A Blueprint for Action

Preparing for Aging in Holland

REPORT CARD TO THE COMMUNITY

OUR MISSION

To assess Holland's readiness for a growing older adult population and present to the community a blueprint for collaborative action.

OUR VISION

Holland is an accessible and affordable community where ALL older adults live fully and are:

- Safe and comfortable.
- Engaged in a continuum of lifelong opportunities for community engagement and leisure activities.
- Supported by a caring community network which addresses basic needs, mental and physical well-being, and encourages independence.
- Empowered to make their own decisions.

Presented by the
Blueprint for Action Steering Committee

June 2009

ABOUT THE PROCESS

Communities across the nation have begun assessing their readiness for the rapidly growing older adult population. Resthaven Care Community and Evergreen Commons wanted to guarantee that Holland remained on the leading edge of services to older adults.

In the spring of 2008 Resthaven applied to the Community Foundation of the Holland/Zeeland Area for a grant to complete an assessment of the City of Holland. A Steering Committee was formed and selected a Michigan–based model for its assessment tool. Hundreds of questions were divided into five focus areas for study. Volunteers were recruited to lead and participate in workgroups that answered the questions in each focus area. The results were analyzed, summarized, prioritized and are contained within this Report Card.

The goal of the Report Card is to report back to the community a summary of findings and to present recommendations, with the anticipation that other groups will flesh out these recommendations and move them forward. Listed below are the community assests and pressing issues identified by the workgroups during the process. Two overarching recommendations were identified by the workgroups: The need for inclusion and the need for expanded coordination. Recommendations about those issues appear on page 3. Recommendations from the individual workgroups are summarized on pages 4 through 6.

ASSETS

In 2006, *Money Magazine* identified Holland as one of the top five small cities in which to retire...and we agree. Holland has an incredible structure for supporting older adults in retirement. We can credit city leaders and community members who have gone before us for making decisions which created the supportive community in which we live. Committee members cited the many parks, bikeways and walkways which allow us to enjoy the natural beauty of the area. Many community amenities such as the library, Aquatic Center, museums, symphony and the many festivals are amazing resources for a community the size of Holland. Senior-focused resources such as Evergreen Commons, Hope Academy of Senior Professionals, and many senior living options enrich the lives of many older adults. Community attributes such as increasing diversity, the philanthropic and volunteer nature of the community, a faith-based willingness to come together to solve community problems, and the capacity of social service agencies to work collaboratively, all make the City an attractive community. The City itself was the recipient of much praise during our process. The current Mayor is visible in the community and an unfailing advocate for the community. City staff is viewed as accessible and willing to problem-solve. Neighborhood services and community policing are seen as assets, as is the ability to generate social capital toward resolving community issues.

PRESSING ISSUES

Pressing issues were identified during the assessment and form the basis for the project's recommendations. The process was conducted during the most severe economic downturn since the depression. Many have lost a considerable part of their financial safety net. For seniors the significant loss of the dollars saved for retirement is

huge. The economic crisis, while severe, is considered transitory and beyond the scope of this report. It is clear though, that in receiving services as an older adult, money matters. We must work to assure more equitable opportunities at all economic levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Inclusion

Founded by Dutch immigrants with a strong work ethic and a commitment to faith, Holland has attracted families of various backgrounds who have been drawn to the community by its lifestyle, work ethic, community values and job opportunities. Even though the diversity of our community has increased, much work needs to be done for our community to be fully inclusive.

1. Develop, adopt and implement a proactive and intentional plan to integrate persons of various faiths, colors, national origins, languages, ages, and abilities into the fabric of the community.
2. Prepare for the continuing shift in demographics to a less Caucasian community.
3. Cultivate diverse individuals for decision making and leadership positions throughout the community.
4. Develop cultural competency within our senior-serving agencies. Agencies must deliver services that are desired by various cultures, and must provide access that is culturally sensitive.
5. Benchmark best practices from other communities which are truly inclusive.

- Coordination / Communication / Clearinghouse

In all of the workgroups, two issues became apparent: There are many things happening in Holland that could benefit older adults (and others), but many people do not know about these options and there is no single point to learn about these options. Activities available in the community are often listed by the organization but not found on a "community calendar". The community has a wonderful array of services for seniors, but knowing where to obtain information and how to select between available services or providers can be challenging for seniors and their family members. The concept of having a single point to access information and/or community activities would help consumers identify the resources available in the community.

1. Develop a "senior focus" within the City of Holland and include the needs of seniors in the City's Master Plan.
2. Create a "Senior Council" to facilitate/increase coordination among senior-focused service providers.
3. Identify and promote a gateway (or several) to access senior services, and assure the agency(ies) serving in this role is able to expand to meet the increased demand for service.
4. Coordinate access to community volunteer opportunities.
5. Foster county-wide cooperation to develop and support an array of services for older adults.
6. Develop better strategies for communicating with seniors that can be inclusive of levels of technological sophistication as well as cultural and language differences.
7. Create a central communication port for activities in the community.

4

HEALTHY, ACTIVE AND ENGAGED AGING

It is critical both to the community and the individual that older adults continue to be engaged in the community and to remain active in their older years. It is critical that older adults remain disease free and active for as long as possible, and to have the supports they need to both engage in their community and to have access to a supportive health care system. The community benefits when older adults continue to contribute to their community.

Recommendations

1. Develop strategies to assist individuals to plan for the aging process beginning at as young an age as possible.
2. Develop resources to assist older adults in planning for their future, including all aspects of their life, not just financial planning. How does one want to age?
3. Assist the senior-serving community in using technology to its fullest in serving older adults; and assist older adults in gaining competency using technology. Encourage community-wide use of electronic health delivery systems to better support older adults and others.
4. Increase community supports for those struggling with Alzheimer's and dementia, both patients and their caregivers.
5. Develop/expand systems that provide patient advocacy and assist older adults in navigating such systems.
6. Assure adequate, accessible, and affordable mental health and substance abuse services for older adults.
7. Sustain and invest in opportunities and assets for active lifestyles.
8. Expand opportunities for older adults to serve on community boards.

HOUSING

Having appropriate housing for each stage of life is important to the well-being of older adults. While there is a growing trend toward "aging in place" this concept is only successful when there are adequate and reliable services that can be maintained over time to support older adults in their own home. Currently there are numerous services to help the older adult remain at home, however, services most widely available are those which the older adult pays for in full. Considerably more difficult is accessing those services which are free or reduced in price. It was clear during the Blueprint process that, with money, all things are possible. Without financial resources older adults could well find themselves living in isolation without access to the most basic needs. Many older adults have chosen to move to retirement communities that provide a range of living options that can support them as needs change. Still others would prefer to live in proximity to a family member but may be prohibited from occupying a "granny flat" that could provide them this proximity to a relative.

Recommendations

1. Conduct a thorough study of current housing options and the anticipated need for those options given the increasing number of older adults in the community. Consider cultural preferences which might well dictate preferences in living arrangements.
2. The City of Holland should examine current zoning ordinances and restrictions through the lens of supporting seniors as they age in place, or as they choose to live with a loved one.
3. Develop a thorough understanding of the resources needed to keep persons safely and happily living on their own as they age. Identify gaps in the needs for accessible and affordable in-home services.
4. Identify the financial resources necessary to provide the services needed to assist older adults to live safely in their own homes as they age. Services must be affordable to the older adult using them, must be sustainable over time, and must be expandable to meet the growing need in the community.
5. Develop affordable places to live with proper assistance when people cannot live in their own homes.

6

PUBLIC/COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

The public/community infrastructure is all of those things available in the public sector which enhances the quality of our lives. These supports are often taken for granted but are necessary for people of all ages to live successfully in the community. We are fortunate in our community to have many of the basics needed for seniors to thrive: a community with parks, a thriving downtown, a walkable community.

Recommendations

1. Transportation
    a. Expand the MAX bus services to better support older adults, including providing off-hour service to community events.
    b. Develop transportation services to meet the needs of older adults—such as a person needing assistance at a destination.
    c. Develop more parking that is accessible to community events; perhaps remote parking with shuttle services to the center of the activity.
2. Planning
    a. Encourage special emphasis on the needs of seniors in public/commercial design.
    b. Encourage a review of zoning requirements with sensitivity to senior housing needs, considering interest in accessory buildings or "granny flats" to assist families in caring for older family members.
    c. Develop a non-motorized plan for the city.
3. Commerce
    a. Encourage businesses that will provide in-neighborhood resources (grocery stores, etc.)
    b. Encourage commercial developments to be aware of senior needs.
4. Safety
    a. Utilize various methods to communicate safety alerts and other community notices in order to reach seniors who may not use newer technology.
    b. Develop a coordinated system for identifying/monitoring seniors living alone.
    c. Encourage programs to educate seniors and their families about personal safety and security.
    d. Promote programs such as "mail carrier alert" and utility shut off notification programs to enhance security for older adults.

NEXT STEPS

To reach our vision we are inviting interested parties to join a Senior Council/Strategy Coalition led by Resthaven and Evergreen Commons. This Council will be charged with continuing the work of the Blueprint for Action project. Specific early action items include:

- Develop a collaborative effort to encourage individual planning for the "third age".
- Maintain heightened community awareness of both the needs and assets of the community's older adults and how to both engage and support them.
- Develop sustainable funding streams for services for older adults through grants and philanthropic endeavors.
- Develop an intentional inclusion plan for the community and assist service providers in increasing cultural competency.
- Encourage the marketing of the livability of our community for older adults.
- Increase awareness of the many assets in our community and the need to support those assets.

To join this effort contact:

Charlie Vander Broek at Resthaven
Phone: (616) 796-3500, Email: charlie.vanderbroek@resthaven.org
Larry Erlandson at Evergreen Commons
Phone: (616) 355-5152 , Email lmerlandson@evergreencommons.org
Copies of this report are located at www.resthaven.org/about.html, www.evergreencommons.org, or www.ottawaunitedway.org

APPRECIATION

Thank you to those who contributed time and effort to this project!

Financial or In-Kind Contributors

John Canfield
Darell and Mary Schregardus

The Steering Committee

Charlie Vander Broek, Co-Chair • Resthaven
Larry Erlandson, Co-Chair • Evergreen Commons
Donna Cornwell, Project Coordinator
Mark de Roo • Resthaven
Norma Killilea • Community Volunteer
Tom Ludwig • Hope College
Phil Meyer • City of Holland
Jinnifer Ortquist • MSU Extension
Celia Serrano de Martinez • Community Volunteer
Selden Smith • Community Volunteer
Peg VanGrouw • Community Volunteer

Committee Members

Abby Reeg
Al Boers
Amy Alderink
Annette Vandenheuvel
Barb Burmeister
Barb VerCande
Bart Jonker
Becky Israels
Beth Hunt
Bill Raymond
Bill Vanderbilt Sr.
Bin Lim
Bob Krueger
Carla Masselink
Cathy Blackburn
Charles Vander Broek
Charles Veldhoff
Chris Hofland
Christiana Getz
Curt Bush
Dave Ellens
David Beattie
David Ziegler
Deb Salguero
Deb Wilson
Denise Stancill
Domingo Hernandez
Eileen Nordstom
Ella L. Weymon
Fennetta Raymond
Fronse Smith
Gene Welch
George Zuidema
Gray Gogolin
Greg Holcombe
Greg McCoy
Greg Robinson
Haans Mulder
Herb Weller
Ilse Saewert
Jack Hyde
Jackie Kleinheksel
Jan Plasman
Jane Longstreet
Jeannie Slenk
Jerry Tonini
Jim Bussis
Jo Ver Beek
Jodi Castillo
Jodi Syens
Jody Gogolin
Joe Silva
Joel Dye
John Buttrey
John Nordstrom
John Vega
Judy Parr
Karen Draeger
Kathleen Lord
Kay Hubbard
Kay Walvoord
Kelli Perkins
Lamont Dirkse
Larry Erlandson
Larry Johnson
Laurie Miedema
Len Fazio
Leroy Hernandez
Linda Falstad
Linda Felder
Linda Jacobs
Lisa Stefanovsky
Liz Vanderby
Loren Snippe
Lorma Freestone
Lou Hallacy
Lupita Reyes
Lyn Raymond
Lynne Bonnette
Marcia Westrate
Maria Sibella
Mark de Roo
Mark Kornelis
Mary Ellen Lunderberg
MaryAnn Knowles
Matt Messer
Michael Bochs
Michael Zywicki
Micki Janssen
N. Linnea Freriks
Nancy Fazio
Nancy Frens
Nancy Rock
Norma Killilea
Pam Mulliner
Peg VanGrouw
Phil Meyer
Poema Weller
Ralph Edgington
Rob Pocock
Roberto "Bert" Jara
Sandy Kiernan
Ruth Dirkse
Sandy Keirnan
Sarah Unzicker
Scott Bolthouse
Selden Smith
Sharon Rocker
Sherry Oegema
Steve Stickel
Susan DeJong
Susan Lassa
Tamra Bouman
Theresa Westerlund
Thun Champassak
Tim Hemingway
Tom Wolterink
Torrey Husmann
Tricia Cranmer
Vern Boersma
Walter Thome
Will Ehmann

Thank you to the older adults who participated in focus groups at Evergreen Commons.