

Howard County Master Plan for the Aging Population
Questions/Comments from Community Kick-off Meetings
May 28th and June 3rd
2014

Question: *How are you planning to address cultural differences? Are any of the team members trained/knowledgeable about how culture impacts aging and what an individual wants and needs as they age?*

Answer: KGRW & Associates has extensive experience planning and designing services and facilities for older adults of many cultures, including retirement communities in China. We recognize that in Howard County we have multiple cultures and groups, with different concepts of aging, caregiving, and the role of families. We are working very closely with the Department of Citizen Services and the Office on Aging to assure that stakeholders from different cultures are included in the process for developing the Master Plan.

Question: *There were a few references to integrated activities that do not isolate older people from others, but they are overwhelmed by emphasis on “centers.” How can we make sure you give weight to things that enable us to participate in normal, public/private community programs and not just “Senior” programs?*

Answer: Staff throughout the Office on Aging work on a daily basis in an effort to provide and plan programming and services that we hope will be of interest to as many county residents as possible, whether you attend a senior center or not. Our Cycle2Health program and many volunteer opportunities are good examples. We also hope that the input and feedback we receive through the Master Plan process aides us in continuing to develop programs and services that meet this wish.

Question: *How will data be gathered from persons who don't use senior centers because of lack of appropriate programming?*

Answer: The project survey has been distributed in multiple venues and through a number of community organizations to assure that we get feedback from a broad sample of individuals, not just senior center participants.

Question: *It's great to get input from involved, interested people. However, that represents a small portion of the population. I understand the selection process, but I think you want a plan to address all of the older adult population, not just the active, interested population. Will there be any effort to get feedback from those less likely to participate? Ideas: doctor's offices, senior living facilities.*

Answer: We have made extensive efforts to encourage residents from everywhere in the County to take our survey and participate in this process. Survey postcards and announcements have been distributed to small and large assisted living and nursing facilities, local businesses, and to all departments within county government. We have also included representatives from a wide-range of areas in both our Master Plan Advisory Committee and Working Group.

Question: *How could we volunteer as a physical therapy clinic, to assist/contribute in this planning?*

Answer: Any assistance that can be provided by physical therapy clinics and any other providers and businesses throughout the county is and has been greatly appreciated, especially so far in helping to get the word about the survey to your customers and clientele. Your continued support as we continue the process and any thoughts or ideas you may have about public-private partnerships going forward will be very welcome!

Question: *How come people younger than 45 cannot participate when we will age in this county as well?*

Answer: While we recognize that everyone is aging in Howard County, our focus is on the age groups which will reach age 65 over the next 20 years.

Question: *What about financial fitness/preparedness? There are some that may not be able to afford to continue in Columbia and the county.*

Answer: Stakeholders in the Master Plan Process include an Advisory Committee, composed of leaders of major Howard County organizations who will consider the best way to address a broad set of policy issues related to implementing the Master Plan. Given the interest from the community, the question of affordability for older adults living in Howard County will be one of the issues under consideration..

Question: *Will there be any advocacy with legislators regarding a) state/county retirement savings plan to target low-wage workers; b) savers credit to target low wage workers; c) robust long term care tax credit to encourage investment in long term care insurance; d) caregiver assistance?*

Answer: KGRW, County staff, and the advisory groups involved in the Master Plan process will not be advocating for specific legislative action. The purpose of the Master Plan is to provide Howard County with a blueprint for meeting the future needs of older adults in Howard County. It is likely that findings generated by the process will be helpful for advocates supporting a variety of strategies, but it is not the role of the Master Plan participants to take advocacy positions.

Question: *Are you confident that every segment of the community is being represented regardless of their socio-economic background?*

Answer: The County is making extensive efforts to include all segments of the community in the planning and data collection processes. And, again, this includes the broad range of representation we have in our Advisory Committee and Working Group.

Other comments...

Finally, we wanted to also share the following comments that were given to us at the Community Kick-off meetings. These ideas and thoughts will be taken into consideration as we work hard over the coming months to develop the Master Plan. A number of these ideas are being considered currently in our efforts to get the word out about and encourage County residents to take the online survey – www.howardcountysurvey.com. Other issues and ideas will be given careful and serious consideration in the work that will be done with our Master Plan Advisory Committee and Working Group, and in drafting the Master Plan.

- *Please make sure to send information about the survey, etc. to the ten village associations of Columbia. I only found out about this meeting from Facebook and the Flier.*
- *Easy fix: Master activity list for all senior centers combined, sortable by activity type, cost, center, etc.*
- *People who are not attending/participating may not be indifferent. They may just not know what's happening, believe their needs aren't important to others, or are too isolated and despairing to participate. Suggested sources: Grassroots, meals on wheels, senior living homes, churches/mosques/synagogues, nursing homes.*
- *We need more choices for people who wish to downsize but have opportunities for activities, community, continuing ed - that are affordable. How about a CCRC that does not require paying for a meal as part of the monthly fee? How about an independent living cottage or a CCRC campus? I wish we had a place like "the Villages" in Florida where one could live independently, have access to transportation, have medical services, and also close access to an assisted living facility. Also need more condo availability for those over 55.*
- *Current senior programming seems to focus on the infirm and economically disadvantaged-making programming more attractive to active and engaged seniors could improve services to both groups.*
- *Hello! I'm 21 and do not want to mess with the survey reliability, but I've spent the past year meeting with seniors across the county. These seniors are very unlikely to complete*

the survey: no internet; no transportation to senior centers; etc. Here are some thoughts that they've shared with me:

- 1. More citizens are food insecure than will ever admit so.*
- 2. Transportation is not only limited but expensive and unreliable.*
- 3. There is both an immediate and a long term need for in-home psychiatric and psychotherapeutic services and they need to be affordable.*
- 4. The SNAP eligibility cut-off is \$1200/month. This needs to be considered as more seniors have less and less in savings.*
- 5. Many seniors have reported that when they try to get help from the county, they get put on a waiting list because there are not enough employed social workers.*

I am a student, one of many who want to financially support all supportive services for seniors, yet also seek to remain living in Howard County. The future of service funding is optimistic, yet also met with anxiety. There are many, many people under 45 that can give thoughts. Please, please reconsider the format of the survey. Thank you very much.

- *Accessible transportation*
- *Aging in place-homes with a master bedroom en suite on the ground floor/affordable housing*
- *The county is demographically diverse. Not all live in Columbia! The southeastern part of the county is middle to low income. The western part of the county is rural and more wealthy. Columbia and Ellicott City are affluent but there are pockets of poverty in Howard County and seniors and younger people are struggling to eat, pay rent, etc. In preparing for Boomers don't forget the silent generation. Many of us are being taxed to death (county taxes, "rain tax," for cleaning the Chesapeake Bay, sales tax is now 6% vs 5%)*
- *Must teach people about loans, credit, savings, financial management, financial world processes. Much needs to be learned about health, human services, medicines and costs. Certain diseases hit seniors. Consumer protection is a major part of HC Citizen Services. There are many problems, exploitations of seniors/users, to be learned.*