

Milpitas Focus Group Professionals

Transportation

Professionals observed that there are many mobility concerns in Milpitas including unsafe walkways and paths and few ways to get outside of the city.

Cost is a major issue and there seems to be a lack of city planning around transportation for seniors. Professionals report there is not a “safe route” for seniors, like for children.

In addition, many sidewalks are in need of repair for wheelchair and walker use. This is particularly an issue in the winter when it gets dark earlier. Professionals noted that many city lights are burned out and areas are dark; and that many of the sidewalks and pathways are themselves cluttered and dirty.

Professionals report that bus stops are not located in areas where seniors congregate and that crossing the freeway is a major barrier for seniors. There are few or no places to cross safely. Incredibly the bus stop in front of the senior center was removed because of a lack of funding!

Bus drivers have not been educated about serving seniors. They sometimes roar by and take off too quickly putting seniors at risk.

On the positive side, Milpitas has a hotline for graffiti and burned out lights.

Housing

Housing affordability continues to be a major issue. Education is important regarding “granny flats” and standalone units for elders. At this time community votes against these measures even though seniors are being displaced and the housing situation is desperate for many.

Some senior housing units have years long waits 3-7 and many no longer accept names for the waiting list. At least the city has a program to help make housing more age-friendly with modifications for lighting, handrails and alarms.

Social Participation

Professionals report that the senior center is excellent but it closes too early; and during the evening and weekend it is closed. The senior center struggles with challenges of multiple languages as they don't have enough interpreters and multilingual persons. There is hope that the 9th street project will create a space for building community. Seniors really need a place to hang out. Many are looking forward to the Super Bowl party next year.

Respect and Social Inclusion

Rude drivers are a constant challenge, they will not slow down or be aware of seniors. There are very few options for seniors to socialize. While the senior center is welcoming, professionals fear that elders outside of the senior center connection may feel isolated or lonely or both.

Professionals know of seniors who are isolated at home and cannot get to the senior center. The challenge is how to reach out to them, and get them to the senior center. Professionals wish to find a way to help seniors be more inclusive and mingle with other groups. Perhaps it is a language barrier. Professionals observe that the South Asian, Indian, community is growing quickly.

Civic Participation and Employment

Seniors have expressed a wish to work and be involved. Professionals report widespread age discrimination, particularly in the tech sector. Many seniors find work in retail and the fast food sectors.

A few seniors are involved in planning and promoting emergency preparedness in the city.

Communication and Information

Professionals are of the opinion that communication efforts on behalf of seniors are slow and ill informed. Milpitas is slow in this regard they say. Many residents don't know what is available, language barriers prevail, and social media should not be the communication vehicle of choice.

On the positive side, many seniors can get information from the Nextdoor social network and neighborhood associations. The Milpitas Post newspaper does a good job.

Community Support and Health Services

RotaCare offers health services but transportation is difficult. They are assessing the need in Milpitas now. The Public Health Department is offering health promotion classes, but they charge a fee. Urgent Care and Express Care are looking into staying open later hours; they may start staying open until 9 pm in July. Kaiser is only available to Kaiser members.

The Valley Health Center is offering adult medicine, dental services, and active living classes and health promotion instruction. These are offered on a sliding scale and they plan to partner with the public library soon.

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Cooling and warming centers are available at city facilities. Professionals think there are plenty of trees, but few benches. There are few covered areas with overhangs and awnings. Community groups have projects to plant more trees in the city.

Parks get a good report from professionals, but they think that the restroom facilities are few and poorly maintained. The restroom problems have been reported to the Recreation Department, but little movement or action in this regard. On the positive side, the city has done a good job with the graffiti removal.

Ideas about Programs and Services

A main need is affordable transportation and urgent/immediate crossing guards for seniors. Many drivers don't stop when the pedestrian crossing lights are flashing! Even the bus drivers fail to stop!

City planners need to become educated and proactive around safe mobility in the city. Little or no planning exists for safe senior mobility. Everything needs work, transport, walking paths, benches, lighting and park restrooms. Seniors need transport to public facilities.

The community needs to be educated and informed about the need for senior housing, particularly granny flats and standalone units on existing property. Existing properties need assistance to become more age-friendly.

There is one program called Rebuilding Together to help with rails, ramps and upgrading senior housing to make it more accommodating to age in place. The professionals think Milpitas needs building contractors with knowledge about universal design criteria and how to make existing structures more age friendly.

Professionals wish to copy the idea of a pop up night club like Club 55 in Los Altos. Milpitas needs a place for seniors to hang out. One idea is to have a Saturday night event at the Senior Center. Professionals would like to see an intergenerational program started at the Senior Center. Perhaps a buddy system would encourage seniors to come out for evening events.

Professionals wish to promote cultural diversity and encourage cultural exchanges and events. Seniors really need a cultural inclusion program in the area.

One idea is to have culturally sensitive exchanges, talks, events and health programs at the Senior Center and attempt to attract and engage other seniors in this way. One way to promote the senior center is to reach out to faith communities and share information about senior programming.

The kiosk idea emerged again as a way to share information. This tried and true idea is re-emerging globally. In addition, professionals promoted the idea of infographics as a way to communicate with more seniors.

Professionals mentioned the Chamber of Commerce in particular as needing improvement in the way they communicate. On the positive side, the Senior Center has a variety of newspapers.

Overall, professionals are of the opinion that city leaders are not well informed about how to create an age-friendly city. Many fixes are possible with minor changes and additions. Like more cooling and warming stations, cleaning up restrooms, repairing sidewalks and offering benches at parks and bus stops, and crossing guards. Basic.

In the area of dementia care, the professionals suggest public education, caregiver support /groups and services at the Senior Center.

Dementia Question Feedback

Most professionals said the Alzheimer's Association is a good resource. A good online resource is Dementia Friendly organization and professionals are working to create knowledge and information in the community.

Charitable organizations and the reading club at the senior center have talked about creating more community programs. Seniors Helping Seniors, seniormatters.com seem to be doing a good job. But the challenges remain around stigma, and a general lack of knowledge and resources.

City of Milpitas Seniors
Age Friendly Focus Group
November 30, 2016
Barbara Lee Senior Center
40 No. Milpitas Blvd. , Milpitas, CA 95035

Facilitated by Dr. Anabel Pelham, Director, Center for Age-Friendly Excellence

Disclaimer: The following represents the opinions of focus group participants and are for informational purposes only.

Transportation

Elders report that it is difficult to get to the senior center, the bus is frequently off schedule and parking is an issue. Seniors report that there are few to no bicycle racks and people frequently park in the bike lanes. Seniors report that oftentimes they cannot find a place to park at the senior center.

Seniors reported that sometimes the bus flies by the senior center and fails to stop. Like other seniors they report problems with Outreach. They find it too expensive and difficult to manage the long waits and delays.

Housing

The seniors focus group shared that there are very long wait lists to get into low-income housing. And regular housing is quite expensive. Seniors cannot find home repair services, they especially need help with grab bars and rails. Sometimes they ask friends or relatives for help with home repairs. One participant shared that she lived with her son, and he takes care of everything.

Seniors have stories of desperate housing situations where an elder got into a fight with her family and she was expelled from the home and has nowhere to live.

Social Participation

Many seniors enjoyed hiking trails and appreciate the opportunity to socialize. Some seniors have organized a daily walking group that grew to 12 persons. They also organized a ping pong group and it serves as a way to keep up with each other. If someone is missing a game people follow up and ask why the other player did not come to the ping pong game. Sometimes they play 2-3 hours a day.

Respect and Social Inclusion

The Asian elders in the focus group said they felt safe in the senior center. They also feel safe and welcome at the Indian Community Center. The seniors believe that bus drivers are respectful and take their time with them. Once in awhile bus drivers drive very fast and drop them off in a hurry, but overall they feel respected. Seniors said respect varies with shops and restaurants.

Several seniors reported that many of their friends have experienced scams. The main scam is being lightly hit by another driver, and then being threatened by a "witness" who will go away for a cash payment.

Civic Participation and Employment

Seniors report that they are free to join any community committee or organization. Seniors volunteer at the senior center, nutrition programs blood pressure center and as readers.

Several seniors serve on the commission for the school district. They said it was easy to apply and at least four volunteer at the senior center.

Most felt that they could participate in any organization they wished.

Communication and Information

Seniors report that outreach is weak in regards to communication outlets. They wish for more information to be passed around. They say that the library, senior center, and even real estate agents are helpful with information.

They depend on the Tri-city and Milpitas Post newspapers for current information but the information hub is the senior center. The senior focus group reinforced the notion that the senior center is essential to their well-being.

Community Support and Health Services

The senior center offers healthcare presentations and flu shots. Kaiser also offers flu shots, but one does not want to cross Calaveras Street as it is a "death trap" to cross. The focus group seniors shared that there is a mobile dental service van. It comes every month for check ups and cleaning and x-rays if needed.

The focus group also reported very bad smells coming from the land fill that may impact health.

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Seniors shared that the sidewalks near the BART station and Great Mall are not safe and that they struggle with too much traffic on 237/880 corridor. They also observe that litter and garbage collecting is a problem in some of the parks. There is also a problem with pet litter, as dog owners don't clean up after their dogs.

Seniors have observed several trees that need trimming, particularly the one in front of the senior center. The tree has gotten so large it blocks the traffic light and one cannot see to know to stop or go.

Ideas about Programs and Services

Busses need to keep a predictable schedule and more parking is needed at the senior center. Seniors also wish to have bicycle racks so they have the option to ride a bike. Seniors asked for covers at the bus stops.

The focus group members repeated the need for affordable, available housing...a chronic need in the Bay Area.

Regarding engagement, seniors asked for more city-wide events with extended hours for seniors. Focus group members want access to the city pool without paying extra fees. They asked for more computers at the senior center. They requested a walking path at the senior so that they could exercise more freely via walking. Some in the focus group requested a par course in the park so that they may exercise in the fair weather.

The senior center is a core resource and the focus group members asked that the senior center open on weekends and some holidays. They noted that the piano has been broken for a long time.

Seniors appreciate the newspapers at the senior center and would like to see more classes, particularly one on "how to talk to your doctor" so they could be more effective as patients. The focus groups thought computer classes would be very well received and help seniors who feel cut off from their families.

The seniors continue to be worried and distressed about the smell from the landfill.

It is clear that the seniors need more education and assistance regarding resources about dementia. This focus group had very little knowledge or experience with dementia. They did not know what to do or where to go except for very basic outreach to physicians and police.

Dementia Question Feedback

The senior focus group took the more traditional approach and thought that consulting the person's doctor might be the first approach, perhaps call the police if there were a safety issue.

The sense of the group was that dementia is an individuals' concern. This group had very little insight or concern about the topic or was not comfortable talking of the issue.