

# Envisioning the Future

Milwaukee County Senior Centers: 2020



DECEMBER 2, 2019

Milwaukee County Commission on Aging  
Aging Advisory Council



MILWAUKEE COUNTY  
Department on Aging

# Envisioning the Future

## Milwaukee County Senior Centers: 2020

Milwaukee County senior centers have hosted older adults in our neighborhoods for more than forty years. These multifunctional senior centers followed the model proposed in the Older Americans Act as:

*“a community facility for the provision of a broad spectrum of services, includ[ing] health, social, nutritional, and educational services and recreational activities for older individuals.”*

Five senior centers were established within the Milwaukee County park system:



## Introduction

Each Milwaukee County senior center has its own character and its own resources. All the County owned senior centers are situated within the City of Milwaukee, except for Kelly, which is located in Cudahy. Responsibility for the operation of the senior centers was transferred from the Department of Parks to the Department on Aging in the mid 1990's. The Milwaukee County senior centers are part of a larger network of thirty senior centers located throughout the county. The Department on Aging supports, maintains, and contracts for programming in the five Milwaukee County senior centers almost exclusively with county tax levy and these levy funds constitute more than eighty percent of the revenue supporting their operation. The Department on Aging also funds senior dining and promotes evidence-based wellness programs in the Milwaukee County senior centers with Older Americans Act funds. Thirteen other senior centers also serve as senior dining sites and five of these serve specific populations and receive some programming support through the Older Americans Act.

In 2016, the reauthorized Older Americans Act called for states to research and identify best practices for the modernization of multipurpose senior centers. That year the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging Advisory Council included in its Area Plan a goal “to gather consumer input from senior center participants and from other community members to learn about consumers’ needs and interest regarding modernization of Milwaukee County Senior Centers.” In response, the Department on Aging began a three-year senior center assessment project.

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During Phase I, the Department developed a baseline to understand the state of Milwaukee County senior centers in the context of the current environment. The Department compiled and reviewed programming occurring at all five Milwaukee County senior centers, as well as at several other senior centers in the county. Throughout the fall of 2017, the Department of Administration completed a comprehensive Facility Condition Assessment of each Milwaukee County senior center to identify repairs that are needed, building systems that require replacement, and capital planning information for future facility fiscal needs. A significant backlog of major maintenance work and capital requirements exist at all five Milwaukee County senior centers, including a long list of ADA deficiencies identified by the City of Milwaukee in 2018. Finally, the Department on Aging reviewed national research on senior centers and conducted two focus groups involving participants and commission members. The Department posted these reports on its [website](#).

Once an assessment of the current state of programming, attendance, and structural needs at the Milwaukee County senior centers was complete, the Department commissioned the Wisconsin Policy Forum to review models of senior center programming and support in other jurisdictions. Over the course of 2018, WPF reviewed the Phase I reports, surveyed senior centers across the country, and identified five jurisdictions that were similar in size, scope, or operation to Milwaukee County. In a report entitled “[Young at Heart](#)”, WPF present the results of this survey including different programming models in Allegheny (Pennsylvania), Dane (Wisconsin), Franklin (Ohio), Hennepin (Minnesota), and Arlington (Virginia) counties. All these counties had experienced some contraction or consolidation of senior centers. Two of the counties had significant sources of dedicated tax funding for senior programming. One did not support any senior centers and in only one did the county own and operate senior centers through its department of parks and recreation.

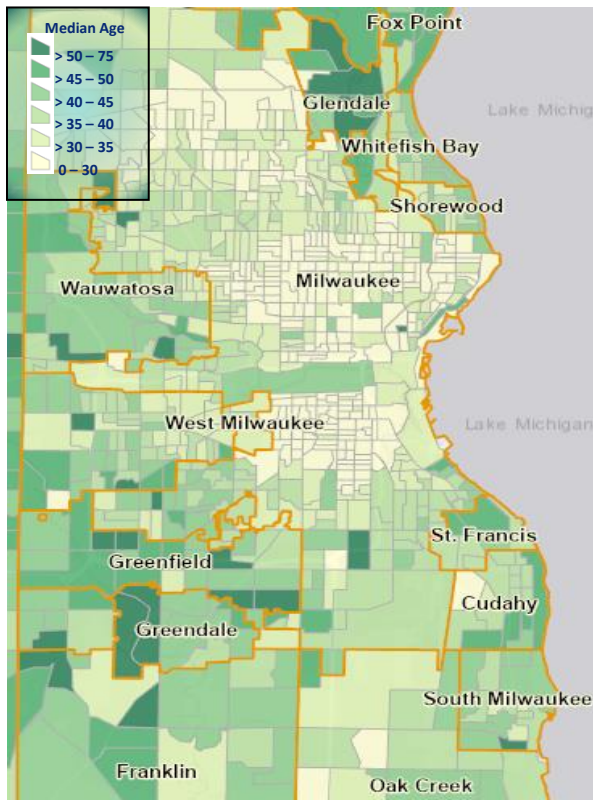
Most senior centers across the country are owned and operated by nonprofit entities or by municipalities, not by counties or Area Agencies on Aging. Yet each of these differing localities offered lessons on how to operate and sustain senior centers, including:

- performance-based contracting increases attendance and produces better outcomes;
- multi-purpose / multi-generational programming draw more users and builds a constituency;
- virtual access allows members to remain engaged when they have a setback and includes homebound residents in programming;
- Prioritization based on local need & input results in centers that have better outcomes;
- Dedicated and coordinated transportation services are vital to ensuring access to centers;
- Intergovernmental cooperation improves both funding and satisfaction with programming;
- A dedicated public funding stream is a critical component supporting older adult programs;
- Significant revenue generated from memberships, fee for service programs, and facility rental.

A literature review reveals that many jurisdictions are struggling to maintain their senior centers as facilities age, maintenance costs escalate, and participation declines. As a 2011 AARP study of New Orleans’ senior centers stated: “there remain fundamental questions about purpose, role,



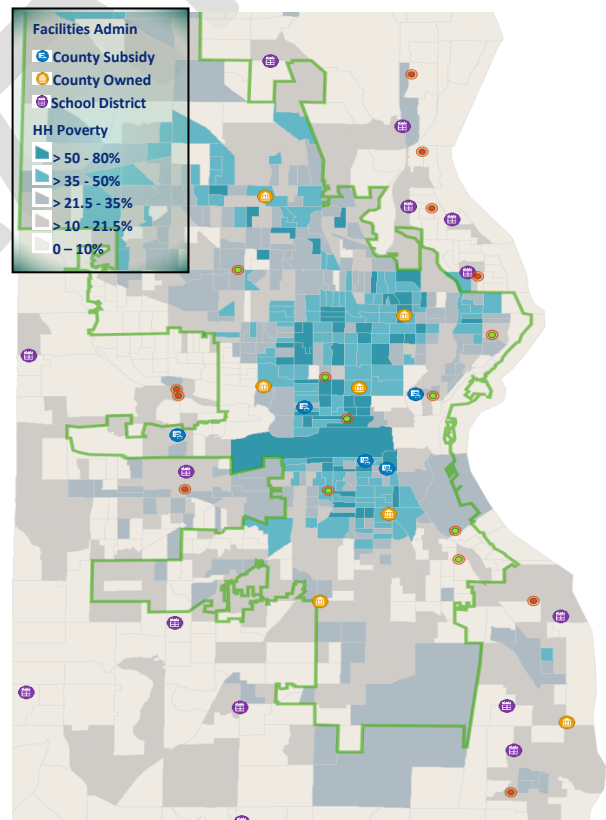
customer base and long-term financial sustainability. The federal policies that brought about the growth of senior centers in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have not kept pace with the changing needs and desires of older people” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As research on aging has progressed, six dimensions of wellness have been identified: emotional, spiritual, intellectual, social, physical, and occupational. Aging experts maintain that senior centers should be examined in view of how they promote wellness in each of these areas. Ultimately senior centers – and the programming that takes place within their walls – are about promoting the wellness of the people they are meant to serve.



Senior center participants are passionate advocates for sustaining their viability well into the future. Demographics however, indicate that the aging population in Milwaukee County has become increasingly concentrated in the suburbs (note darker green areas on map).

Moreover, despite their location, the centers do not seem to be attracting a high level of participation from low-income constituencies that might benefit the most from their utilization, for example residents of senior housing in the City of Milwaukee. With a rapidly growing population of older adults in the County, it is time to reassess how best to serve this vital constituency.

Over the years Milwaukee County senior centers have provided tens of thousands of residents over age 50 with a safe, healthy, and active gathering space. Programming in our senior centers has included arts & crafts, fitness equipment, evidence-based exercise & wellness, woodworking, games, puzzles & bingo, sewing & quilting, spiritual and cultural celebrations, trips & outings, and daily luncheons. Participation in these activities has varied from more than 2000 individuals per year at Wilson senior center to 650 per year at McGovern. Offerings at the different senior centers are likewise varied.





During 2019, the Department on Aging launched the third phase of this assessment process under the auspices of the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging Advisory Council: conducting a series of community conversations to understand what current and potential participants wanted from their senior centers and what models, partnerships, and funding sources might make these ideas a reality. This report presents the results of eight formal and twelve informal community conversations on the future of our senior centers held between June and November of 2019 across Milwaukee county, in addition to input received online.

Nearly 500 individuals provided feedback through this process, generating hundreds of ideas for renewal of our senior centers. Feedback was solicited and received from every area of the county, including participants at all five Milwaukee County senior centers, and residents of many municipalities with their own senior centers.

After a brief overview of the process and a summary of Phases I & II, participants were asked to form small groups and consider the following questions:

### **Inclusion**

Senior centers can improve the quality of life and community engagement of older adults - particularly those who are isolated, lower income, or from marginalized communities.

How can we involve older adults who are not currently utilizing the senior centers?

### **Prioritizing Services**

As we consider the County tax levy and any potential new revenue sources available to fund senior centers, we will need to prioritize what types of programs and services will attract and meet the needs of older adults throughout our county.

Which programs and services that might be offered through our senior centers would be most appealing and beneficial to you?



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## Growing and Expanding

If you were to reimagine the delivery of senior center services to reach a larger audience, how might this look? (E.g. New or updated facilities, shared use buildings, intergenerational centers, community gathering places, different locations, etc.)

How can we update and expand the benefits of the senior centers?

Can you suggest any accommodations or design elements that would make it easier for you to participate in senior center activities? (E.g. Physical barriers, assistive devices, dedicated spaces, interpretive services, accommodations for special healthcare needs, colors, types of programming).

## Partnerships and Funding

Looking to the future, as we seek to expand the reach and impact of our senior centers, we will need to seek out new partnerships and/or revenue sources.

What partnerships and revenue sources could we pursue to expand and support senior centers?

Online participants were provided the same questions in a survey.



Next, we report the results of this engagement process. In section one, we affirm the many strengths and values that Milwaukee County senior center programming provide to our residents and garner ideas to reach new participants. Section two explores ideas to improve or re-envision the programmatic features of senior centers. Section three presents suggestions to review the design, location, and accessibility of the centers. In section four we discuss partnership and funding models that could sustain – or rebuild – Milwaukee County’s senior centers for the next generation of older adults. Finally, the Aging Advisory Council presents its recommendations to the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging to include in a strategic plan to address the programmatic renewal and fiscal sustainability of senior centers in Milwaukee County.

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## **I. Promoting the Senior Centers**

Those who participated in the community conversations indicated they were generally pleased with the program offerings that currently exist through Serving Older Adults, the agency contracted through the Department on Aging to operate the centers. There were many suggestions for attracting new participants which generally focused on relatively simple marketing strategies.

### **Local Outreach**

- Provide information to families, caregivers, and older adults in the surrounding neighborhoods about the senior centers and programming offered within them.
- Engage former Neighborhood Outreach Program volunteers to promote centers.
- Contact nearby senior living facilities. Conduct a door-to-door campaign.
- Ask each current participant to invite one new senior to join them.
- Create a “speakers bureau” to promote senior centers at community meetings.
- Ask participants to deliver flyers to local congregations, homes & businesses.
- Support the development of the neighborhoods in which the centers are located.
- Place a sign in front of the centers to advertise activities, events, meals etc.
- Ensure that 211 refers people to senior centers for programming.

### **Advertising Campaign**

- Targeted mailing/ flyers to older adult residents in the surrounding area.
- Advertise what is available in the senior centers.
- Promote senior centers in health care facilities, esp. local clinics & physicians.
- Collaborate with the MPS Recreation Department to include Senior Center offerings in MPS Activity guides.
- Promote the centers at church festivals, local fairs, and ethnic fests.
- Utilize public service announcements on TV, event calendars on cable.
- Post information about monthly programming in local libraries, grocery stores, pharmacies & doctors’ offices.
- Contact companies HR & retiree groups to promote available of senior centers.
- Include insert in mailing to Milwaukee County /City retirees.
- Make presentations at libraries, soup kitchens, hospitals & senior living complexes.
- Create an insert to be distributed in tax or utility bill.
- Flyers in Hunger Task Force “stockbox” and distributed through Meals on Wheels
- Ensure Social Development Commission’s Senior Companion & Senior Grandparents know about and utilize senior centers.
- Write articles for municipal newsletters, community newspapers.
- Milwaukee Journal/Sentinel feature article / series.



- Placard on MCTS buses.
- Get a Milwaukee Buck to be a sponsor / promotor.
- Host an “open house” with free food & refreshments.
- Utilize FaceBook & social media and let participants know about it.
- Ask AARP & Senior volunteers to help promote with their members.

### **Differentiate the Programming to appeal to broader range of participants**

- Wider variety of fitness classes & availability of exercise equipment
- Offer more speaker topics and discussion groups
- Include some events that would appeal to younger older adults such as physical challenges, older adult triathlon, etc.
- Include more cultural and educational programming /partner with OSHER.
- Modernize the centers by concentrating on wellness activities, including those that are recommended by physicians to improve health combat chronic diseases.
- Partner with parks & recreation centers to include water exercise & recreation.
- People think you must be 65+ to use the centers, emphasize 50+ in materials.
- Offer coffee & snacks at cafés within the centers.
- Offer counseling services, including how to build good habits.
- Reduce “presentation” time and increase discussion time.
- Offer childcare for grandparents taking care of grandchildren.
- Offer some inter-generational programs between children and older adults.
- Provide a wider range of programming and activities.
- Add night classes for GED, Technical training, job retraining, etc.
- Invite high school students to compete in board games with seniors.
- Increase diversity of participants with programming appealing to different cultures.
- Offer some bilingual programming or translators.

### **Improve access to the senior centers and programming**

- Provide transportation to the centers so people can get there (many comments).
- Provide accessible transportation for people with mobility impairments.
- Allow attendants to accompany people with disabilities at the senior centers.
- Ease online membership & class registration, provide phone option for registration – perhaps partner with MPS to utilize their registration system.
- Develop an app for membership, class & event registration, program notifications.
- Include senior center programming prominently on Department on Aging website.
- Extend senior centers to outer areas of Milwaukee County.
- Promote inclusion of senior center programming in insurance & long term care benefit plans, including suggesting participation during Medicare wellness check.



- Expand hours of availability and programming, including on weekends.
- Lower age limit to involve residents at an earlier age, e.g. dance classes.
- Provide an incentive for first time attendees.
- Change name from senior centers because no one thinks of themselves as a senior.
- Ask state government to allow internet connection to be used as part of utility assistance- other states allow it.
- Follow up with seniors who stop participating.
- Create virtual access to programming for those who are homebound.
- Increase the safety of the centers, including conducting background checks on member participants and conduct anti-bullying campaign.
- Institute a grievance procedure to address complaints on a timely basis and resolve issues of seniors who are treated unfairly.
- Instead of preserving physical locations, focus more on creating network of relationships between older adults.
- Have a volunteer greeter at every senior center.

## II. Attractive Programming

In addition to marketing strategies and increasing access, we received several ideas to improve programming at the senior centers.

### Lifestyle

- Opportunities for me to use my life experience to help others.
- Make centers a hub for volunteering by seniors.
- Help with shopping, cleaning and yard work.
- LGBT / Gay-Straight alliance & ally programs.
- Post office.
- Doggie day care, dog competitions, pet friendly.
- Grocery deliveries from farmers markets.
- Women's coffee groups.
- Potlucks once per month.
- Movies.
- Storytelling, interviewing.
- Dating / relationship building activities.
- Legal counseling.
- A quiet room to read and study, book club.
- Seasonally appropriate field trips, outings. Buses to ethnic festivals & special events in the community.
- Promote "dine around town" program that gets people into local businesses.

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- Provide transportation from SCs to grocery stores, other shopping.
  - Folk fair highlighting different cultures, food, diversity among participants.
  - Don't add programming – maintain the centers.

## **Sports & Fitness**

- Pickleball (several asked for this).
- Wii bowling and other Wii games.
- More fitness classes and a better gym.
- Hire a fitness coordinator to serve all senior centers.
- Update the fitness rooms & equipment.
- Exercise classes that are more challenging for younger older adults.
- Yoga, Tai Chi, Pilates.
- Competitions between centers: pool, sports, badminton.

## **Health & Wellness, Arts & Crafts**

- Health screening, flu shots, and PT, a small medical clinic.
- Health education.
- Mental health counseling and AODA.
- Keep the good nutrition programs we already have.
- Add breakfast offering.
- Maintain centers as dining sites.
- Walking/hiking group, bird watching, outdoor activities that take advantage of location in the parks.
- Gardening.
- Woodworking shop, Potter shop.
- Painting, such as painting with wine places.
- Table games / board games like those at board game stores.
- Make sure centers themselves are healthy spaces – plans to prevent spread of illness, bedbugs, other communicable diseases. Adequate cleaning of spaces.

## **Educational**

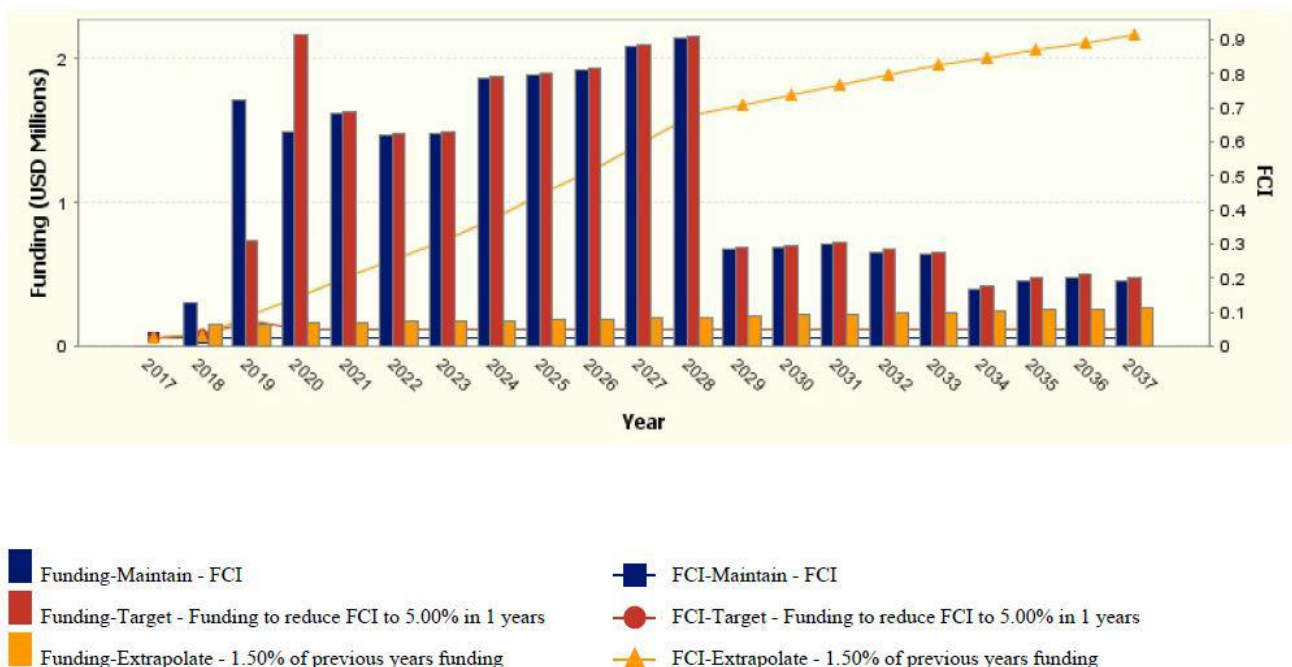
- Programs and classes that stimulate the mind, like college style classes.
- Ask senior participants about their skills to teach and share with others.
- Resources regarding tax preparation.
- Add regular Medicare information sessions.
- Foreign language classes.
- Financial management & fraud and financial abuse.
- Communal kitchen with cooking classes (several comments).
- Forums with civic leaders and politicians.

- Provide seniors with recycled computers, teach current computer applications and how to communicate using social media, mobile phones.
- Informational programs on social security, end of life, estate & funeral planning.
- Dance groups and classes for all ages.
- Textiles, knitting, felting, etc.
- Music room. Teach instruments.
- ESL classes & support.
- Partnership with UWM or Marquette for educational classes.
- Partnership with Milwaukee County zoo – talks on animals.

### III. Envisioning New Models

Milwaukee County continues to maintain and support the operation and programming in our five senior centers and intends to do so for the foreseeable future. For the past several years, the centers have operated with county funding of approximately \$700,000 to support staff and programming, while \$400,000 supports routine utilities, maintenance and repair. Another \$250,000 is charged by the Department of Administration for building and system maintenance. Each center also supports a congregate dining site with daily hot lunch which is funded with \$100,000 of MCDA's Older Americans Act Title IIIc allocation.

Concern about the cost of the existing senior center facilities featured prominently in the first two phases of the assessment process. While the County and the programming contractor provided steady facility maintenance over the years, several major building systems will reach the end of their useful life in 2022 and 2027, raising the question of whether capital investments of \$17 - \$26 million



in the existing five senior centers will best meet the needs of tomorrow's older adults, even if this amount of capital funding became available to the County.

Nonetheless, in response to the Phase I study in 2017, the Department on Aging has requested and the County has prioritized, nearly \$5,000,000 in capital projects to repair or replace major building systems in the senior centers over the next five years:

	Kelly	McGovern	Rose	Washington	Wilson					TOTAL
Built	1956	1974	1982	1987	1980					
2027TotNeed	\$2,341,223	\$1,470,805	\$5,487,740	\$4,479,480	\$5,344,799					\$19,124,047
CtyCapBudget										\$55,895,000
2019			\$19,000	Carpet	\$359,000	Chiller	\$200,000	Chiller		
2019			\$60,000	Asbestos	\$400,000	Bathroom				\$1,038,000
2020										
2020	\$249,858	Boiler	\$167,938	Boiler/Exh		\$194,954	Boiler/Ex			\$612,750
2021	\$315,180	Bathroom								
2021	\$430,746	HVAC	\$177,551	Kitchen	\$140,243	Lighting	\$127,503	Lighting		\$1,191,223
2022			\$141,453	Bathroom						
2022	\$233,771	Windows	\$357,000	Roof		\$937,728	Bathroom			\$1,669,952
2023		\$102,000	Bathroom							
2023		\$208,019	Floor/Ceil							\$310,019
2024										
2024		\$128,173	Kitchen							\$128,173
RemaingNeed	\$1,111,668	\$1,032,613	\$4,564,798	\$3,580,237	\$3,884,614					\$14,173,930
										\$4,950,117

Despite this generous investment, many major building systems are due for replacement or renewal in 2027, leaving substantial unmet need on the table. New models will help the Commission continue to deliver high quality senior services through senior centers, while at the same time, lowering the long- term cost to the County and improving access to programming.

The Commission on Aging has never suggested or recommended that Milwaukee County's existing senior centers be closed or neglected. Rather, the Commission is seeking ideas on how the Department on Aging might use its funding to leverage new partnerships and revenue streams to modernize, improve, and reimagine both the programming and facilities in light of the growing demographic of older adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.



## Idea Sparks

As a prelude to the envisioning community conversations, several creative ideas were offered as sparks for imaginative rethinking of what senior centers could be in the future. These ideas were:



- Senior Centers as the base for new senior housing, similar to the Milwaukee Public Library renewal projects.



- Multi-generational centers with a dedicated senior center component.

- Inviting private vendors such as credit unions, coffee shops, or fitness centers into the senior centers.



- Senior Centers affiliating with lifelong learning programs such as Osher, or with local universities and technical colleges.

- Senior Centers affiliated with or including health care clinics / services.



- Virtual senior centers.



Many seniors were attracted by these ideas. They also added their own ideas on how to create new spaces and partnerships and find additional revenue sources to support the centers.

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## Design and Accessibility

### Location

- More locations / different locations.
- Co-locate senior centers in school buildings.
- Keep senior programming during day, but open to others afternoon and evenings
- Update/expand existing facilities.
- Fix the existing issues with senior centers first.
- Keep 5 centers because of geographic reach.
- Locate senior centers centrally, so that they are easy to get to.
- Add a center on the eastside – increase advocacy and buy in by wealthier constituents.
- Add a center in the southwest suburbs, where public transit is very sparse.
- Make sure people in each municipality have access to a senior center.
- Build intergenerational facilities / share space with others.
- Mixed use building in the park – senior housing, senior center, café.
- Utilize existing spaces in libraries, shopping centers, churches etc. to have more diversity of smaller centers throughout the county.
- Place senior centers in shopping malls for redevelopment of space
- Public/Private collaboration for construction of new senior centers in underserved neighborhoods.
- Locate senior centers near bus stops & offer ample parking, including many spots for handicap parking.
- Partner with other senior living complexes that have updated facilities to gain access for other / low-income seniors.
- Promote the centers in the wider community and open up their use to a wider range of participants, since many of the assets and spaces in the centers are now underutilized.
- Hire staff who are warm, welcoming, and responsive.
- Identify unique strengths of each center and avoid a cookie cutter approach.
- Institute better safety measures in and around the senior centers.

### Accessibility

- Provide wheelchairs, walkers and make centers more accessible to people with mobility impairments.
- Locate senior centers near bus stops & offer ample parking, including many spots for handicap parking.
- Add a hearing loop in facilities.

- Provide quiet spaces, times for adults that have difficulty hearing, sensory difficulties, or don't enjoy a faster paced environment.
- Video screens that are captioned.
- Interpreter services for programs, announcements, etc.
- Make sure elevators are safe, in working condition, and can accommodate wheelchairs.
- Make sure that all spaces are accessible to people with disabilities, this will help all seniors and increase participation because it is easier for all.
- Build ramps and eliminate steps.
- Remodel bathrooms to make accessible to people with disabilities – higher commodes.
- Access dining areas, utensils, etc. to accommodate people with disabilities.
- Add wall railings.
- Make sure automated door openers are functional.
- Improve signage both interior and exterior.
- Don't make the senior centers intergenerational – those already exist and seniors want a space of their own and cut down on fear.

### **Facility Updates & Additions**

- Fitness rooms updated/expanded.
- Add shower and gym facilities.
- Update kitchens to commercial grade and hold cooking classes/cook meals on site.
- Add gardens and landscaping to make centers more attractive and increase outdoor activities.
- Add Daycare space for seniors / children / grandchildren.
- Incorporate Memory café's and spaces that are dementia friendly.
- Update technology and technology support for all members.
- Transportation to and from the centers is critical, shared van service.
- Transportation, transportation, transportation. Aging friendly.
- Build vestibule, waiting space for transportation indoors for bad weather.
- Attractive design and furnishings – Make the buildings an architectural delight.
- Use UCC and St. Ann's Intergenerational Day Care buildings as models.
- Brighten up the shared spaces like hallways & rooms, bright colors.
- Remodel the bathrooms to make them look more attractive.
- Brighter street visibility, lighting outside of center.
- Install defibrillators in all centers.
- Add plants.
- Wireless access and upgrade computer center, create an Internet café.

- Add an outdoor entertainment venue.
- Add a huge TV lounge / movie theatre space.
- Add better sound / music system.
- Fix HVAC / ceiling fans.
- Update community gathering spaces.
- Swimming pool.

## IV. Funding & Partnerships

At the beginning of 2019 the entity that had operated Milwaukee County's senior centers since the mid-1990's ceased operations and a new nonprofit, Serving Older Adults, took over responsibility for the staffing, programming, maintenance, and nutrition services at these five centers. Serving Older Adults has recognized the need to diversify its funding base in order to effectively operate the senior centers. It has already implemented some of the measures suggested below to increase and diversify revenue streams and projected \$75,000 in philanthropic support, and more than \$200,000 in rental income, activity fees, and sales revenue in its 2020 budget. At the same time, in its 2020 proposed budget MCDA facility maintenance responsibilities would be transferred to the Department of Administration which can improve operating efficiencies and project manager major repairs. Nonetheless, new partnerships and revenue must be sought if the facilities and programming are to be improved and updated for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### Fund Raising

- Naming rights for each center, rooms, or project specific donations (i.e. HVAC Johnson Controls).
- Hire a professional fundraiser.
- Write grants.
- Hire public relations firm.
- Time Exchange.
- Corporate sponsorships – age related industries, insurers, religious organizations.
- Solicit philanthropic support from older Milwaukeeans.
- Estate planning to encourage end of life gifts.
- Milwaukee Bucks and/or Milwaukee Brewers to sponsor.
- Bader Philanthropies, Northwestern Mutual Foundation, Potawatomi Foundation.
- Harley Davidson, Miller, Johnson Controls, Associated Bank, Realty agencies, car dealers, Healthcare corporations, Gruber Law offices.
- Fundraising events – walk for seniors, etc.
- Donations by participants – Friends of the senior centers.
- Go Fund Me online campaign.
- Host a telethon.
- Establish foundation or nonprofit entity to receive gifts in trust for senior centers.



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## **Fees & Revenue Generating Activities**

- Sliding scale for membership fees.
- Lease out building space when not in use.
- Rent office space in the centers.
- Utilize insurance coverage for exercise, health, and fitness programs.
- Add revenue generating amenities, such as a coffee shop, gift shop, groceries, pharmacy, book store, health clinic.
- Offer programming that is attractive to others who will pay market rates, while offering the same programming to senior members for free/discount.
- Cultural Programming (music, theater, etc.) with ticket sales.
- Set up scrip program and sell scrip for shopping w/ % retained as profit.
- Bill for Evidence Based Health services through Medicaid.
- Crafters /woodworkers in the centers to make items for sale – run a business.

## **Partnerships**

- Leverage wisdom of seniors to support local businesses.
- Increase volunteerism within the centers.
- Provide service hour opportunities for High School students.
- MCTS to provide busses directly to centers.
- MPS recreation department to co-sponsor classes & activities.
- Public school systems for newer accessible facilities – lifelong learning.
- Establish a “quick care” health clinic within the senior centers.
- Exchange support from health care centers with health-based programming.
- Partner with other agencies that contract with MCDA, or serve older adults, such as the Alzheimer’s Assn, American Health Assn, United Way, etc.
- Partner with the City of Milwaukee Health Department for wellness programs.
- Partner with the Urban Ecology Center for nature programming.
- Partner with an IT company for computer support.
- Partner with MATC for classes & clinic placements – cosmetology, auto repair, appliance repair etc.
- Partner with Marquette Dental clinic for scheduled dental cleanings.
- Partner with tour companies to work out of centers.
- Partner with credit unions to offer financial literacy, branch services.
- Team with neighborhood libraries.
- Reinstate a dedicated senior center coordinator at MCDA.

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## Public Support

- Dedicate portion of county budget to continue these programs.
- Pursue Fair Deal to secure additional tax funds dedicated to parks & senior centers.
- Fund new senior center through a TIF district or similar financing.
- Increase sales tax.
- Check-off box on income taxes.
- Apply for Lottery funds.
- Cut back at Milwaukee County, eliminate positions & unnecessary departments.
- Use County funds to update and repair buildings, not studies.
- Partner with City of Milwaukee – DNS or DCD to run centers.

## Progress Already Made

While the *Envisioning* sessions were taking place across Milwaukee County, Serving Older Adults conducted its own survey of Milwaukee County senior center participants. This survey identified the desire of participants for different programming and asked participants about their attendance, safety, outreach efforts, and attention to improvements at the centers. In response to the input received through this internal process and in discussions with the Department on Aging, SOA has already begun to implement some operational and programmatic changes.

Before considering these changes however, it is helpful to understand the staffing and structure of SOA's operation of the five Milwaukee County senior centers. Serving Older Adults (SOA) was selected to contract with the Department on Aging to operate the five Milwaukee County senior centers and dining sites beginning in January of 2019 after Unison closed its business operations. At present, SOA employs a Director of Senior Centers who also serves as the Manager at Wilson Park senior center. Each of the five senior centers has a full time manager and program coordinator, full or part-time custodian, and half-time dining site coordinator. Some centers have additional program coordinators and SOA also employs a woodshop coordinator and building rental coordinator.

Each senior center has an advisory council that meets monthly with the center manager to address issues, present ideas, and provide feedback from the participants to the staff of the center. The advisory council members are all volunteer participants at each particular senior center. In addition to monthly meetings, these advisory council members promote their senior centers in the local community and promote program participation within the senior center community.

In addition to the ongoing schedule of more than \$2.9 million in capital building improvements initiated by the Department on Aging, some operational and programmatic changes have also been initiated by SOA. These include:

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### SOA Agency

- 1) Created a staff position for Health and Wellness as of November 4, 2019, responsible for orientation to the fitness centers, nutrition education in the dining sites, implementation of evidence-based classes, and leading low to no cost classes of interest in fitness and wellness.
- 2) Re-established travel groups and expanded the opportunities to include casino trips within the state of Wisconsin.
- 3) Opened a Re-gift shop at Washington Park to increase revenue streams and offer additional opportunities at the center.
- 4) Negotiating with a partner to open a health clinic at one of the senior centers.

### Clinton Rose

- 1) Contracted with an instructor to teach jewelry making.
- 2) Implemented a Yoga class.
- 3) Partnered with Dr. Sandra Underwood R.N., Ph.D. (UWM) to hold nutrition education classes.
- 4) Exploring the creation of a Theater/Drama program in 2020.

### Kelly

- 1) Implemented Journaling & writing tutorials during the Writer's Roundtable that meets monthly.
- 2) Held financial wellness workshops as part of National Senior Center Month.
- 3) Established more nature/birding walks throughout the park to utilize the natural settings around them.
- 4) Working with Ascension to provide support groups for older adults focusing on depression, anxiety, and suicide prevention.

### McGovern Park

- 1) Increased offerings to include Dance for Fun and Fitness, Self Defense and Yoga.
- 2) Created special events to pamper, indulge and relax.
- 3) Held an informational session on handgun Carry and Conceal classes.
- 4) Purchased a dart board and implemented darts games at the center.

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### Washington Park

- 1) Implemented nutrition education by offering Living well with Diabetes, and Holiday cooking classes. Exploring a collaboration with UW-Extension.
- 2) Starting a retirement/money management 101 class in January 2020 to be taught by a retired professor.
- 3) Created a monthly jewelry and beading workshop.
- 4) Began an annual talent show.

### Wilson Park

- 1) Implemented a guitar jam session run by a volunteer.
- 2) Worked with the Garden Club to hold a floral arrangement class sponsored by Flowers by Jan.
- 3) Collaborated with the Alzheimer's Association to create a caregiver's support group once a month on site.
- 4) Collaborated with Our Harmony Club to create a respite program held on site on day a month.

### Distribution of SOA's monthly *Connection* & Outreach Efforts

- 1) Speaking engagements with Rexnord Retirees, and OWLS to discuss senior centers.
- 2) Distributed 1,500 flyers in June and July entitled *Neighbors Helping Neighbors* in neighborhoods around the senior centers and during the Hunger Task Force's Farmer's Market Distribution Days at the senior centers.
- 3) Created the SOA Facebook Page to increase awareness through connecting with collaborators (@servingolderadultsofsoutheastwisconsin).
- 4) Ongoing distribution of more than 3000 copies of the *Connection* to 68 sites throughout Milwaukee County.



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## 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.

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 tax levy 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.
- 3) Milwaukee County should continue to maintain and sustain the five existing Milwaukee County senior centers, build on them, and improve them.
- 4) Existing senior centers should partner with other community resources to increase participation and revenue.
- 5) Address access to senior centers by establishing transit stops or other up to the door transportation alternatives and ensuring ADA accessibility standards are met at all centers.
- 6) Milwaukee County should explore other models of senior centers that include public-private partnerships such as travel, recreation, housing, banking, education, and health care.
- 7) Establish a working Program Committee or Senior Center Committee that would include membership from the Commission on Aging, Advisory Council, representatives from each of the five Milwaukee County senior center SOA advisory councils, representatives from other senior centers in Milwaukee County, and other interested members of the public to develop and monitor a short and long term strategic plan for senior centers in Milwaukee County.
- 8) Review and prioritize infrastructure needs at each of the Milwaukee County Senior Centers.

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- 9) Evaluate the suggestions provided by the public in this report, characterize as long or short term, and determine what resources will be necessary to carry out the suggestions.
  - 10) Add a staff member at the Milwaukee County Department on Aging to staff the senior center committee and carry out the Commission's strategic plan, work to ensure access to senior center programming exists across the county, assist the senior center programming vendor in identifying best practices, and 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.