Senior Center Committee
Strategic Planning Notes
07/31-08/01/25

The Milwaukee County Commission on Aging's Senior Center Committee held a 2-half-day strategic planning session to determine goals for the Committee's future work over the next two years.

There are many potential priorities for Milwaukee County's Senior Centers. The strategic planning session resulted in 5 main goals:
1) Make a concerted effort to maintain the current senior center buildings in a way that ensures accessibility and acceptability of the space.
2) Build on and promote self-governing programs as the primary model for program delivery in senior centers.
3) Diversify programmatic partners of the senior centers to realize the vision of the HUBs report.
4) Create a messaging strategy and materials for broad and diverse reach, focusing on advocacy and senior center constituents.
5) Generate fiscal sustainability through the creation of a collective, non-profit agency.

The next steps for the Senior Center Committee will be to first gain official acknowledgement and approval of these goals from the Commission on Aging. Next, the Committee will form workgroups for each of these goals and to create objectives and tactics for the work. The Area Agency on Aging and Department of Health and Human Services will support this work.

The following pages of this document capture the notes from the discussion during the strategic planning session. These notes consist of four areas of focus for the Committee, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis, and aspirations under each of the four focus areas. Through discussion, the group arrived at the five goals given the SWOT analysis, aspirations in each focus area, and discussing what might be most successful and impactful in the current environment.

Four Focus Areas
1) Programming
2) Physical Space
3) Messaging
4) Funding/Partnerships

SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
- HUBS Report - Serving Older Adults - History - Welcoming Culture - Established population - Nutritional support - Orientation toward health - Have the authority for voice - Profound impact on the community - Many life saving anecdotes - Generational identity - Built technical literacy, which was a protective factor during COVID - Opportunity to volunteer & share skills	- History - Low participant engagement (6000 participants out of 190,000 seniors) - Availability of senior centers is unknown to public - Stigma - Reliance on government funding - Lack of strategic locations - Hours of operations - Our deficit/loss-based programming - Seen as a place to do activities that may not inspire participation - Could better use the parks - Need diverse modes of advertising - Senior Center name may be confining
Opportunities	Threats
- Pair housing and senior centers for development dollars - Develop volunteer network - Listen to those who are apathetic - Void of McGovern creates opportunity - Advocacy voice - Use new models to engage GenX - Storytelling - Podcasts - Hybrid opportunities- maximize the internet - Do programming outside of parks - Communicating opportunities beyond County programming - Maximize education sessions - Build assets that could be seen as deficits later - Economic reality creates new paths for the work - Opportunity to genuinely change the narrative around aging and individualism. This is not decline but empowerment - Global change of people aging longer brings more participants	- Uncertainty - Stigma - Apathy - Abrasive culture for organizing - Manipulation of messaging - Generational identity - Condition of current centers - Economic reality of the County budget - Individualism and anti-publicism - Imminent closing of McGovern

Potential Goal Ideas in Four Programming Areas

1. Programming
   - listen to community to define services at each center
   - promote engagement
   - determine who is engaging in what
   - determine modality for delivery
   - diversify programmatic providers
   - promote self-governing programming
   - develop volunteer coordinator
   - review position needs to fit to HUBs report
   - shift from deficit-based programming to building community
   - review RFP for programing to see if it fits the HUBs report

2. Physical Space
   - Focus on current County buildings
   - maintain specific space for seniors
   - explore partners to improve space- could a partners build/reconstruct space that we share?
   - explore funding models for capital dollars
   - advocate that City zoning require senior center space for new developments
   - explore vacant buildings
   - make a concerted effort to beautify the 5 current buildings
   - make all buildings accessible, adaptable, and agile
   - review best practice spaces (e.g., United Community Center)
   - utilize service directory to inform geography
   - explore options to take county ownership out of physical spaces
   - build on the success of investment at Clinton-Rose

3. Messaging
   - branding/name strategy- "senior" may be problematic because people don't see themselves in it
   - demand what we need- build an advocacy coalition
   - craft message for what we need- a vision for older adults
   - get buy-in to vision from government leaders
   - craft message to break through stigma and encourage participation
   - craft message for financial investment

4. Funding/Partnerships
   - explore current service provision to include partnerships as central to service delivery
   - learn from municipalities
   - explore partnerships for space
   - which attributes require partnership to realize?

- which partners are a good fit?
- partners at different levels: program, funding, power/influence
- engage the County Executive's office
- engage philanthropy
- create a "Friends Of" group, seek a possible endowment
- advocate for increased tax levy for senior centers
- create a sustainable alternate sourve of funding
- promote discipleship for funding services outside of government
- hold the City of Milwaukee accountable for providing for seniors