



Raleigh's New Senior Centers Public Input Meeting and Survey August 26, 2008

On August 26, 2008, the City of Raleigh Department of Parks & Recreation hosted a public meeting at Hayes Barton United Methodist Church to receive input on issues pertaining to the programming and design of new senior centers to be constructed at Whitaker Mill and Millbrook Exchange Park. Approximately 120 individuals who attended the meeting had the opportunity to voice their opinions and/or complete a written survey prepared by the design team and City staff: 83 surveys were submitted.

The meeting was opened by Stephen Bentley (City of Raleigh Department of Parks & Recreation Project Manager), who welcomed guests and introduced other members of the Panel, including Steve White (Parks & Recreation Senior Adult Program Director), Chris Horner and Kristen Hess (HH Architecture), Doug Gallow and Ellen Gallow (Lifespan Design Studio). Mr. Bentley provided a brief history of the project including:

- **January 2006**
Raleigh City Council authorized a Feasibility Study (with public input) to identify programming needs and facility requirements, select a site, and determine costs.
- **November 2007**
Voters approved a Parks & Recreation Bond Referendum allocating \$7.74 million for a building of approximately 25,000 square feet.
- **March 2008**
City Council directed Parks & Recreation staff to proceed with the design of a Senior Center at Whitaker Mill and smaller Senior Center at Millbrook Exchange Park.

Steve White briefly introduced the City's Senior Adult Program, and encouraged guests to review the Autumn 2008 Guide to Adult Leisure Programs that was distributed at the meeting. Mr. White explained that the City provides socialization, recreation/fitness, and educational/informational programs through the Department of Parks & Recreation, and sponsors 48 Golden Years Clubs that meet in various locations throughout the City. Other programs and services for senior adults are provided locally through Resources for Seniors, Meals on Wheels, Wake County, and other agencies.

Chris Horner outlined the projected schedule and process for the design and construction of the new facilities. Two additional public input meetings are planned: one to review "early design" in February or March of 2009, and another to review the developed design in June or July of 2009. Design should be completed in late 2009, and construction completed early in 2011. The two facilities will be designed and constructed in tandem.

Doug Gallow explained that the design team is beginning the design process without any preconceived notions: each senior center should be designed in direct response to the needs and interests of the community, the programs to be accommodated, and other circumstance unique to that project. The design process will begin with an intensive review of the programs, services,

informal activities, participants, staff, administrative, and operational needs to be accommodated in each building. Information gathered through the Taylor, Wiseman, & Taylor study, discussions with City staff, meetings with other agencies who provide programs and services for seniors in Raleigh, today's survey, and this and future public meetings will all be utilized as design continues. Practical limitations imposed by the sites, the project budget, etc. also will influence design decisions, and it is unlikely that everything on the "wish list" will be included in the finished product. Every effort will be made to make design decisions that reflect the most compelling needs and interests of seniors throughout the Raleigh community. The finished results will be two buildings that are universally accessible, user-friendly, safe, and comfortable for use by individuals of diverse abilities.

Ellen Gallow "walked participants through" the Public Input Survey, clarifying the questions and encouraging write-in responses in addition to those provided. She explained that those who are uncomfortable voicing their opinions in the public forum should feel free to express them in writing. All survey information will become part of the permanent record of today's meeting.

Following a brief recess, Kristen Hess emceed open discussion of the issues raised by the written survey. Questions and comments from the audience pertaining to the five areas of discussion included in the survey are summarized below.

Public Input Survey: Comments and Questions from the Audience

1. What programs or services not currently offered through the Raleigh Parks & Recreation Senior Adult Program should we consider adding to address current and future interests?

Interest was expressed in the following:

- A pool
- Crafts programs/room
- SeniorNet computer classes
- Pool table/billiards room
- Sewing room with layout table
- Watercolor painting classes
- Theatre/acting classes and groups
- Movie viewing and discussion program
- Large dance floor
- Men's programs such as a golf league, breakfast club, card groups, fishing club, etc.
- Art history classes offered through partnerships with museums
- Choral groups and appropriate room
- Programs from current Whitaker Mill Senior Center, including those offered free-of-charge
- Nutrition education

2. In addition to regularly scheduled events, what kinds of un-programmed uses should the new Senior Center at Whitaker Mill be designed to accommodate?

Interest was expressed in the following:

- A lounge where people can drop in to play cards
- Place to display seniors' artwork
- Drop-in use of computers/Internet
- Drop-in use of exercise equipment and ping pong tables

3. What programs currently offered through the Raleigh Parks & Recreation Senior Adult Program are compromised by the setting in which they are held?

Responses included:

- Sound systems are inadequate
 - Temperature control is a problem: facilities are often too hot or too cold
 - More restrooms are needed
 - More separate/private spaces are needed to support different kinds of activities at one time
 - Parking is a problem: especially at Millbrook Exchange Park
 - Lack of public transportation (should drop off at door of facility)
4. The City and design team will be weighing the pro's and con's of various options for the location of the Senior Center at Millbrook Exchange Park. How would you rank these issues? (1 = not important, 2 = somewhat important, 3 = very important)

Issues:

- Easy access to parking
- Main entrance drop-off
- Physical connection to the community center
- Physical separation from the community center
- A separate entrance and distinct identity from the community center
- Make it as big as possible

Comments from the audience:

- Covered front entrance drop-off is essential
 - Design must be fully accessible
 - Door swings must not block safe egress from rooms
 - The new building should be connected to the community center so that seniors programs can continue to make use of community center space when needed
 - The buildings should be separate, and the senior center should have its own parking
5. How would you rank these exterior amenities, for either location? (1 = not important, 2 = somewhat important, 3 = very important)

Amenities:

- Walking trail
- Gardens/raised planters
- Patio with seating
- Game courts (what kinds?)

Interest was expressed in:

- Volleyball
- Basketball
- Badminton
- Horseshoes
- Shuffleboard
- Grill area
- Croquet
- Walking trail

General Comments and Questions from the Audience

Following the open discussion of survey issues, Stephen Bentley opened the floor for general comments and questions pertaining to the project.

- Some participants pointed out that a comprehensive needs/interests study was completed by Taylor, Wiseman & Taylor. Mr. Bentley explained that the new survey and public input meeting are intended to supplement and build upon the information gathered through the T, W & T study, as design begins. The survey was created by the design team to help clarify functional objectives for the buildings.
- Some participants expressed confusion or frustration over the use of project funds to design and construct two facilities, rather than just one center, as originally envisioned. Mr. Bentley explained that City Council has directed the Department of Parks & Recreation to design and construct a senior center at Whitaker Mill *and* senior center satellite at Millbrook Exchange Park. Both projects are to be completed for a total of \$7.74 million.
- Mr. Bentley reassured a concerned audience member that the County-owned building on the site at Whitaker Mill will not be torn down.

Miscellaneous comments and questions included:

1. Comment from audience: Exterior lighting and safety are concerns, especially at Millbrook Exchange
2. Question from audience: Does the City have a purchase agreement for the land at Whitaker Mill?
 - a. Response from panel: Not yet. Decisions need to be made regarding the placement of the building on the lot before an agreement can be reached for the lease or purchase of the property from the County.
3. Comment from audience: There should be a walkway connection between the two buildings at Whitaker Mill.
4. Comment from the audience: The design of the new facility at Whitaker Mill must be respectful of and harmonious with the design of the existing building.
5. Question from the audience: How will the opinions/information being gathered by the City and design team be weighed to make decisions?
 - a. Response from panel: There is no formula for assigning weight to input. All input will be taken seriously and given due consideration.
6. Comment from audience: The building should be “green.”
 - a. Response from panel: the building will be certified LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, a program of the Green Building Council) silver or higher
7. Question from audience: Will there be an elevator at Whitaker Mill?
 - a. Response from panel: Yes, if the building has more than one story, an elevator will be required.
8. Question from audience: How will staff be funded?
 - a. Response from panel: Through the City’s Parks & Recreation budget, unless the individual is employed by a partner agency.
9. Question from audience: Has the design team visited other senior centers in the area?
 - a. Response from panel: City staff members have already visited several, and will return with the design team as the design process continues.

Public Input Survey: Summary of Written Responses

Written responses to the Public Input Survey distributed and collected at the Public Input Meeting are summarized below.

1. What programs or services not currently offered through the Raleigh Parks and Recreation Senior Adult Program should we consider adding to address current and future interests?

Socialization, recreation & special events

Art tours, garden tours, Sarah Duke gardens, cards, movies (6), dances, swimming pool, computer games: Nintendo Wii (2), billiards (3), theatrical productions, transportation to local sports & entertainment, bridge, sports on TV, dances & dance classes, low-cost rental for parties, meet & greet City/County officials, day trips, movie & theatre discussions, more men's programs, men's card groups, men's breakfast club, chi gong (qigong)

Exercise and sports programs

Tai chi (2), ping pong (2), water aerobics, shuffleboard, warm water pool (2) yoga, water aerobics (2), billiards, bocce ball (2), putting green, walking trails, aerobics for seniors, volleyball (2), walking programs (2), water aerobics (3), biking, badminton (2), more active programs, more outdoor activities, treadmills, weight machines, exercise machines, lockers, home exercise instruction, martial arts (floating floor), horseshoes, chi gong, exercise dance class, horse shoes

Educational programs

computer training (12), genealogy, SeniorNet (3), Biblical and European middle ages history, lectures (2), history classes (2), Spanish classes (2), health classes, language programs, tax information, current events discussion group, book club, computer club, Medicare/SS/financial planning/tax information

Arts programs

Acting classes (3), museum trips, scrapbook club (4), crocheting (2), kiln/pottery (2), equipped woodworking shop, drawing/painting, pottery/clay (2), square dancing, movie appreciation, gardening, flower arranging, tatting (2), knitting (5), acrylic or watercolor painting, sewing/sewing club (5), quilting (3), crafts & sewing room (4), plastic canvas (2), Toastmaster/public speaking (2), art history classes, museum trips, photography, handcrafts (2), creative writing, art show (senior artists), folk art painting, community band open to all ages, drawing, art display/gallery, piano lessons, singing/musical groups (5)

Nutrition/wellness programs and social services

nutrition speakers (4), tax preparation (2), health screenings (3), diabetic nutrition education, home remedies, diet programs, flu shot clinics, wellness education, legal services, dietician talks, support groups, doctor or nurse on duty at all times

Other (and miscellaneous comments/suggestions)

Peer counseling, stage for drama, more international trips, discounted prices for seniors, community bulletin board (2), evening programming (with transportation), coffee, "simple lunch," dollhouse miniatures (gallery and workshop), adult day care, more programs in north Raleigh, stamp collecting, transportation services, men's & women's golf league, mentoring, employment services, cookout equipment, porch with rocking chairs & swing, opportunities to help others, Fletcher Park concert series

2. In addition to regularly scheduled events, what kinds of un-programmed uses should the new Senior Center at Whitaker Mill be designed to accommodate?

Numbers and percentages below indicated the number of respondents who checked the item, and the percent of respondents who checked that item. Respondents were asked to “select all that apply.”

Drop-in use of computers/Internet: **50 (60%)**

Informal card and game playing: **46 (55%)**

Drop-in use of an art studio: **26 (31%)**

Drop-in use of exercise equipment: **51 (61%)**

Informal socialization or individual use of un-programmed spaces, such as a beverage/snack café, lounge/TV room, library, etc.: **53 (64%)**

Unscheduled access to information and referral through a qualified staff person: **33 (40%)**

Art media that respondents said they'd like to be able to pursue on a drop-in basis:

crafts (3), oil painting, photography (2), acrylic (3), watercolor (2), drawing/sketching (3), pottery or ceramics (4), sewing (2), weaving, music, woodworking (2), digital photography, painting (2)

What un-programmed uses should be accommodated at Millbrook Exchange?

piano, exercise equipment, all of those listed above (4), computers (2), more exercise equipment, sewing room, card playing (2), socialization/café (2), access to information and referral for social services, small-group parties (2), quilting/sewing, socialization, art, library

3. What programs currently offered through the Raleigh Parks & Recreation Senior Adult Program are compromised by the setting in which they are held?

Facilities/programs identified by respondents included Whitaker Mill Senior Center, Community Center at Millbrook Exchange Park, Pullen Community Center, dance programs, exercise programs. Note: many responses refer directly to the current senior center at Whitaker Mill.

What is it about the setting that doesn't work? (Select all that apply)

Numbers and percentages below indicated the number of respondents who checked the item, and the percent of respondents who checked that item. Respondents were asked to “select all that apply.” Some respondents did not respond to this question.

Location is inconvenient: **19 (23%)**

Noise/distractions from other activities: **28 (34%)**

The space isn't well suited to the activity: **39 (47%)**

Room is too small: **49 (59%)**

Inadequate parking: **24 (29%)**

Write-in responses:

Inadequate kitchen space, forced to share, general lack of sinks

Sun's glare through windows

Lack of public transportation to front door

Insufficient seating area for dances (separates dancers and non-dancers)

Inappropriate flooring

Uncomfortable room temperatures

Noise from/competition with kids programs

Difficulty getting in and out of parking lot

Feel unwelcome during summer months

Feel unsafe

3. continued

Inadequate restrooms
Poor public address systems, bad acoustics
Limited handicapped parking
Inadequate space for exercising

4. The City and Design Team will be weighing the pro's and con's of various options for the location of the Senior Center at Millbrook Exchange Park.

How would you rate these issues?

1 = **not** important 2 = **somewhat** important 3 = **very** important

Easy access to parking: 53 respondents

Not important = 0 (0%)
Somewhat important = 7 (13%)
Very important = 46 (87%)

Main entrance drop-off: 48 respondents

Not important = 4 (8%)
Somewhat important = 16 (34%)
Very important = 28 (58%)

Physical connection to community center: 52 respondents

Not important = 24 (46%)
Somewhat important = 13 (25%)
Very important = 7 (13%)
No response = 8 (16 %)

Physical separation from the community center: 50 respondents

Not important = 12 (24%)
Somewhat important = 10 (20%)
Very important = 17 (34%)
No response = 11 (22%)

A separate entrance/distinct identity: 46 respondents

Not important = 6 (13%)
Somewhat important = 12 (26%)
Very important = 28 (61%)

Make it as big as possible: 49 respondents

Not important = 1 (2%)
Somewhat important = 15 (31%)
Very important = 33 (67%)

5. How would you rate the exterior amenities below, for either location?

1 = **not** important 2 = **somewhat** important 3 = **very** important

| | <u>Whitaker Mill</u> | <u>Millbrook Exchange</u> |
|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Walking trail | 1=7, 2=20, 3=25 | 1=3, 2=15, 3=15 |
| Gardens/raised planters | 1=11, 2=24, 3=17 | 1=10, 2=12, 3=14 |
| Patio with seating | 1=5, 2=19, 3=28 | 1=4, 2=15, 3=20 |
| Game courts | 1=17, 2=18, 3=13 | 1=9, 2=16, 3=8 |

Games and other outdoor activities requested: shuffleboard (13), lawn bowling, badminton (7), bocce (10), golf, tennis (3), volleyball (4), croquet (2), horseshoes (8), grill (2), ping pong (2), handball against the building wall, screened porch (2), sun porch, picnics

Summary

The Public Input Meeting and Survey were extremely useful in helping to clarify key issues as programming and design options are considered for the new facilities. Prominent themes in the meeting and survey reinforce and expand upon issues identified in the Taylor, Wiseman & Taylor Study. Question One, which explored interest in specific programs and services not currently offered through the Senior Adult Program yielded responses across a broad range of program and service types, validating a multi-purpose model. Strong interest was expressed in the various forms of drop-in activity proposed in Question Two, suggesting the importance of envisioning facilities not so tightly programmed as to preclude this kind of activity—and design features that support both programmed and un-programmed uses. The similarly strong interest in outdoor programming and amenities expressed in response to Question Five also must be taken into consideration as options for the placement of the buildings on their sites are weighed.

The issues identified by respondents as problematic in the facilities that currently house senior programs in Raleigh will receive due attention as the new facilities are developed. Concerns about safe and easy access (including front-door drop off, ample parking, and the overall accessibility and navigability of the site) must drive decisions about each building’s footprint and orientation on its site. Problems relating to the appropriateness and size of spaces utilized for specific functions, distractions from adjacent activities, ambient comfort, rest room locations and fixture counts, etc., all will be addressed in matching design choices with specific program- and client-focused requirements.

Responses to Question Four, which explored preferences regarding the location of the Millbrook Exchange Center within the busy park, reinforced the importance of studying this issue carefully. Respondents’ concerns about ease of access, safety, and parking were very strongly expressed.