

Seniors Forum, September 16th, 2014 at Centennial Community Centre and hosted by The Seniors Advisory Committee of Markham. The event was sponsored by CHARTWELL REIT and REVERA LIVING RETIREMENT Residences.

The major issues revealed by participants repeatedly at the Seniors Forum were as follows:

- Transportation
- Space
- Funding
- Volunteerism
- Communication

While one might think that transportation was an all-consuming issue, it would appear that Space, Funding, Volunteerism and Communication were each of equal or greater importance. As the Seniors Advisory Committee, throughout its years, has vested time and energy in attempting to determine solutions to the issue of transportation, it is now felt that it is not within the scope of this Committee- that change sits squarely with the Municipal, Provincial and Federal governments. However, for the purpose of this project, we will record various concerns and ideas brought forward as relates to transportation.

Without a car, access to the majority of the Senior meeting places is impossible. This leaves a segment of the Senior population vulnerable, which leads to a form of isolation for many. It would appear that most Centers have neither the funds nor the manpower to offer assistance. Carpooling and volunteer drivers are a solution but the onus must be placed on safety and security. Insurance and driving habits are a concern as Senior volunteers age. It would appear that the Mobility Bus/Wheel Trans services are lacking in the number of buses and drivers and in flexibility. Transportation might be improved by initiating sponsorships, engaging younger Seniors, advertising and by approaching Service Clubs within the area. Dialogue is important in this regard. School buses might also be utilized during off-periods by this would require conversation by the City. A shuttle bus could also be considered. A pilot project could be put in place to test one or more of the suggestions put forward. Without transportation, many Seniors are not receiving adequate education, nutritional ideas, socialization or community involvement.

Most participants indicated that having access to space on a daily basis was their primary goal. There was a suggestion to have a co-ordinated approach to maximize all space and it's availability in the City of Markham by the City of Markham. Seniors presently meet in Community Centres, Churches, Schools and Shopping Centres. Many of these establishments are no longer large enough for the growing population and activities are being reduced. Parking is

also not adequate. Language is a barrier to choice for many. While Markham appears to have set a path towards a small Senior area in the Community Centres, this does not work in terms of numbers or in the case of Seniors, wishing to meet, learn and socialize. These areas are not equipped and have not been funded as yet for this type of activity. The symposium revealed that space is rented by various groups for different time periods and different costs. Fundraising is not an option and so the idea or location dies. The construction of dedicated Centres devoted to the needs of Seniors would appear to be a drawing point.

Funding was a priority across all locations. The City of Markham grant for use by Senior Centres or Clubs is not well known in the Community and instruction and guidelines are clearly required. Other areas of funding i.e. Trillium Foundation are difficult to complete and justify. It was clear from feedback that space was dependant on cost and that it varied in rental rates from location to location. Payments for space also impacted upon membership fees, programs that could be offered and number of days weekly or in one case- monthly. There is a need for standardization in both areas of rental and fees. If the volunteer community does not provide leaders, then programs must be led by paid instructors. In one case fund raising is necessary to pay for programs and space. It was suggested that perhaps the creation of non-profit organizations might alleviate some of the issues. It was also suggested that the City of Markham is more interested in promoting youth and family to the exclusion of the Senior. Another very viable suggestion was that Markham Council join with the numerous developers to include a Centre instead of the proverbial school, park or strip mall. In general, it was voiced that the needs of Markham's Seniors have taken a backseat.

Volunteers would appear to be a major concern "across the board." The idea of a "volunteer fair" similar to a job fair was raised. It was noted that younger people could volunteer to assist Seniors with the Internet and specific web design. The Mayor's Youth Task Force might provide an avenue. A newspaper of volunteer organizations might be created for distribution to leaders and onward to members. Markham citizens need to be educated about giving back to the Community- not just taking. They need to be educated and informed about "what is a volunteer." The benefits of volunteerism need to be promoted. Perhaps The Mayor's Seniors Hall of Fame Committee might be an avenue for this.

Communication was declared a problem in as much as it is perceived that the City has not and does not take a lead role in identifying Senior concerns, ideas or recognizing the role of Seniors in our Community. There must be an attempt made to co-ordinate resources and to help organizations to promote their identity and activities, social structure and fees. City initiatives for

Seniors and Seniors groups should be better defined. Suggestions pointed towards websites, bulletin boards, Seniors Day and Awareness Day being held in various locations to minimize transportation but to capture a maximum audience. Some remembered that City staff were utilized to co-ordinate events throughout the area. This was beneficial to the development of relationships and new learning opportunities. The Seniors Symposium was declared a success and recommended as a vehicle for further dialogue. It was recommended that the Seniors Advisory Committee play a role in the area of communication. The need for a large, all-inclusive Senior Centre was raised. It was suggested that the City sponsor with developers to build these Centres in new subdivisions, just as they do schools, parks, tennis courts, skate boarding areas, etc. It was noted that Corporate Communications assistance should be more flexible with less red tape to advertise free programs. The same requirement is asked of local cultural newspapers. Information is required for utilizing Community Centre space. A process for creating new programs would be welcome. Links to services should be provided- both electronically and in paper form. There should be follow-up and feedback from this forum.

Other Associated Issues Attributed to the Forum

- Health Care issues- reduced funding has resulted in a reduction of number of hours allowed.
- Home Assistance- grass cutting, home maintenance, etc.
- Parking rate at Hospital- Seniors rate suggested.
- Parking lot does not have an attendant after 5.00 pm. There is a need both with the parking and the hospital for guidance after hours.
- More information required about nursing homes e.g. costs, accommodations, subsidies, etc. What will social workers help with?
- Technology is the problem.
- Assistance is difficult as Markham is considered a rich area.
- Elder abuse and Senior bullying- occurs both in the home and at gathering places.
- Lack of learning facilities for the Chinese Elder population wishing to learn English.
- Isolation is a factor in every culture within the Senior Community.
- More assisted living where rent is geared to income. Create a smaller community within the City.
- Library services could be provided for homebound Seniors.
- Treat Seniors with respect and Listen to Us.
- The City must play a supporting role when planning the new Community Centres while considering demographics and ensuring that needs meet the area.
- Education.

Submitted on behalf of the Seniors Advisory Committee, December, 2014.