

Summary: March 2015 Age Friendly Multnomah County Forums

Background: The mission of the Multnomah County Citizen Involvement Committee (CIC) is to maximize the opportunities that community members have to understand issues affecting the county and provide input in decision-making. Given that county services are among the resources most often used by elders, the CIC elected to participate in the outreach activities led by the Age Friendly Portland Action Team*. In partnership with Chair Deborah Kafoury's Office and the Budget Office, the CIC co-hosted public forums on March 3rd in Portland and March 5th in Gresham.

More than 40 members of the public attended the forums during which presenters from the Departments of Health and Human Services described the current status of county age friendly services and their hopes for the future. Attendees then broke into 9 discussion groups for a facilitated discussion of three questions:

1. How could current county services be made more age friendly?
2. How can the county plan to meet the future needs of an aging population (e.g., new services, special considerations, community involvement)?
3. Looking at your suggestions, what should the county prioritize (e.g., services, research, funding)?

Summary and Results: Housing, transportation, and meaningful engagement emerged as the overriding themes throughout both forums followed by intergenerational activities and more effective communication of services, opportunities, and activities. (Similar comments made by multiple discussion groups were categorized together.)

Q1) With regard to making current county services more age friendly, comments varied greatly; many specifically supported Health Department health and wellness initiatives that are preventative and create self-sufficiency, such as early aging programs. They also noted initiative attributes they supported (e.g., accessible in multiple languages, eligibility regardless of class).

Q2) Concerning the second question about how the county can plan to meet future needs of an aging population, multiple categories emerged from the comments:

- Several groups wanted the county to take steps to create more affordable housing for elders using varied approaches (e.g., home sharing programs involving multiple generations, reducing or contributing to rent for caregivers, rent control where the county would have to approve increases).
- Four groups supported encouraging the county to provide services using models that avoid assumptions about elders, as well as recognize their talents and abilities to volunteer and take actions that make a positive difference (e.g., home-sharing programs, opportunities involving their career skills).

- Four groups also advocated for transportation and mobility improvements to access county services and housing (e.g., crosswalks and signal timing, connections to public transit, providing housing with parking).
- Three groups said that the county should sponsor intergenerational activities that engage younger adults, assistance for elders when navigating county resources, and more connections to volunteer opportunities.

Q3) With regard to participants' top priorities moving forward:

- All the groups urged the county to focus on increasing affordable and/or physically accessible housing (e.g., home sharing programs, reduced rent for caregivers).
- Four groups wanted the county to address transportation issues that affect elders. For example, using innovative approaches like providing services within walking distance and extending office hours.
- Four groups also wanted the county to sponsor more intergenerational activities and engagement, particularly those that involve volunteering, families and human connection. One example is connecting elders with peers who may need support or with foster care children.
- Three groups prioritized the county increasing outreach and using multiple media to communicate information to elders. These should include print materials as well as communicating information through community institutions like schools and churches.

Ongoing input opportunities: A video of the presentation portion of the forum is available on the [Office of Citizen Involvement website](#) and will be rebroadcast seven times on public access television (times are posted on the website).

Members of the public are also being invited to view the video and take an online survey consisting of the same three questions asked during the forums. Links to the video and the survey are also located on the website. The input generated by the surveys will be summarized and reported to the Board of County Commissioners and the Department of Human Services in the future. The CIC and OCI will also be collaborating with DCHS Aging, Disabilities, and Veterans Services on future outreach activities aligned with the Age Friendly Multnomah County initiative.

For more information: contact the Office of Citizen Involvement at 503-988-3450 or citizen.involvement@multco.us.

** subsequent to the CIC decision to participate, the Multnomah Board of Commissioners adopted Resolution #2014-130 and is actively engaged through the DCHS Aging, Disability, and Veterans Services Program.*