

III. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Background

In the spring of 2004, following the announcement that the Whitaker Mill Road Senior Center would be closing, informational and open forum meetings were held to hear the responses of the seniors most affected by the closing of the center. Community residents that participated shared their ideas and priorities for the building and vitalization of a new facility with supporting programs that would replace the Whitaker Mill facility. This information, coupled with information presented in the *Senior Center Capacity Survey, June 2001* by the NC Division on Aging, *Growing Older Living with Dignity*, the Wake County Aging Plan 2004-2008, information obtained from a number of local government sources, the information obtained from the participant questionnaires at the July 2006 Kick-off meeting, and the hours of focus group discussions, together shaped the content and focus of this feasibility analysis. The following priorities developed in the 2004 and 2005 meetings were echoed in the responses obtained in this study.

- **Location** – It is of importance that there is a defined location or locations for the provision of senior services. People, especially seniors depend on set method of travel, activity and program routines that they come to rely on, and friends and acquaintances made at the center and at the area clubs. These safety nets are seriously disrupted when programs and activities sift between locations. Consistency of service is important.
- **Transportation** – Seniors do not always have access to private transportation – either because they do not own a vehicle or they are no longer allowed to operate one. They are also not always able to utilize public transportation. Often bus stops are too far away from their home, the ride too long to their destination or the routes do not serve their destination. Many seniors have never utilized public transportation and find it intimidating, fearing that they will be left behind or will get off at the wrong stop. Facilities must be located in a central area easily accessible to all modes and forms of transportation, from foot to buses, in order to make a center viable.

In addition to Capital Area Transit (CAT) and Triangle Transit Authority (TTA) *customized* transportation is being provided to seniors in Wake County on a limited basis. This includes limited door-to-door transport through the non-profit Resources for Seniors, bus and van service through Accessible Raleigh Transportation (ART), and limited door to door service through the Wake County TRAC program.

- **Programming** – The most wonderful center with the easiest access will still remain empty if the center does not provide what the participants want or need. Programs and activities offered must be based on their choices and desires, and facilities must be flexible enough to change as needs change. Also of prime importance is programming that addresses the activity level of each individual. People will, by nature and ability, choose different levels of activity and these needs must also be met.
- **Environment** – The facility must be a pleasant place to be in. People are going out of their way to reach a center and may be spending a fairly sizable amount of their time in there.

Demographics of the Current Senior Population

As of July 2004, the City of Raleigh had 51,142 adults aged 55 and over, according to the 2004 American Community Survey produced by the US Census Bureau. This is 16.1% of the total population of Raleigh. By July 2005, the senior population in the City of Raleigh had risen to 51,385 adults aged 55 and over, according to the 2005 American Community Survey produced by the US Census Bureau. This is 16.3% of the total population of Raleigh and it is projected that by 2020 the senior population will have reached 24%. Raleigh's population breakdown by ages for 2004 and 2005 can be seen in Table 2. Note the growth in segments of the total population for 20 to 40 year olds, as well the 55 to 65 year olds.

**TABLE 2
 CENSUS AGE BREAKDOWN**

2004 Census Breakdown		2005 Census Breakdown	
Age Group	%	Age Group	%
Under 5 years	8.5%	Under 5 years	7.6%
5 to 9 years	5.4%	5 to 9 years	5.8%
10 to 14 years	5.9%	10 to 14 years	5.6%
15 to 19 years	5.5%	15 to 19 years	4.9%
20 to 24 years	8.0%	20 to 24 years	10.2%
25 to 29 years	11.5%	25 to 29 years	11.3%
30 to 34 years	8.1%	30 to 34 years	8.9%
35 to 39 years	6.4%	35 to 39 years	8.3%
40 to 44 years	9.0%	40 to 44 years	7.9%
45 to 49 years	7.2%	45 to 49 years	6.9%
50 to 54 years	7.5%	50 to 54 years	6.3%
55 to 59 years	4.6%	55 to 59 years	5.3%
60 to 64 years	3.1%	60 to 64 years	3.4%
65 to 69 years	2.3%	65 to 69 years	1.9%
70 to 74 years	2.1%	70 to 74 years	1.8%
75 to 79 years	1.7%	75 to 79 years	1.6%
80 to 84 years	1.8%	80 to 84 years	1.2%
85 years and over	1.2%	85 years and over	1.1%

2005 American Community Survey – US Census Bureau

Figure 3, on the next page, was created using available GIS data and creating representation of various density levels of senior population. This data was used in understanding where the majority of seniors lived within the study area, and can be used by the City in the future to track “trends” or movements in densities of senior population. This data was also used in ranking possible sites, as described later in this report, because the data behind it could show the total number of seniors residing in an area immediately around a perspective site.

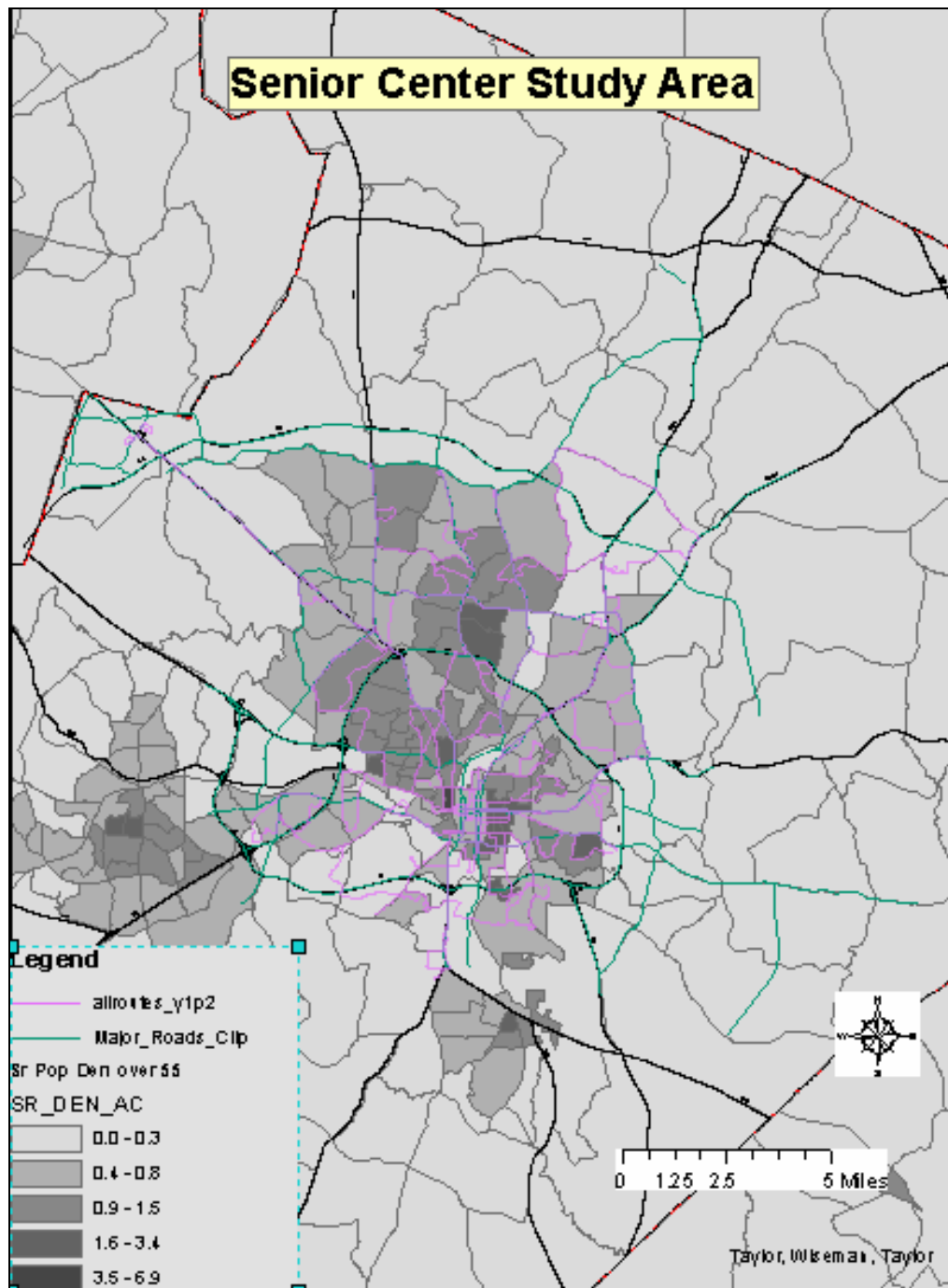
Existing Senior Programs

Currently 49 separate clubs serve 5500 seniors in the City of Raleigh with a diversity of activities. These clubs range from meeting once a month or less, to meeting multiple times a week. Locations include community and elderly housing facility meeting rooms, city-run community centers, churches, and the YWCA. These programs are open to anyone aged 55 or older, and activities range from speakers, events and luncheons to games, crafts and day trips. Also available to seniors in Raleigh are a monthly day trip (through the Senior Adult program),

bingo games and senior exercise classes at multiple sites, chorus, bridge, horseshoes, shuffleboard, softball, basketball, badminton, table tennis, tennis and a walkers group.

Currently the only facility in Raleigh that carries the designation of Senior Center is the Whitaker Mill Senior Center, and it presently occupies half of a Wake County Human Services Building. The other half of the older brick building is used for Spectrum House, a county-run program for the mentally-challenged. This center serves an average of 120-150 persons a day and is operated by a non-profit entity – Resources for Seniors. This groups rents 5,008 sq. ft. of space in order to run its programs.

FIGURE 3
DENSITY OF SENIORS POPULATION IN STUDY



Other centers available to seniors in Wake County include the Senior Center in Cary, the Eastern Wake Senior Center in Wendell, the Senior Center in Garner, and the Northern Wake Senior Center in Wake Forest. Raleigh seniors may be currently utilizing these facilities, while residents of these surrounding communities are using Raleigh’s facilities.

The City of Raleigh currently has open space in the form of parks, greenways and lakes covering 8,588 acres. Of the parks, 22 contain staffed community centers, 9 have non-staffed centers, and 2 have art centers. There are 57 miles of greenways and there are lake facilities at four locations offering water activities, 2 with waterfront centers. Some of these sites are already utilized for senior activities, and portions of others could also serve the Senior Center program needs.

Senior Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire that was developed for the Kickoff meeting in July was available on a special website set up by the city Parks and Recreation Department. It was also distributed to all senior clubs and the Whitaker Mill Senior Center, and it was direct-mailed by city staff to a large number of individuals on senior activity rosters. Through the questionnaire, Raleigh seniors indicated that they generally participated in senior activities once to three times per week. They preferred to participate in social activities, card games, bingo, crafts, meals, educational activities and speakers, dancing, trips, exercise, aquatics and club meetings. When asked to identify what programs they would like to see in the future, they asked for health and wellness programs, exercise, trips, speakers and programs, club meetings, walking trails, educational activities, arts and crafts, aquatics, dancing, card games and social activities. They identified their primary means of travel as the automobile. Table 1 contains a summary of the some of the responses to the study grouped by facility need. Table 3 contains a further summary of these responses to a number of topics.

**TABLE 3
 SUMMARY OF SENIOR QUESTIONNAIRE REPONSES**

Age of respondents – 265 responses

Age group	Reponses	Age group	Responses
Below 50	5	71-80	112
51-60	20	81-90	46
61-70	82	91 and above	0

Current Participation in Senior Activities –

Number of activities participated in per week – 171 responses

Activities per week	Reponses
1-3 times per week	137
4-6 times per week	30
7-12 times per week	4

Number of activity participated in per month – 83 responses

Activities per month	Responses
1-4 per month	62
5-8 per month	14
9 or more per month	7

Number of times activities participated in per year – 25 responses

Activities per year	Reponses
1-10 per year	5
11-50 per year	11
51-100 per year	6
More than 100 per year	5

Current clubs or places of participation represented in questionnaire – 287 responses

55+ club	5	Millbrook Exchange	40
Athens High	2	N. Blount St.	3
BYB Church	4	North Raleigh United Methodist	1
Capital Towers	1	North Wake Senior Center	1
Cary Senior Center	2	Optimist	1
Catholic Golden Age	2	Our Lady of Lourdes	3
Community United Church	1	Park View Manor	1
Duke Health	1	Powell Dr.	6
Eastgate Park	4	Pullen Park (aquatic center)	40
Edwards	1	Quail Hollow	6
Emanuel Baptist	3	Raleigh Senior Clubs	5
First Cosmopolitan Church	3	Rex Wellness	1
Fit 24	1	Roberts Park	5
Garner Senior Center	5	Robinson Park	2
Glenwood South	1	Senior Games	1
Golden Agers	1	Senior Net	4
Green Rd. Park	20	Southeastern Adult Day Health	5
Hayes Barton Methodist	8	Southeastern Sparkling Seniors	3
Hedingham	6	St. George Church	1
Heritage Pines	1	Stonehenge	1
Hillyer	1	Wake Forest Senior Center	2
Jaycee Park	9	Wakefield	3
Keenagers	3	Whitaker Mill	33
Lake Lynn	5	White Memorial Presbyterian	14
Laurel Hills	1	YMCA	3
Lions Park	9	YWCA	1
McKenly Center	1		

Current Programs in which seniors are participating - 541 responses

Program	Responses	Program	Responses
Computer	9	Genealogy	1
Spiritual Services	6	Volunteer Programs	2
Games	9	Singing / Chorus	7
Social Activities	33	Trips / Travel	65
Cards	74	Senior Business Management	3
Entertainment	6	Swimming	11
Bingo	49	Exercise	60
Crafts	14	Walking	9
Bowling	2	Basketball	2
Golf	4	Programs / Speakers	25
Shuffleboard	2	Communication	3
Health & Wellness	3	Politics	1
Meals	25	Club Meetings	72
Education	13	Line Dancing	4
Ballroom Dancing	10	Ping-Pong	3
Sports	4	Bicycling	1
Horseshoes	1	Tai Chi / Yoga	3
Library	5		

Programs desired to be in a new facility - 612 responses

Program	Responses	Program	Responses
Health and Wellness	22	Walking Trail	17
Indoor Exercise And Fitness	97	Theater And Entertainment	8
Trips And Travel	63	Educational Offerings	34
Line Dancing	4	Ping-Pong	2
Computers / Internet	8	Arts, Crafts and Wood Shop	37
Outdoor Low Impact Exercise	7	Aquatics / Swimming	28
Therapeutic Activities	5	Transportation Service	1
Putting Green, Croquet, Shuffleboard	1	Indoor Activities	13
Music	1	Ballroom Dancing	12
Speakers / Programs	29	Bowling	1
Fitness Equipment	10	Meals	21
Library and Reading Room	1	Help For Caregivers	1
Meetings and Clubs	24	Cards, Board Games, Bingo	120
Sports	5	Social Activities	34
Choral Singing	2	Showers	2
Tai Chi, Yoga and Palates	2		

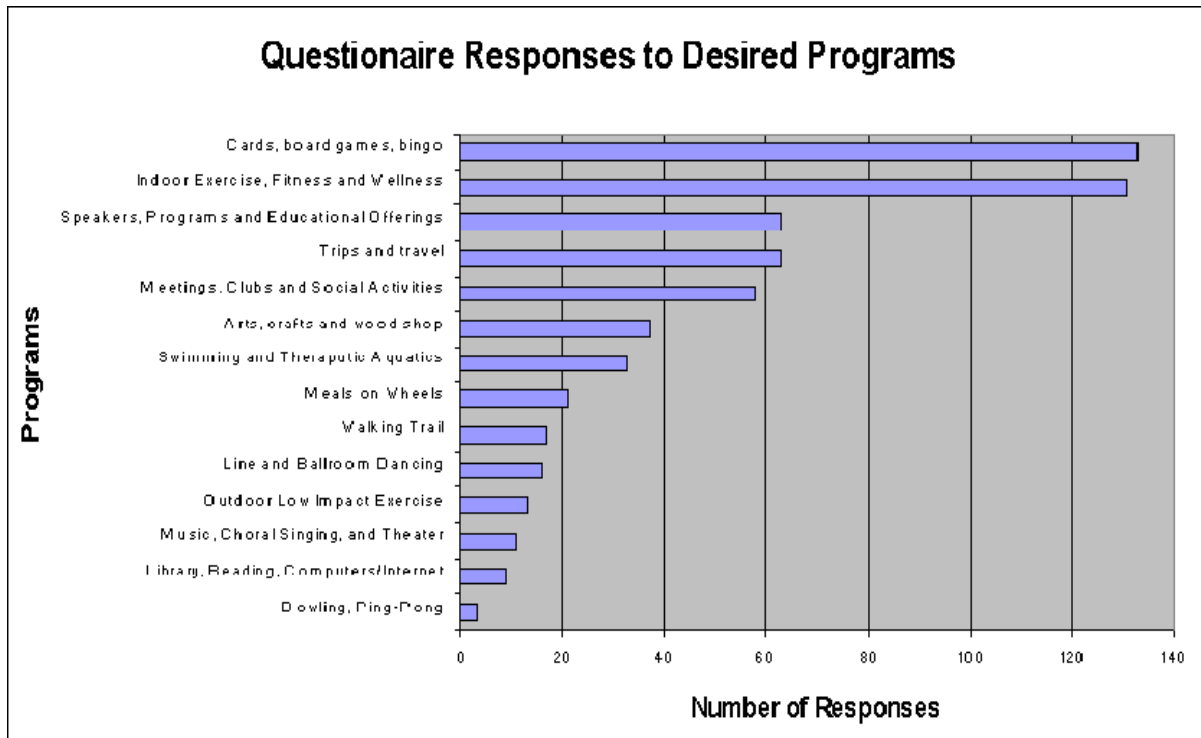
Methods of transportation currently used to get to Senior Programs – 247 responses

Transportation	Responses	Transportation	Responses
Drive / Car	216	Van / Bus	19
Walk	7	Other	5

What encourages your participation in senior programs – 516 responses

Encouragement	Responses	Encouragement	Responses
Friends	134	Easy Transportation	80
Services and Programs of Interest	200	Center Close to Home	102

FIGURE 4
QUESTIONNAIRE REPONSES TO DESIRED PROGRAMS



Focus Group Results

On August 14, 15, 16, 21 and 22 of 2005, Focus groups were held with Raleigh seniors who volunteered to give their time and insight toward the goal of formulating a consensus concerning their needs for a senior center. The information gained from these groups, along with information gained from the questionnaires filled out by area seniors in July and early August, formed the basis for focused discussions concerning programs desired and potential building space – quantity and structure – required to provide for these programs.

Each focus group was structured where an initial group of questions were asked. Appendix C contains the outline for the focus group discussions, including lists of topics and programs. These were basically the same for each group and were intended to ascertain how the seniors perceived themselves, seniors in general, and their needs. From this basis, the individual groups then were directed into the focus topic for the group for which the seniors had volunteered to participate. These topics included transportation and accessibility, senior programs and the future needs of seniors. The focus groups were held in different parts of the City based on the zip codes provided on the volunteer responses, providing an opportunity for the volunteers to serve in a group in or near where they lived. Purely by coincidence, persons from similar geographical locations within the City tended to also have similar interests in topics. A number of volunteers listed interest in multiple topics and were assigned to the closest group, but not to more than one group.

As a means of comparison of opinions as to desired programs for seniors, Figure 5 summarizes the responses of the focus groups. It should be noted that while the questionnaire was administered with very open-ended questions, the focus group discussion topics were more confined, perhaps resulting in responses that concerned the more critical needs of seniors.

Four groups were initially scheduled and persons assigned. At the request members of Senior Adult Action Group (SAAG,) a fifth focus group was held.

Appendix D contains summaries of the discussions in each of the five focus groups.

Figure 6 *normalizes* the sample group represented by the focus groups by proportionately expanding their responses in the various areas and adding their responses to those from the questionnaires.

**FIGURE 5
 FOCUS GROUPS RESPONSES TO DESIRED PROGRAMS**

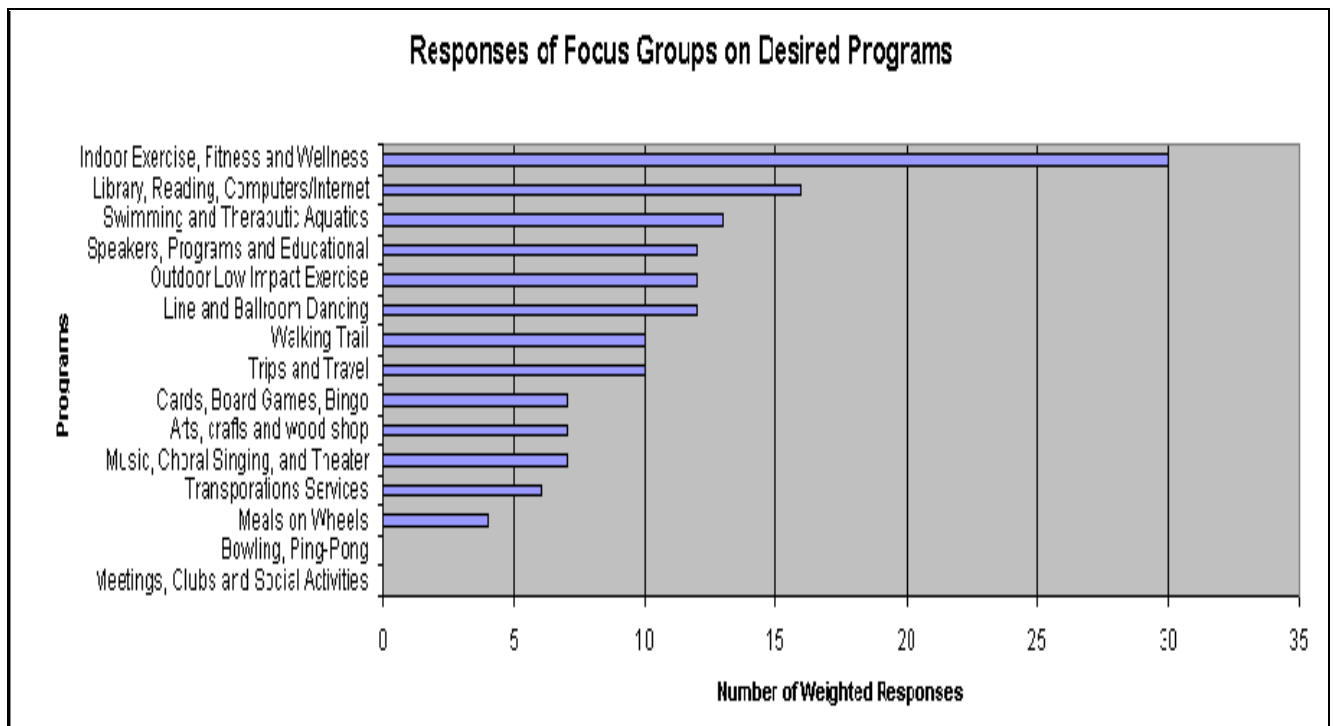
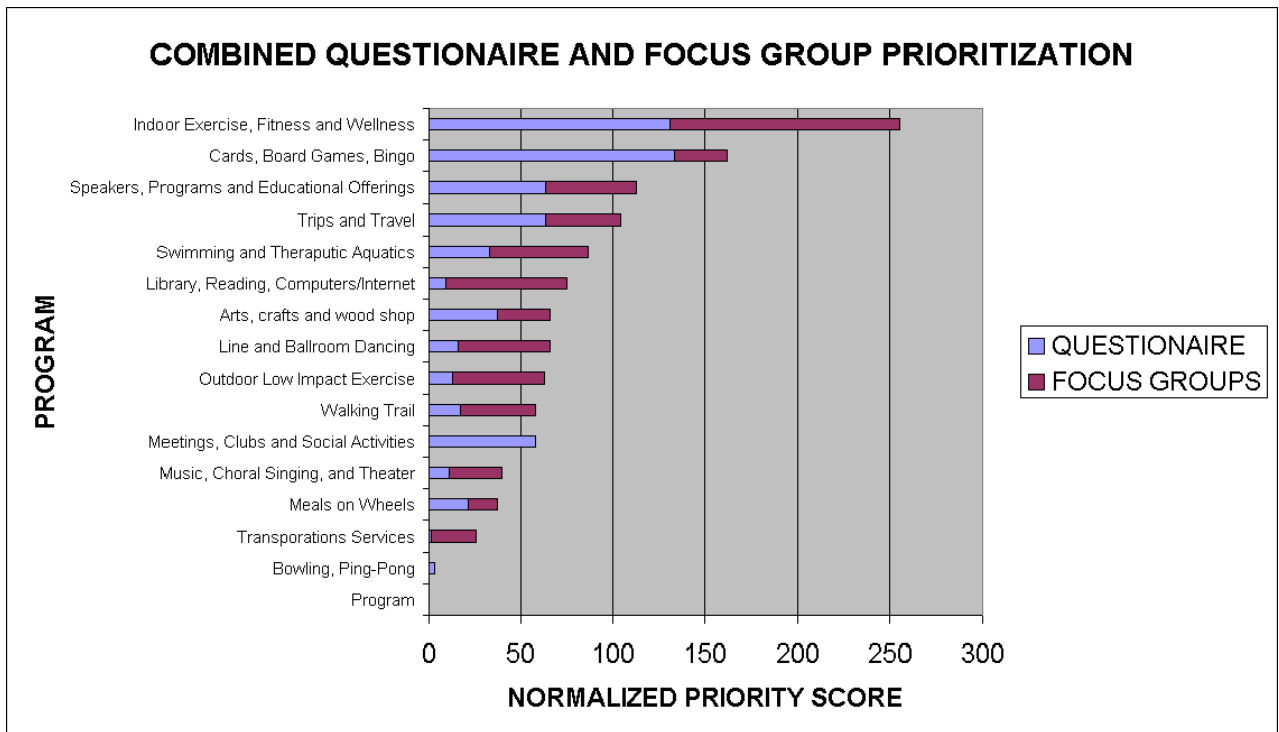


FIGURE 6
COMBINED QUESTIONNAIRE AND FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES TO DESIRED PROGRAMS



SUMMARY OF NEEDS

As seen, Table 1 takes the programs identified above from both the questionnaire responses and focus group discussions and begins to sort them into the types of indoor or outdoor program space that would accommodate such activities.

This data then translates to building and facility space usage needs as shown in Figure 7 below. This information is then used in prioritizing the space allocation or types of space programmed into a new Senor Center.

FIGURE 7
COMBINED PROGRAM NEEDS BY SPACE DESCRIPTION

