A PATH FORWARD

24 October 2021

The **Envisioning the Future Milwaukee County Senior Centers: 2020** report issued by the **Milwaukee County Commission on Aging** described a series of Senior Center Assessment Processes in which more than 500 individuals provided feedback which generated hundreds of ideas for renewal of the existing Milwaukee County Senior Centers. In the final **Recommendations** of the Report, it called for the creation of a working Program Committee, now entitled the **Select Committee on Senior Centers,** and charged it with **5 specific tasks** in order to chart a path toward implementing the results of the Assessment Processes.

1. **Evaluate the suggestions provided by the public in the report.**
   The Committee met often during 2021 and adopted a **Vision Statement** on 19 October 2021. This statement evaluates the suggestions and input from the current Senior Centers constituencies. It also places them in the context of the uniqueness of the current social construct which reflects the convergence of new generational users and the effects of the pandemic on older Milwaukee County residents. The key component of the statement is a series of **Attributes** that can be used as an effective tool to not only evaluate the functionality of the existing Centers but also to inspire the design of any new renovations or new construction.

This Vision Statement is critically important and is at the center of Select Committee's charge. Because the additional 4 tasks will basically be an outgrowth of the Vision Statement' intent, it is imperative that the Vision Statement be shared immediately with the Commission on Aging to receive their feedback and acceptance so that the balance of the tasks can commence.

2. **Characterize these suggestions as long term or short term**
   The Vision Statement, if accepted by the Commission on Aging, offers a framework that can be easily classified as short- and long-term endeavors. For example, much of the work to date created by the Promotion Program Subcommittee in terms of Outreach, Advertising, Improved Access and Programming Enhancements are short term improvements that could be implemented as soon as conditions and funding allow. On the other hand, major renovations of the existing buildings and potential new construction opportunities are longer term tasks that will require further study.

3. **Review and prioritize the infrastructure needs at each of the Milwaukee County senior centers**
   If the Commission on Aging approves the Vision Statement, the Select Committee can then dig deeper into the "infrastructure" needs of each existing building. Note that in this situation "infrastructure" would be more than just analyzing the mechanical systems that support each site. That work has already been done and was part of a different component of the Senior Centers Assessment process. "Infrastructure" would now refer to how each building functions and more importantly how each build would need to be enhanced in order to properly respond to the Attributes that are described in the Vision Statement.

4. **Develop and monitor both short- and long-term strategic plans for Senior Centers in Milwaukee County**

This will be a much larger undertaking that will, again, require the Commission on Aging to accept and support the Vision Statement before proceeding. The Select Committee, based on the findings of item 3 above, would begin to outline a **strategic plan** to implement the various improvements at each Center so that the buildings can then support and be compliant with the various Attributes that are listed in the Vision Statement**. It would also be the time to make strategic decisions regarding appropriate locations, potential teardowns and replacements, and pursuing construction of additional centers to best serve the diverse nuances and needs of the entire Milwaukee County older population**. **Especially in the context that there are other important Senior Centers in Milwaukee County which will likely necessitate a collaborative approach in this strategic planning effort**.

5. **Determine the resources necessary to carry out the plan.**
   Many of the Attributes listed in the Vision Statement imply that **Strategic Partnerships** will be necessary to create successful and sustainable solutions. During this task the Select Committee and other important stakeholders would reach out to various organizations, agencies and likeminded providers to identify long term partners in this larger and worthy endeavor of **Envisioning the future of Milwaukee County Senior Centers.**

These **5 specific** tasks that Select Committee on Senior Centers will pursue are daunting but certainly not insurmountable. Completing them, however, will require significant effort, additional time and a can-do attitude. **Therefore, good communication between the Select Committee on Senior Centers and the Commission on Aging, which has charged them to do this work, is imperative. After each task is completed there should be an update given to the Commission on Aging to keep it apprised of progress being made.**

The Ultimate Goal

The Conclusion of the **Envisioning the Future Milwaukee County Senior Centers** acknowledges "that bringing an enhanced vision of senior centers to fruition in Milwaukee County will take all of us working together, building partnerships with the community, advocates, stakeholders, and new supporters and allies. This will require strong collaboration and compromise from all of us to achieve the common goal we are passionate about – building and enhancing opportunities for growth, wellness, and a full life for older adults throughout Milwaukee County."

This will be a multi-layered task as described above. But the pathway can be simplified if the relationship between the client (the Commission on Aging) and its consultant (the Select Committee on Senior Centers) can be clearly defined and respected by all.

The first step in this process is to forward the Vision Statement to the Commission on Aging for its approval so that the work needed to complete the other 4 tasks outlined above can be proceed.