

Seniors Advisory Committee Activity Report 2015

Committee Overview

The Strathcona County Seniors Advisory Committee was created in 2007 to enhance the quality of life for seniors in our community. The committee members consist of Marcus Schwabe, Yvonne Herbert, Wendy Zelt, Sylvia Hancock, Lynn Olenek Councillor Linton Delaine and Councillor Dave Anderson. The committee advises Council about current and emerging needs and concerns of seniors. It also provided input and recommendations to improve existing programs and services for seniors, including social, recreation and leisure.

This is the final report of the Seniors Advisory Committee. As such, we have some general recommendations:

- In order to ensure that the needs and concerns of the seniors' population continue to be heard by Council, we recommend to the Community Living Advisory Committee, that a sub-committee, comprised of representatives of seniors age 55+ be established. The sub-committee will encourage synergies and dialogue that strengthen social, recreational and cultural opportunities for seniors and provide input on needs and concerns of seniors.
- In order to ensure continuity of services, we recommend to the Community Living Advisory Committee that they review progress of recommendations as appropriate, based on the past three years' annual reports from the Seniors Advisory Committee.
- That the Community Living Advisory Committee plan a meeting in early spring, to focus on seniors programming.

Activities

Community Participation

In 2015 committee members were active in the community in a variety of roles: advisory committee members, community volunteers and participants. They have:

- connected with seniors at community initiatives, such as the Seniors' Week Provincial Launch, Seniors' Transportation Forum and Active Living Conference, to learn about the needs and concerns of seniors
- volunteered at the Seniors' Week Provincial Launch and Seniors' Transportation Forum
- participated in a range of recreation and leisure activities

Consultation and Learning

Committee members participated in discussions to provide their input into program design. Topics included:

- recreation and leisure programming and facilities
- library services
- seniors housing
- community connections and supports for isolated seniors
- access to information
- retirement
- transportation
- poverty
- Municipal Development Plan
- agriculture

- Active Living Conference – participation and survey (results attached)

Youth Advisory Committee Joint Meeting

The annual joint meeting with the Youth Advisory Committee was focused on discussion regarding strategies for collective voices still being heard, identification of priority issues and celebration of proud moments and achievements for both youth and seniors committees.

Areas of Focus for 2014-2015

The committee discussed the importance of seniors having meaningful opportunities to participate fully in our community as they age. Older adults span two generations and their strengths, needs and interests are diverse. It is essential that Strathcona County programs, services and facilities are age-friendly and responsive.

A number of factors impact age friendly communities. The four key areas the committee focused on in 2015 included:

- inclusive facilities and gathering spaces
- supportive connections for isolated seniors
- effective communication and information about community resources
- accessible transportation

1. Inclusive Facilities and Gathering Spaces: Inclusive communities have age-friendly spaces where residents can connect and feel they belong.

The committee suggests that the following elements can make our facilities more inclusive to the needs of older adults:

- program options that meet the diverse needs and interests of older adults
- an environment and philosophy that recognizes the importance of informal social connections and supports this by providing access to space and refreshments, both before and after programming

Progress on 2014 recommendations:

- Glen Allan Recreation Complex will offer new fitness spaces for seniors programming and a greater emphasis on adaptable equipment for the older adult population as well as those with more limited mobility
- Glen Allan Recreation Complex will be equipped with a curling club and lounge. This will be a location that seniors can meet after a fitness class or activity such as seniors skating where they can have coffee, food and socialize.
- Glen Allan Recreation Complex will also introduce other fitness activities when it reopens, which will lead to various social opportunities.
- Ardrossan Recreation Complex provides opportunities for rural seniors to participate in age-friendly social and leisure activities by offering seniors' fitness including drop-in Pickleball afternoons and one evening per week

The Committee further recommends:

Glen Allan Recreation Complex

- continue creating an age-friendly space at Glen Allan Recreation Complex where seniors can participate in a range of social and leisure activities in a central location
- New fitness space and equipment has helped. However, we recommend daytime programming also involves social and direct opportunities.
- that a social area with food and drink opportunities be open year round from early mornings and throughout the day

Ardrossan Recreation Complex

- the maintenance of opportunities when the Glen Allan Recreation Complex reopens and that current programs remain at Ardrossan in addition to these programs also offered at GARC
- early morning and throughout the day food and beverage opportunities be offered which does not depend on Ardrossan curling hours

2. Supportive Connections for Isolated Seniors: To be truly inclusive, it is important to engage seniors who are less involved in community activities and/or at risk of social isolation.

Progress on 2014 recommendations:

- funding was received for the Travelling Resource Café Project, a project that will strengthen social connections and increase access to resources for seniors who are experiencing or at risk of social isolation

The committee continues to recommend:

- the creation of opportunities for ongoing consultation regarding supportive strategies for seniors at risk of social isolation
- facilitate the development of a non-denominational widow and widower program for seniors in Strathcona County
- continue to offer the Travelling Café Program as an on-going program within Strathcona County
- that in order to proactively reduce the incidence of social isolation and loneliness of seniors, leaders of all programs directed at seniors incorporate some social interaction into their program or encourage participants to gather after the program for a social time in an appropriate space

3. Effective Communication and Information: Easy access to community information is essential for older adults. To meet diverse needs it is important to ensure information is available in print and online formats.

Progress on 2014 recommendations:

- it was decided that it would be too complex to make one print resource that would be comprehensive and user-friendly for older adults
- the Recreation Parks and Culture Guide promotes programs like seniors fitness days, dances, drop-in pickle-ball, and active aging week with separate leaflets that are available at the facilities

- Open Access Database, when in full swing, will have an online resource that will be easily searchable and printable so seniors can access the information themselves, or someone to assist if required

4. Accessible Transportation: The transition from driver to passenger is a very difficult reality for many older adults. Support through this transition is essential so they can continue to be active members of our community. While Strathcona County has a number of good transportation services, increased community awareness would be beneficial.

Progress on 2014 recommendations:

- a Seniors' Transportation Forum was offered in 2015 to help seniors understand and experience transportation in Strathcona County
- As part of the multi-year marketing plan, beginning in 2016, Transit is developing a Senior Transit Buddy Program to assist first time transit riders to learn about Strathcona County Transit, including fares, routes and amenities, including terminals and buses. Seniors will have the opportunity to sit in on presentations, and if desired, be paired-up with a Transit Buddy to participate in a one-on-one information session including a local transit experience. Buddies will likely be community volunteers comfortable with Transit service. This program will likely be implemented in stages depending on volunteer interest and availability.

The committee continues to recommend:

- that a Seniors' Transportation Forum be offered annually to help seniors understand and experience transportation in Strathcona County
- that transportation information be offered to seniors on a regular basis
- increase community awareness on transportation services in Strathcona County
- that new transit-users be supported through orientation sessions and a buddy system