

VI. Recommendations

Hundreds of older adults testified to the importance of the Milwaukee County senior centers in helping them to age well. Senior centers continue to serve an important role in the mix of programming offered through the Milwaukee County Department on Aging to address social isolation, provide opportunities for recreation and physical exercise, and improve nutrition and food security. Senior centers and their programming must continue to grow and adapt to the changing needs and desires of an aging populace. New and creative solutions for both the programming and the buildings within which this programming is offered must be pursued if senior centers are to continue to be sustainable and vital focal points for older adults in Milwaukee County.

Of the many ideas shared through this community feedback process, the most frequent suggestions in each category included:

I. Promoting the Senior Centers

- Utilize participants to conduct outreach in neighborhoods surrounding the centers.
- Utilize County resources to better promote the value of the senior centers.

II. Attractive Programming

- Provide a communal kitchen to hold cooking classes and prepare meals on site.
- Provide a wide range of regularly scheduled exercise and fitness classes including more challenging offerings.

III. Envisioning New Models

- Establish new fully accessible senior centers in areas underserved by existing centers with higher concentrations of older adults.
- Create new public/private partnerships particularly with health care and higher education institutions to provide more services and programs on site.

IV. Funding and Partnerships

- Provide transportation options that deliver participants directly to the centers.
- Seek corporate and philanthropic sponsorship and support for the senior centers.



Upon consideration of the suggestions put forth by Milwaukee County residents participating in our community conversations on envisioning the future of our senior centers, we urge the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging to adopt the following recommendations:

- 1) Advocate for a dedicated base of support from Milwaukee County for senior center programming in Milwaukee County.
- 2) Advance the Fair Deal/Forward Milwaukee initiative to respond to the need for additional revenue to address senior center infrastructure and programming by strengthening the partnership between Milwaukee County and the State of Wisconsin by allowing Milwaukee County local control to generate new revenue and reduce the current reliance on property taxes through a binding referendum as well as increasing contributions from the state toward the provision of current and any new state-mandated services .
- 3) Milwaukee County should continue to maintain and sustain the existing Milwaukee County senior centers, build on them, and improve them to promote equity of services and activities in all senior centers.
- 4) Milwaukee County should explore other models of senior centers that include public-private partnerships such as travel, recreation, housing, banking, education, and health care and existing senior centers should partner with other community resources to increase participation and revenue.
- 5) Address access to senior centers by establishing transit stops at each Milwaukee County senior center and adding other up to the door transportation, as well as ensuring Americans with Disability Act (ADA) accessibility standards are met at all centers.
- 6) Establish a working Program Committee or Senior Center Committee of the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging that would include membership from the Commission on Aging, Advisory Council, representatives from each of the five Milwaukee County senior center SOA advisory councils, a representative from the Milwaukee County senior center programming vendor, representatives from other senior centers in Milwaukee County, and other interested members of the public to:
 - 1) Evaluate the suggestions provided by the public in this report;
 - 2) Characterize these suggestions as long or short term;
 - 3) Review and prioritize the infrastructure needs at each of the Milwaukee County senior centers;
 - 4) Develop and monitor both short and long-term strategic plans for senior centers in Milwaukee County; and
 - 5) Determine what resources will be necessary to carry out the plan.

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- 7) Add or assign a staff member or independent contractor within the Milwaukee County Department on Aging with responsibility to:
- 1) Staff support for the proposed Senior Center or Program Committee;
 - 2) Assist the Commission to develop and monitor its strategic plan for senior centers;
 - 3) Work to ensure access to senior center programming exists across the county;
 - 4) Assist the senior center programming vendor in identifying best practices; and
 - 5) Coordinate interdepartmental efforts within County government and between County and municipal governments, foundations, and private firms to pursue new grants, partnerships, revenue streams, and capital financing.

VII. Conclusion

With these stated recommendations, the Advisory Council commends this report to the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging for full consideration and urges the Commission to adopt and act upon its recommendations. The Council wishes to thank all who have contributed to this three year senior center assessment process, including members of this Council and the Commission on Aging, the Executive Director and staff of the Milwaukee County Department on Aging, staff of the Milwaukee County Department of Administrative Services, staff of Serving Older Adults of Southeast Wisconsin and former staff of Unison, the Wisconsin Policy Forum, and most especially the participants at our Milwaukee County Seniors and members of the public throughout the county who contributed their time, talent and suggestions throughout this process.

We recognize that bringing an enhanced vision of senior centers to fruition in Milwaukee County will take all of us working together, building partnerships with the community, advocates, stakeholders, and new supporters and allies. This will require strong collaboration and compromise from all of us to achieve the common goal we are all passionate about -- building and enhancing opportunities for growth, wellness, and a full life for older adults in Milwaukee County.

The Council looks forward to learning of the Commission's action on this report and the progress made in the coming years on the 2019-2021 Area Aging Plan goals relating to senior centers:

Goal Statement 1: The Department on Aging, in partnership with a third-party provider, will complete "Phase 2" of its senior center assessment project. This project will involve additional research and will ultimately result in a final report being published in 2019. The report will be shared with the Commission on Aging and other various providers, and feedback will be collected through Senior Center advisory council meetings, Commission on Aging meetings, and other public forums.

Goal Statement 2: The Department will use the third-party report, as well as feedback from the report, to shape senior center programming that meets the needs of existing seniors as well as the seniors of the future.

Goal Statement 3: The Department will assess the effectiveness and impact of new programming solutions and based on the evaluation, will restructure the 2021 senior center programming RFP to ensure that 2021 programming options are cost-effective and sustainable.