

CAFE: The Center for Age-Friendly Excellence

Advancing Livable Communities for all Generations



Qualitative Report

Focus Groups at Senior Center Inc.

Regarding Unmet Needs of Older Adult E. Palo Alto Residents

Focus Group Discussions:

April 24, 2023 at 11:30 am - 1:00 pm

May 17, 2023 at 1:00 – 2:30 pm

Total # of participants in Focus Groups: 16 people (11F/5M)

Latinx: 8, African American: 7, Asian: 1

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Notetaker: Cynthia Nakayama, otter.ai

Unmet Needs, Strengths, and Potential Solutions in the Eight Domains of Livability

Introductory note: There was not much time available to discuss the city's strengths due to the additional time required for interpretation. We did not have time to discuss strengths in all of the domain areas. Since a priority of the focus groups is to discuss the unmet needs of older adults, the majority of our time was spent discussing this.

Mobility & Transportation

Unmet Needs

- **Lack of dependability:** Buses do not arrive on schedule. So, getting to our appointments is not easy.

- **A valuable shuttle was cut:** There was a shuttle that brought many of us to the senior center for lunch. The driver knew who to pick up when he arrived. The city took a survey to determine whether that shift was beneficial and decided that it was not needed. However, they did not ask the seniors. We need the shuttle back because some seniors have no other way to go out. Since the pandemic, many seniors are homebound. The buses are not as convenient for most.
- **Lack of respect for older passengers:** Bus service is poor; once they arrive, they are not considerate to seniors. When the senior(s) come onto the bus, the drivers start driving right away before there is a chance to sit down.
- **Current costs are too high:** Need free or highly discounted transportation available for seniors. Some are on fixed incomes; many cannot afford even a minimal fee to ride the bus as they do not receive social security. Many are immigrants with no benefits.
- **Sidewalks around EPA are destroyed and uneven;** seniors fall.
- **Sidewalks can be blocked by parked vehicles:** wheelchairs cannot get through; you cannot even walk through. Need regulations that prohibit the cars from parking there.

Strengths

- None mentioned.

Potential Solutions

- Transportation is a number one 'MUST have' that the City can do for its older adults.
- Offer free or highly discounted transportation available for seniors. Many cannot afford to pay event a minimal fee e.g. \$5.
- Offer a shuttle for seniors and the disabled, that would take seniors to the places they need to go including shopping and appointments, or wherever they need to be. It would be helpful if there was no cost. If the driver could also stay there with them, they could ensure nothing goes wrong. Palo Alto and Redwood City have shuttles.
- Reinstate the shuttle that brought older adults to the senior center for lunch.
- Provide a free transit pass for seniors and the disabled.
- Repair uneven sidewalks.

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Unmet Needs

- Bell Park needs a public restroom. We like to convene there after the Senior Center closes so that we can talk. However, we feel that the park needs more amenities.
- Feel like EPA lacks beautiful parks, like a garden.

Strengths

- Joe Davis Park and Martin Luther King Park
- Walking and biking trails
- East Palo Alto Art Center has open spaces where people gather informally

Potential Solutions

- Need for nice, beautiful parks, like a garden, somewhere to enjoy.
 - Should include clean, safe bathrooms.

Housing

Unmet Needs

- Not enough affordable and accessible housing.
- Half of city residents are renters. *Renters spend a significantly larger portion of their income on housing than homeowners. This can lead to renters needing to cut back on food- or medical- related costs.*
- Some residents want to age in community; they don't want to get moved far from their community and loved ones. However, when required care levels increase, the family often does not have time to provide this additional care. *This statement implies that participants felt it was too expensive to retire in EPA and/or there are no affordable options for long term care.*
- No one asks us if we need assistance finding good home repair services.
- The City needs to pay more attention to seniors, and the residents who have a home and want to do a conversion so that their senior parent can live there. One of our senior residents spent \$20,000 trying to get his home fixed because he wanted his mother to live there. He experienced many challenges from city employees.

Strengths

- A couple of years ago we built housing for seniors. They were specifically targeted first for senior residents who already live in EPA, though seniors in other parts of the county could also apply.
- Rebuilding Together Peninsula presented their resources at the Senior Center:
<https://rebuildingtogether.org/>
 - Christmas in April used to be held pre-pandemic: This is a Rebuilding Together Peninsula, Safe at Home program where volunteer home repair and modification services are offered to low-income families and also elder homeowners to help them to age in community.

Potential Solutions

- Offer more affordable and accessible housing. Start small and create housing for about 30 members of senior population and their care workforce (e.g., medical staff such as nurses). Possibly start with an available building that would be remodeled or renovated.
- Offer educational session presentations on HIP Housing, a shared housing program (<https://hiphousing.org/>). HIP Housing is helpful in making housing more affordable for residents. Also, housemates provide company and assistance in activities that older adult can no longer do such as upkeep of yard, shopping, housekeeping, and driving.

- For homeowners, make available the names of trusted, vetted resources for home repair.
- Invite Rebuilding Together Peninsula to return and talk about their program.

Social Participation

Unmet Needs

- There is a big need right now for seniors to have more social interactions.
- Not all senior residents know about the Senior Center and the many activities offered here.
- There were many classes and activities offered at the Senior Center before the pandemic. We need more programs and classes at the Senior Center. We have been calling and following up, but we feel like we're being discriminated against and put on a wait list, since EPA is a lower income area and has a reputation for crime. The other areas that already have big senior centers and have more resources get first choice and are taken care of.
- Since there is no longer a shuttle, or any transportation, that brings seniors to the Senior Center, there has been a decrease in those that have an opportunity to socialize and participate in activities.
 - There were many Asians that took the shuttle to the Senior Center. Some used to ride their bikes but have gotten older and are now unable to.
 - Since there is no shuttle to the local Senior Center, some older residents (e.g. Lytton Gardens residents) now get picked up by the Avenidas bus to attend Avenidas in downtown Palo Alto.
- Need for more education and information on how to identify and avoid scams.
- No movie theater in EPA.
- Seating for movies in the park does not work for seniors. It is not comfortable for either movies or any other times when they need to sit.

Strengths

- The senior center will soon offer counseling again. We talked with the psychologist and asked her to come back, so she will be at the Senior Center once each week.

Potential Solutions

- There needs to be a flyer or other ways to inform older residents of the Senior Center and the activities that are available.
- Identify areas in the parks that can be used for social activities, singing, or exercise groups, such as tai chi. These can be free and people may join in as they would like.
- Tai chi classes could be held at the East Palo Alto Art Center.
- Offer educational talks.
- Look into having a California AARP representative present; or have Senior Center make available AARP webinars including calling in with questions
- Bring back movies in the park and provide comfortable seating for seniors.

Respect and Social Inclusion

Unmet needs

- When you're older, you're not respected, you're treated differently, or you're ignored.
- It is important to have city staff that considers the needs and value of elders. The city has to be more considerate about seniors, not just families.
- Customer service at restaurants: Some seniors feel that they are made to wait longer since the restaurants believe they don't tip as well as younger patrons.
- Need more understanding, acceptance, and assistance for adults with cognitive decline.
- Lack of intergenerational activities.
 - Younger people need to understand that they will get older too. They are young now but they are going to be seniors too. Need to remember that we are all getting older, everyone is getting older.
- Older adults feel socially isolated from their adult children.
 - "In this country, everyone is working hard because everything is so expensive. The family does not have time to take care of their elders. At the senior center, I hear, "My daughter does not love me," or, "My daughter or my son doesn't talk to me." This is how we live in the Bay Area. I used to work three jobs, part-time and full-time. My kids would only see me a small part of each day. That is the same thing that is happening to the seniors, they are ignored."
- Desire for more social interactions with people who care about older adults and are willing to listen, like the psychologist from Palo Alto that came to the senior center. This makes me feel like my existence is valuable in the world.

Strengths

- Some participants said they are treated well; they do not feel they are treated differently from other residents.
- East Palo Alto has always celebrated our diverse cultures and respect one another. We need to continue to work together toward our quality of life.
- Feel that the Senior Center staff/ patrons are understanding and accepting to adults with cognitive changes.
 - The seniors begin forgetting things and repeat what they are saying, over and over. The family may get angry and that really hurts them. But if they come here to the Senior Center and people don't get angry if they repeat themselves.
- Because of our current Community Services Manager, the National Council of Negro Women now participates in our activities. This enriches the experience of the seniors who attend.

Potential Solutions

- Offer intergenerational activities to increase understanding and awareness.
- Offer multicultural activities that are also intergenerational so increase understanding of other cultures.

- City governments and communities need to view their city with an older adult lens. For example:
 - If you were older, what would you change about this?
 - If you were a bus driver, what would you do differently when older adults board the bus?

Civic Participation and Employment

Unmet Needs

- There is a need for older adults to stay involved, go to the City Council, and reach out to the city's Senior Advisory Committee representative who advocates at the State and County level on older adults' behalf.

Strengths

- There is new funding available for older adults at the county and state levels.

Potential Solutions

- Form an older adult advocacy coalition.
 - Older adults need to go to their city council; we need to solidify our voices and make that voice louder because no one is hearing us. Our voice needs to be united and we need to speak with one voice. Sacramento will not hear us without this.

Communication and Information

Unmet Needs

- Need to offer activities in more than one language. There are a lot of activities and they say they are for the community, but everything is in English only.
- Need for improved communication and collaboration between the city and the senior center staff.
 - A Senior Center representative was previously on the Juneteenth event committee. However, this year, it will be held at the senior center but they were not included on the committee and did not know anything about it.

Strengths

- None mentioned.

Potential Solutions

- For older adults that are not comfortable with technology, other ways to distribute information:
 - Include information in City's weekly community calendar of events.
 - Include information in Senior Center calendar of events.
 - Have announcements made at faith-based organizations, churches.

- Phone calls
- Flyers: post on kiosks, businesses that allow posting of flyers in window
- Word of Mouth

Community Support/ Health Services

Unmet Needs

- We need the nutritionist to return and provide classes on healthy eating at the Senior Center.
- We need more volunteers at the Senior Center.
 - During the pandemic there were over 30 volunteers at the Senior Center every day. Most were available due to being unemployed, but now they have returned to work.
- There is a lack of long-term care facilities and skilled nursing facilities (SNFs); these need to be available.
 - Need to build long-term care facilities here or a place with beds for older adults who have run out of money and need higher levels of medical care.
- Transportation is needed to travel to the medical facilities outside of the city, including Stanford, Kaiser in Redwood City, and Palo Alto Medical Foundation.
 - East Palo Alto has a high prevalence of asthma and cancer due to the Romic chemical plant that was previously there.

Strengths

- Senior Center provides nutritious lunches for older adults.
- Ravenswood Clinic offers healthcare on a sliding scale.
- There are also two pharmacies available.

Potential Solutions

- Bring back the nutritionist to teach classes on healthy eating at the Senior Center
- Recruit more volunteers at the Senior Center
- Expand awareness of transportation options to access Stanford, Kaiser in Redwood City, and Palo Alto Medical Foundation