

OAKLAND COUNTY

Novi is aging. How the Oakland Co. suburb is weighing programs, transportation for seniors

More than 20% of Novi's population is 60 and over so the city has formed a committee to address their needs. One idea is to create a dedicated space for programs.



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Novi — More than 20% of Novi residents are now over the age of 60, mirroring state-wide trends of a growing population of older adults, promptly city officials to think more broadly about what older residents will need down the road and how to improve those services.

While attracting young people has been a large focus of state officials this year, the city of Novi has created an Older Adults Needs Committee to identify and advocate for the needs of its senior citizens.

Nearly a year later, they have plans in the works to improve transportation and programming, and also potentially create a dedicated place for seniors.

"We have been looking at everything you can possibly understand about what seniors are going to need, what they need today and what they're likely going to need in the future," said Laura Casey, city council member and a member of the Older Adults Needs Committee.

The committee decided to focus on transportation first, in part because of the county-wide transportation millage that was approved by Oakland County voters in November 2022, Casey said. Novi has offered free transportation to seniors, within a certain radius, for years but it needs to expand, she said.

"We knew that there needed to be some conversations with the county about what our needs are as a community and how we might be able to best offer transit for both our senior citizens and also residents with disabilities," Casey said. "The city has been in conversation with the County and some of those third-party (transportation) providers."

Doreen Poupard, 87, has lived in Novi at the Fox Run senior living community since 2005 and can no longer see well enough to drive herself around.

"Transportation is an issue," Poupard said. "I think there's just enough to let us know we need more."

Poupard would like to see the scope of transportation broadened beyond places like her doctor's office, the hospital, and the library.

"We sit northwest of the city of Detroit," Poupard said. "(Transportation) would be really helpful from our institute to the music venues, to the various... sports teams and so on. There's so much available and we're a suburb."

According to U.S. Census figures released this week, 21.3% of Novi's population was 60 years or older in 2022, up from 17.9% in 2017.

City officials is looking not just at transportation but how it communicates with older residents and programming. The city is expecting to make progress on expanding transportation in 2024, Casey said. The committee also has recommended convert a part-time event programming position in the city to full-time, focusing specifically on activities for older adults.

"We have experts in the Parks and Rec and Cultural Services department that put on programming and within their space, they also include activities for seniors," Casey said. "We have a very vibrant list of senior activities, we just knew we wanted to increase the opportunity for us to offer more."

Lynn and Gary Cummings, also residents of the Fox Run Senior Living Community, agreed that while Novi offers many activities, they should ask seniors what else they're interested in.

"I think that still there are people that imagine and have interests and needs in a lot of different things, and I would like for them to have those opportunities," Lynn, 72, said.

She'd also like to see the city engage with caregivers since they would have insights into what activities their clients enjoy, and provide them with more respite opportunities.

"I would like to see much more communication and engagement of the Novi activities," Gary, 68, added. "It's not as visible or noticeable within Fox Run on what Novi offers. ... We would like to have advance notice and some coordination of what's going on in the Novi community."

Loneliness also is a big issue for older adults who live by themselves, Poupard said. Effective communication is key to getting them to leave their homes, and setting up buddy systems could help alleviate the worry that they'll be the only ones attending an event, she suggested.

"You have seniors that are not within the senior communities," Gary said. "And that is a challenge on how do you get them comfortable and engaged to come out of their homes when they probably don't do that unless they absolutely have to."

The city plans to send out a community survey in January to determine what the programming needs are, Casey said. There is a general need for a space to house most programming activities, for seniors and other age groups, but it is unclear whether older adults want their own designated facility, Casey said.

"We did some focus groups back in September. ... one of the things we've identified is we do need to look at the facilities and the space we have available for events globally, and specifically for our older adult population," Casey said. "Seniors want... something dedicated to them."

While the committee was only chartered for one year, Casey plans to extend this because there is still work left to do, specifically when it comes to housing options for seniors.

Poupard said older adults shouldn't only be treated as recipients of care or programming but engaged as contributors as well.

"Older adults don't have to just be on the receiving end of services, older adults have a lot they can contribute to the community," she said. "We have a life that's lived and full of experience, and we have time for volunteering."

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