**CAFE: The Center for Age-Friendly Excellence**

*Advancing Livable Communities for all Generations*



**CAFE Focus Group Report**

**Redwood City Older Adults**

**January 11, 2019**

**Transportation**

Many of the residential streets in Redwood City are so narrow that cars cannot pass in two directions. When cars are parked on both sides, one can only pass by walking. The hoped for traffic help of bulb outs have had the consequence of narrowing roads so much that two cars can no longer pass.

Older adult participants report that there is little or no public transportation and that elders have difficulty getting on and off busses that do exist. Canes and walkers make it even more hazardous.

Participants report that traffic has gotten worse over time and they fear it will become impossible with the advent of new construction; they cannot navigate around the construction-related concrete barriers.

Traffic lights are not synchronized so that traffic flow is erratic and slowed even more. Many drivers are distracted and in a rush and not aware of crosswalk rules, so that elder pedestrians are in mortal danger. “…I fear for anyone who has to cross the streets…” In addition, the one way road system around town is confusing and wrong turns are a constant hazard.

Signage needs updating as words are worn off and covered by buses and tree growth. Focus group participants recommend repainting and using reflective paint so that signs can be seen at night.

Focus group members report that there are uneven sidewalks around town and that they have tripped. “…so far I have been able to catch myself, but others can’t…” Others say that sidewalks are “outrageous” even downtown. They report that sidewalks are treacherous and dangerous. Even the uneven texture of sidewalks can cause a tripping hazard. The rubber spacing makes the sidewalks even more uneven.

Focus group members reported that walking the 3 blocks from Woodside Road to the YMCA is too dangerous.

**Housing**

“Outrageous rent!” Participants reported being trapped in their homes because of tax laws, even if the house is not safe or accommodating, they cannot move. Some reported that they have to rent an “age-friendly” home because they cannot afford to buy a house that accommodates their changing needs. Average rental costs that are re-calculated when one renews a lease equal dramatic increases. One participant reported that over 1,000 students had to leave the area because they could not afford to live in the area.

Focus group participants share that the hope of new housing is slowed or stopped because of the mire of requirements that developers, architects and contractors are required to meet.

Other participants report that laws regarding below market rates (BMRs) are unclear and unfair. We have noted from former focus groups that information about BMR availability, accessibility and affordability is largely unknown. The application process is cumbersome and buying or selling one is months long and extremely expensive. Additionally HOA dues for a BMR are the same for a market rate condo or home.

Some participants wonder what happens to land lost to school closings. They want the new property used to develop housing, but they fear it is going to high technology companies. They wonder why there isn’t more senior housing? Focus group members say they cannot find housing for special needs and they anticipate that younger people will never be able to afford to live in Redwood City. They suggested the city leaders look into shared housing programs like those that exist in other cities like Berkeley.

Focus group members suggest an updated inventory of smaller homes so seniors can find them.

**Social Participation**

Members of this focus group made the connection between the lack of transportation and the ability to participate in community life and events. They said that there is not enough transportation, that traffic has become “undriveable” and Lyft and Uber are relatively expensive. They also report that Redi-Wheels requires advanced appointments and one must pay a significant fee.

Participants need education and training on how Lyft and Uber work. Others wonder aloud, where can seniors go for a social life?

Participants had mixed feelings about the Senior Center, they noted that there are activities, but how can seniors get to them? Further, things have changed at the Senior Center. In past times, activities were free, now seniors have to pay a fee. They said there were no more free coffee and doughnuts. They said there was a lack of free social activities. Seniors understand they need to pay for classes, but where are the free social activities? They explained a vicious cycle, they cannot get to activities, they cannot pay extra fees and so the Senior Center offers fewer activities because there are fewer seniors at the activities. Focus group members suggested more space is needed where people can meet to play cards, board games and visit, free space. They suggested field trips where transportation is provided.

They said that Redwood City has done a good job of having things to do, but there are few or no activities for seniors at churches.

Focus group members suggested summer concerts, drop in game nights, line dancing classes, and held at places where there is easy parking, not parallel parking…

Participants mentioned a desirable model in Arkansas called Bella Vista where transportation to and from is provided, all day activities, and a caring culture. They asked is there anything like this in Redwood City?

Regarding social participation: There is a three-headed challenge: lack of transportation, lack of money and lack of knowledge.

**Respect and Social Inclusion**

Some focus group members said it was not a problem, but it’s hard for seniors to get out of their housing. Many older persons want and need to work, but one has to make an effort to “…go out to be included…”

**Civic Participation & Employment**

Focus group members suggested that around the age of 50 the Redwood City make a concerted effort to reach out to older persons to serve the community in meaningful ways. Also the city could offer incentives to businesses to hire seniors and set up a pathway to volunteer or be hired in local schools. They believe there is a “desperate” need for school volunteers, but how to learn about and access the process. They mentioned tutoring ESL children and Reading Partners. They recommended a central volunteer bureau like in Santa Cruz. The group believed that there is a vast untapped well of older persons who would be happy to volunteer if there was an easy process and meaningful work.

Regarding employment, many focus group members say they want part time work, like 10 hours a week. They recommended educating business owners as to the value of hiring older persons. They see themselves as still active and contributing to society. One commented: “…we look like poison oak to them, but we don’t feel that way…” Perhaps volunteer and part time employment opportunities could be overtly advertised in local newspapers. And, establish a volunteer opportunity center.

Focus group members suggested a major public relations campaign to promote older adult workers. This could include a plan for job sharing with older workers. Perhaps match them with young part time workers. Many expressed a wish for more multigenerational contacts.

**Communication and Information**

Focus group members recommended a central location for senor resources; like one website. They made a distinction between the younger and older seniors. The older group is not native users of technology and need help to access basic skills. They suggested computer, iPad and even smart phone classes.

They noted that the Redwood City Library is a good resource, but they charge for parking and the group found that offensive. Why is there not free parking? “Why do you have parking meters if you want people to come downtown?”

The focus group members said they missed the daily Redwood City Tribune and get information from the Internet and Daily Journal. Seniors get helpful information from the Spectrum, Daily Journal and Daily Post. They noted that the print in almost all places is too small to read. They suggested a downtown senior fair by the courthouse.

**Community & Health Services**

One focus group member shared that a neighbor uses 70 Strong to get to medical appointments. Once again, a major issue is transport to medical care. Some bus stops have benches and some do not, and one never knows the situation in advance. A major problem is getting to El Camino Real. Public transportation needs to be located where people live.

**Outdoor Spaces & Buildings**

Regarding city parks, a lot of them have needed restrooms and that is an important plus. They reported that parks are being maintained, but focus group members felt “creepy” when passing by so many homeless persons.

Participants have observed an increasing number of vacant buildings because of high rents.

Focus group members wish for the campus (school) greenhouses be maintained (many are closing).

Focus group members recommended that signage be consistent.