

FINDINGS FROM SUMMER 2011 FOCUS GROUPS WITH OC CITIZENS ISSUES RELEVANT TO AGING IN PLACE

Focus Group Findings: Housing

One major finding of this analysis was that adults in Orange County both value aging in place and expect to age in their homes. Focus group participants expressed this by saying things like “I am going to live where I currently live. I am comfortable there...It’s better to be taken care of in your home.”

Although the consensus seemed to be that aging in place is a desirable way to grow older in Orange County, many residents also repeatedly voiced the desire for more senior housing options, especially affordable options, other than living in one’s own home. Reasons included worries about declining health, concern about maintaining a household independently, and an increased desire for social interaction that senior housing often affords. Some participants in focus groups in the southern part of the county were interested in building intentional communities in their neighborhoods to provide opportunities for social engagement and interaction and to promote health and wellness.

Additionally, focus group participants expressed a lack of knowledge about existing housing options in the county (e.g. home sharing, income-based housing, CCRC, et). For example a participant noted, “People need to know what kinds of homes and services those homes provide and how to pay for them. They need options.” Even for those familiar with other kinds of long term care resources noted the extensive barriers, including long waiting lists and lack of financial assistance.

It should be noted that new housing developments were not a salient issue in the focus group in the rural Northern area of the county. There, the conversations centered on community-oriented strategies and using church networks as a resource to help older adults age in place in a supportive community. Without a social network or community, a sense of isolation, particularly in Northern parts of Orange County, may actually lead individuals to “age in place accidentally.”

Housing Priorities

- **People intend to live in their own homes**
- **Physical modification and appropriate services will be necessary**
- **People want more housing options to avoid isolation**
- **Valuable to understand role of community in an individuals’ ability to age in place**
- **Concerns about property taxes, cost of living and financial planning**

Focus Group Findings: In-home care services

In order for older adults to age in place safely and successfully, they may require a variety of in-home services and programs, such as the Urgent Care/Home Repair program sponsored by the Housing Department, and the curbside assistance program sponsored by the Solid Waste Management Department.

Being able to access everyday services may be more difficult for an older adult to complete frequently so having “services come to you”, for example mobile libraries and grocery delivery, may be a new model to consider. It was suggested that grocery stores like Harris Teeter and Weaver Street could develop a fund for older adults to send out meals and might be interested in developing a partnership with the local community. Greater publicity surrounding the types of services younger individuals can do to help older adults may also be valuable, especially to older adults who are living without families.

While a telephone reassurance program may not be popular in the Northern part of the county, it was suggested that those living in the Southern part of the county might be better served with such a program.

Focus Group Findings: Financial Planning Assistance

Although there was not extensive conversation regarding resources for financial planning assistance, some focus group participants did make note of affordability issues in Orange County. Ideally, options for housing, health care and transportation would be free or affordable for all residents. Repeatedly (and particularly in free response sections of the Perceptions on Aging survey), individuals noted that the cost of property taxes and general cost of living in Chapel Hill were too high and that if you are financially well-off, Orange County is an ideal place in which to age due to retirement options, access to hospitals, proximity to the University with cultural events to attend.