

Findings

Our study group found, in order to continue to improve the experiences of Older Adult Services, we can adopt items that we observed in three different stages. The first group of items can be done with low-cost, low risk, and mostly done through the administration (Implement). The second group may need some budget attention or more planning and goal setting (Tactical). Finally, the third area would be where we want the Older Adults Service program and department to go (Direction).

One item we want to focus on is improving the socialization of our Seniors. Improving socialization can be the gateway for more interaction and building of relationships which also opens doors for being aware of and utilizing City of Novi programs. Some of the items we want to implement right of way are:

Implement

- Comfortable and welcoming space(s) for seniors to gather and socialize before and after programs
- Centralized all senior programming information (Should this be defined more? Kathy is going to advocate for a monthly newsletter)
- Videos of interest specifically for older adults
- Opportunity to promote gathering at Library in mornings for socialization/café.

Tactically, we can move forward items that will take some planning, designing or budgetary focus. Some of the items we want to tactically start moving are:

Tactical

- Additional program employees as we increase older adult programs
- Bocci Ball court outside Civic Center or Meadowbrook Commons
- Pickleball courts at Meadowbrook Commons with gathering space and shade
- Senior Home Assistance Repair Program (SHARP)

Finally, with a clear direction, we can move forward items that will require City Council Direction and public input. Some of the items with Directional focus are:

Direction

- Additional City owned Senior Housing
- Warm water therapy pool
- Indoor Pickleball Courts
- Staffing to facilitate and maintain additional spaces/amenities and programs

Introduction:

This report is a snapshot of a multi-month endeavor to evaluate where our Older Adult Services (OAS) division ranks comparably to the best senior facilities/programs across the State of Michigan. Additionally, we looked at staffing models and local government-operated housing for the OAS population. I engaged Kathy Crawford to assist due to her decades of committed advocacy for all things related to the OAS population. To round out our team, our Director of Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services (PRCS), Jeff Muck, added his expertise with almost 30 years of programming, managing facilities, and overseeing staff working with populations of all ages.

The process started with Mrs. Crawford selecting five (5) of the top agencies/facilities in the State of Michigan to visit, inspect and learn from and compare to. I then requested Director Muck to select three (3) additional programs/facilities that he would see as comparable. The first five (5) are listed in the order of visits selected by Mrs. Crawford, and the next three (3) are the ones selected by Director Muck:

[Hartland Senior Activity Center](#), 9525 E Highland Rd, Howell, MI 48843
[Loose Senior Center in Linden](#), 707 N Bridge St, Linden, MI 48451
[Auburn Hills Community Center](#), 3350 E. Seyburn Dr. Auburn Hills, MI 48326
[Oceana County Council On Aging](#), 4250 W Tyler Rd, Hart, MI 49420
[Charles & Lynn Zhang Portage Senior Center](#), 203 E Centre Ave, Portage, MI 49002
[OPC \(Older Persons Commission\) Rochester](#), 650 Letica Dr, Rochester, MI 48307
[Troy Community Senior Center](#), 3179 Livernois Rd, Troy, MI 48083
[Senior Friendship Center Westland](#), 1119 N Newburgh Road, Westland, MI 48185=

Due to each community being different, the process of recording and blending our observations was simplified by each member turning in notes after the visits with Likes, Dislikes, and Other Observations. This allowed the combination of items into the three distinct buckets. The dislikes are important but, at this point, don't add value, and after review of the items, we found seven (7) categories that make sense when we perform an overview of Novi OAS, where we are at and help us continue to improve on where we are going. Those categories are:

- Facilities
- Programs
- Personnel
- Boards/Advisory Committee
- Transportation
- Housing

Facilities

Common observations and characteristics from visiting each facility:

- Parking that is adequate and close to the building. Covered drop-off area. No step entries.
- Aesthetics and design are welcoming and not oversized, with a fireplace, nice seating/gathering space, views of nature, and large restrooms.
- Most popular features included a billiard/game room, fitness equipment, indoor walking track, pickleball courts, and a warm water pool. The building easily flows to outdoor spaces for programming. No need for computer rooms.
- Sufficient storage.
- Patio, meeting/program rooms, and spaces that can be utilized for banquets and conferences, as well as private events that bring revenue to the center.
- Members have learned how to use the online scheduling system for the pool and classes. (OPC, Portage)
- Private multi-story senior housing facility next door to OPC. Residents don't use OPC much as they have their own amenities in their complex. (Much like the amenities that our private sector housing provides in Novi)
- Large crafts room for pottery, basket weaving, and wood carving
- Water Aerobics and water therapy
- Well-equipped exercise room
- Large areas of the property that could be used for outdoor activities such as Bocce Ball etc.
- All rooms had large windows with lots of natural light
- A small greenhouse maintained by seniors was attached to the center.
- Park grounds with pavilion, picnic area, and room for having Hot Dogs on the grill, Walking path, cornhole, and programable space. Area for socialization outdoors.
- Outside bocce ball court and shuffleboard with shade areas

How does Novi Compare?

- The city's OAS Housing (Meadowbrook Commons) has a covered drop-off area. Novi Civic Center, Library, and Lakeshore Park facilities have closed parking but are not covered.
- Civic Center, Library, Lakeshore Park, and Meadowbrook Commons all have no step entries and large restrooms.
- We do not have a "Sr. Center" with a fitness room, but we do have a fitness center available to Meadowbrook Commons residents.

- Currently, the Lakeshore Park building flows into the park with the deck, proximity to the pavilion, and views of Shawood lake. The library has a patio that opens to Fuerst Park. Meadowbrook Commons has an open courtyard for residents and exercise equipment for all abilities, with a nearby gazebo.
- While restrained from building banquet facilities by city charter, the city still has a steady revenue stream by renting out meeting rooms for private events at the library, the Civic Center, Township Hall/Fuerst Park, and park shelters. Currently, the policy at Lakeshore Park is no renting of the building space.
- Warm water pools, fitness centers, and indoor pickleball courts are provided by the private sector.
- Novi seniors utilize online registration for our programs and services.

Programs

Program and Service observations:

- Comprehensive programming: special events, classes, social services, travel, opportunities to socialize and volunteer, center meals and home delivered, leagues and fitness programs.
- Open Mic night for musical instruments.
- Utilize surveys to assess senior needs.
- Opportunities to facilitate inter-generational programs.
- Senior Home Assistance Repair Program (SHARP) at Auburn Hills and Troy. The SHARP program provides home repair to senior and disabled residents. The labor is free; the homeowner pays for the cost of the materials. Trained volunteers will provide miscellaneous home repairs and maintenance.
- Adventure-type activities (Kayaking, biking, Cross-Country skiing) and an out-of-state travel program (ex: white water rafting) have positive revenue for the center (Oceana).
- Counselors on site for assistance with Medicare, and Medicaid.
- Support groups were provided.
- Adult Day Care on site, beneficial to users but was not staffed by or licensed at the State level. (Oceana)
- On-site health programs (BP, Pulse, Oxygen) are provided by Ascension Health(OPC). Collaboration with the private sector to provide Physical Therapy and Sports Medicine on site

- Collaboration with the Nature Center and Troy Historic Village for free enrichment events such as Autumn Jewels, Preservation Conversations, and Michigan's Native Americans.
- Large, equipped computer center for classes and use by seniors
- Intergenerational programming
- Considerable focus on providing Cable TV shows of interest to older adults...particularly information related to Medicare and Medicaid scams. (Westland)
- Friends of Troy Seniors group organized tax prep, Document shredding, Monthly Brunch & Learn, Health screenings, Community Garage Sale and Flea Market, Senior Indoor Picnic, Ice Cream Social, and other programs.
- Sell fitness center passes. (Troy)
- Seniors pay full price for classes (Troy)

How does Novi compare?

- Novi provides a full complement of programs and services, including Meals on Wheels and luncheons, Medicare/Medicaid Counseling, social services, transportation, and enrichment. A few that we do not offer are SHARP, white water rafting trips, and open mic night.
- The Novi Concert Band and the Novi Choraliers are two community groups organized under PRCS. Participation is mainly seniors.
- SOS survey conducted in Fall 2021, National Citizens Survey, Parks and Rec Master Plan survey, ongoing program surveys, and after-action reports are all utilized to access programming needs and wants.
- Offer programs such as fitness, crafts, birding, and walking clubs that do not have age ranges. Working with Novi Schools on robotics collaboration for seniors. We are planning to offer several more programs over the next few months, including kayaking.
- Novi contracts with travel companies and offers some staff-led trips. We generate revenue on our travel programs that outpace expenditures.
- Support groups held at Meadowbrook and the Civic Center have included Hearing Loss, Tech Assistance, Bereavement Support, and Care Giver Support. SOS guide provided to the entire community, including links and phone contact for support groups. OAS Social Services Coordinator acts as our city "concierge" to refer those in need of services. Maintain Boomers and Beyond Facebook page that provides messaging on support services and OAS programs.

- We have worked with Ascension for years. They have been reluctant to be in person at our location since Covid and have been offering virtual opportunities.

Personnel

Common observations, and characteristics from visiting each facility:

- Director had passion, drive, professionalism, and knowledgeable.
- The staff seems to be familiar with many of the participants and calls them by name.
- One staff person and one part-time employee are dedicated to the senior program (Troy)
- Full-Time Director and then a few part-time workers who were not necessarily educated regarding seniors but are seniors themselves who need a job to supplement their limited income (Westland).

How Novi compares:

- Novi has 6 Nationally Certified Parks and Recreation Professionals, 1 Certified Dementia Practitioner, and one (1) certified Program Planner through The Learning Resources Network (LERN).
- Staff attend mParks, National Recreation and Park Association, Michigan Alliance of Senior Centers, and National Council On Aging conferences and webinars.
- PRCS/OAS staff are very familiar with clientele that attend cards and fitness classes and Meadowbrook residents. Madison and Judy have explicitly been complimented by participants for their work at lunches and events.

Boards/Advisory Committee

Observations from other communities:

- Their eleven-person volunteer board was diverse in their passion, active in the center, and had very specific areas of expertise in different activities offered by the center. (Hartland)
- There is a FRIENDS of the Portage Senior Center that has a 501(c)3 status that fundraises for the center, active in fundraising, including golf outings and purse exchange events.
- No advisory board for some agencies.

How Novi compares:

- Nine (9) member PRCS Commission (includes two [2] student reps). OAS Programs and Services is a standing agenda item monthly.
- OAS Advisory Board has six (6) members. Meets bi-monthly. Acts in an advisory capacity but does not actively volunteer or lead activities
- Novi Parks Foundation has contributed to pickleball courts and ITC Trail. Novi Rotary Club built a gazebo at Meadowbrook Commons

Transportation

Observations from other communities:

- Hartland offers transportation. Employs one full-time van driver. Transportation M-F 8 am to 5 pm, no service when school is closed or inclement weather. \$1.50 to \$3.00 per one-way trip.
- OPC- Transportation is provided with a one mill levy that does not cover the annual cost of the system. There is a nominal fee on weekdays from 8:15-4:30 and Saturdays from 9-4 pm. They average 200/day (for reference, Novi around 50-60 per day). Own 28 vehicles, 14 on the road every day. Supported by one mill levy across three (3) communities just for this transportation, but this program runs on deficit spending.
- Transportation via Troy R.Y.D.E, separate from Parks or Seniors.
- Transportation is provided for seniors and non-seniors for a cost and offset with CDBG Funds. (Oceana)

How Novi compares:

- Transportation is available 8am-7pm Monday-Friday (last pick-up is at 6:30pm in Novi or 6:00pm out of Novi) and 9am-3pm Saturday (last pick-up is at 2:30pm).
- Free rides within the City of Novi and border shopping areas.
- \$5 one way outside the city limits within a 10-mile range (begins at the Novi Civic Center).
- Seven (7) vehicles, three (3) PT schedulers, and an average of 12 PT drivers
- Average 50-60 rides per day

Housing

- Novi is the only community we visited that supplies Older Adult Housing supported by the city. Most rely on the private sector to provide. We currently have approximately 2,000 Older Adult apartments in Novi and additional 500 beds for older adults with specialized care.

Extra/Comments

- Local business and vendor support- OAS has support from local businesses such as O'Brien Sullivan, Walton Woods, Anthology Senior Living, Maple Manor, and Mission BBQ for specific program sponsorships, but not to the scope in other communities we visited where this was a major source of funding.
- Newsletter/ Quarterly Programing guide/ Yearly calendar. This ran the gamut based on different factors in the communities; some mailed to members and available at the center, some monthly, most quarterly, and the common phrase of "Residents know to look for it." (Similar to Engage).
- Senior/Recreation Department lost \$700k last year. Projected to lose 1.7 million this year (Troy) for operations.
- "Why are you visiting us? You guys have what we want."
- We are trying to be "Not your parent's senior center"
- Many of these centers are attempting to attract more users by dropping the age to age 50

Conclusion

The good news is we are not off track on the intergenerational programming that we are doing, and it is what other agencies are attempting to implement. That being said, we also witnessed the preverbal solid wall built between different municipal work groups. Silos between Parks and Recreation and Senior Departments. Some with their own HR and finance personnel, etc. We also witnessed other agencies with very limited hours for Senior centers, E.g. open from 9 am to 3 pm, limited weekends.

Our team of three spent a lot of time traversing the State in a car, which gave us the opportunity time to explore the likes and dislikes of what we saw, what we thought we might

be able to implement, and some ideas for long-term strategies for Older Adult Services. We also discussed what type of output or recommendation we could make to city council. We thought of a three-prong agenda that city council may choose to prioritize. The first would be low-hanging fruit, or items we could implement quickly. These items could be implemented quicker with fewer planning or budgetary changes. The second were more tactical or short-range items that may cause us to shift or change some direction and need budgetary priority. The third would be more directional or longer-range items that may be transitory in nature.

Implement

- Comfortable space for seniors to gather and socialize before and after programs
- Centralized all senior programming information
- Videos of interest specifically for older adults
- Opportunity to promote gathering at Library in mornings for socialization/café.

The above items, and other similar ideas, would be lower in cost and low risk in which we could easily measure and adapt to acceptance or rejection by the older adult population.

Tactically, we can move forward items that will take some planning, designing or budgetary focus. Some of the items we want tactically start moving are:

Tactical

- Additional program employees as we increase older adult programs
- Bocci Ball court outside Civic Center or Meadowbrook Commons
- Pickleball court at Meadowbrook Commons
- Senior Home Assistance Repair Program (SHARP)

We are already seeing positive feedback and growth of new programming that is being implemented such as nature walks, bird watching and different in-house travel programs. If this trend continues, additional staffing to support these endeavors could be necessary and we should plan on, including up to a managing director of OAS.

We visited places that had Bocci Ball courts, and these could be added to some of our facilities. We have also witnessed the growth of Pickleball in the last decade and since placing courts at Wildlife Woods Park see that demand increasing. The SHARP program is a great way for people to donate their time to help those who need minor things done around their households. This would take some organizational time to get up and running, then help to oversee operations.

Finally, with a clear direction and vision, we can move forward items that will require City Council Direction and public input. Some of the items with Directional focus are:

Direction

- Additional City owned Senior Housing
- Warm water therapy pool
- Indoor Pickleball Courts
- Staffing Opportunities to facilitate and maintain

Anecdotally, we hear of people in the Older Adult population that are looking for affordable ranch style housing. A result of our good governance creates some friction as the property values are higher than those properties outside the City of Novi. This makes “affordable” developments difficult as the private sector developers must recoup their investment and cost. If the city wants to pursue addition subsidized housing, we could look at existing city own properties or acquiring other land to develop under this portfolio.

Other communities find their Older Adults appreciate a warm water therapy pool to stay active with low impact. Likewise, indoor Pickleball courts could allow active OAS programs year long. Depending on the speed and growth of facilities and programming the city will have to adapt staffing to help ensure OAS success. We did recognize many of the communities we visited did not do this and are now struggling to operate how they envisioned.