

Wethersfield Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities

Wednesday, January 19, 2005

Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present: Carol Keenan, Kathleen Sullivan, Jim Grise, Frank Lane, Frank Meunier, Judy Tacey, Louise Ryan

Liaisons: Christine Taylor

Guests: Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager; Russ Morin, Mayor; Nancy Stillwell, Director of Human Services; Jim Clinch, Strategic Planning Committee; various members of the community

Introductions: Carol Keenan introduced the three guests from the Town of Wethersfield present to hear public discussion regarding transportation and Dial-a-Ride concerns. The three guests are Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, Russ Morin, Mayor, and Nancy Stillwell, Director of Human Services.

There will be a meeting for Connecticut's Real Choice First National Central Regional Forum on the Capital Community Inclusion of People with Disabilities. It will be held Thursday, February 3, 2005 from 9:30 am to noon at the William Pitkin Community Center in Wethersfield. Please RSVP by January 20th if you will attend. You can call 860-679-1513 and just leave name and number. Wethersfield was chosen to host this meeting because it is considered a model town for the programs offered for individuals with disability.

Public Comment:

- *Strategic Plan:* Jim Clinch attended the meeting as a representative of the Strategic Planning Committee for the Town of Wethersfield. The group is in the process of developing the town's strategic plan and is looking for input from the Committee for People with Disabilities. He is looking for problems or areas of interest to present to the town. An example given was transportation. The plan needs to be completed in 2-3 weeks. Ice and snow removal at crosswalks such as at the intersection of Church Street and Silas Deans Highway was suggested. Also, crosswalk sounds so that people who cross at intersections will be able to hear when to cross.
- *Transportation:* The following is a summary of the points the public made at this meeting regarding transportation for persons with disabilities.
 - Problems with Dial-a-ride and Ambassador. They send a van for two people and there are three people (therapeutic recreation trips). Ambassador has old vans that do not have enough room for a scooter to turn around. Cancellations are a problem. The drivers let people off and do paperwork in the parking lot.
 - The group was reminded by a committee member of a previous meeting in which the following had been discussed:
 - No seat safety restraints
 - Size of seats - not big enough
 - No room for large power wheelchairs
 - Limited number of appointments per person
 - It was suggested that the transportation company add "type of assistive device" to their database so that every time an appointment is booked, they will know what type of van to send.
 - Ambassador needs to train drivers not to feed guide dogs.
 - Service is restricted on Fridays for out of town medical appointments. Individuals are able to use ADA but not all are eligible. It was suggested that Monday through Thursday transportation service be decreased by one hour each day so that hours of service can be added onto Fridays.
 - Dial-a-ride is late on return trips. On occasion they can be 1/2 hour late.
 - There seems to be continued problems with transportation for the therapeutic recreation trips. This seems unusual because a town employee does the majority of coordination for the trips. Nancy Stillwell is aware of the situation and it looking into it.
 - The bus tonight was only accessible for one wheelchair and there are more than that here tonight. Previous

service had room for more chairs.

- One incident occurred in which a grocery trip left at 9:00am and didn't return until 1:00pm. Nancy Stillwell called regarding this incident and it was a result of a vehicle problem.
- One person indicated that she uses transportation for doctor's appointments and therapeutic recreation and thinks they are pretty reliable. Could work on more accessible vans, the vans are very narrow.
- It was suggested that the vans be checked more thoroughly as the motor went dead and the van did not have heat.
- One member described questionable behavior by a driver. Nancy Stillwell urged that anyone experiencing inappropriate behavior to call her immediately.
- Nancy Stillwell confirmed that drivers are supposed to help individuals on and off the van and provide door to door service. This help is variable depending on driver.
- Bonnie Therrien had indicated that there is a rumor that transportation to shopping areas is being cut back. She is checking with the Vice President of Connecticut Transit.
- Another individual indicated that the rides are okay with her.
- Jim Clinch pointed out that this issue of transportation was not in the previous strategic plan. He indicated that it needs to get into the strategic plan so that it can get into the town's budget.
- Mayor Morin pointed out that it is important to be here today. He will be looking for another town council member to come to the committee meetings. He indicated that Nancy Stillwell lobbies on behalf of social services with the town council. Everyone deserves quality service.
- Dial-a-ride contract is separate from Therapeutic Recreation trips. They have been told they can look at other companies and are not locked into Ambassador.
- Dial-a-ride cost to the town goes up 3% in July of this year.
- Discussion occurred regarding medical emergency. ADA is available as a back-up. Individuals may have to request a ride from a friend or an ambulance.
- The idea of soliciting volunteers to help with transportation had been suggested but cars cannot accommodate equipment.
- Christine Taylor indicated that Medicaid and state assistance do have other benefits for services that may need investigating.
- It was asked when putting a contract for a service out to bid for transportation if you have to go with the lowest bid or with a company with better quality. It must be justified why you are not going with the lowest bid.
- Lastly, please call or email the town with strategic plan ideas.

Due to inclement weather and extensive discussion on transportation, the remainder of the agenda will be discussed at the next meeting. There is no February meeting. Meeting adjourned at 8:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Sullivan
Committee Member