Board of Directors Zoom Board Meeting
Minutes
September 13, 2021

Present: Laurence B. Simon, Chairman; Melissa Gibbons, Secretary; Suzanne Brown; Christopher Carter; Paul Hopper; Nisha Hurst; Richard Kaplan; Nirmal Patel, MD MPH

Absent: Joan Merrill

Staff: Chris Ann Bennett, Infection Preventionist; Nadia Benson, Deputy and Director of Nursing; Linda Marini, Assistant to Executive Director; John Mastronardi, Executive Director; Elizabeth Mungai, Dir. Of Utilization, Clinical Outcomes and Rehab Svcs; Scott Neff, FNW Executive Director; Nunzio Raimo, Director of Financial Operations; Carissa Ronish, Therapeutic Recreation Administrator; Larry Vanterpool, Facilities Director; Dr. Frank Walsh, Medical Director; Margaret Wayne, Assoc. Director of Nursing

Guests: Jocelyn Braxton Armstrong; Amy Badini; Andy Duus, BET Liaison; Paul Scholtes; Mary Alice Schulte; Sheilah Smith; Maria Szpak; Ellen Wolfson, Commission on Aging;

Mr. Simon opened the meeting at 5:00 PM via Zoom Webinar.

Medical Director’s Report – presented by Dr. Frank Walsh

Dr. Walsh reported that the current census is 174, which is down slightly but not unexpected due to the holiday weekend (Labor Day) when a lot of discharges happen prior to the long weekend. Admissions have begun to increase over the last couple days.

All staff are required to submit an attestation form to the CT Department of Health verifying the validity of their COVID vaccination card. COVID-19 vaccination is now a requirement of anyone working in a nursing home. Anyone with an approved medical or religious exemption must be tested weekly. Vaccinations are becoming mandatory across the country and Connecticut has been one of the forerunners. Our Infection Preventionist has been assisting employees in many ways to make it easier for them to receive their vaccines.
Dr. Walsh stated that we will be administering the flu vaccine to all residents and staff beginning late October/early November. The flu vaccine can protect an individual for up to 6 months. Based on previous years, flu strains are coming later in the winter and into the spring. If we administer the vaccine too early, Dr. Walsh noted, residents/staff will not be protected long enough and may require a second vaccine at a later time. Dr. Walsh commented that we saw very few flu cases last year which could be attributed to quarantining and masking.

Review/Approval of Minutes of July 26, 2021

A motion to approve the minutes of July 26, 2021 was made by Mr. Carter, seconded by Ms. Hurst. A vote was taken, and the minutes were approved by a vote of 6-0-0. Ms. Brown and Mr. Kaplan had not yet arrived at the time of this vote.

Executive Director’s Report - presented by John Mastronardi

COVID-19 Vaccination Mandate - Mr. Mastronardi reported that on August 13th NW management issued a mandatory vaccination notice to all staff. At that time 81% of staff were vaccinated; today, 95% of overall staff have been vaccinated.
- 249 of 262 total employees, or 95%, have been vaccinated
- 135 of 139 full time employees, or 97%, have been vaccinated; of the 4 not vaccinated, 3 have approved exemptions and 1 is on FMLA
- 114 of 123 part time employees, or 93%, have been vaccinated; 9 employees are not eligible to report to work.
- Overall, 14 staff members, or 5%, remain unvaccinated at this time: 4, or 1.5% (3 full time & 1 part time) have received approved exemptions through the Town Human Resource and Legal Departments.
- All employees must complete and sign an attestation as to the validity of their COVID vaccine cards. These must be uploaded to the CT Department of Health (DPH) by Sept. 28, 2021, or the facility could face a monetary penalty of $20K per day for non-compliance.
- The DPH is closely following potential updates on recommendations for COVID-19 booster doses. No official FDA or Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) decision or recommendation has been made to administer the booster doses to any population, though we acknowledge this is likely and may happen soon. If and when a recommendation from the FDA or ACIP is issued, DPH will follow up with additional guidance and information on long term care facilities and getting those eligible the third booster shot.

Census/Medicaid – For August 2021, the average daily census was just over 180, compared to 178 in July 2021. The new Medicaid rate that was approved, effective July 21st through March 31st of 2022, was $335.65, an increase of $43 per day.

IT Support Position – We are in the final stages of selecting an appropriate candidate to fill this role. This individual will help us with our onsite technology needs and will also act as a liaison between NW and the TOG IT Department.
RFPs – Mr. Mastronardi reported that as a strategic part of our fiscal responsibility plan, our leadership team has been reviewing, revising, and submitting RFP’s with a particular emphasis on our most costly vendors:

- **Food & Nutritional Services** – With a response deadline of September 21st, the pre-bidding meeting was held today; we had seven companies participate and tour the kitchen the CAFÉ.
- **Rehab Services** – We have reviewed and revised the rehab contract and are in the final stages of submitting an RFP for those providers to bid on services.
- **Pharmacy** - Over the next two weeks we will be reviewing and revising our current pharmacy contract with a goal of awarding a contract at the start of the New Year.

Mr. Simon asked Mr. Mastronardi to comment on the new potential state mandate requiring facilities to have 1 full time Social Worker for every 60 beds. Mr. Mastronardi confirmed that under this mandate NW would need 4 full time Social Workers; we currently have 2 full time and 1 part time Social Worker. The State will be providing facilities with additional money to help pay for this mandate.

Mr. Simon stated that we have money from the state that we can use to incentivize or increase wages for staff. Mr. Mastronardi confirmed that we have approximately $542K that we should be spending on staff. Our leadership team has been working to formulate a plan as to how best to utilize those resources and how to allocate them.

Ms. Hurst asked Mr. Mastronardi to comment on the feeling/morale among employees, families, and staff in the facility since the August 13th vaccination mandate. Mr. Mastronardi believes the majority of staff are fine and have willingly received the vaccine for the safety of themselves, the residents and their families and peers. He believes the high percentage of staff that have received the vaccine speaks for itself. For the most part, staff are feeling “safer and sounder”. Mr. Carter congratulated Mr. Mastronardi and the staff for their work and amazing results. Mr. Mastronardi thanked everyone on the team for their efforts.

Mr. Simon asked how we communicate to families what our visitation status is. Mr. Mastronardi explained that it is updated on our website. Ms. Ronish has also been updating the email blast list so that an email could be sent out to communicate significant changes. Mr. Carter confirmed that the information is easy to find on the website, in the Family Section, located in the top right corner on the home page. Current visitation information and the most recent COVID-19 numbers are located here.

**Therapeutic Recreation – presented by Carissa Ronish**

Ms. Ronish stated that since her report in July the residents continue to attend a variety of Therapeutic Recreation activities.

The Recreation Department has conducted outdoor concerts in the courtyard, ice cream socials, and featured the summer’s sporting events, such as tennis and the Olympics, on the big screen TV. Residents continue to enjoy weekly exercise classes, Bingo and news programs.
Last week the residents viewed a patriotic slideshow in commemoration of September 11th.

In celebration of National Grandparents Day, residents received cards and puzzles and attended a music program honoring all of the NW grandparents and great-grandparents.

Darby Cartun, a local art historian, recently gave a lecture on Greenwich Art History and an in depth look of how the Bruce Museum came to be.

This month we have 2 outdoor BBQs and birthday celebrations planned for Wednesdays 9/15 and 9/22, at 12 noon in the Rose Garden. Mr. Simon encouraged Board members to attend one of these events; they are truly crowd favorites.

Fall events will include an Oktoberfest party, Halloween costume & pumpkin carving contests, autumn crafts, and our annual Veterans Day ceremony.

Ms. Ronish has also added an interactive art program based around Norman Rockwell that will be scheduled for October.

Ms. Ronish noted that we have not faced any transport challenges and volunteers continue to assist.

Ms. Ronish knows that families are beginning to think about what the holidays will look like this year. Although still a bit too early to tell, over the past several months Therapeutic Recreation has created meaningful holiday events, no matter what the circumstances. The same will hold true for this holiday season. There will be more to come on the holiday party and other events at a later time.

The monthly calendar of events, along with the monthly newsletter, continue to be posted on our website.

Ms. Amy Badini stated that Family Council’s main concern is engaging the residents, mind and body. She stated that in the past there were morning and afternoon activities. She asked what specific measures are being done to expand the current offerings? She suggested reaching out to local yoga studios for volunteers. She was aware that Ms. Mary Tate had put an ad for volunteers in at the Senior Center; but she suggested other alternatives where volunteers could be found, i.e. Next Door Greenwich, FaceBook groups.

Ms. Ronish reminded all that while in Outbreak Testing activities are brought back on unit. Weekend programs on TV are available on the units and any staff member can assist residents with that. We do currently have exercise programs 3 times per week in the morning (mornings work better with our population). She thanked Ms. Badini for the yoga suggestion and noted that it would perhaps be revisited.
Nursing Report - presented by Nadia Benson

Ms. Benson thanked the staff and Ms. Chris Ann Bennett, Infection Preventionist, for the tremendous job they did on the push to get employees vaccinated. Ms. Bennett has offered transportation to vaccination locations and has offered her support and encouragement to those with fears and hesitation about the vaccine. This has greatly contributed to the 95% staff vaccination rate we have attained to date. There are a still a few unvaccinated staff who we are trying to encourage to either get the vaccine or to let us know what their intentions are so that we may staff accordingly.

Ms. Joanne Kotulski will be here beginning tomorrow to train and evaluate the nursing staff on the units.

Vaccination Report – presented by Chris Ann Bennett

Ms. Bennett reported that to date:
- 95% of the staff have had at least one dose of the vaccine
- 88% of the staff are fully vaccinated; 97% of full-time staff are vaccinated

Ms. Bennett is monitoring to make sure staff members receive their second shot. Although the 2nd dose has a schedule of 21 to 28 days from the first dose, there has been no strict guidance that it must be on the 21st or 28th day. Ms. Bennett is working with a couple of individuals who are not, or close to not, being compliant with getting that 2nd dose.

In the last DPH meeting attended by Ms. Bennett, it was discussed that the boosters are coming, but they do not know what the plan is yet or how it will be implemented. Since it is not possible for us to send our residents out of the facility to receive their boosters, Ms. Bennett believes there will be a clinic offered here onsite.

Ms. Sheilah Smith commented that family members have been on the floors helping out and she believes it is clear that the staff cuts are significant and there are not enough staff available. Ms. Smith questioned what is being done, and when will this situation change so that there is adequate staffing?

Ms. Benson responded that what Ms. Smith is seeing on the units does not correlate with the staff cuts she referenced. The cuts involved 3 PCC’s and 4 CNA’s (one of which was brought back). Ms. Benson stated that what is being seen on the floors, primarily among the CNA’s, is the result of call outs, FMLAs, PLOAs, vacations, etc. Ms. Benson believes we will see improvement in this situation toward the end of the year.

Mr. Mastronardi commented that saying the staff cuts were “deep” is simply not true. With 196 nursing staff, the elimination of 3 CNA positions does not symbolize deep cuts. All facilities are experiencing this situation post pandemic, this is not exclusive to NW; some CNA’s and LPN’s are actually reconsidering their occupations. Mr.
Mastronardi noted that our staffing is actually much better than other facilities. We are doing the best we can with what we have and the challenges we face.

Mr. Simon noted that we have money to put toward salary incentives for staff. We need to use this money to increase wages or incentives so that the CNA's/Nurses want to work with us and consequently have better attendance records. This has become a very changing, competitive environment. Fortunately, the State is giving us $540K that must be spent by the end of the year on staff wage increases; this will be a great help.

**Building Committee Report - presented by Larry Vanterpool**

Mr. Vanterpool announced that this is National Housekeeping Week and we are planning several activities next week to honor these very committed individuals. He encouraged everyone as you walk through the facility and encounter a Housekeeping staff member, to please thank them for their service and for the job they do. Mr. Vanterpool commented that this department is, by far, one of the best groups of people he has every worked with; during the pandemic he received zero pushback from them about coming to work, which is a great reflection on their strong work ethic.

The Pavilion External Renovations – Mr. Hopper reported that this project is now nearly complete. A final walk-through/punch list will take place at the end of this week. The completion of this project was extended slightly due to all the rain we have experienced, and also to include the necessary repairs/updatess to the fire escape. Mr. Hopper noted that the deadline wasn’t as important as the quality of the work and the end result of the complete project.

Tower Electrical Panel upgrade – Mr. Vanterpool reported that all of the parts have been ordered and the electrical contractor should receive them within the next couple of weeks. We have a lot of work to do internally in terms of how we are going to manage and coordinate the necessary shut downs to facilitate the upgrade. We will also need to make our second attempt at receiving approval from DPH. Mr. Vanterpool does not anticipate any pushback and will expect approval by late October or early November. Mr. Vanterpool also stated that because we utilized only approximately 55% of the original budget, the building committee is considering advancing the progress of the second upgrade of the localized panels in the patient care areas. We have engaged another engineer to develop those plans, and those plans should be finalized this week and an RFB will be developed. Hopefully, the numbers will not exceed the remainder of those available funds.

American Rescue Plan (ARP) – Mr. Vanterpool stated that the Town is in the very early stages with their involvement in the American Rescue Plan (ARP). The Town has received approximately $31M in conjunction with this plan, and there will be preliminary meetings held with the Town Administrator and other Town Departments to determine the best use of these funds. We hope it will allow NW to advance some of our physical needs/improvements. Mr. Simon suggested addressing 3 areas: 1.) the accumulation of water in the water pit from Parsonage Road; 2.) the rooftop units that will need replacing; and 3.) improving the filtration system and the overall air quality and flow throughout NW.
Interior Maintenance Plan – We have engaged companies with current Town contracts and solicited quotes for frequencies and painting of different areas. Mr. Vanterpool has also engaged Red Thread, a Town vendor, to gauge and divide the costs of carpet replacement and the vinyl flooring throughout the facility. Once we have these numbers, we may move into the second phase of this interior plan, which could include upgrading resident televisions to larger sizes. Mr. Vanterpool noted that we need to do the best we can to utilize the limited funds available.

Ms. Gibbons asked if we have a sustainability plan in place. Mr. Vanterpool responded that every time we can engage into more sustainable solutions we will certainly evaluate them. Although, he did note that in his experience, those solutions often come at double the cost of a more standard project solution.

Mr. Simon noted that at the October Board meeting he would like to discuss how the Board visualizes the single and double rooms to look, for interior design. In October/November the Board will need to vote on a capital budget and we will need to know whether we need more money for interior/exterior improvements. It would also be helpful to know the amount of ARP funds we will have come our way.

Mr. Simon reported that EBI Consulting performed a comprehensive survey of our building to determine its’ physical needs and capital assessment. Mr. Simon will distribute this report to the Board. He noted that our main budget item for next year is repairing/replacing the elevators which was not a major focus of this report.

Finance Report – presented by Nunzio Raimo

Mr. Raimo reviewed the Financial Statement and Operating Results for the period ending August 31, 2021 (first 2 months of FY 2022):

- NW Census by payer class for August 2021: total days billed were 5,595.
- Occupancy Percentage for August 2021 was 89%, off budget by only 4%; average beds per day for August 2021 was 180.5. Our occupancy percentages are good for Private Pay and also Medicare A, and are exceeding or somewhere near budget for the numbers that provide us with the highest reimbursement.
- Revenue by Payer Class: August revenue from operations was $2,731,569. Private pay was budgeted at 26% but was actually 27% of revenue for August 2021.
- In both July and August, for the first time in a very long time, we have actually beat our budgeted targeted revenue. The budgeted monthly targeted revenue for fiscal year 2022 is $2.43 million. Income from operations for July and August was $2.56M and $2.731M respectively, and is census driven.
- We saw better revenue for the months of July and August also due to an increase in the Medicaid rate. The rate increased by $42.98 from $292.66 to $335.64 starting on July 1st through March 31, 2022.
- Two efficiency metrics were highlighted: 1.) Monthly revenue per FTE (which is an indicator of staffing efficiency) for August 2021 was $12,072; 2.) Revenue per billable patient day (which shows the efficiency of our revenue stream from operations) for August 2021 was $488.00.
● Revenue August YTD Actual was $5,291,110, compared to budget of $4,861,040, resulting in a positive variance of $430,071.
● Expenses from Operations for August 2021 YTD Actual were $2,795,630 compared to budget of $3,444,618, resulting in a negative variance of $648,988.
● For August YTD 2021 Salaries & Wages were under budget by $271K.
● For August YTD 2021 OTPS were $58K under budget.
● For August YTD 2021 Supplies & Materials were below budget by $311K.
● For August YTD 2021 Maintenance expenditures were under budget by $7,400.
● For August YTD 2021 Benefits were under budget by $135K.
● August 2021 YTD Margin Before Debt & Allocation of $2,495,480, $1M over Budget.
● August 2021 YTD Margin Before Debt & Capital was $1,680,782 compared to our budget of $461,534 resulting in a variance of $1,219,248. Actual Capital Expenditures were $297,683. Operating Profit before Debt Service was $1,383,099 with a positive variance of $1,219,248.
● Overall Gain/(Loss) Fiscal Year to date at $238,653.

Mr. Raimo noted that with the additional $542,000 that we have to allocate to payroll right now, the indication is, we can only spend that on payroll. It will not cover any benefits, payroll taxes, or anything beyond that. Any allocation that we make for staff in order to try to attract new staff and reward current staff members, it has to be non-pensionable/non-benefit salary.

**Marketing – presented by Christopher Carter**

Mr. Carter reported the following:

The two-month geofencing ad campaign with Today Media ended in August. The campaign garnered over 208,000 impressions and over 600 visits to the website. The greatest engagement with our ads were with prospects at the Montefiore area, St. Joseph’s Medical Center, Burke Rehab and St. John’s Riverside.

In August the Witherell concentrated all of its’ advertising dollars on Google pay per click ads; no Facebook ads or Google ads. We had over 45,000 impressions and 2,000 visits to the site.

Mr. Carter reported that we just started our print ads this September and will feature skilled nursing in both Greenwich and Stanford Magazines, the Greenwich Time the Stanford Advocate and the Greenwich Symphony program.

In an effort to get a better understanding of our advertising effectiveness, Harrison Edwards will be developing a questionnaire for the Admissions Director, so he can ask prospects where and how they may have heard about NW.

There were 26 Facebook posts since the last Board meeting, including Simple Ways Caregivers Can Stay Active. They also included the return of the outdoor barbecues in September during resident lunchtime.
Mr. Carter stated that the website is continually updated to reflect the latest COVID information and visitation guidance. The new website is moving forward and doing well with its main goal of attracting new residents.

Two new blogs were posted: 1.) The Challenges of Aging - What Caregivers Should Know; and 2.) Making our House a Home, the Witherell Facilities Team, featuring Larry Vanterpool and Michel Baptist.

There was an article in the Greenwich Time that spotlighted World War II veteran and NW resident Mr. George Tai who received the Congressional Gold Medal for his service.

Mr. Carter noted that that there was some unspent marketing money at year end. They will make sure that Harrison Edwards is using all the available money this Fiscal Year and exploring other ways that we can grow our business.

Friends of Nathaniel Witherell (FNW) – presented by Scott Neff

Mr. Neff reported that the Friends of Nathaniel Witherell Annual Meeting will be held via phone conference on Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 at 9:00 AM.

The fall Community Appeal direct mailer is currently being developed and will be mailed to approximately 15,000 Greenwich households during the first week of October.

Chairman’s Discussion – presented by Laurence Simon

Mr. Simon distributed a draft calendar of Board Meetings for 2022. A vote will be taken at the October Board meeting. If Board members have any comments or major conflicts, Mr. Simon asks that they notify him in advance of the October meeting.

Ms. Merrill is absent this evening as she has experienced a great deal of personal property loss and damage due to Hurricane Ida. Mr. Simon shared that our thoughts are with her.

Hurricane Ida and Regal Care – Mr. Mastronardi explained that our Mutual Aid Plan was enacted when Regal Care on King Street needed to evacuate. The Mutual Aid provides a venue/agency for us to coordinate emergency services, via website, email, and phone. It involves facilities calling each other for bed availability, vehicle availability, and help by the GPD, EMS and GFD as well. Mr. Mastronardi and Ms. Benson remained in touch with these parties throughout the day/night. NW would have been able to provide 15 safe and appropriate beds for evacuated residents. However, Greenwich Woods, because of their extremely low census, was able to take all residents that were evacuated into a vacant wing of their facility; along with their staff, pharmacy, linens, supplies, etc. Regal Care does not know when/if they will be able to open again due to the damage they suffered. That combined with the fact that Greenwich Woods has filed plans to become an Assisted Living Facility, may provide the Witherell an opportunity to increase admissions. Mr. Simon stated that we did a very good job in our participation with the Mutual Aid network.
Virtual / In-person Board meetings – Mr. Simon asked if Board members wanted to return to in-person meetings or to some hybrid schedule of in-person and virtual meetings. Mr. Simon is in favor of beginning with the October meeting, meeting in-person in the Chapel, unless we have an outbreak or change in circumstance. He asked Board members to call or email him to discuss their preferences.

Mr. Simon stated that healthcare has turned out to be quite a dynamic environment over the last year and a half. The Federal and State Governments are dispersing money to nursing homes to ensure that the elderly are well cared for, and that people will want to come and work in these facilities. It is a challenge to keep track of the funds that are coming to NW, to spend them effectively, and continue to maintain and run the Witherell in a way that is in accordance with the town requirements and to make money.

The Teamsters represent all of the CNA’s, LPN’s, Food Service Workers and Housekeepers at NW. Their Contract will be submitted to the RTM in October for approval. The Teamsters have not seen a wage increase in over 2 years. Mr. Simon commented that when we offer a CNA a starting position at $18 per hour, they are not going to choose to work for us because everyone else is now going to be paying more than that. That is where the sign-on bonuses or the stipends are going to come to our advantage. Mr. Simon also said that we pay part-time, non-represented Dietary employees $13/hour. We need to find a way to pay them $17/$18/$19 per hour to work for us. We need to improve our competitiveness. The State continues to give nursing homes money and they want us to have staff to provide proper nursing care.

Mr. Simon stated that although there is money coming to nursing homes from Federal/State Governments, there are also many staffing challenges. We at NW need to find the correct way to navigate it all, in order to provide the right kind of nursing care and determine the best way to attract people to the Witherell so we may continue our current good performance.

**New Business - none**

A motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:25 PM was made by Ms. Hurst, seconded by Mr. Carter and approved by a vote of 8-0-0.

Respectfully Submitted,
Linda Marini
Sept. 21, 2021