



## **Milwaukee County Department on Aging – Senior Center FAQ – May 2018**

**Q:** What is the status of the five Milwaukee County-owned senior centers? Will any of them be closing or reducing their hours of operation?

**A:** All five County-owned senior centers (Kelly, McGovern, Wilson, Washington, and Clinton Rose) are open five days per week from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. Milwaukee County has no plans to close any of the five centers or reduce hours of operation.

**Q:** I've heard that the Kelly Senior Center might be demolished. Is that true?

**A:** There are no plans to demolish the Kelly Senior Center or any of the other County-owned senior centers. In 2013 a company hired by Milwaukee County (CBRE) to evaluate a number of the County's buildings recommended that Kelly Senior Center be demolished. This report found that the Kelly Senior Center, built as military barracks housing in 1954 and not intended for long-term use, doesn't meet current energy, space, and safety standards and was a candidate for demolition and consolidation or replacement of the facility.

**Q:** I've heard that the Department on Aging also did a study that looked at the facilities at each of the five county-owned centers. Why did the Department do this study and what is the study telling us?

**A:** The Milwaukee County Facilities Condition Assessment Team published a report in September 2017 entitled "Department on Aging – 2017 Facility Assessment Reports." This study was done because the Department on Aging asked for a report that would identify repairs that are needed as well as building systems that need replacement at the five county-owned centers. The study was also done to help the Department on Aging with its long-term capital planning.

The report found that Department on Aging building assets are at an age where building systems need to be replaced. There were several architectural, electrical, and mechanical issues identified within the report that need attention, and the Department on Aging is in the process of getting cost estimates on the "big-ticket" items such as installation of a second boiler at Clinton Rose, replacement of the chiller at both Wilson Park and Washington Park, and repair of the unit ventilators at Clinton Rose and Washington Park.

A copy of the 2017 Facilities report can be found on the Department on Aging's website at this link: <http://county.milwaukee.gov/ImageLibrary/Groups/cntyAging/docs/Reports/Aging-2017FinalAssessmentReport.pdf>

**Q:** Why doesn't the Department on Aging put more money into fixing up the senior centers?

**A:** The Department on Aging, and Milwaukee County in general, does not have enough funding to make all of the necessary fixes at the senior centers. The Department and its senior center vendor (Interfaith/Unison) is already spending about \$400,000 per year on maintenance at the centers. Like all other County Departments, the Department on Aging puts together a five-year plan for funding "big-ticket" items (i.e., projects that would cost \$100,000 or more) within the Milwaukee County budget. Milwaukee County does not have nearly enough funding in its budget to cover all of these projects, so difficult choices have to be made every year on which projects are the most critical to complete. The 2017 Facilities report notes that the current cost of repairs and system replacements needed at the five county-owned senior centers is \$9.5 million through 2022 and over \$23 million through 2036. Across all County facilities, the amount of maintenance, repair and replacement needed is estimated at nearly \$400 million by 2022.

In 2018, the entire capital budget for Milwaukee County is \$92 million. This budget includes funding for not only senior center projects, but projects related to county parks, roads, parkways, community centers, buses, and all other assets that Milwaukee County owns. Milwaukee County and the Department on Aging must think about the future of senior center programming because, according to the 2017 Facilities report, in five years all five senior centers will be in "poor" condition (assuming current levels of spending on senior center facilities).

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**Q:** I've heard that the Department on Aging has begun some kind of long-term planning effort focused on the senior centers. What is the Department doing, and where can I find out more information about this process?

**A:** The Department began "Phase I" of its Senior Center Assessment Study last year, and it recently finished gathering all of the data for that phase of the project. The Senior Center Assessment Study is the Department's attempt to assess all aspects of the five county-owned senior centers, including the programming and buildings, as well as other senior/community centers throughout Milwaukee County. All data that was gathered for "Phase I" of the report can be found on the county's website at this link: <http://county.milwaukee.gov/Aging>

**Q:** I've heard that Milwaukee County is now providing less funding for senior center programs. Is that true?

**A:** In September 2017, the 2018 Proposed Budget submitted by County Executive Chris Abele included \$1.12 million in funding for senior center programming, \$200,000 below 2017 funding. In November, the Milwaukee County Board accepted the County Executive's proposed funding of \$1.12 million for senior centers. In addition, the County Board's Adopted Budget also required that the Department on Aging cut an additional \$105,000 from its budget, which the Department plans to absorb through an



increase in anticipated revenue as well as managing existing position vacancies. The County Board's Adopted Budget also allocated up to \$200,000 in a contingency fund account that the Department on Aging could request if it determined that there was a need to add funding to its senior center contract.

After the County Board passed its budget in November 2017, the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging voted to recommend a contract amount of \$1.12 million with Interfaith/Unison, which was approved by the County Board in December. The Department's current contract with Interfaith/Unison will end on December 31, 2018. The Department will be putting out its 2019 RFP for senior center programming in August of this year.

**Q:** I've heard and read that programming at the five senior centers has suffered because of the \$200,000 reduction in funding contained in the 2018 Adopted Budget. Is this true?

**A:** At this point, the Department on Aging has not seen or heard any evidence that senior center programming has suffered at the five county-owned centers. After the County Board adopted its 2018 Budget last November, Interfaith/Unison in December informed the Department that they would be eliminating 8 positions (1 Senior Center Manager, 2 Senior Center Program Coordinators, 1 part-time Senior Center Custodian, 1 Senior Meal Coordinator, and 3 Dining Site Supervisors). Interfaith/Unison also made other operational changes that impacted the Senior Center Managers and Wellness Coordinator.

Since these changes were made in December, the Department on Aging has had numerous meetings and conversations with Interfaith/Unison staff, and its staff has also talked to many seniors at the senior centers and throughout the community. Based on these conversations, as well as the data and reports that Interfaith/Unison sends to the Department each month, the Department believes that there has been very little impact on programming at the senior centers. In fact, Department on Aging staff recently heard about new classes and activities that are being added at Wilson Park Senior Center and Washington Park Senior Center.

The Department has been updating the County Board, Commission on Aging, Interfaith/Unison staff, and senior center customers on all of these developments. The Department is committed to serving as many seniors as possible in the senior centers, and it will continue to monitor senior center programming closely in the coming months. The Department has consistently stated that if there is evidence that senior center programming is being scaled back or eliminated because of the reduced amount of contract funding, then it will ask the Milwaukee County Board to move funding from the County's contingency funds to the senior center contract so that seniors are not negatively impacted.

**Q:** I've heard that the Department on Aging is coordinating a Request for Information (RFI) process related to the senior centers. What is involved in this process, and will it impact senior center programming in any way?

**A:** As part of the 2018 Adopted Budget passed by the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, the Department was asked to explore senior center programming alternatives. The 2016 Congressional reauthorization of the Older Americans Act also included language which encourages efforts to

modernize multipurpose senior centers and promote intergenerational models. To meet the County Board's requirement, the Department on Aging recently released a "Request for Information" (RFI). The purpose of the RFI process is to gather information on possible alternatives to the existing model of senior center programming. RFI respondents will be asked a number of questions related to best practices and trends in providing programming for senior citizens, organizational capacity to provide programming for seniors, possible alternatives or enhancements to existing programming, possible space or building alternatives, and many other questions. RFI respondents will have one month to respond to the Department's questions. The Department, along with staff from the County's Department of Administrative Services-Procurement Division, will analyze the responses and use this information to frame its 2019 RFP for senior center programming.

Current senior center programming will not be impacted in any way as a result of the Department's RFI process. The Department's goal is to collect as much information as possible that enables it to improve its request for proposal for senior center programming in 2019.

Looking ahead, the Department on Aging is committed to expanding and enhancing programming for seniors that is cost-effective and sustainable. Seniors have identified many programs and activities that are needed in order for them to live healthy and active lives. The Department on Aging will continue to engage older adults and other community stakeholders as it moves forward in its effort to plan for the future and meet the programmatic needs of Milwaukee County's seniors.