

PLYMOUTH HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION

80 Main Street
Terryville, CT 06786
(860) 585-4028

MINUTES

DATE: Thursday, November 20, 2014
TIME: 7:00 p.m.
PLACE: Town Hall, Mayor's Conference Room

I. SPECIAL MEETING CALLED TO ORDER & NOTE EXITS

7:10 P.M. by Chairwoman, Heidi Caron

Attendance:

Chairwoman Heidi Caron, Vice Chair Sally Bain-Picard, Rev. Chris Drew, Secretary Karen Saccu, Tracy DuPont, Helena Schwalm, Elzina Zalaski, Human Service Coordinator Abby Egan, Alternate Fred Schwalm, Council Liaison John Pajeski,

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Lead by Heidi Caron

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS

None

IV. MINUTES SEPTEMBER 4, 2014 REGULAR MEETING

A motion was made by Elzina Zalaski; seconded by Rev. Chris Drew to accept September 4, 2014 Minutes.

Voted: To accept September 4, 2014 Minutes

Motion Passed

V. HUMAN SERVICE COORDINATOR – Abby Egan

- a. **Hoarding Task Force:** Meeting on November 5, 2014. (DID NOT ATTEND)
- b. **Salvation Army:** An employee from Thomaston Savings Bank in Terryville has volunteered to coordinate the Kettle Campaign! This is exciting news and we hope that we can have a more successful kettle drive since Plymouth uses the majority of the funds raised in our region, but also raises the least amount of money. Please contact Marissa McGhee, if you are interested in ringing the bell for a few hours this season. (Starting Saturday after Thanksgiving).

V. **HUMAN SERVICE COORDINATOR** – Abby Egan (continued)

- c. **Annual Report Narrative:** The Human Services Department provides confidential advocacy, information, assistance; and referral services to town residents of all ages. The Department assists with all areas of human and social services such as food, heating, insurance, programs for children, elderly needs, and more. The department consists of one Human Services Director and one part time assistant. The Human Services director is the designated Veteran's Services Contact Person and the appointed Municipal Agent for the Elderly. Human Services staff are also mandated reporters of children and elder abuse. The office has seen its call volume increase significantly over the past year. In effort to quantify services provided, the office began using Charity Tracker Software in April 2014.

Most towns that are of this size (population of 12,000) have at least three to four full time employees providing assistance to low income families, adults; and senior citizens. However, despite our small size, Human Services staff members are committed to providing high quality customer services and maximizing limited resources, ensuring that all residents are provided with the assistance they need.

The office provides assistance to residents of all ages with state benefit applications (such Medicaid or SNAP), including liaising with the State of Connecticut Department of Social Services as needed when difficulties arise. The State of CT has made many changes within its Department of Social Services, and sadly, many of our most vulnerable citizens have been negatively affected. They call the Human Services Department when they are unable to fill their prescription or buy food or when they get a confusing letter. Though it can be very time consuming, human services staff are almost always able to answer their questions and/or help resolve the problem.

The Human Services office also helps low income residents stay warm and helps prevent utility shut offs through dollars from Operation Fuel, the Salvation Army and through the Plymouth Fuel Bank, which is funded solely through private donations. Between July 1st 2013 and June 30th 2014, Human services provided 110 households with energy assistance. This number is significantly higher than in previous years (in 2012-14 the number was 64) and demonstrates the ongoing and growing hardship of low income families in Plymouth. Operation Fuel allocated \$19,000 for Plymouth residents, and \$23,000 came from the Plymouth Fuel Bank. The total amount of assistance provided during this period is \$42,000.

The Human Service Commission implemented Rental Assistance Program in January 2014, using dollars from interest earned from the Cleaveland Trust. The set amount for assistance is \$500, and 6 households were able to receive assistance. Because there is no other rental assistance programs available for people who don't have Section 8, this program was very popular and the allocated budget of \$3000 was depleted within 6 weeks.

For Plymouth's senior population, the Human Services office hosted a Health Fair in November 2013. Twenty-two health providers participated, including physicians from Bristol Hospital, and low-vision screening provided by the Lions Club. Human services coordinate's foot care clinics (8 per year) and two AARP driving courses were held in November 2013 and

V. HUMAN SERVICE COORDINATOR – Abby Egan (continued)

c. **Annual Report Narrative:** June 2014. Additionally, Human Services staff are certified by the State of CT to provide CHOICES counseling to Medicare coverage, supplemental insurance coverage, help paying medical cost, etc. The Human Services director is an active member of the United Way's West Central CT Triad for Senior Safety, a partnership with local seniors, law enforcement and community providers. Triad hosted a "Spring into Wellness" Conference in April 2014, which was well attended by the Plymouth Seniors.

The Human Services Department also works with Plymouth's families. The Human Services Director is an active member of the Plymouth Early Childhood Council (PECC) as well as the Plymouth Local Prevention Council (LPC). Through these partnerships we are able to connect families with need resources. For Plymouth's low income families, the Human Services office also coordinates the back to school supply program and, in partnership with the Food Pantry, a holiday gift program for families with children. Along with increasing calls for assistance, these programs have also grown. The number of children who received back to school supplies is 90 and 148 children received gifts from the holiday gift program. This nearly double the numbers from 2012-2013. The Department is very grateful to the churches and community members for supporting this initiative, the Plymouth Family Resource network for assisting with the back pack program and to the Plymouth Police Department for coordinating two very successful toy drives! In June 2014, the Human Services Director recruited a volunteer committee to increase donations and to manage the relationships with the donors. There is a fund for children called the "Small Wonders Fund" which is funded solely through donations. In the late fall the Human Services Department had its first "Boots and Coats Program", in partnership with the food pantry. The Learning Center Daycare and the Plymouth Family Resource Center. We purchased \$1270 in Payless Shoe gift cards, and \$1250 in clothing store gift cards from this fund. Gift cards were distributed to families identified as needed help with coats and boots.

For low income individuals, who are not seniors and not parents of minor children, finding affordable health insurance was a serious problem. While controversial, the Affordable Care Act looked to eliminate this problem. With introduction of the Access Health CT Insurance Marketplace, and Expanded Medicaid, many people were able to finally sign up for insurance. The Human Services office was awarded a \$6000 grant from Access Health Connecticut to fund an "Assister" for information and assistance applying for Affordable Care Act insurance between October 2013 – April 2014. The assister program engaged nearly 200 people, which double the initial goal of 100 people. Though the funding has ended the Human Services Department continues to assist individuals with Access Health.

The Human Services Department is there to help any Plymouth resident needing assistance. Most programs do have income limits that are constantly changing, there for it never hurts just to place the call. Our staff is a wealth of information about community resources and we are happy to help!

V. **HUMAN SERVICE COORDINATOR** – Abby Egan (continued)

- c. **Annual Report Narrative:** Please visit the new online resource guide at www.plymouth.k12.ct.us/guide to learn more about the many programs that are there to help people.
- d. **Energy Assistance:** (**UPDATES ADDED IN BOLD**) it's been warm enough that we have not done much with oil ahead of the energy assistance season. BCO decided to mail paper applications to all the senior housing apartments, with no instructions. We have been telling people with questions on BCO applications to go to BCO, as BCO will not share this responsibility with the town (other agencies in other regions provide municipalities with technology and software so that towns can assist residents with the applications). Under some circumstances we will help homebound, disabled individuals with energy applications. However, we do not have staffing to help everyone, especially without the software required. **A Gosinski park resident never got energy assistance last year because BCO lost her mailed application. I REPORTED THIS TO THE STATE, AS THIS AN UNACCEPTABLE PRACTICE. Now that it has gotten cold, BCO has fallen far behind on deliverable fuel applications. The problem is that the law states that they must certify households within 24 hours if they are at risk of running out of oil. This was also reported to the state and I have encouraged everyone to contact their elected officials and the state energy board with their experiences.** Operation Fuel has been willing to do two households with deliverable fuel due to extenuating circumstances and we still have some funds left in our "fall" allocation from Operation Fuel. I have not used Fuel Bank funds, due to the high amount used last year, and the fact that it has been warm in October.
- e. **Technology:** I will be picking up our new equipment from Operation Fuel on November 13. **UPDATE, equipment still on back order.** We will be getting a laptop, portable scanner/printer and carrying case. Operation Fuel "owns" the equipment so if we ever stop partnering with them we will have to give it back. We are allowed to use the equipment for any social assistance; it does not have to be just for energy assistance.
- f. **CHOICES – Medicare Counseling:** Open Enrollment for Medicare has started. CHOICES will be coming with DSS on Dec. 3rd to Town Hall, I am trying to get as many Medicare beneficiaries as possible to come on the 3rd. Sent an invitation to surrounding towns to attend.
- g. **AARP Driving Class:** No longer free for Veterans, we are still going to host a class this November since it was already scheduled but it may not make sense to have one at this time of year if they are not free, since this is such a busy time of year for everything else. Twelve people for class tomorrow. Human Services will provide refreshments and lunch.

V. HUMAN SERVICE COORDINATOR – Abby Egan (continued)

- h. **Small Wonders**: Ad Hoc Committee has met several times. On December 15th will start moving all the toys the Police Department has collected from the drive at Walmart. There will be two collections, first will be Saturday, November 22 and the second will be Saturday, December 6. Since last year's collection was successful, we are going to share with the United Way this year. Need volunteers December 15, 16 and 17 to help organize the gifts. Monday, December 15 between Noon and 4:00 p.m. gifts will be brought to the Community Room.
- i. **Access Health CT/HUSKY (Medicaid)**: Open enrollment for Access Health Insurance exchange is Nov. 15th – Dec. 31st. People seeking private insurance should enroll by Dec. 15 to get coverage by Jan. 1st. At this time, there is no funding for community assisters. People seeking assistance will be directed to go to enrollment centers located at libraries in New Britain or Waterbury, or Access Health's store front at 200 Main St., New Britain.

I was informed at CLASS meeting in October that Access Health – who also handles all HUSKY A, B (families with minor children) and D applications (low income adults) – will also put everyone on HUSKY on the same schedule for renewing during open enrollment. That means that all 1,000+ individuals on HUSKY in Plymouth are going to be getting mailings starting in early November (some households can expect up to five letters saying different things). This is going to put a huge burden on this office. Usually we do help people with their HUSKY renewals, which have always been scattered throughout the year. I anticipate that in addition to all the people we have “regularly” helped, we also get an influx of people who have always been able to complete their forms independently since a) the form is brand new and completely different and b) they are expected to do the forms online. **We are getting some calls on this, everyone who is able has been able to successfully complete these independently online or over the phone.**

We either need to hire Erin back as seasonal help or we will have a policy that we send people to Access Health. This is already our busiest time of year, and adding potentially hundreds more calls for assistance is NOT doable.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

- a. Budget Update: Not available until audit completed.
- b. Special Accounts Update: Not available until audit completed.
- c. 501c3 Update: Town attorney Bill Hamzy working on. Will contact Heidi when complete.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Small Wonders: Discussed under Human Service Coordinator.
- b. Boots & Coats Gift Cards: Many requests for boots on the holiday gift program. \$25/boots, \$50/coats. Request \$1,000 for gift cards from Wonders Program. Brief discussion if gift cards for Seniors could be purchased out of the funds for the Small Wonders Program. No would have to come out of another account. Will discuss at the January meeting.

A motion was made by Elzina Zalaski; seconded by Helena Schwalm to take \$1,000 out of the Small Wonders Program Account to purchase gift cards.

Voted: To take \$1,000 out of the Small Wonders Program Account to purchase gift cards.

Motion Passed

- c. Access Health: Discussed by Human Service Coordinator.
- d. Personnel: Held discussion, recommendation further discussion with the Mayor.
- e. Election of Officers:

A motion was made by Dickie Zalaski to nominate Karen Saccu as Secretary, seconded by Sally Bain Picard. Accepted by Karen Saccu.

Voted: Karen Saccu, Secretary.

Motion Passed

A motion was made by Dickie Zalaski to nominate Sally Bain Picard as Vice Chairwoman, seconded by Karen Saccu. Accepted by Sally Bain Picard.

Voted: Sally Bain Picard, Vice Chairwoman.

Motion Passed

A motion was made by Sally Bain Picard to nominate Heidi Caron, as Chairwoman, seconded by Karen Saccu. Accepted by Heidi Caron.

Voted: Heidi Caron, Chairwoman

Motion Passed

VIII. CHAIRWOMEN'S COMMENTS: None

IX. COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS: None

X. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS: None

XI. NEXT MEETING

Thursday, January 8, 2015 (**Note: 2nd Thursday**)
7:00 p.m.
Senior Lounge

XIII. ADJOURNMENT:

A motion was made by Helena Schwalm; seconded by Dickie Zalaski to adjourn meeting at 9:02 p.m.

Voted: To adjourn November 20, 2014 meeting at 9:02 p.m.

Motion Passed

Respectfully submitted by:

Karen Saccu

Karen Saccu
Secretary
Human Services Commission
12/01/2014