

Age-Friendly Cities Focus Group Questions

The eight domains of an Age-Friendly City are evidence-based categories developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). To insure cross-city uniformity, the eight domains will form the core of the focus group questions.

A. In your experience, what are the greatest unmet needs in your community in the following areas?

- 1. Transportation**
- 2. Housing**
- 3. Social Participation**
- 4. Respect and Social Inclusion**
- 5. Civic Participation and Employment**
- 6. Communication and Information**
- 7. Community Support and Health Services**
- 8. Outdoor spaces and buildings**
- 9. Other...?**

B. In your view what project or program might meet one or more of the above eight unmet needs in your community?

C. Dementia care and services are becoming more important in our communities.

Where do you refer community members who may show early signs of dementia or are diagnosed with early stage dementia?

City of Los Gatos Seniors
Age Friendly Focus Group
April 6, 2017
Los Gatos Library
100 Villa Avenue, Los Gatos, CA 95030

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

Seniors report that there is a lack of transportation in Los Gatos and they share that the San Jose Mercury News reports services will be reduced. This is a pattern we are seeing all around the Peninsula. Furthermore, they share that Los Gatos lacks a strong public transit support system; and many fear it may get worse.

One focus group member was “appalled” by the lack of public transportation; she shared that while living in New York she did not need a car and could get to any location via public transportation.

The group explained that when an elder stops driving, it is very upsetting and isolation can easily set in.

The group again repeated the problem of distracted drivers. More and more people are talking and texting on the phone and don't respect crosswalks at all. Pedestrians are in mortal danger. The focus group wants fines and enforcement increased.

Los Gatos focus group pointed out a nearly unique problem: beach traffic impacts everything during the summer. Tourists on the way to Santa Cruz visit Los Gatos and older persons find it nearly impossible to park. Also, drivers are distracted and one is in danger all the time while walking. They suggest some kind of bypass for beach traffic so local residents can be safer in the summer months.

Los Gatos focus group members echoed the problems with Outreach: cost, wait times and general dissatisfaction. There are not enough drivers and service is inadequate.

One good idea in town are large orange flags that pedestrians carry when crossing the street. We tried them ourselves and it makes one easier to see, if the driver is not texting. Another good idea that is failing are benches at bus stops. Many have been removed and seniors miss the one in Vasona Park in particular. The Terraces of Los Gatos offers a ride service called Arrive, but many seniors don't know about it. This is an opportunity to promote an existing and needed service.

Housing

Again, the focus group reported a lack of affordable housing, and the situation is very bad. Seniors are being priced out of the area and many are moving away; priced out of the community. Affordable housing needs to be truly affordable for real people. Focus group members shared that seniors are leaving life time friends and their doctor to move away; they cannot afford to live in Los Gatos any more.

Even worse, there are no downsized places to live, even if seniors could afford it. The Terraces offers good long-term care but it is very expensive. Focus group members told stories of elders being stuck upstairs because of an injury. Seniors need a single story living situation.

Focus group members reported that there is no central place where one can find trusted contractors. People use word of mouth, referrals of friends, the church and faith communities to get referrals, but this is a poor system. This is another good opportunity for an easy fix to a pressing problem for seniors.

Of particular concern are home repair scams directed at seniors. Seniors are particularly vulnerable to such scams and with no central vetted directory the problem continues to fester. Seniors want a geriatric care manager provided by the city to help connect seniors to information and referral. This is a more costly fix, but the benefits could be significant in the prevention of costly legal and health issues.

Some seniors are moving in with younger family members as they cannot find adequate housing. In-home supportive service is expensive and the pressure on families is increasing with few affordable housing options, expensive in-home care and poor transportation.

One recommendation and easy fix is to use the 55 Plus Newsletter as a way to list vetted contractors. There is some discussion of offering a legal assistance class and promote it via the 55 Plus Newsletter.

Social Participation

Focus group members say that the Los Gatos Saratoga Recreation Adult center is a “gem” and they really appreciate it. Many in the focus group mentioned the organized trips. A main concern about the center is that many seniors cannot get there because of a lack of transportation.

They also noted the good work of Live Oak Senior Nutrition Center. They mentioned music and social programs including chair yoga and a respite day program that are very important to seniors at the Live Oak Center.

Many in the focus group mentioned The Terraces and the impressive array of activities offered. Not all of these are open to the public.

The library was noted as an important community resource for seniors; particularly the book clubs. The group mentioned Great Decisions lectures and wished they were open to the general public. This is perhaps an easy fix with the sponsoring organization allowing a once a season guest welcome policy.

Respect and Social Inclusion

The overall sense of the group is that merchants and restaurants in Los Gatos are sensitive and respectful to the older adult population. Many in the focus group shared that Lunardi’s Market is particularly helpful with bags and delivery. They are very service oriented.

Focus group members also mentioned Nob Hill Market. The history of the area is reported to be a main reason for the concern for elders. Group members reported that Los Gatos was considered a retirement or bedroom community and the tradition of elder care is deep in the culture.

One focus group member reported that choking is common in restaurants and most staff have no knowledge of how to help, except to call 911. None are familiar with the Heimlich or CPR. The group also observed that while young people are kind and respectful, the so called millennial's are not. They are totally distracted by devices and self-absorbed and dismissive.

Civic Participation and Employment

The group shared that volunteer opportunities are relatively easy in Los Gatos if one can use a computer as most are listed there. One long lived and outstanding example is the VIP or Volunteering in Policing program where citizens help with emergency preparedness, vacation home checks and seniors' check in to see if the person is doing OK.

Many cited the opportunities to get involved in city commissions and seniors feel welcome at Town Council. One person observed that this is not the case in Los Altos.

Most of the seniors in the group are not looking for full or part time work, but sense widespread age-discrimination in the area, particularly among the tech industries.

Communication and Information

Many members of the focus group mentioned the library as a vital resource for information, both in person and online. Members noted that if one does not have a computer or is not computer literate, one is handicapped about accessing information.

The library prints many information sheets, but the trend is online and seniors struggle to keep up. The Recreation Department has a newsletter and this is very important and helpful. Also, there have been some limited projects of youth teaching seniors how to use their devices. But more help is needed.

The 55 Plus program helps older persons to fill out forms and with some minor legal assistance. Many in the group mentioned the value of Nextdoor for general information and crime alerts. Again, one has to be online and computer savvy.

Community Support and Health Services

The sense of the group is that health services are good as long as you have insurance. A major topic of conversation was the poor training and lack of cultural sensitivity of caregivers. Some people had experienced painful encounters with caregivers.

Most thought that dental, hearing and vision care were very expensive. Most in the group are fearful of calling 911 or ambulance help because of the cost. One told the story of a death because the person did not call for help because of the cost. They reported that Los Gatos Meadows provides health care.

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

A main topic of conversation was the risk to seniors by the new speed bumps. They are the same color as the asphalt and seniors cannot see them and trip and fall. This is a major risk factor for seniors and the city is very exposed to liability. This is an easy fix with proper painting and marking of the speed bumps.

Many in the group thought that most of the pedestrian crossing lights were too short, and did not offer enough time to get across the street. Persons walking in cross walks are in mortal danger at stop signs as cars speed around and don't wait for the person to cross. If there is a light or flashing crosswalks, the situation is a little better. Many are fearful of walking because of distracted and aggressive drivers.

Most of the group thought there were plenty of benches, but report that needed benches in the park have been removed, and they miss them.

Ideas about Programs and Services

Most of the focus group members requested a city funded geriatric care manager, even part time, to help with information and referral. They need and want on-demand transportation. They want to see more intergenerational activities and more to do in the outdoors in the summer and fall.

They want the parks to be free to seniors. At one time parks were free to seniors but no longer and many are unhappy with charges. They wish for more organized activities in the parks. This is an easy fix and some indoor activities can be shifted outdoors.

The group wanted more intergenerational programming like the JCC PAL program. This was a strong sense in the group.

Recommendations for Improvement to Los Gatos Recreation Center/Senior Center

- Update outside landscaping all around the building to match landscaping of the library**
- Paint outside of building to match library**
- Paint inside entry white**
- Kitchen needs to be updated completely.
Current appliances and floor are old and worn**
- White wash brick in main dining room**
- Small deck next to dining room is unsafe and needs to be re-built**
- Fire door needs to be larger**

They say that the Center has become outdated and could use some of the above mentioned improvements to make it a bright and welcoming place for young and old to gather.

The group suggested computer classes for seniors. An intergenerational project would be very successful.

Seniors want an opportunity to serve on the school board.

The group had strong feelings that the former senior coordinator should be returned. That staff person is missing and seniors suffer with the loss. Cupertino sends a person once a week to help and there is a fractional person with West Valley College but that person is a fee for service model costs are an issue.

Dementia Question Feedback

Most of the members of the group had little idea of what to do about mild dementia. Life Oak Adult Day Care has a program and some knew about that service.

Some thought that there was care for advanced Alzheimer's and memory care, but few knew of help for mild impairment.

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Transportation

Professionals report lots of uneven and broken sidewalks and curbs. They have reported many to the city. Focus group members report that many elders are cut off in the evening and cannot join in any activities because of a lack of transportation. Many other elders who can drive, choose not to drive at night because they cannot see well, and then have no transportation.

Focus group members report that crosswalk lights do not offer enough time for elders to cross. Because of the hilly area, elders are unable to walk even if they are relatively able. Many that are dependent, must move to flat areas and then they are unable to find housing. Elders that are machine dependent (oxygen) are especially vulnerable.

Heart of the Valley has just contracted with LYFT to offer rides via a concierge service via a phone number. The challenge is to get the word out about these services.

Housing

There continues to be a lack of affordable housing for anyone, including seniors in Los Gatos. Many are leaving the area. Professionals say this is the main issue. Seniors cannot manage their own homes and yet they would rather not share, so they become isolated and often lonely. Younger people are more comfortable with shared housing so the situation may change over time.

The Rebuild Together program is helping with home repairs and updates. They help with handrails, ramps and may donate alarms. Some church groups help with home repairs. Los Gatos has not supported senior or affordable housing; so the problem gets worse. More and more seniors are leaving the area or becoming homeless.

When new housing is built, it is often multi-level and many buildings (especially older ones) don't have elevators.

Social Participation

More and more seniors are aging into isolation because of a lack of transportation. The Parks and Recreation Department offers many activities, but the isolated cannot get to them. Popular programs include emergency preparedness, 55 Plus, Happy Hour and Social.

Los Gatos Recreation received high praise from the focus group, but the challenge is getting to the events.

Los Gatos Meadows offers programs and many churches are involved in senior programming.

Many focus group members think seniors need help with legal issues.

Respect and Social Inclusion

Focus group members would like to see more inclusion in the downtown area. The sense of the group is that seniors are well-treated generally, but not sure about their experiences in high end restaurants.

Professionals observe that wealthy seniors are treated one way and frail elders another. And it depends on where you go. Many noted that there is a youth friendly initiative, and there ought to be a senior or aging friendly initiative.

Civic Participation and Employment

The Volunteers in Policing (VIP) program is very popular. And there are 21 members over age 60. Most volunteers are over age 50.

Focus group members believe there are many volunteer opportunities in Los Gatos. Los Gatos is proud of its senior friendly culture, except for the tech sector. The attitudes are very different in the tech sector culture.

Many observe age discrimination in the tech sector and it is difficult to prove and alter.

Focus group members noted that El Camino hospital offers many good volunteer opportunities.

Communication and Information

The focus group is of the opinion that the best way to share information is by word of mouth. This is especially true for the aged. The Los Gatos Weekly Times is a good source of information. Many thought a weekly senior column would be very helpful.

The Police Department has a data base of community organizations (273) but it needs to be updated constantly. They did an experiment and found that one person can reach 5-100 others quite quickly with modern communications.

The Police Department also has an operation CARE where they check in on seniors once a week. If there is no reply an office will drive by and knock. Some faith communities have tried to create a virtual village, but it has not worked yet.

The Neighborhood Watch program brings the community together. It also serves as a useful communication platform. It also offers a way to help seniors who may need assistance.

Community Support and Health Services

Many in the focus group thought that there is a lack of informed medical professionals about the health care needs of seniors. The real issue is not access per se, but coordinated care, like with a geriatric care manager. Physicians are not connected with each other.

There is a low Medi-Cal population, so access is not a problem in Los Gatos. Dental and vision care are expensive and if not covered by health insurance, the costs can be prohibitive. The sense of the group is that there is a lot of community support.

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Focus group members report that there are several pocked roads and sidewalks and many areas have no sidewalks. Sidewalks are being repaired but the real solution is new ones.

Some parts of the city have newer construction and elders manage better in these buildings, in the older parts of town it is much more difficult.

The general sense of the group is that lighting is fine in most parts of the city.

Ideas about Programs and Services

Elders urgently need transportation, especially at night. Faith communities have tried to offer rides but the liability issues loom large and some seniors ask for more than drivers can offer.

Heart of the Valley is working to contract with LYFT to offer rides to seniors. This is the only transportation project idea at this time.

The need for available, affordable and accessible housing is pressing. One idea is to expand Rebuilding Together and work to create programs to support senior housing. This is a very complex challenge for communities and every city in Santa Clara County is struggling with the housing issue...for all ages...

Many in the group supported the idea of an intergenerational music program...Grand Friends... and involving children in long-term care communities. There are many successful models like this and it could be expanded in a smaller city like Los Gatos. Many in the focus group thought Los Gatos should have a Senior Commission like the Youth Commission. The group supported an expanded and robust CERT program. Many seniors are unwilling to express a need for help, saying they are afraid they will lose their independence and be placed in an institution.

Seniors are in need of emergency preparedness information and support. This is a relatively easy fix and could be implemented in a variety of ways in the community.

Dementia Question Feedback

Many focus group members thought one should refer needy elders and families to the Alzheimer's Association. They have a 24-hour Helpline and offer support groups at various locations.

Cedar Creek and the Terraces offer memory care programs. Overall, there was very limited service for elders with dementia.