



**Commission on Aging  
Select Committee on Senior Centers Meeting  
August 23, 2022**

**Members Present:**

Chair Gloria Pitchford-Nicholas  
Vice Chair Gene Guskowski  
Commissioner John Griffith  
Commissioner Cherie Swenson  
Leon Davis  
Sandra Dotson  
Deborah Lewis  
Kent Mayfield  
Howard Snyder  
Alice Steuck Konkel  
Cathy Wood, SOA

**Members Excused:**

County Supervisor Sequanna Taylor  
Patricia Delmenhorst  
Sharron Fitak  
Sally Lindner  
Kelsie Lyons

**Milwaukee County Staff**

Timothy Christian, *DAS*  
Debra Horton, *DHHS*  
Daniel Idzikowski, *DHHS*  
David Muhammed, *DHHS*  
Vonda Nyang, *DHHS*  
Jill Knight, *DHHS*  
Darryl Whyte, *DAS*

**Attendees from the Public:**

Shelia Carter, SOA  
Diane Chilinski, SOA  
Laz Jackson, SOA  
Miriam Kaja, SOA  
James Kimble  
Commissioner Gloria Miller  
Vevette Hill-Nwagbaraocha, SOA  
Bobby Thomson

**MINUTES**

**I. WELCOME, CALL TO ORDER AND REVIEW OF MEETING PURPOSE**

Chairwoman Gloria Pitchford-Nicholas called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. and congratulated Dan Idzikowski on his selection as DHHS Aging Unit Director. She welcomed committee members and thanked them for being one of the hardest working committees she has been a part of and reviewed the charge listed below with Committee:

1. Evaluate suggestions presented in the "Envisioning" report
2. Categorize suggestions as long or short term
3. Review programming and infrastructure needs at each Milwaukee County Senior Center
4. Develop and monitor short and long-term plans for senior centers and senior center programming.
5. Ascertain resources necessary to carry out these plans.
6. Report findings and recommendations to the Advisory Council.

## II. ROLL CALL

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Aging Services Director Idzikowski took roll call. A quorum was present.

## III. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF THE APRIL 12th & 28th, MAY 12th & 24th, JUNE 14th & 28th 2022, SENIOR CENTER SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES.

**MOTION:** To approve the Committee's meeting minutes for April 12th & 28th, May 12th & 24th, and June 14th 2022.

**ACTION:** Motion passed unanimously (Mayfield, Griffith seconds).

Chair Pitchford Nicholas summarized the proceedings of the last meeting of the Select Committee on Senior Centers on June 28, 2022 and noted that the Committee did not meet in July or early August.

**MOTION:** To approve the minutes of the Committee's meeting on June 28, 2022.

**ACTION:** Motion passed unanimously (Guszkowski, Mayfield seconds).

## IV. REVIEW OF CRITICAL QUESTIONS AND SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Chair Pitchford Nicholas called the Committee to begin with a consideration of Question #2 Should Milwaukee County continue to own and operate its five Milwaukee County senior centers? Which of the five senior centers, if any, must be maintained? She then summarized the proposed answer and opened the floor for discussion of this response in light of the Commission's senior center vision statement and the attributes for senior centers contained therein.

Vice Chair Gene Guszkowski reviewed the Critical Questions and Summary of Recommendations document with the Committee. He noted that the purpose of the Committee is really to provide a long term vision for senior centers to serve the more than 180,000 older adults in Milwaukee County. Each of the existing senior centers have been tested against the desire attributes and we have learned that improvements can be made to all and some may need more assistance and different strategies than others. We want to be able to say that our vision can stand up to these critical questions.

Guszkowski continued by noting that the implementation of this vision is going to take a long time and will require the investment of many new resources. However, he warned the Committee not to be distracted by the challenges inherent in implementation. The Committee is not there yet and there will be many different ways that the vision can be implemented. Step back from the

worry of implementation or choice of strategy. What we are trying to approve today is how well does our vision respond to these six important questions that have broader community implications.

Idzikowski adds that the County is committed to this public process and that implementation could take many different forms and we are committed to gathering feedback from the constituents who might be affected by any particular proposal before moving forward toward implementation. Second, Milwaukee County has very limited resources and it is only fair to point out that these fiscal constraints have in part forced us to consider how we can continue to support our older adults through our senior centers in light of shrinking tax levy available to support all facilities in the County.

Snyder comments that while the County may well have a fiscal problem, its not the Committee's responsibility to pay attention to them. Our job is to reimagine what can be for the senior centers in a way that get funders excited about their future – both those who we know and those who we don't yet know. This is an opportunity to come up with a vision that Milwaukee County can be excited about, find the money for, and support. Everyone knows there is no money now. That doesn't matter because we are imagining what we want to see in the future and create a proposal that all the politicians, bureaucrats, and outside partners want to put money into and when they are excited about something the money can be found.

Snyder continues: What we are doing isn't for us. It is for the people who are coming after us – for our children and grandchildren. We want to be sensitive to our current participants, but this is really about future generations. There are two facilities where the communities deserve something are better than what they have got – Kelly and McGovern. If we can reimagine something for the near future – something that is new, different, and is just a better facility for seniors is what our goal should be. Snyder also commented that he worked in Westlawn for six years and thinks the Westlawn proposal is terrible. A senior center needs to stand on its own and be special and another facility at Westlawn would get lost. The residents at McGovern don't support it and neither should we.

Pitchford-Nicholas clarifies that Snyder is advocating for the replacement of McGovern and Kelly with new facilities in north Milwaukee and Cudahy.

Griffith asks what do we do next after this plan? The Committee needs to be advocates – not just with the County Executive and Board, but with the community, city alders and state and federal legislators. We need to be advocates to put the plan into action. Expresses hope that committee members will join the advocacy committee or other Commission on Aging committees.

Mayfield says that is critically important the Committee realize that the work of this committee is not to implement the vision, but to develop a vision that can be implemented. Imagine a future that is not our present – for future generations and for those who do not utilize senior centers now. How many centers and where is a peripheral question. What do we want to do that will sustain and improve the quality of life for a larger number of older adults in Milwaukee County? While a lot of time has been focused on the bricks and mortar, we are also really talking about how services might be delivered to older adults, including the management of the programming in senior centers. Broader vision.

Wood likes what Mayfield says, but asks when did we send out experts to the centers to determine whether it made more sense to renovate and remodel or close and build new. Encourage the whole committee to visit the centers. Staff have made the centers better in the last few years. Is this our next step – to close down and build new, or another group takes up the next step. How did we go from our vision to our answer in question #3 that we should have additional centers perhaps smaller. Given Kelly and McGovern, it seems we need bigger centers not smaller ones, because there is so much programming already going on in those centers. Larger centers can operate more efficiently than smaller centers.

Guszkowski notes that the committee has to some extent relied on his expertise as a design professional with a long history in senior living and center design. Evaluation as to renovation versus building new in terms of cost should be accomplished in the implementation phase by other professionals. However, we have evaluated the current use of all of the facilities against our vision. Kelly and McGovern are simply undersized versus the three other centers which have about 30,000 square feet. If you want to put all the attributes into all of the centers, something has to be done to the 2 smaller centers.

But why think about something smaller? Isn't this counterintuitive? There are ethnic groups that are not comfortable within the existing centers. There is an opportunity to create smaller centers that are part of a longer term vision of regionalization and diversification that might be more appealing to residents. Even with the smaller centers however, if you could start from scratch and build out a space designed as a senior center, you would have a much better building serving as a senior center than McGovern or Kelly, even in the same footprint. The current buildings at McGovern and Kelly would be really hard to adapt to that kind of use. We did talk about these ideas in our discussion and it is worthwhile to be reminded of why we came to this conclusion.

Wood asks what about the possible plans to renovate the existing centers?  
When did we vote to replace the centers with housing attached to new centers?

Guszkowski replies that the committee didn't vote on that, but was exploring financially viable ways to construct and pay for new senior centers. The kind of money it would take to add 15,000 square feet to McGovern or Kelly would be really hard to come by, especially in light of the County's financial position. The idea of new spaces is to have the burden of development taken on by developers who want to create a mixed use structure and is looking for a use for the ground floor and we would offer the opportunity to develop the ground floor as a senior center. We have implied that we would be a good tenant, because then the burden on the County would be just to pay rent and provide programming.

There has been concern about mixing private use and public use. For example, if housing was built above the senior center, would the center be viewed as the sole domain of the people who live in that building or can it be a community resource, as has often been the case in the development of mixed use buildings.

Pitchford-Nicholas reviews the second question and the proposed answer. She notes that the three larger centers referred to are Clinton Rose, Wilson, and Washington Park. Asks for feedback on the proposed answer to question 2.

Mayfield states that the answer the Committee has arrived at is "No, the County need not own all the senior centers." Rather, the County should commit itself to operate programming in at least five senior centers, but these do not need to be the 5 existing senior centers. We are instead suggesting that the County will maintain three of centers it owns and two others will be replaced. It is not critical that Milwaukee County own any new facilities.

Wood states she is uncomfortable with the conclusion that the 2 smaller centers can't be upgraded. Suggests changing the wording to own "at least" 3 centers.

Horton states that she is confused. Thought that when they did the matrix that was to upgrade all of the centers. We seem to have a vision we didn't agree to.

Pitchford Nicholas states that we did agree upon the vision. We are trying to apply that vision to these questions. What happens to the 5 existing Milwaukee County owned senior centers when applying the vision to them?

Steuck Konkel states we are getting into semantics. If the intent is to meet the attributes at every center, then our recommendation is to improve, add to, or replace the smaller centers so that the facilities do meet the standards that we are looking to have in place. It is not the Committee's responsibility to decide how to make that happen. It is our conclusion that the smaller facilities do not meet the standards that we're looking for. We don't need to reach a conclusion about the perfect solution for the centers that don't meet the model.

Pitchford Nicolas notes that the third paragraph recommends that all of the centers will be maintained until such time that new centers are fully operational. There would have to be a lot of PR that goes into that and that is not our job. What is our recommendation so that we can say the best centers that we have found have included all the attributes and met our vision.

Guszkowski offers a compromise. We are sinking a lot of our assumptions that the Housing division is going to come through and develop new centers on the north and south sides of Milwaukee. Perhaps instead, we should offer two strategies in regard the two smaller centers – replacement with new facilities, or major renovation of those centers. This could cover both bases.

Jackson suggests if the design of a new center exceeds the attributes in the current centers – we should be coming from a place of exceeding or expanding. In regard to the smaller centers, we should recommend a strategy to replace or renovate the two smaller facilities. Konkell recommends adding “and expand”. “In the long run we recommend a strategy to replace or renovate and expand the two smaller facilities.”

Idzikowski makes changes to the text and tries to summarize the Committee’s consensus.

Jackson states that the way Idzikowski stated this it appears that our primary recommendation is to get rid of the smaller facilities and replace them. He thinks the two strategies should be offered as equal alternatives and the wording should follow. We should keep an open mind to all options. Either replace, substantially renovate, or expand the two smaller centers.

Mayfield states that we have spent an hour and a half trying to wordsmith a response to the second question without reference to a response to the first one. Go back to the questions and develop a coherent response to all three questions. Does not think we can come up with the final copy at this meeting.

Wood now states that we recommend the word expand first, but don’t worry about that now.

Idzikowski states that we can finish this task today. He then summarizes the revised answer, including a specific answer to the first question – that no, Milwaukee County need not own the 5 senior centers. Which of the centers should be maintained? The three large ones, with some modifications. The two smaller centers need not be maintained and can be replaced or substantially renovated and expanded. The point is that we are recommending that programming at 5 senior centers be maintained, but that programming need not be in the 5 existing senior centers.



Pitchford Nicholas suggests that she wants to hear everyone's feedback and then have time to rest on the answer before making a final decision. In addition, the Committee is not going to get to question # 3 at this point. So we will come back to this at our next meeting in September.

Snyder comments that first thing that Mr. Jackson said got lost – that the idea is to make all of the centers “better” than what we have right now. It is a good point to say that we want more not less – and if we accept the status quo, we are going to get less because the buildings will be run down. Retrofitting the buildings is not the kind of re-imagining that we all started with in 2021. Coming up with something new is what sparked imagination and gives the County Board something that they want to fund. “Just fix up what is there” says to the County Board, this Committee doesn't know what it wants. They are giving us the leeway to do anything instead of telling us what the vision is. I will vote for a compromise, but I am ready to vote on this now. Calls the question – otherwise we will just keep revisiting this and never be done. Are we under Roberts Rules of Order?

Idzikowski states that the Committee is operating under Roberts Rules of Order.

Pitchford-Nicholas believes we need to give each question really thoughtful consideration and we have made progress – what is different is that we have developed the attributes and they are the driving force for any development. We didn't rush through anything. Looking back we should say that we have come to consensus. Whoever takes this to implementation shouldn't rush this either and get the public involved. We need to come back and make sure that everyone is comfortable with that.

Idzikowski notes that it is important to answer this question well. As we all know, this is a political process and while we should not let funding be a limitation on our vision, the reality is that from an imagination point of view, in order to get the funding we want to make the vision a reality, we have been told by the County that a prioritization would be extraordinarily helpful in moving our case for investment forward. Serving up a plate of “do whatever you want to do” is not an inspiring vision and is not likely to garner any additional investment into our centers.

Milwaukee County DHHS doesn't own any of these facilities. We control the programming funds, and we can advocate for facilities where we have programming, but ultimately it is the County Board and administration that own and operate or renovate any of these centers. The County has a committee to decide every year which of the thousands of assets the county owns get attention.

There is no clear County message to say that above all other facilities in need, the Milwaukee County senior centers are standing in first place. What we have been told is that in order to garner County investment in any of the senior centers, we need you to prioritize which centers you really want to invest in and to help us to get to the point where we have a smaller overall commitment with regard to our physical space. Those are also considerations that have to play into this from a realistic political point of view.

Pitchford Nicholas asks whether the Committee would be willing to come together next week Tuesday at 1:00pm to finish this work.

Wood notes that St. John's on the Lake is partnering with SOA to show a documentary next week Tuesday, starting at 11:00 a.m., followed by a lunch and facilitated discussion. Not sure if she or Mayfield would be available at 1:00p.m.

Pitchford Nicholas then asks if the Committee could attend next Tuesday at 9am.

**V. REPORT ON CAPITAL PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS**

Report was tabled until the next Committee meeting.

**VI. REPORT ON SOA BOARD MEETINGS WITH MILWAUKEE COUNTY STAFF**

Report was tabled until the next Committee meeting.

**VII. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

The Committee will complete its discussion of questions #2 and #3 of the "Critical Questions" document and take up the reports on proposed capital improvements and discussion with the Serving Older Adults of Southeast Wisconsin board.

**VIII. NEXT MEETING TIME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Committee agreed to meet on Tuesday, August 30, 2022 at 9:00 a.m. in lieu of the scheduled September 13<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**IX. ADJOURNMENT:** Meeting adjourned at 3:20 p.m.

**MOTION:** To adjourn until Tuesday, August 30, 2022.

**ACTION:** Motion passes unanimously (Mayfield, Wood seconds).

The next Select Committee on Senior Centers meeting will be held virtually on Tuesday, August 30, 2022, at 9:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Daniel Idzikowski