

Senior Services Task Force - Second Report:

**A Needed Activity Center**

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## Background and Context

1. On April 16<sup>th</sup>, the Senior Services Task Force delivered its first report to the Town Board.
2. Data was provided on the rapid “graying” of our community paralleling similar phenomena at the state and national levels.
3. Noteworthy information about this trend included:
  - About 1/3 of the residents of Orchard Park are 55 or older
  - The Senior Population is growing at three times the rate of the population as a whole.
  - The fastest growing demographic in Orchard Park is 85+ which increased 55% between the 2000 and 2010 censuses. The second fastest was 60-64 which was up 43% during the same period.
4. Problems which have particularly strong impact on the senior population are:
  - social isolation, increased vulnerability to loss of memory and mental alertness, chronic health and physical fitness problems, mobility limitations, nutrition problems, stressors consequent to dealing with loss of friends, family and loss of the physical, mental and financial resources to maintain the level of independence that has been customary in adult life. The impact of each of these problems can be profound. For example, the AARP Foundation cites Dr. Lisa Berkman, Director of the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, who reports that the mortality risk for socially isolated individuals, a particularly pervasive problem for the elderly, is three times as high as for those who are not .
5. The Task Force identified a set of core needs of the aging to make our community better suited to its changing character. These included:
  - Appropriate activities
  - Transportation options

- Supports
- Senior-friendly housing

6. Activities and an Activity Center were identified as the first need to be addressed:

- A. Many of the key critical problems and needs that have been identified can be most effectively and efficiently addressed in the setting of an Activity Center properly sized and configured to support events, groups, classes and activities that has adequate space and parking. An appropriate physical space is required to host programs in order for them to occur.
- B. The obvious shortcomings of the current Center for senior activities are familiar. There are serious questions about the accessibility, size, configuration, safety, handicapped suitability, cost efficiency and lack of adequate, accessible parking for the current structure.

## Senior Service Needs - Activity Center

The underlying common theme to the listed needs is that they promote optimal health, mental clarity, quality of life and support for maximally independent physical, social and life functioning.

1. Interpersonal Contact and Connection - preventing social isolation; building new contacts, relationships and networks; forming and developing relationships to replace losses; depth of relationships to be determined by comfort level and skills - casual, interdependent, close
2. Mind and Memory Fitness - promote preservation of mental agility, memory and mental clarity - classes, presentations, exercises to promote and maintain active intellectual involvement and higher level functioning
3. Elder Physical Fitness - exercise and physical activity geared to agility, strength and flexibility levels that are commonly found in an aging population
4. Engaging Activity - Intellectual and Physical - Classes, Hobbies, Education, Games to stimulate interest and involvement.
5. Health Teaching to Manage Issues of Aging – Diets and activities that prevent or minimize symptoms of illness; care for transient and chronic health and physical problems prevalent in aging populations
6. Managing Life Issue of Aging - Financial, Legal, Personal and Family - Wills, Health Care Proxies, Living Wills, Uniform Gifts to Minors, Trust accounts
7. Maintaining Positive Spirit and Outlook - Promoting self-worth, personal pride, self-esteem and positive outlook to ward off self-doubt and prevent depression often associated with age-related loss of physical and functional capacity.
8. Education and Learning - Learning new things to stimulate intellectual growth and develop skills needed to function in the face of changing environments and technology

**2014 Programs And Activities - Descriptions and Benefits –**  
**Orchard Park Senior Center -**

Mind Aerobics	One hour program designed to challenge a person's cognitive ability by using visual puzzles, memory quizzes, and trivia. Helps exercise brain and may slow process of dementia. Maintains or increases interactive skills among participants.
Chair Exercise	Fitness program designed for the person with limited mobility. Using weights, fitness balls, resistance bands, it strengthens and tones muscles
Diabetic Wellness	Trained County Personnel conduct six week courses whose focus is to help the diabetic learn to control diet and medication through exercise and food choices.
Women's Exercise	Classes with aerobic, stretch and weight lifting, designed specifically for women encourages those with limited mobility to continue to exercise
Senior Safe Driving	Promotes safe driving; refresh driving techniques, updates seniors on new state driving laws
Tai Chi	Relieves physical effects of stress, improves mind and body as focus on concentration; improve balance
Yoga	Improve overall health and well-being; helps seniors with chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, arthritis. Improves flexibility and range of motion.
Cardiovascular Health	Monitoring blood pressure enables seniors to control diet and warns of any problems
University Express	Promote personal improvement by exploring new ideas, learning new skills and connecting with other seniors
Stay Fit Dining	Provides nutritious, well balanced meal to seniors and gives an opportunity to meet new people and socialize - especially to those living alone.
Men's Fitness	Use of weights, aerobics, stretch, and floor exercise designed specifically for men. Encourages those who are limited physically. Exercising with a group helps one to remain focused on well being
Competitive cognitive game	Bridge, Pinochle, Euchre, Mah Jong , enhances working memory and reasoning, and building social circles to help maintain health and work to help delay or prevent dementia.
Competitive Active Games	Bocce, pool shooting, senior games, helps hand eye co-ordination, develop team concept and can be played by anyone. Great way to meet people and develop friendships
Language, Spanish,	Learning new language helps stimulate mental functioning and offers an opportunity for seniors to learn about different culture and customs
Computer Skills	Help seniors learn new technology; keep contact with family, friends; research any topic, opens a new world
Electronic Games	Wii bowling, aids in eye/hand co-ordination; offers exercise to those physically limited or those with early dementia

Craft Activities	Offers people an opportunity to explore their creativity and learn from other people's projects. Promotes a sense of accomplishment and personal effectiveness.
Art Expression	Ability to express oneself; exercises the brain and promotes memory, available for every level of skill and ability; promotes socialization
Active Exercise	Using resistance bands, help manages stress and improve memory; build and tone muscle,
Dance Exercise	A combined mind-body workout that challenges memory and strengthen bones and muscles.
Group Dance	Provides an opportunity to meet people and encourage the use and practice of interpersonal skills; improves balance; reduces stress
Library/book group	Meet new people; stimulates mental alertness and cognitive acuity; promotes learning, and expressing thoughts and ideas.
Movies	Opportunity to view movies in safe, familiar surroundings; develop and practice casual relationship skills; keep abreast of new movies enabling discussion with children, and grandchildren
Senior Group Meetings	Ability to meet new people, express ideas in a group setting, plan co-operatively with others; develop friendship, travel
Current Events	Discuss world, state and local events enhancing understanding and allowing constructive discussion with people having different points of view.
Senior Monthly Bulletin	Provide information on programs, activities and events allowing seniors to plan and gives them something to look forward to
Meditation	Reduces stress, help lower blood pressure and arthritic symptoms.
Social Events	Chance to socialize, meet new people, relieves loneliness
Outings - BPO & Shea's	Opportunity to experience travel and cultural events. Offers different perspective on life,
Outings - Dinner club	Meets once a month, opportunity to try different cuisine; helps senior explore different cultures; helps people meet new friends.

/awJune 23/2014

Service Need / Activity Matrix

Activity	Contact and Connection	Mind and Memory	Elder Fitness	Engaging Activity
1. Mind Aerobics	X	X		X
2. Chair Exercise			X	
3. Diabetic Wellness			X	
4. Women's Exercise	X			
5. Senior Safe Driving				
6. Tai Chi		X	X	X
7. Yoga			X	X
8. Cardiovascular Health				
9. University Express	X	X		X
10. Stay Fit Dining	X			
11. Men's Fitness	X		X	
12. Competitive Cognitive Games	X	X		X
13. Competitive Active Games	X	X	X	X
14. Language (Spanish)	X	X		X
15. Computer Skills		X		
16. Electronic Games	X	X		X
17. Craft Activities	X			X
18. Art Expression				X
19. Active Exercise	X		X	X
20. Dance Exercise	X		X	X
21. Group Dance	X	X	X	X
22. Library		X		X
23. Movies				X
24. Senior Group Meetings	X	X		X
25. Current Events	X	X		X
26. Outings	X	X	X	X
27. Special Events	X	X		X
28. Meditation		X		X





## Space Requirements

Description	Size	Number	Activities	Total Space
1. Entrance/reception area with an information desk, chairs, table, coat racks, footwear changing bench, package storage, space for storing mobility equipment and handicapped accessible rest rooms.	1900 sq. ft.	1	entry, reception, outer wear removal and storage, mobility equipment storage, hygiene	1900 sq. ft.
2. Extra width corridors to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers passing in opposite directions	per existing standard	all	transit	as per standard applied to design
3. Auxiliary handicapped accessible rest rooms located distally to the entrance area.	500 sq ft	1 set	hygiene	500 sq ft.
4. Four 40' x 40' multipurpose activity/class rooms with cabinet, counters and below counter storage. One configured for equipment.	1600 sq. ft.	4	Activities - 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20, 25, 27, 28	6400 sq. ft.
5. Four 15' x 20' ft. activity/class/counseling/family meeting/support/ health teaching/group rooms	300 sq. ft.	4	Activities - 1, 3, 8, 12, 13, 27, 28, Add'l	1200 sq. ft.
6. Billiard room	700 sq. ft.	1	Activity - 13	700 sq. ft.
7. Dedicated space for creative arts and crafts activities with specialized storage and equipment.	800 sq. ft.	1	Activities - 17, 18	800 sq. ft.
8. Multipurpose large activity, meeting and assembly area.	1600 sq. ft.	1	Activities - 9, 20, 21, 23, 24, 27	1600 sq. ft.
9. Large partitionable space for dining, large meetings, heavily attended active programs and special events.	4200 sq. ft.	1	Activities- 10, 21, 23, 24, 27	4200 sq. ft.
10. Kitchen, serving, food storage and office areas for County supported meal program for seniors. Adjacent and connected to space #9 above. Available for use for special events.	800 sq. ft.	1	Activities - 10, 27	800 sq. ft.
11. Library	1325 sq. ft.	1	Activities - 22, 25	1325 sq.ft.
12. Computer room - eight stations	800 sq. ft.	1	Activities - 15, 16	800 sq. ft.
13. Senior Center administrative offices and record storage. Space for County van service scheduling staff. Prep space for visiting county and guest teachers and program leaders.	1400 sq. ft.	1	Administrative offices, records, program preparation area for county and guest speakers.	1400 sq. ft.
14. Gymnasium with male and female locker rooms.	3600 sq. ft.	1	Activities - 4, 6, 7, 11, 13, 19, 20	3600 sq.ft.
15. Storage Areas for tables, chairs, office supplies, and program, cleaning and kitchen equipment. May be multiple areas with number and size of individual spaces as most easily accommodated in the architectural design.	total of 2500 sq. ft.	As per design	All activities and area of functioning	2500 sq. ft.
<b>Total Space</b>				<b>27,725 sq. ft.</b>

# The Current Senior Center

The structure and location of the current Senior Center fail to meet needs. There are several key areas of deficiency: These are:

1. Safety
2. Health
3. Size
4. Accessibility

## Safety Issues

The two story configuration inherited from the Center's origin as an old house creates serious safety as well as accessibility issues. The stairwell is very steep and falls have already occurred. Fortunately, none have resulted in serious injury. Its narrow width impedes two-way traffic and it does not accommodate transport appliances. In the event of a fire, the elevator would not be usable and the second floor would have to be evacuated using the steep, narrow stairs. This would be extremely slow and difficult for those requiring wheel chairs, walkers, crutches and other assistive devices. For them and those behind them, timely evacuation would not be practicable.

## Health Issues

Due to size limitations and lack of alternative space, the dining area is also used for exercise and other physical activities. This frequently requires activities to take place on the same carpeted floor with food imbedded from spills during lunch and other activities in which food was served. Vacuuming or cleaning the carpet between activities is not practical or possible due to tight scheduling consequent to lack of alternative space. Exercise activities have taken place on the floor between dining tables as people were seating themselves at the tables for lunch.

## **Size Issues**

Cramped quarters and lack of alternative space often results in loud activities occurring in rooms contiguous to activities requiring listening and concentration. It's not easy to listen to a lecture on health insurance or watch a movie with Zumba or tap dancing going on in the room over your head or to learn Spanish in a room next to a billiard game.

In addition to disruptive arrangement and contiguity issues, small room sizes prevent meaningful use for intended activities. The "library" has one table with four chairs and is often used for meetings when no other space is available. People who try to come to read or research a situation have no place to sit. The billiard room is so narrow and the table so close to the wall that players have no room to take their shots. An intrusive structural pillar in the center of the room impedes players on the other side of the table.

## **Accessibility Issues**

**Parking** - The lot adjacent to the center has 37 spaces and there are usually 10 – 15 more on the street and in more distant lots. The hundred plus seniors who attend each day and Center staff have to compete with neighbors and staff and patrons of nearby local businesses for parking. Many seniors have serious mobility limitations and will give up and go home if they cannot park nearby. Instructors who have been sent by the county report that they are unable to park. There are fewer handicapped parking spaces at the Center than there are at the nearby Veterinary Hospital.

**Building Use** – The second story, steep stairs, narrow corridors and undersized upstairs bathrooms made it very difficult for people with the hip, knee and other mobility problems that are very common among seniors. It is especially difficult for those with assistive devices and transport appliances. Many who need services give up and don't return.

## **Benefit Analysis**

Maintaining optimal health, intellectual clarity, quality of life and independence of seniors has multiple benefits to a community. A community of active aging can offer a variety of benefits including:

### **Neighborhood and Community Stability:**

Seniors are far less likely to be subject to company transfers and job changes that necessitate substantial moves. They tend to remain in a neighborhood and community for longer periods and maintain local character and customs. A senior population within a neighborhood is often used as a selling point in realty as retired seniors add an element of security by providing a de facto neighborhood watch.

### **Personal and Family Well Being:**

Promoting sustained independence of seniors can provide benefits at two levels. Seniors can often offer a variety of supports to their children including regular, supplemental and occasional care for grandchildren. Conversely, programs that extend independence of seniors can delay and reduce demands that parental illness and infirmity can place on their children.

### **Benefits to Local Business:**

As a group, seniors find lengthy drives increasingly unattractive and are more likely to shop and do business closer to home. Many, finding the tasks of property maintenance increasingly strenuous, contract for these services with local businesses.

## **Taxes and Economy:**

### **Differential Impact of Independence vs. Dependency**

#### **Independent Living**

Seniors living Independently share the costs of services they receive and, also, share the costs of services that have no direct benefit to them but do benefit other members of the community. Roughly half of their local tax contribution supports education and the schools from which they receive no direct service. A reduction in the proportion of seniors in the community would result in a commensurate increase in the amount of school tax that others would have to pay.

As previously noted, independent seniors shop more and purchase more goods and services locally. This positively impacts local business with consequent positive impact on the appearance and character of our community.

#### **Dependency**

There are several levels of dependent living. Costs vary with the level of care needed. After a period in which insurance and personal savings are exhausted, costs of care are paid by tax dollars most often through Medicaid. These costs are often high. For example, the median cost for Skilled Nursing Facility care is \$372 per day or, \$135,780 a year.

This moves a senior from being a partner in sharing the tax burden to being a recipient of major public funding. It also removes them from a position of supporting local service and retail and reduces their ability to contribute to their families and community

## **Summary:**

It is more advantageous and less costly for communities to maintain the independence of their Seniors for as long as possible. Senior Centers with programs that can defer dependency are cost-saving and deserving approaches to maximizing quality of life for our grandparents, our parents, our neighbors and, eventually, ourselves.