

Report on the Proceedings of The Woodbury Town Conversation on Aging

Introduction

The Town Conversation on Aging was held on Friday, May 10, 2013 at the Woodbury Senior Community Center. The event was attended by 72 people, including members of the public, senior center members, local providers of aging-related and social services, members of the Woodbury Commission for the Elderly, and town employees. Grant funding from the Connecticut Community Foundation provided funds for advertising and marketing the event, lunch for the participants, and materials used during the event.

Purpose

The purpose of the program was fivefold:

1. To raise awareness of the issues caused by changing demographics (the aging of our population) in Woodbury and the larger community
2. To raise awareness of current services and programs in place to help meet town residents' aging-related needs
3. To identify those gaps in current services
4. To identify potential needs in the future, and
5. To identify possible solutions for meeting those needs.

Proceedings

1. Following a demographics presentation and a general introduction to the "aging of America – and Woodbury" issues, attendees broke into small discussion groups. Each group focused on one aging-related topic (one group tackled two related topics on "Elder Friendly Community"), and addressed the following questions:
 - a) What services are currently in place?
 - b) Where are there gaps in service or current problems?
 - c) What will be needed in the next 5, 10, or 15 years?
 - d) What potential ideas or solutions might work to address the need? In other words, what opportunities exist in this area.

2. After the breakout sessions, the entire group reconvened to share results of the small group discussions. Trends and patterns emerged as the conversation moved forward, most notably, that many attendees are currently concerned about access to :
 - Transportation
 - Affordable and suitable housing in the area as they age, and
 - The ability to sustain social ties in the community through visits with friends, local shopping and appointments, and programs such as those found at the Senior Center.

Each of these areas is described, below.

1. Transportation:

Current gaps include on-demand transportation and evening/weekend bus service. **Future needs** will include on-demand transportation; door through door (meaning assistance is provided in managing the distance from vehicle to inside the home) services; creative forms of transportation assistance to recruit drivers (tax incentives for volunteering as a driver/ insurance coverage for same?), expanded service hours and locations (perhaps the need for more senior buses to expand wheelchair access). Seniors will want to continue to be active in town even when they no longer drive, and increasingly, will need more opportunities for transportation both in and out of town.

2. Affordable and suitable housing:

Current gaps include a clear source of referrals for housing options in the Woodbury area, and access to chore-type services for household tasks large and small. **Future needs** will include more affordable housing as well as a greater diversity in housing types to meet the needs of a larger senior population. In-home services will also need to increase, including “handy husband” type services, and major chore services as well. Resources for adaptive technologies in the home will be needed to make bathrooms, kitchens and other areas safe. Communities may need to look at co-housing and other options to allow more options for seniors to remain in the community.

3. Sustaining social ties to the community:

Current gaps include the lack of transportation, if one does not drive, in the evenings and weekends. Many seniors living alone also feel isolated on weekends, especially Sundays. Many attendees expressed interest in expanding Senior Center hours to Sunday afternoons, to allow for an option for getting together with others, while others would like to see transportation options for attending religious services of their choice. **Future needs** will include the need for more social outlets of interest and availability to a wide diverse audience, especially during these “off-peak” hours. Methods to identify seniors at-risk for social isolation and programs to address these needs will also be needed.

Of note during the conversation was the disparity between what services were perceived as not available, and what actually is currently offered. For example, one request, echoed by many others, was for transportation available to visit a friend in town, yet this service has been provided for years when the bus is in Woodbury. In another example, people thought the bus was not wheelchair-accessible, and were pleasantly surprised to find the bus can hold two wheelchair riders in addition to the ambulatory riders.

Another topic of interest was the gap between needed services and available funding. Access to health care, especially in the home, seems daunting in the current economic environment. Addressing mental health issues, in particular, appeared overwhelming to many participants.

Most participants cited Woodbury as a good place to live, and retire, and many noted the many programs and services in place at the Senior Center and Library, for example, along with faith communities, etc. Yet, many participants worry about being able to afford living in Woodbury in later years due to economic stresses and stresses of daily living should one not be able to drive and/or live independently. The Woodbury Ambulance Association was given credit for providing good service by volunteers, as was FISH, which provides transportation to medical appointments. However, there was some confusion as to where each organization would and would not provide transportation, and there was concern that a lack of qualified volunteers may force these services to be limited or curtailed at some point.

What Happens Next?

Under the terms of the sponsoring grant, the balance of any monies from the grant must be used to address one or more action items resulting from the Conversation. The Woodbury Commission on Aging will meet in June to address the data gathered from the Conversation and develop action items. One or more items will be selected, and work will be implemented to meet the identified need. Potential action items include, but are not limited to:

- Developing and distributing a “Housing for Seniors in Woodbury” guide, to assist those facing housing changes
- Establishing a Senior Issues Forum, consisting of seniors, families, and professionals serving seniors in Woodbury, to address needs and further the Conversation
- Establishing a portfolio of information related to needs and services for seniors in town, which could be made available free of charge through the Senior Center, faith communities, and other venues. This could be a “one-stop” packet of information to answer questions about housing, transportation, health services, etc.
- Establish a “mini-chores” service to provide “honey-do” services like changing light bulbs, small repairs, etc.

A conclusion report will be made available once the action items are addressed.

Appendix A:

Results from the small group work

Topic Area : Senior Employment and Volunteer Activities/Civic Engagement

Services in Place	Gaps/Problems	Needs in 5,10,15 years	What Might Work?
Some part time employment	Seniors need to earn money-	More opportunities as seniors need to work longer	Senior job retraining programs
Many volunteer opportunities	need for senior jobs retraining	More ability to find meaningful volunteer opportunities	Volunteer clearinghouse
RSVP	Need to match needs with people's skills	More local RSVP opportunities	More local RSVP opportunities

Topic Area: Reaching Isolated and Homebound Seniors

Services in Place	Gaps/Problems	Needs in 5,10,15 years	What Might Work?
Homecare covered by Medicare and CT Care	Locating handicapped or isolated seniors	Increase in number of seniors means we will need more of ALL services	A list of names of isolated, etc
FISH- medical transportation	Staying in contact with disabled elderly on a frequent basis		Emergency list of those using O2, or needing batteries during emergencies
Senior Housing	Senior center can help; but not open on weekends		
Food Bank			
Senior Center	Need for FREE emergency medical device- to wear around neck?		

Topic Area: Housing

Services in Place	Gaps/Problems	Needs in 5,10,15 years	What Might Work?
<p>Elderly Housing in town: Spruce Bank Farm – low-moderate income</p> <p>Other housing for seniors in town:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judson Ave. Apts • Holly House (mixed ages) • The Garden Apts (mixed ages) • 1080 Main Street South • Several other smaller apartment buildings <p>Some elderly living in condos and private apts, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodlake • Woodbury Hill • Scott Enterprises • Private home 	<p>Info is sparse re: availability of senior-friendly housing</p> <p>Seniors with no family in the area with few resources are in jeopardy</p> <p>Staying in one’s own home presents problems (yard work, minor repairs) and can be difficult if health and/or finances decline</p> <p>Social network (family , friends, etc.) are diminishing due to moves, age, limited mobility, lack of transportation, etc.</p>	<p>More affordable senior housing, including 24 hour on-call services for medical emergencies</p> <p>Expansion of services for “aging in place”; such as congregate dining, transportation, chore services, meals on wheels, etc.</p> <p>Senior assisting living places (like Southbury’s The Hearth, Watermark/East Hill Woods)</p> <p>Adult Day Care</p> <p>Medical and Social Services</p>	<p>On-call medical and security services</p> <p>Have a clearing house match seniors’ needs with providers (maybe a registration of seniors and/or provider listing)</p> <p>Provide for any senior housing unit, adaptive equipment (ex: shower seat),</p>

Woodbury Town Conversation on Aging
 May 10, 2013

Topic Area: Mental Health and Emotional Support Services (including caregiving)

Services in Place	Gaps/Problems	Needs in 5,10,15 years	What Might Work
Private Counselors – DMHAS – statewide Families Churches 12 Step Program (ex: Danbury’s Healing Hearts model)	Advocates Lack of companions Need for help on a continuum from light issues to severer mental health issues Need for Trained volunteers to talk 1:1	Referral/ intake system Training for volunteers Support and educational programs Increased funding	

Topic Area: Transportation

Services in Place	Gaps/Problems	Needs in 5,10,15 years	What Might Work
FISH Senior Bus Private Car	Travel to Danbury Travel to New Haven no Transportation for Wheelchair bound (*note: there IS limited transportation for 2 wheelchair riders at a time on the senior bus) Limited Social Travel Opportunities No transportation on weekends or evenings Lack of visits to relatives and friends	More volunteers More and different forms of transportation More buses Day, evening and weekend options On-demand transportation	Subsidies for drivers Involve younger drivers Increase in bus availability Keep bus routes standard

Woodbury Town Conversation on Aging
 May 10, 2013

	(Note: *seniors can and do use senior bus for visiting during bus hours)		
--	--	--	--

Topic Area: Health and Wellness/Access to Medical Care

Services in Place	Gaps/Problems	Needs in 5,10,15 years	What might work?
Blood Pressure Clinic at Senior Center	Mental health-isolation/depression	Doctors	More transportation to services
Dental Clinic at Senior Center	Diabetes Ed/Care	More services such as physical therapy	Something to attract doctors (not sure what: free housing?, tuition assistance?)
Foot Care Clinic at Senior Center	Specialists and Medical Centers not local (need for transportation)	Food banks with foods for special dietary needs	
Immunizations through PDDH	Urgent Care	Mental health care and programs	
Doctors	Physical Therapy	Programs to get seniors out of their houses to prevent isolation/depression	
Pharmacies	Doctors are Aging		
Intermittent Health Programs	Medication Monitoring	Funding for health/senior programs	
Exercise Programs	Nutrition for Seniors -meals on wheels -senior lunches -need for improved taste, choice, fresh	Prevention programs and chronic health programs	
Volunteer Ambulance/EMS	Access to nutritious foods – especially for those with special dietary needs		
	Vision and dental care		
	Woodbury ambulance cannot go out of town?		

Woodbury Town Conversation on Aging
 May 10, 2013

Topic Area: Community Activities/ Building an Elder Friendly Community

Services in Place	Gaps/Problems	Needs in 5,10,15 years	What Might Work?
<p>Health and Wellness:</p> <p>Screenings and Programs (dental, podiatry, flu shots, etc)</p> <p>Exercise Programs</p> <p>Fitness Center</p> <p>Municipal Agent (programs, health ins. Counseling, access to services)</p> <p>Healthy Woodbury</p> <p>Nutrition</p> <p>Meals on Wheels</p> <p>Congregate Meals</p> <p>Senior Dine</p> <p>Mental Health</p> <p>Socialization and enrichment programs</p> <p>Bus trips</p>	<p>Would like more day trips and overnight trips (i.e.- Broadway trips, Boston, shore)</p> <p>Coordinate trips with other towns (note- currently working with Washington CT for senior trips)</p> <p>Publicize trips better</p>	<p>More services and programs</p> <p>More volunteers</p> <p>Possibly expansion of current senior center</p> <p>Expansion of tech services and programs (ipad, kindle, computer, etc)</p> <p>More accomodations for older people in community – better lighting in public parking lots, crosswalks with good sightlines, etc.</p>	<p>Hard to answer for future seniors but don't envision changes will be radically different</p> <p>Possible increase in education to keep people abreast of new developments</p> <p>Transportation ideas:</p> <p>Opticare picks up and drops off (for eye surgery)</p> <p>Transportation to select and MDs on Straits Tnpk.</p> <p>Encourage volunteerism</p> <p>Bring a friend day (to Senior Center)</p> <p>Increase participation to continue established programs</p>

Woodbury Town Conversation on Aging
May 10, 2013

Services in Place	Gaps/Problems	Needs in 5,10,15 years	What might work
Senior Center Municipal Agent Tax Relief Programs For Elders Healthy Woodbury programs Faith Communities			