

## Historical Summary Updated 2019

Seniors in New Canaan have been meeting as a group for over 70 years. Meetings began in churches for dessert and a program; later meetings were held at Waveny House.

In 1986 the New Canaan Needs Assessment, funded by the United Way of New Canaan and the New Canaan Community Foundation, found a need for a "drop-in" center, for coordination of services and for a central source for information and referral. To address these issues, the United Way established a Planning Council, which included a committee to study the needs of seniors. At a meeting in May 1987, that Committee voted unanimously to establish a Senior Center.

In March 1988, an Executive Director for the new Center was hired by the Recreation Department, with support by the Board of Directors of the Senior Center. Program expenses were funded through the Town budget, with start-up funds contributed by the New Canaan Community Foundation, churches and other community groups. In May 1988 the Center opened with a Tuesday-Wednesday program in Waveny House.

By 1992 attendance had increased enough that the Senior Center Board of Directors appointed a Long Range Planning Committee to begin an intensive evaluation of the program. It concluded that additional days and a "home of its own" would enable the Center to be more responsive to the needs and interests of the Town's seniors. An intensive site search led to selection of the Stone Cottage in Waveny Park as an ideal location. It boasted town ownership, one-floor accessibility, extensive grounds for outdoor activities and parking, and welcoming charm.

The project received enthusiastic approval, contingent upon raising the requisite funds. Community support for the project resulted in over 1,100 individuals, organizations, churches, and foundations contributing \$950,000. The renovated facility was named the Lapham Community Center in recognition of the generosity of the Lapham family. Programs meeting five days a week commenced in September 1996.

Attendance growth was phenomenal. When the Center opened, 550 individuals had been attending the 2 1/2 day per week programs at Waveny House and other locations around town. At the end of FY2001, 1,044 individuals made 17,892 visits to the Center, representing a 90% growth in attendance over the 5 year period. Demand for classes superceded availability.

A committee studied program and space needs for and proposed the construction of a two story, 6455 sq. ft. annex consisting of a large lecture/fitness room, kitchen, multipurpose room, storage and rest rooms on the main level and a large game room, a multipurpose room, restrooms, and utility room on the lower level. Expansion was financed through community-wide contributions from individuals, churches, civic organizations, and foundations. As with the Lapham Community Center renovation, the new annex was gifted to the Town by the Board of Directors; operating costs of the building and programs continue to be supported by the Town through the Parks and Recreation Department.

Today over 100 classes and programs are offered throughout the year attracting, in FY2019, over 1,100 residents who made over 30,000 visits to the Lapham Community Center.