



Report to the Board of Directors of the Bainbridge Island Senior Community Center Summarizing the September 2018 Strategic Planning Listening Tour

As the numbers of newly retired and older people on Bainbridge Island continue to be on the upswing, the Bainbridge Island Senior Community Center (BISC) has embarked on a 5-year strategic planning effort to address current and emerging needs and to build organizational capacity to support and sustain its inevitable growth.

The Center's Strategic Planning Committee developed draft mission and vision statements and five goals as a framework for its strategic plan. The Committee determined that reaching out to our community would be very important in helping us determine if we are on the right track and invaluable in shaping our strategies and actions.

In early September 2018, BISC conducted a listening tour, inviting community members and leaders to provide input into five draft goals and to suggest strategies to achieve them. A grand total of 72 community residents and leaders attended meetings at Bethany Lutheran Church (12), Eagle Harbor Congregational Church (16), Island Volunteer Caregivers offices (18) and the Senior Center (26). Several members attended more than one session for an unduplicated total of 54 individuals. This report summarizes key themes identified during these open and thoughtful group conversations. Major and repeated themes are reported as they relate to one of the five goals. A more detailed 15-page report that delineates strengths, barriers and suggestions for each goal is available upon request.

This report is for the BISSC Board to use as a resource in refining the five goals, developing strategies for implementing the goals, and drafting the Strategic Plan.

DRAFT GOAL #1: The Senior Center will be well known throughout the area as the "go to" resource for intergenerational information, wellness, life-long learning, fun and friendships.

Related to this goal, the Strategic Planning Committee explored questions regarding how the Senior Center is perceived and respondents thoughts about how to increase the attractiveness and accessibility of the Center's programs and services to a broader range of participants and volunteers.

In response, participants shared their appreciation, amazement and delight about the changes the Center is making. They feel, however, that community and societal perceptions of seniors and senior centers is that they are for someone else, people 80+ who need a place to hang out. They told stories about how many of their friends and community members think of the term senior as being really old and that a senior center is not the place for today's active retirees in their 60s and 70s.

Every group talked about changing the name of the Center. Suggestions include: Senior (or Adult) Activity Center, Intergenerational or Multigenerational Center, along with other ideas. Some, in the minority, felt that changing the name would be a mistake, as it may be important for funding and could diminish the appeal for those trying to find resources and sense of belonging a senior center offers.

Many felt that a key is to get people in the door. They believe that the activity level of the Center today will be the best draw and way to change perception. They cite multiple programs involving

people of differing ages. Most agreed that getting more diversity of age, socio-economic and activity levels is a desirable goal, to assure the future vibrancy of the Center.

There were wonderful suggestions for drawing more people in, which include: regular tours; engaging newcomers to the Island; open houses; bring a friend days; using more pictures of active participants in promotional materials; engaging realtors, churches, the Chamber of Commerce, the City in their promotional efforts; and active story-telling of people's experiences. They also talked about signage, making the facility more appealing inside and out and improving the website. One participant said:

“The five goals are very good and spot on – calling the institution the Sr. Center helps to get funding – the best way to recruit is through word of mouth and, based on the 80/20 rule, super-serve the 20% core so they will be energized to go out and bring in more people. People recruit their peers.”

Throughout the four meetings, there were specific marketing ideas offered. Splash was lauded as an excellent vehicle for promotion, as well as Reed's Monday Memos. It was suggested that these vehicles reach more audiences, including NextDoor website; be available at the Chamber and City. Other suggestions include: regular feature articles in local newspapers; a new video to take on the road; brochures for welcome packages for new residents at the Chamber and in real estate offices, and emphasizing the role of the Center for information and community gatherings.

DRAFT GOAL # 2: Senior Center offerings will meet the diverse needs and energize our community's growing over 50 population through relevant, accessible and innovative programs and services.

For this goal, facilitators explored questions related to the programs offered by the Center, now and in the future, and how to make these offerings more relevant and accessible to our growing over 50 population.

People praised the Aging Mastery Course, recent program with Middle School students and the Evergreen Singers as examples of outstanding programs. They also thought we should get the word out about what is available, not only at the Center, but in the community.

Some expressed concerns that we need to engage more men in Center programs; that the Meals on Wheels program is depressing to some; and that we need to recover dental services.

Suggestions for new programs include: cooking classes and more emphasis on nutrition and other wellness programs, “not just exercise”; computer tutoring and computer lab; more social hours (happy hour/bar); singles group; and games.

More intentional intergenerational programs were suggested. One thought was to “shift emphasis from what can the Center do for its members to what seniors can do for the community.” Suggestions included: partnering with the schools to have seniors help teach “living history”; possibly some after school activities; more academic-type and educational offerings for younger people; information programs for younger people concerned about their aging parents; multi-generational game room; hold grandparents and their kids evenings. These were just some of the ideas offered.

There was also a lot of conversation about outreach programs and roadshows. People suggested creating a traveling activities group, like Liberation Laughter, travel series, partnering with BIMA, BARN, Library, Senior Living Centers, to get Center activities, e.g., cooking more in the community. “Think of Center as a movement, not a facility.” There was concern expressed about people who are homebound and their needs. How can we reach these people and help reduce isolation?

People also talked about making the Center more accessible by having activities and events in the evenings and on weekends. There was also talk of engaging transportation resources more to empower people to use existing resources.

DRAFT GOAL #3: The Senior Center will be a professional organization, with appropriate facilities and infrastructure (a strong board, qualified staff and engaged volunteers) sufficient to meet its goals.

For this goal, facilitators probed questions related to infrastructure and capacity.

Respondents talked about the “good vibes” coming from the Center and welcoming atmosphere, as a result of Reed’s leadership. There was a feeling that volunteers and members are happier and more engaged. They have a sense that the Center is growing and that there is more diversity in participation at all levels.

There were concerns expressed regarding whether there are sufficient staff to deal with the current and pending growth and rising expectations. Getting additional support for Reed and Mary is seen as an important prerequisite to meeting expansion goals.

There were also many questions expressed about the adequacy of the current facility to meet growing needs. People would like to see the building modernized and given a facelift, “looks like grandma’s house.” Some suggested improvements include: a computer lab; a dance floor; better sound system to accommodate hearing impaired. It was also suggested that the Center use other facilities in the community for certain program offerings and, possibly, relocating the Thrift Store to a larger and more visible location.

Volunteers are seen as a big and important part of the Center’s capacity. Suggestions include; better identifying volunteers, e.g., a vest or smock; badges identifying their role (e.g., board, volunteer, staff). There was also discussion about possible advantage of a paid part-time volunteer coordinator, as this part of the program is growing and adds demands on the staff for training and accountability.

Other suggestions include: finding a non-paid intern, exploring field placement opportunities, and partnering with other organizations to share staff and other resources.

DRAFT GOAL # 4: The Senior Center will have a multi-faceted funding program to sustain its mission in perpetuity.

People were asked about their ideas for fund-raising to support the Center both short-term and long-term. Management was paid for in the past through the Parks District budget, so there is a great need for a solid fund-raising plan moving forward.

It was noted that membership has grown from 700 to almost 1300 members in the last 18 months and that membership cost is now at \$20 per year, up from \$12. Many members are also donors.

Participants suggested that we explore how tax monies can be again made available to the Center directly or indirectly, such as through discounts on classes, use of the pool, etc.

Other fund-raising ideas mentioned include: tiered membership; monthly electronic giving; aggressive membership drive, perhaps in conjunction with an event.

Some creative ideas were offered about increasing revenues of the Thrift Store such as: moving to a bigger, more visible, off-site facility; contest to give it a name; being an intermediary for selling donated or consigned furniture on social media, like Facebook and Craig's List.

Having a signature fund-raising event was mentioned. Some ideas included: Taste of the Island; Holiday Bazaar. The need to have events that bring in more dollars than current events was mentioned. Effort vs return are considerations, as well as the need to grow events over time.

Major giving, bequests, and endowment were discussed. The importance of cultivating major donors slowly and carefully was emphasized. People were positive about the idea of endowment, as a longer term strategy.

Getting more creative about corporate sponsorship, e.g., linking with health providers and Paper and Leaf around wellness were ideas that came up. Other corporations with a local presence (Safeway and Town and Country) could also be contacted for sponsorships.

Additional earned income ideas included thinking about outreach and what opportunities for funding could be developed with different populations and/or commercial service providers.

DRAFT GOAL #5: The Senior Center will be a leader in strengthening our community's capacity to meet the needs of its citizens, in collaboration with partnering organizations and agencies.

For this goal, facilitators explored unmet needs and creative partnering with our neighboring organizations.

People discussed the new Bainbridge Resource Network, led by the Senior Center as a promising development. Working with homebound people to help them age in place was mentioned as an unmet need, especially since Island Neighbors has dissolved. More help in applying for Medicaid; emergency preparedness, advanced directives and information and referral were identified as needs.

Opportunities for innovative partnering included: connecting with the BARN to offer cooking classes; connecting with the School District for intergenerational programming, e.g., "Big Brother like" programs; collaborating with Kidi-Mu and BIMA for unique offerings; visiting shut-ins; Therapy Pets.

The potential synergy between Island Volunteer Caregivers regarding shared service population and values was lifted up as having great potential for collaboration, including co-location.

Throughout the discussions the opportunities for sharing facilities, values and programs between the Center and other fine community programs was highlighted.

Respectfully submitted,

Your Strategic Planning Team

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