



Social Services Commission
Caroline Temlock Teichman, Chair
Kathleen Lombardo
Juan Ospina
Ellen Petersen
Renai Strother

SOCIAL SERVICES COMMISSION

888 Washington Blvd.
Stamford, CT 06901

Minutes for October 26, 2021

ATTENDEES:

Commission Members

Caroline Temlock Teichman, Chair
Kathleen Lombardo
Juan Ospina - absent
Ellen Petersen
Renai Strother

City of Stamford Staff

Ted Jankowski, Director, Public Safety
Sharona Cowan, Mandated Services, Social Services

Members of Public

No members of the public present

The Chair called the meeting to order at 5:04pm.

Acceptance of Minutes

Minutes from November 12, 2019 were reviewed, and corrected and accepted as follows: Old Business- The Chair met with Lorna Peart from Childcare Learning Center (not Child Guidance). The financial literacy training is provided by Childcare Learning Center (not Child Guidance) to its staff.

Public Comment

No members of the public were present for comment.

Old Business

- Status of Social Services During the Pandemic to Present – A report entitled *Stamford Social Services Department* was provided in writing to Commissioners by the Director of Social Services, and is attached to these minutes. Ted Jankowski and Sharona Cowan reviewed the highlights of the report with the Commissioners and responded to questions from the Commissioners. Director Jankowski informed the Commissioners of the retirement of Ellen Bromley, Social Services Director.

Items emphasized included

- the apparent need for numbers of Stamford residents to get assistance gaining access to cell phones, and how to use them, including obtaining email accounts
- work of Unite CT related to landlord-tenant relations
- No Fair Rent hearings January 2020-September 2021
- Importance of leveraging activities and knowledge of community partners

- New initiatives in Police Department to address mental health, homeless and addiction, and youth program concerns

Commissioners commented on

- Food security and pantry use in Stamford
- Concern for housing and resources for women who have been trafficked or are post DCF care.

New Business

The November 16, 2021 meeting of the Commission will be devoted to (re)training the Commissioners on Fair Rent Hearing Law and procedures.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:17pm.

Respectfully submitted:
Caroline Temlock Teichman

Stamford Social Services Department

The Department of Social Services provides Stamford's citizens with information about, and assists them to assess eligibility and access programs and/or resources available to meet a myriad of needs and/or protect basic human and legal rights.

The department is staffed by four full-time (cross-trained) employees. Staff are responsible for responding to, planning, administering, implementing, managing and/or making referrals in connection with a myriad of programs and services. Pre-pandemic a significant amount of the department's daily work was unplanned as staff was required to respond immediately to regular interruptions from the public (via telephone and "walk in" inquiries) for advice and assistance with a range of issues that affect Stamford's youth, family, adult and senior populations (birth to death). At this point, COVID reopening protocols have minimized walk-ins. That said, the security guards assigned to desk duty in the lobby know to call the Social Services department whenever someone comes to the Government Center and asks for assistance. When this happens, one of our staff meets with the citizen in the lobby at one of the tables that have been set aside for this purpose.

Interestingly, with specific respect to those programs within our purview that require us to provide one-to-one application or enrollment assistance, staff have found that doing so via the phone or electronically has improved our efficiency. The downside has been that peripheral issues that come up in face-to-face meetings do not come up in virtual settings. Accordingly, we believe that we are less aware of the kinds of peripheral issues where we have always been able to provide assistance than we were pre-pandemic. Accordingly, we look forward to a full reopening in 2022.

Application Assistance

On a daily basis trained staff explains medical bills and provides one-to-one application assistance with respect to a number of federal, state and municipal benefit programs for which individuals may be eligible. These include:

- Access Health Connecticut (Obamacare);
- HUSKY and Title XIX (also known as Medicaid);
- Medicare Part D;
- Medicare Savings Programs (for income eligible seniors) including: QMB which pays Medicare Part A & B premiums, Medicare deductibles and Medicare co-payments for eligible seniors; and SLMB and ALMB which pay the Part B premium
- SNAP (federally funded food stamp program provides assistance to persons meeting monthly income limits)
- Subsidized Senior Housing
- Easy Access (subsidized transportation for disabled individuals); and
- The State of Connecticut Rent Rebate Program (income qualifying Stamford residents sixty-five or older, or disabled and receiving disability payments may be eligible to receive a partial refund of rent and utility payments from the State).

Application assistance is labor intensive, involving considerable time securing information and arranging for needed services. Accordingly, department staff are tasked with

providing individualized assistance -- most frequently one-to-one program enrollment assistance -- on an "as needed" and bi-lingual basis.

Direct Service and Referrals to Community Partners

The need for casework, advocacy and community services often presents coincident with the need for application assistance. Staff's effectiveness in helping residents to address their needs or manage life crises requires: a thorough knowledge of community resources and programs; the ability to take initiative; and the maturity to exercise sound judgement. Errors can result in failure to obtain, or loss of service.

Accordingly, staff maintain strong working relationships with personnel in other municipal departments (health, police, board of education), state agencies, community social service and not-for-profit organizations, local housing authorities, health clinics, hospitals, etc.

Mandated Services - Evictions

After a residential eviction has occurred Connecticut law requires any unclaimed property of the evicted tenant(s) to be removed from the rental premises (by a state marshal) and delivered to a municipally designated location for storage. Possessions remaining unclaimed after fifteen days may be sold at a public auction. In Stamford evictee possessions are delivered to, and stored in city-owned bins located at Magee Avenue. The Department's Mandated Services Coordinator is responsible for administering the eviction storage program and, as appropriate to individual circumstances, assisting evictees in locating safe, secure permanent housing or placement in temporary housing or shelters.

Mandated Services - Relocations

Under Connecticut landlord tenant law, landlords are required to comply with the provisions of municipal codes (including housing, health and fire) that affect the health and safety of their tenants. When municipal inspectors charged with code enforcement responsibilities find residential conditions that constitute immediate or serious threats to occupants' health or safety, the subject premises are declared "unfit for human habitation" and "condemned." Occupants displaced as a result of condemnation orders may be legally eligible for financial assistance from the municipality to cover specific costs associated with permanent "relocation." (As permitted by law, Stamford holds non-code compliant landlords liable for reimbursement of relocation payments made to, or on behalf of their displaced tenants.) The Department's Mandated Services Coordinator is responsible for administering and service delivery in connection with Stamford's relocation program, including determining, on a case by case basis, whether local code enforcement activities have resulted in displacement and, if so, whether, and what benefits displaced families and/or individuals may be eligible for.

Stamford Social Services Commission – Oversight Function

The Social Services Commission has oversight responsibility for issues pertaining to the social welfare of Stamford's citizens, including shelter. In this capacity, the Commission is charged with coordinating and promoting policies and strategies that maximize the

existence and availability of local social service resources and increase the flow of relevant information to Stamford citizens in need.

Stamford Social Services Commission - Fair Rent and Human Rights

Connecticut law permits municipalities to establish Fair Rent and Human Rights Commissions within the guidelines required by State law. Accordingly, the Stamford Social Services Commission acts as the city's Fair Rent Commission, as well as its Human Rights Commission. In its Fair Rent capacity, the Social Services Commission is empowered to make studies and investigations, conduct hearings and receive complaints relative to rental charges on housing accommodations within the city, in order to control and eliminate excessive rental charges on such accommodations.

The Department's Director acts as staff to the Commission. With respect to the Fair Rent process, the Director is responsible for receiving, investigating and conciliating complaints (settling most landlord-tenant disputes without need to resort to a formal complaint filing) or assisting with the administrative hearing process.

General Housing Issues and Inquiries

On a daily basis staff provide written or verbal assistance, substantive advice and appropriate referrals in response to inquiries on virtually all housing related inquiries: landlord - tenant rights; rental assistance; security deposits (including "return of"), discrimination, homelessness, housing code violations, evictions, subsidized housing, public housing, senior housing, inclusionary zoning, privately sponsored affordable housing, requirements and limitations of HUD, tax credit and state funding programs, and foreclosures.

This year we participated in efforts to design, or work out problems with the State's federally funded emergency rental assistance program, UniteCT. Our experience is that Stamford landlords and tenants know of the program. If they require guidance or application assistance, we provide it.

Senior Transportation

Stamford's state-funded (CT Dial-a-Ride grant) Share the Fare program provides subsidized rides for Stamford senior citizens and disabled individuals. Utilizing dollars required as a local match for Share the Fare, working with local non-profit partners, the department assists low income seniors to access local destinations by subsidizing their bus or, in the case of disabled seniors, their paratransit fares. We also use match funds to support the Ride to Wellness, a Silver Source program that provides free medical transportation and is open to all Stamford senior citizens.

Public Education

Department staff: conduct community workshops to promote health care and health care literacy make educational presentations on landlord/tenant rights and housing and zoning code requirements pertaining to home safety.

Holiday and General Giving

Department staff coordinate holiday giving initiatives to assist in providing appropriate gifts for the most needy children and senior citizens with whom they have worked during the year. They also hold food drives to support the Food Bank of Lower Fairfield County food bank; collect coats were to support the Backyard Humanitarians distribution efforts, etc.

Division of Social Services Activities 2019-2020

Service	Numbers Served	Comment/Outcome
Insurance Enrollment (Access Health CT, HUSKY A,B,D Insurance, Presumptive Eligibility Medical Vouchers, re-determinations, unpaid medical bills, spend-downs)	1426	One-on-one assistance to apply for: Access Health CT-ACA (applications and appeals-826) HUSKY applications-(600 applications)
Eviction Management	56	Coordinate storage, retrieval & auctioning of evictees belongings -- 7/1/19-3/17/20 – prior to eviction moratorium (in an average year there are 14 evictions/month)
Fair Rent Inquiries / Proceedings	25	Complaints are received, investigated and resolved or heard
Relocation Assistance	17	Relocation assistance provided to people displaced by code enforcement: (relocation costs, moving fees, emergency housing)

		(mandated by Uniform Relocation Assistance Act), landlord/tenant mediation - - 7/1/19-3/17/20
Renter's Rebate Program	1600	CT Tax Relief Program for elderly and/or disabled renters
Landlord / Tenant Inquiries	700	Responses and assistance with problems pertaining to landlord tenant relationships, fair housing, affordability, public housing, senior housing, etc.
Senior Transportation		Share-the-Fare program for 1/2 priced rides, door-to-door transportation for elderly & disabled who need affordable transport to senior nutrition sites, medical appointments, shopping sites.
Holiday Gifts for Children	216	Low income children
Senior Holiday Gift Cards		Donated by City Employees
COVID calls	1200	COVID-19 Hotline – referrals, substantive responses, direct assistance