conversation- Joe Tarzia; French Class- Hendricks Vriesen Spanish Beginner & Intermediate- Luz Rincon, MONTHLY Book Club- *Inheritance*

**Creative Pursuits:** Pleasure Through Plants- Garden Club of Darien; Mason Jar Craft- Caitlin; WEEKLY: Advanced Watercolor/Acrylic- Nobu Miki; Beginner/Intermediate Acrylic- Joe Fama, Watercolors All Levels- Elizabeth Lincan; Stain Glass Class Lou Benedetto; Monday Knitting and Crocheting Circle; Wood Shop Donation Program Tuesday 9-11:30-Wednesday and Thursdays 1:30-2:30

**Entertainment & FUN:** Welcome the New Year- Them G's Band; Afternoon of Lively Music with the Hot Owls and Chris Coogan; BINGO with Compassionate Care; Word Games with Caitlin; Reminisce with Rosie and Gori Genovese; Movie and a Treat- Some Like it Hot and Ground Hog Day; WEEKLY: Monday BINGO Fun; Tuesdays: Cribbage; Thursdays- Mahjong  
**Service:** Ask a Social Worker Tuesdays- Cynthia Hal LMSW.; Blood Pressure and Health screening 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday Christine Burns, RN Waveny Life care Network; Caregiver Educational Support Group - Beth Paris; Information and Referral as need/requested

**Program Days:** 21 (Closed 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>)

**Family Inquiries:** 10

**Caregiver Support Group:** 9

**Human Services Referral:** 7

**At Home in Darien:** 3

**Information and Referral:** 11

**Ongoing Work this Month**

Weekly Constant Contact/Monthly Newsletter

Staff Meetings building Team with PS/AA

Budget Review and Finalization

Program Planning Spring

Daily Operations- Staff/Volunteer Assignments

Entertainment Events- Winter Through Spring

Valentine Projects- 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Tokeneke School

Coordination with Youth Coordinating Happy Hearts

**Meetings:** Staff Meetings weekly: 1/9 Department Head; 19 Budget Review: 1/17 Senior Center Directors at Mather Center; COA Meeting 1/17; BOS Quarterly Meeting 1/23

Ms. Ramsteck read her report as submitted:.

## Commission on Aging - Human Services Report - January 17, 2024

- Mental Health First Aid

The Town of Darien is offering another chance to attend the Mental Health First Aid 8-hour interactive certification course. This course is designed to give members of the public key skills to help someone who is developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. Like CPR training helps a non-medical professional assist an individual following a heart attack, Mental Health First Aid training helps an individual who doesn't have clinical training assist someone experiencing a mental health crisis. Dates are **February 7<sup>th</sup> and February 8<sup>th</sup> 2024, both days from 8:30am-1:00pm**, at EMS Post 53. Please register by emailing Ali Ramsteck at [aramsteck@darienct.gov](mailto:aramsteck@darienct.gov). This program is being funded by ARPA funds.

- Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

We continue to accept applications for 2023-2024 Energy Assistance Program. This program helps supplement energy costs for financially struggling residents. Income limits apply. The 2023-2024 income limit for a single person household is \$41,553, for a family of 4 people it is \$79,910. There will be no asset limit again this year, which makes many more people, particularly seniors, eligible. Please call 203-656-7328 with any questions or for an appointment.

- The Medical Loan closet continues to be a great resource for Darien residents for short term loans of wheelchairs, knee scooters, walkers, crutches and canes. A refundable deposit of \$50 (check payable to "Town of Darien") is required for wheelchairs, transport chairs and walkers with a seat. The feedback from residents is positive and they appreciate this convenient resource.

- The staff of Darien Human Services maintains an Emergency Call List with the names of vulnerable seniors and individuals with disabilities to contact prior to and after a storm or town wide emergency. We called the list this Monday in anticipation of Tuesday's storm. We now have close to 100 residents on our list. We are requesting that any individual who is vulnerable, or has medical conditions that might make them vulnerable during an emergency, notify Darien Human Services (203-656-7328) so their name can be added to our list.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ali Ramsteck, LCSW, Directo

### OLD BUSINESS.

Mr. Eder reported that the Darien Library series of professional seminars starts next week with the first being "Psychology of Happiness". The other topics are personal finances, IRS tax aide services January 22 from 1-7 pm. The topic of elder isolation is a primary goal and efforts to get the word out with collaboration with the Mather Center are in place. AARP offers tax assistance and services at the Weed Library.

Mr. Eder added that the library has under-utilized equipment for those with audio and visual challenges, and we need to get the word out to inform seniors of the resources available at CT Libraries. CT Collaborative Legislative session is February 2 - May 8 and we need to reach out to our state reps to make sure voices of seniors are being heard.

### NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Chris Jones spoke about relief on taxes in view of increased incomes. He spoke about a program to defer taxes that includes a lien on the house, so it is one that seniors are not willing to look into. He asked if we could get the Tax Assessor in for a meeting to discuss programs on tax relief. Mr. Piankowski offered to come to the Senior Center in the spring to go over the program and explain the lien issue.

### ADJOURNMENT

**\*\* MS. MCCARTHY MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**\*\* MS. CLEARY SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:15 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Telesco Secretarial Services

Commission on Aging Report  
Darien Senior Programs at Mather Center  
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Respectfully Submitted: Beth Paris, Director

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