

Mayor Caroline Simmons Policy Committee Reporting Document

Committee Name: Senior Advisory Committee

Co-Chairs: Christina Crain, Stamford Senior Center,
Kathleen Bordelon, SilverSource

Committee Members: Connie Freeman of the JCC, Betty McOsker of The Over Sixty Club, Jeanette Bilczniansk of The Villa at Stamford.

According to the 2020 Census, Stamford's 65+ population makes up 14% of the city's total population (18,966 residents). Stamford is the second largest city in Connecticut but ranks at the bottom in per capita spending for older adults across other Fairfield County municipalities. The lens through which policy decisions are made need to include older adults, in decision making and spending allocation on community assets. Stamford's Commission on Aging has been inactive for over a decade, creating a void in representation and advocacy on issues impacting older adults.

- 25% of Stamford's 65 plus population are low income (4,741 residents), live at less than 200% of the federal poverty level.
- 10% of Stamford residents 65 and older, have income below the federal poverty line (almost 2,000 seniors)
- Stamford does not have a municipally operated Senior Center.
- There are three 501(c)3 organizations providing senior center programing for Stamford's older residents and only one gets partial funding from the city.
- The Stamford Senior Center has outgrown its space at the Government Center and its location poses significant challenges to many seniors, who are afraid to navigate the parking garage.

This Committee identified the following as important next steps for the Simmons administration, as it relates to the Administrations priorities of 1) making local government work better, 2) investing in infrastructure and communication, 3) creating a more livable and equitable community and 4) increasing affordable housing.

- I. Establish a Mayor's Advisory Council on Senior Issues. This council would serve in place of a Commission on Aging. The council would represent and advocate for issues related to the older adult population in Stamford. Members would be community leaders who are well versed in issues associated with the older adult population and Stamford residents over the age of 60 representative of the racially and culturally diverse senior population. (see appendix A for list of potential names to serve on council)
- II. Create a Citywide survey of older adults to assess their needs (this can be undertaken in partnership with the Council on Aging)
- III. Explore re-locating the Senior Center to a larger campus where other senior services can be co-located, to better serve Stamford's senior community.

- IV. Establish a database of vulnerable seniors and persons with disabilities like many other municipalities have, to target these households with outreach in emergency situations like the COVID-19 pandemic.
- V. Evaluate safety of crosswalks and sidewalks around low -income senior housing buildings. (see appendix B)
- VI. Assess transportation options for Stamford's senior residents. (see appendix C)
- VII. Work with public and private low-income senior housing sites to bring broadband internet access into all senior housing buildings.
- VIII. Expand number of low -income housing units for seniors
- IX. Work with public and private senior housing sites to develop a single common application.
- X. Evaluate the Senior Property Tax Relief Program to make it more accessible to eligible households. (Seniors should not have to come into the Government Center to apply for the property tax relief program). Also to address our very low income senior homeowners who struggle to remain in their homes, the administration can study the feasibility of implementing a tax freeze for senior households living at 200% of FPL

1. How do you propose the Simmons Administration should prioritize policy goals in this area and on what time frame?

The above goals should be prioritized in the order listed above, with the first three being a priority.

2. Which goals are achievable in the first 100 days of the Administration?

In the first 100 days, Mayor Simmons can initiate or achieve the following goals:

Goal I- Establish a Mayor's Advisory Council on Senior Issues

Goal II- begin working on Survey of senior households (to be included in their property tax bill and other means of distribution for renters)

Goal IV – Begin to establish database of vulnerable senior households . This is something the Mayor's Advisory Council can help undertake in partnership with the City's Health Dept. who is supportive of this from a public health perspective.

Goal VI-senior transportation; in particular, addressing the Share the Fare program barriers

Goal IX- Evaluate the Elderly Property Tax relief program to make it more accessible. Why can't the application be done online or through the mail?

3. Which goals will require legislation to move forward? Which can be achieved by administration alone? What is the fiscal impact of these legislative or executive actions?

The committee believes that the goals listed above in #2 can all be achieved by the administration alone and have minimal financial impact.

Building more senior housing, and senior low income housing should be a priority in the Housing and Affordability recommendations. This may require adoption of zoning too and development tools, application for federal and state funding and coordination with housing construction partners.

4. Are there specific challenges you can identify with regard to achieving the Simmons Administration's goals and how would you suggest addressing those?

The committee does not see specific challenges in achieving most of the goals set forth above and think they would be well received by all. We recognize that some of the goals have fiscal impacts and will need to be achieved through legislative action. Those will pose greater challenges, but several of the goals outlined can be achieved with the assistance of the Mayor's Senior Advisory Council and city departments. Others will require a public/private partnership (Goals III, VI, VII, VIII, IX and X).

APPENDICES-

A. Senior Advisory Council can assist with undertaking some of the proposed goals. The committee proposes the following members: Representatives from the following organizations/ agencies that serve the senior population as well as Stamford residents over the age of 65.

- The Stamford Senior Center
- The Over 60 Club
- Silver Source
- The Stamford JCC
- Catholic Charities
- Stamford Social Services rep
- NAACP
- Stamford Health
- Senior constituents

B. Safer Streets Projects:

Evaluate crosswalks and sidewalks for safety where all senior housing buildings are located, with priority given to the cross walk on High Ridge Road and Vine Road

There are two low-income senior housing buildings on Vine Road and this intersection has been very challenging for seniors to cross, due to the short light and no crosswalk at the intersection of Vine and High Ridge Road.

C. Transportation issues

1. **Share the Fare** - All Stamford elderly and disabled individuals are eligible for the Share the Fare Program, which is a reduced fare taxi voucher program. Taxi vouchers are sold in books of 10 each and are valued at \$50, but sold for \$25. Taxi Vouchers are sold in the Cashiering and Permitting Office located in the lobby of the Government Center. Currently to take advantage of this program you have to physically get to the government center, to register and to purchase more vouchers. The vouchers should to be made available by phone, mail or internet for seniors who have mobility and financial challenges.
2. **Easy Access**

Norwalk Transit operates the para transportation services in Stamford. They have transitioned to a ticketless, online application, making access to low income older adults who do not have computer/internet access or credit cards more problematic. The city of Stamford historically funded/subsidized tickets for low income seniors who were attending the senior centers (or to other places). This year, the city did not provide funding to the Senior Center or Over 60 Club to subsidize the cost of transportation vouchers for low income seniors to get them to medical appointments, grocery shopping and to the senior centers.