



City of Dallas

Office of

Community Care

Senior Services

Event Report

Districts 2 & 9 – Join the Senior Conversation

Office of Community Care (OCC) Senior Services and Senior Affairs Commission (SAC) reintroduced the topic of Senior Listening Sessions during 2023 SAC meetings after a 4-year pause, which was due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of Senior Listening Sessions is to create greater awareness of senior issues, gather data regarding senior concerns in each district, and offer information about available resources to the community.

The plan was to conduct a listening session in each council district during the year 2024 and explore as well as share ideas on how to better serve the older adults in the City of Dallas. The Senior Affairs Commissioners Portia Cantrell (District 2), Lisa Kelly (District 9), and Mike Nurre (District 15) suggested a joint listening session. The Offices of Council Member Jesse Moreno (District 2) and Paula Blackmon (District 9) concurred. City Council Offices, Senior Affairs Commissioners, and Office of Community Care Senior Services worked together to plan and execute the event. It was agreed that the session would focus on both sharing resources and gathering feedback from the community, including their concerns and suggestions for potential solutions.

The Event

The Districts 2 & 9 'Join the Senior Conversation' took place on Saturday, October 12th, 2024, at the Harry Stone Recreation Center located at 2403 Millmar Dr. Dallas, TX 75228. The event started at 9:00 A.M. and ran till 11:00 A.M. The event was promoted via multiple outlets: Council Office mailing list, neighborhood associations, email blast to partner organizations, places of worship, apartment complexes, Park and Rec, Dallas Public Library, and social media sites. The SAC Commissioners distributed the flyer widely throughout their community, while the Senior Services team promoted the event during various outreach activities. With assistance from the Park and Recreation staff, the Senior Services team managed all aspects of the event, including setup, catering, and cleanup.

The event drew in 43 participants, including older adults and caregivers. In addition to the district residents, many of the Senior Affairs Commissioners attended the event: Feliz Jarvis (5, Vice Chair), Debbie Austin (8), Peter Kline (13, Chair), and Karen Roberts (14).

SAC Commissioner Mike Nurre kick started the event by introducing the Council Members Jesse Moreno and Paula Blackmon. Both Council Members warmly welcomed the older adults present, highlighting the importance of hearing their perspectives within the community. They acknowledged that older adults offer important perspectives and knowledge. By inviting feedback from this group, the City seeks to foster an inclusive environment where seniors feel valued and heard.

SAC Commissioner Portia Cantrell continued the session with providing an overview of seniors in district 2 and sharing statistics concerning the older population in her district. Additionally, she highlighted the unique circumstances faced by minority groups, particularly LGBT older adults. By addressing the unique challenges faced by these individuals, she emphasized the importance of understanding their demographics. She pointed out that while the overall population is aging, the LGBT community often encounters additional obstacles, including social stigma and discrimination.

SAC Commissioner Lisa Kelly continued by reviewing the demographics of older adults in her District 9. She presented an overview that emphasized the number of seniors residing in the area, along with the socioeconomic factors impacting this population, such as income levels, housing conditions, and overall safety. Commissioner Kelly also discussed broader issues impacting the aging population.

Supervisor of Community Care Services, Mirka Norman, gave a brief overview of the Senior Services offered by the City of Dallas and drawing attention to the resource folder provided to attendees at the start of the session: This folder contained valuable information for them to take home and explore further. She also introduced the agencies present at the event, such as the Library, 311 services, sanitation, and the Dallas Area Agency on Aging.

She emphasized that the primary goal of the day was not to provide a comprehensive overview of all existing programs, but rather to prioritize collecting feedback from the community regarding their needs. She encouraged everyone to take part in the discussion so the City could gain a better understanding of the community's needs.

Discussion

After the overview of district data and services in the area, SAC Commissioner Nurre facilitated a breakout session where participants were divided into smaller groups. Each

table was tasked with discussing 3 to 5 priorities related to issues that are important to older residents.

The breakout groups engaged in discussion for about 10 to 15 minutes. Afterward, each table shared the key points and themes that emerged from their conversations with everyone. This collaborative effort aimed to highlight the most pressing issues affecting older residents in the community.

Streets and Sidewalks

A pressing need for sidewalk and street repairs emerged as a key concern among residents. Participants highlighted specific areas that require immediate attention, including Shiloh Road between Oats and Gus Thomas, which is in dire need of repairs. Other areas needing urgent attention were Crest Ridge Drive and Shiloh Road as well as San Lorenzo Drive and Peavy Road. Other locations mentioned were Healy Drive, where sidewalks are backing up. Additionally, on the corner of Shiloh Road and Blyth Drive, there is significant hole in the road that poses a safety risks. A notable concern raised was that Hispanic families feel they are not receiving adequate assistance with these repairs, raising questions about equity when accessing resources.

To address some of these challenges, a homeowner's association in District 9 has compiled a list of 25 streets requiring repairs, which is set to be released in 2025. This collaborative effort highlights the community's commitment to advocating for necessary infrastructure improvements and ensuring that all residents have safe and accessible roadways.

Road Safety

In addition to street and sidewalk condition, road safety has emerged as a pressing concern in both Districts 2 and 9, with residents reporting unsafe speeding on local streets and reckless driving behavior. Many drivers are seen racing through neighborhoods, and ignoring four-way stops like the intersection of Hunnicut Road and St. Francis Avenue. Residents also expressed the need for enhanced traffic safety measures, particularly on "Little Shiloh" between Ferguson and Maylee Boulevard, where the installation of speed bumps could help mitigate risks. The situation is particularly concerning at Millmar and Ferguson, where there is a significant volume of pedestrians, particularly children and older adults. Community members are calling for immediate action and suggested adding speed bumps to help protect all residents.

Neighborhood Safety

Safety has become a significant concern for residents in the community, highlighted by issues such as loose dogs that roam freely. Additionally, panhandling and loitering near

the Casa View shopping center and Albertsons have further exacerbated feelings of insecurity among locals. One resident described the neighborhood as resembling the "Wild Wild West," with sounds of fireworks and gunshots contributing to a sense of lawlessness. The absence of Volunteer in Patrol (VIP) at night has left residents feeling vulnerable, prompting calls for increased public safety measures. Council Member Blackmon suggested practical strategies, such as turning on outdoor lights and encouraging residents to spend time outside, as these actions can help deter crime by increasing visibility and community presence.

Residents have expressed frustration with the city's response to safety concerns, citing poor experiences when trying to report issues. Many have found it challenging to get through to 311, which has led to calls for more effective communication channels. A representative from 311 recommended that residents use the app or call during off-peak hours for better service. Community mobile units are also available to assist residents daily at different locations. This environment underscores the urgent need for collaborative efforts to enhance safety and foster a more secure community for all.

Home Repair

Finding reliable and honest contractors for home repairs has become a significant challenge for residents, particularly when it comes to small maintenance tasks. After storms and flooding from creeks, many homeowners face urgent repairs, and low-income seniors are especially vulnerable as they struggle to maintain their properties. One of the main concerns expressed was finding reliable contractors and how to ensure that only qualified and insured professionals are hired.

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity remains a significant concern within the community, highlighting the urgent need for increased resources and support for seniors. Many attendees expressed a desire for more accessible information regarding food pantries and food delivery services available to them. By enhancing awareness of existing food resources and exploring new initiatives, the community can better address the challenges of food insecurity and support the well-being of its senior population.

Communication and Information Sharing

There is a pressing need for improved dissemination of information within the community, particularly regarding available resources e.g., transportation services. Many residents feel uninformed about the various services available to them, highlighting a gap in communication and information sharing. A coordinated effort to more effectively promote available services is essential, as many people are still unaware of the valuable programs that could assist them. Enhancing awareness and

accessibility will help ensure that everyone can find the assistance they need. Also, workshops on how to effectively use mobile apps should be offered at every library and recreation center, empowering residents to navigate available resources more easily.

Other Community Needs

During the senior listening session, several important topics emerged beyond the immediate concerns of safety and information dissemination. Residents expressed frustration with issues such as the noise from barking dogs, particularly those from local puppy mills, which disrupts their peace at night. The problem of senior isolation was also a significant concern, as many older adults feel disconnected from the community and lack opportunities for social engagement. Participants emphasized the need for subsidized housing options tailored for seniors. Additionally, there was a call for more senior activities at Harry Stone Recreation Center and a request for improved garbage pickup services to enhance overall quality of life for older residents. These discussions highlight the multifaceted challenges faced by seniors in the community and the importance of addressing their diverse needs.

Survey

At the Senior Listening Session, a survey was distributed to all attendees to gather feedback on the event itself, preferred communication methods, and general service needs within the community. Out of the 43 participants, 25 older adults or caregivers (58%) completed the survey, providing valuable insights into their experiences and preferences.

The majority of respondents (36%) learned about the event through the Park and Recreation Center. Other sources of information included family and friends, the Council District mailing list, local libraries, and churches. When it came to preferred communication methods, responses were evenly divided among various channels, including email, online newsletters, text messages, and TV announcements.

The survey revealed that 60% of respondents were between the ages of 70 and 79. In terms of service needs, a significant 52% of participants reported a need for home repair services. Other critical needs identified included housing assistance, legal services, yard and lawn care, financial counseling, and transportation services.

Overall, the feedback from the survey indicated that 52% of respondents were satisfied with the event, while 20% expressed being very satisfied. However, there were some concerns, as four individuals reported feeling neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, one was dissatisfied, and another was very dissatisfied. To enhance future sessions, participants recommended longer events with more information, a different location with a larger room, and improved facilitation. These suggestions highlight the community's desire for

more comprehensive engagement and support, emphasizing the importance of addressing their needs effectively in future gatherings.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the recent senior listening session was an impactful opportunity for community members to voice their concerns and engage in meaningful discussions about issues that directly affect their lives. With topics ranging from the need for street repairs and safety to the importance of improving information sharing, the event highlighted the diverse challenges faced by older adults. The overall outcome was a significant step toward fostering community engagement, allowing participants to express their needs and preferences while providing invaluable feedback that will guide future initiatives.

The insights gathered from the session reaffirmed the necessity of understanding how to effectively communicate with seniors and the strong demand for accessible services. The suggestions for improvement demonstrated a collective commitment to enhancing the quality of future gatherings, ensuring that they are more relevant and supportive of the community's needs. As one attendee aptly noted, "I'm really happy you had this meeting. I appreciated getting to share my concerns and getting good handouts too." This sentiment encapsulates the positive impact of the session and underscores the vital role such events play in promoting engagement and addressing the unique needs of seniors in the community.