

Envisioning the Future

Milwaukee County Senior Centers: 2020



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Milwaukee County Commission on Aging
Aging Advisory Council



MILWAUKEE COUNTY
Department on Aging

Envisioning the Future

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Milwaukee County Senior Centers: 2020

Introduction

Milwaukee County senior centers have hosted older adults in our neighborhoods for more than forty years. These multifunctional 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:



Each Milwaukee County senior center has its own character and its own resources. All of 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 (the Department) 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. This report will provide an overview of that assessment process and conclude with the Aging Advisory Council’s recommendations to the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging for sustaining and enhancing the future of our senior centers.

Senior Center Assessment Phase I

During Phase I of the assessment, 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 Milwaukee County Department of Administrative Services completed a comprehensive Facility Condition Assessment of each Milwaukee County senior center to identify needed repairs, building systems that required replacement, and capital planning information for future facility fiscal needs. This study found a significant backlog of major maintenance work and capital requirements at all five Milwaukee County senior centers, including a long list of Americans with Disabilities Act (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 senior center participants, other stakeholders, and Commission on Aging members. The Department posted these reports on its [website](#).

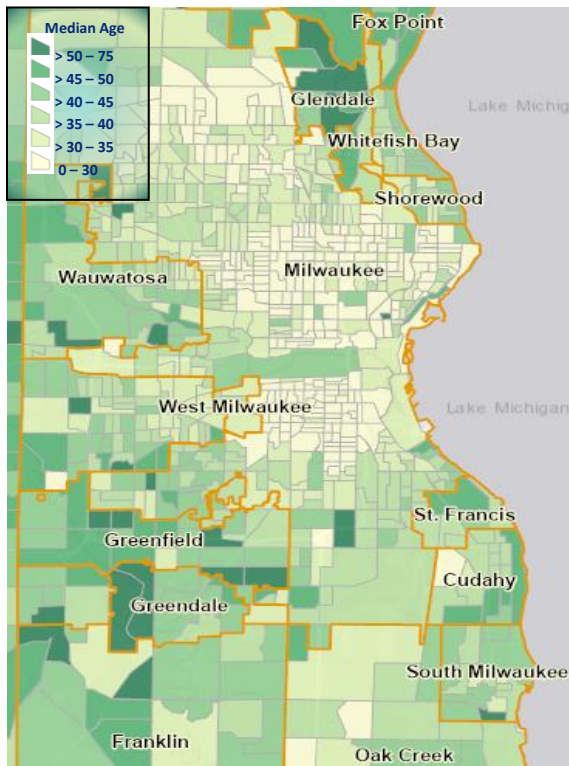
Senior Center Assessment Phase II

Once an assessment of the current state of programming, attendance, and structural needs at these senior centers was complete, the Department gathered an advisory group to guide Phase II and commissioned the Wisconsin Policy Forum (WPF) to review new models of senior center support and programming. 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 presented 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 draws 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 and 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 to supporting older adult programs;
- revenue can be generated from memberships, fee for service programs, and facility rental.

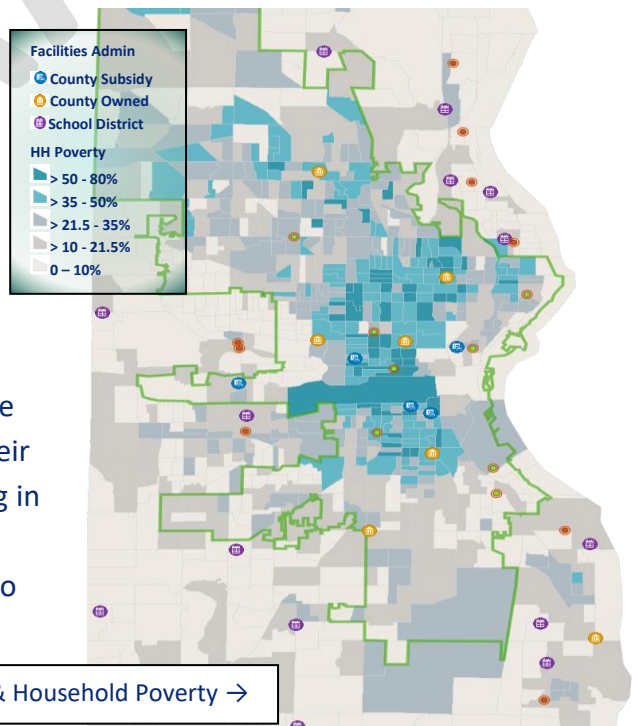
A literature review reveals that many jurisdictions are struggling to maintain their senior centers as facilities age, maintenance costs escalate, and participation declines. As a 2011 AARP study of New Orleans stated: “there remain fundamental questions about purpose, role, customer base and long-term financial sustainability [of senior centers]. The federal policies that brought about the growth of senior centers in the second half of the 20th century have not kept pace with the changing needs and desires of older people” in the 21st century. Moreover, recent research on aging has identified seven dimensions of wellness. 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 – exist to promote the wellness of the people they are meant to serve.

Over the years Milwaukee County senior centers have provided tens of thousands of residents over age fifty (50) with a safe, healthy, and active gathering space. Programming in our senior centers has included: arts & crafts, fitness exercise, evidence-based wellness, woodworking, sewing, quilting, games & puzzles, spiritual and cultural celebrations, outings, and daily luncheons. Participation in these activities has varied from more than 2,000 individuals per year at Wilson Senior Center to 650 individuals per year at McGovern Senior Center. Offerings at the different senior centers are likewise varied.

Senior center participants are passionate advocates for sustaining their viability well into the future, demographics indicate that the aging population in Milwaukee County has shifted and become increasingly concentrated in the suburbs (note darker green areas on map). Moreover, despite their location, the centers do not appear to attract 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.



Senior Centers in MKE County & Household Poverty →

Senior Center Assessment Phase III

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.

Envisioning Session Questions

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:

Q. 1 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?

Q. 2 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?



Q. 3 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)?

Q. 4 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 reported 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.

I. Promoting the Senior Centers

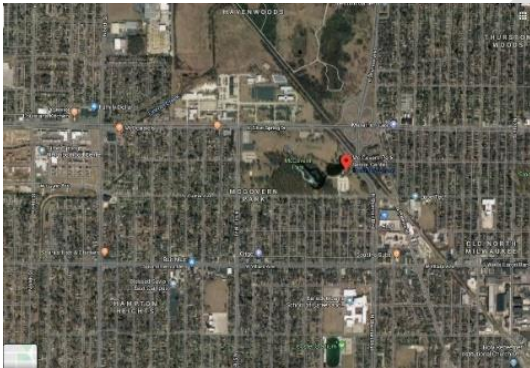
Those who participated in the community conversations indicated they were generally pleased with the program offerings that currently exist through Serving Older Adults of Southeast Wisconsin (SOA), the agency contracted through the Department on Aging to operate the centers. Yet it was noted that there has been a general decline in participation at the five Milwaukee County senior centers over time and that some centers are underutilized by residents in their local neighborhood. Participants and nonparticipants alike expressed a need to increase awareness of the existence and benefits of these senior centers. Thus, there were many suggestions for attracting new participants which generally focused on relatively simple marketing strategies involving the Milwaukee County Department on Aging, SOA, and the senior center participants themselves.



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 and businesses.
- Have interns interview local pastors/rabbis and solicit their help in promotion.
- 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 mailings or flyers to older adult residents in the surrounding area.
- Advertise what is available in the senior centers.
- Promote senior centers in health care facilities, with local clinics and physicians.
- Collaborate with the MPS Recreation Department to include Senior Center offerings in MPS Activity guides.
- Promote 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 and doctors’ offices.
- Contact companies HR and retiree groups to promote availability 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 SDC’s Senior Companion and Foster Grandparents promote senior centers.
- Write articles for municipal newsletters, community newspapers.
- Milwaukee Journal/Sentinel feature article or series.



- Place placard on MCTS buses advertising the centers.
- Get a Milwaukee Buck to be a sponsor or promotor.
- Host an “open house” with free food & refreshments.
- Utilize Facebook and social media involving participants.
- Ask AARP, retiree groups, and senior volunteers to help promote with their members.

Differentiate Programming to Appeal to Broader Range of Participants

- Wider variety of fitness classes and 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 and recreation centers to include water exercise and recreation.
- People think you must be 65+ to use the centers, emphasize 50+ in materials.
- Offer coffee and 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 and class registration and provide phone option for registration – perhaps partner with MPS to utilize their registration system.
- Develop an app for membership, class and event registration, and 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 and 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.
- Hire staff who are warm, welcoming, and responsive.



II. Attractive Programming

In addition to marketing strategies and increasing access, we received several ideas to improve programming at the senior centers. Programming itself was viewed as a key to attracting more participants and bringing the benefits of senior centers to a wider audience. When considering programming alternatives, experts in the aging community suggest viewing all offerings through the lens of the seven Dimensions of Wellness, as recognized by the International Council on Active Aging:



Emotional

Feelings are the lens through which people view the world. The ability to be aware of and direct one's feelings helps to create balance in life, cope with challenges, and behave in a trustworthy manner.

Intellectual, cognitive

Engaging in creative pursuits and intellectually stimulating activities is a proven approach to keeping minds alert and interested.

Physical

Improving health and functional ability by engaging in physical activity, choosing healthy foods, getting adequate sleep, managing stress, limiting alcohol intake, and not smoking.

Professional, vocational

Participating in the paid and unpaid workforce maintains or improves skills and helps others. Leisure-time vocations in the arts and through hobbies maintain vocational skills.

Social

Social interactions with family, friends, neighbors and chosen peer groups by joining clubs, traveling, visiting friends and family, engaging in intergenerational experiences.

Spiritual

Living with meaning and purpose in life, guided by personal values, and creating a connection to the larger world. Faith-based activities, personal meditation, mindful exercise and experiencing nature.

Environmental

Respecting the value of nature, bringing people into the natural environment and encouraging active living through urban and property designs emphasizing walking paths, light, and gardens.

With these seven dimensions in mind, participants in the envisioning process offered that our senior centers could add or improve programming in the areas of lifestyle, fitness, health and wellness, arts and crafts, and education.

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 and relationship building activities, including dances.
- Legal counseling.
- A quiet room to read and study, book club.
- Seasonally appropriate field trips, outings. Buses to ethnic festivals and special events in the community.
- Promote "dine around town" program that gets people into local businesses.
- Provide transportation from senior centers 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 and 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

- Add health clinics that offer health screenings, flu shots, and therapy.
- 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 – 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 training.
- Communal kitchen with cooking classes.
- 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 and funeral planning.
- Dance groups and classes for all ages.
- Textiles, knitting, felting, etc.
- Music room. Teach instruments.
- ESL classes and support.
- Partnership with UWM or Marquette for educational classes.
- Partnership with Milwaukee County zoo – talks on animals.



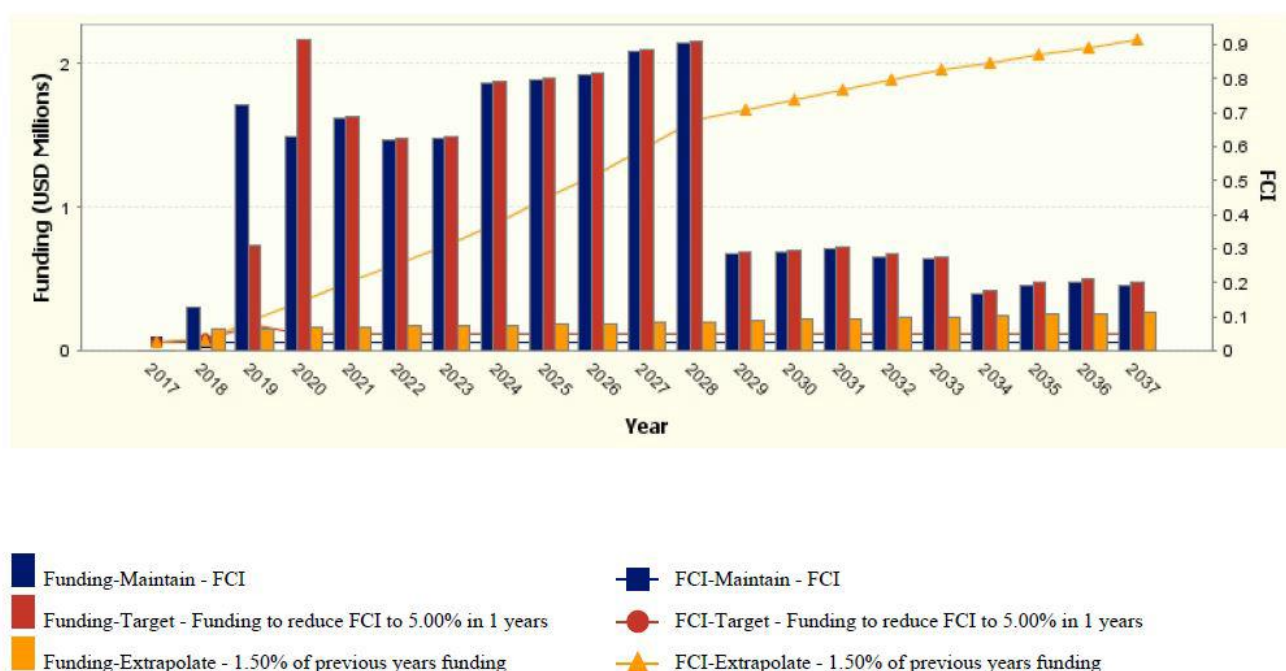
III. Envisioning New Models

Current Funding, Maintenance and Capital Needs

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 Administrative Services for major 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. Finally, in some years major capital projects are also approved by the County Board.

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.

The chart below illustrates that while expected funds available to maintain the senior center facilities remain relatively stable, major system needs and deferred maintenance will quickly outpace the ability of this funding to keep them in a safe and usable state. FCI is the ratio of deferred maintenance costs to estimated replacement value and provides a straightforward comparison of an organization's key assets. The lower the FCI, the lower the need for remedial or renewal funding



relative to the facility's value. For example, an FCI of 0.1 is generally considered low, while an FCI of 0.7 means that the building needs extensive repairs or replacement.

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/Exh	\$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 replace 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.

In the same way, County levy contributions to the programming, operation and routine maintenance of the Milwaukee County senior centers have remained relatively static over the past decade at approximately \$1.1 million. During this time, the number of eligible participants has increased, while the number of staff members operating the centers and actual participation has declined. The programming offered at the Milwaukee County senior centers and the equipment and supplies necessary to implement this programming have likewise not been updated in many years. In some cases, material and equipment have been mothballed due to lack of use.

Yet it is vitally important to note that the Commission on Aging has never suggested nor 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 21st Century. This section details ideas that were proposed during the Envisioning sessions to renew the senior centers both in form and function.

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.

Location

- More locations or different locations.
- Set up "pop-up" or storefront satellite centers in underrepresented areas.
- Co-locate senior centers in school buildings.
- Keep senior programming during day, but open to others afternoon and evenings.
- Fix the existing issues with senior centers first, update and expand these facilities.
- Enhance park setting where the centers are located; add beer gardens, pathways.
- Expand and support farmer's markets in each location.
- 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 use 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 and 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 to build new centers in underserved neighborhoods.
- Partner with senior living complexes that have updated facilities to gain access for other low-income seniors.
- Promote the centers in the community and open their use to a wider range of participants. Many of the assets and spaces in the centers are now underutilized.
- 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.
- Ensure elevators are in safe, 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 for accessibility 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 readability of signage both interior and exterior.
- Don't make the senior centers intergenerational – those already exist and seniors want a space of their own and cuts down on fear.

Facility Design

- Build larger buildings that could share space with library outreach, healthcare clinics, summer youth programs, MPS, OSHER.
- Fitness rooms updated and 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.
- Aging friendly transportation to and from the centers is critical, shared van service.
- 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 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 and signage outside of the centers.
- Install defibrillators in all centers.
- Add plants within the centers.
- Wireless access and upgraded computer center, create an Internet café.
- Add an outdoor entertainment venue.
- Add a TV lounge or movie theatre space.
- Add better sound and music systems.
- Fix HVAC and ceiling fans.
- Update community gathering spaces.
- Add indoor warm water swimming pool.



IV. Funding & Partnerships

Beginning in 2019 the entity that had operated Milwaukee County's senior centers since the mid-1990's ceased operation. The Department contracted with a new nonprofit, Serving Older Adults of Southeast Wisconsin (SOA) for the staffing, programming, maintenance, and nutrition services at these five senior centers. SOA has recognized the need to diversify its funding base to effectively operate the senior centers. SOA has already implemented some of the measures suggested below to increase and diversify revenue streams and projects \$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 2020 MCDA facility maintenance responsibilities and funding will be transferred to the Department of Administrative Services, improving operating efficiencies and project management of major repairs.

Nevertheless, new partnerships and revenue must be sought if the facilities and programming in the Milwaukee County senior centers are to be improved and updated for the 21st century. Shared revenue from the state of Wisconsin has stagnated over the past decade, and the state legislature has imposed restrictions on the ability of counties to raise additional tax revenue. Thus, with an annual budget deficit of almost \$27 million, and growing demands on existing revenue for mandated services, the County likely will be unable to contribute additional resources to the senior centers. Moreover, innovative partnerships in other jurisdictions have proven helpful not only by contributing additional revenue for operational support, they have added great value in the form of new programs and services that are more easily accessible to the older adult population. During the Phase III engagement sessions, many ideas emerged for building new partnerships and raising new revenue.

Fundraising

- Naming rights for centers, rooms, or specific projects (e.g. HVAC-Johnson Controls).
- Hire a professional fundraiser and/or grant writer.
- 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.

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, rummage sales, etc.
- 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.
- Sell scrip for shopping with a percentage retained as profit.
- Bill for Evidence Based Health services through Medicaid.
- Crafters and woodworkers in the centers to make items for sale – run a business.



Programming 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 buses directly to the 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 Association, American Health Association, 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 & internship/clinical placements – cosmetology, auto repair, appliance repair etc.
- Partner with Marquette Dental School 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.

Public Support

- Dedicate portion of the county budget to continue senior center programs.
- Pursue Fair Deal to secure additional tax funds dedicated to parks & senior centers.



- Fund new senior centers through a TIF district or similar financing.
- Increase sales tax and/or check-off box on income taxes.
- Apply for Lottery funds.
- Partner with Friends of the Parks or establish similar compact.
- Reinstate a dedicated senior center coordinator at MCDA.
- Partner with City of Milwaukee Departments of Neighborhood Services or Community Development to operate the centers.

V. 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, perception of safety, outreach efforts, and preference for improvements at the centers. In response to the input received through this survey and in discussions with the Department on Aging, SOA has already begun to implement 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. 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, program coordinator, full or part-time custodian, and half-time dining site coordinator. Some centers have additional program coordinators. SOA also employs a fitness coordinator, 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 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 capital improvements initiated by the Department on Aging, operational and programmatic changes have also been initiated by SOA. These include:

SOA Agency

- Added a Health and Wellness Coordinator responsible for orientation to the fitness centers, nutrition, fitness, and evidence-based wellness educational programs.
- Re-established travel groups and expanded to include Wisconsin casino trips.
- Speaking engagements with Rexnord Retirees and OWLS to discuss senior centers.
- Distributed 1,500 "Neighbors Helping Neighbors" flyers during summer in neighborhoods around the senior centers and during Farmer's Market Days.
- Updated computers, internet, and phone service at the senior centers.
- Implemented donor software, conducted annual appeal and special events.

- Established a SOA Facebook Page and designed website to increase awareness.
- Ongoing distribution of more than 3,000 copies of the *Connection* to 68 sites.



Clinton Rose Senior Center

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



Kelly Senior Center

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



McGovern Park Senior Center

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



Washington Park Senior Center

- Implemented nutrition education by offering Healthy Living with Diabetes, and holiday cooking classes.
- Opened a re-gift shop at Washington Park to increase revenue streams and offer additional opportunities at the center.
- Exploring a collaboration with UW-Extension.
- Starting a money management class in 2020 to be taught by a retired professor.
- Created a monthly jewelry and beading workshop. Began an annual talent show.



Wilson Park Senior Center

- Implemented a guitar jam session run by a volunteer.
- Worked with the Garden Club to hold a floral arrangement class.
- Collaborated with the Alzheimer's Association to create a caregiver support group.
- Collaborated with Our Harmony Club to create an on-site respite program.

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, 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.

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