



**Frederick County
Senior Services Advisory Board**
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Frederick County Senior Service Advisory Board's Listening Sessions Report

The Senior Services Advisory Board is comprised of eleven volunteers appointed by the County Executive who serve three-year, staggered terms. The mission of the Board is to promote the well-being and quality of life of older adults in Frederick County, Maryland. The Board collaborates with, advises, advocates, and educates the Frederick County Government, Division of Aging and Independence, and the larger community on matters related to the administration of services for older adults.

In keeping with this mission, during September 2023, the Board offered seniors and caregivers an opportunity to share their needs and concerns about successfully living-well-in-place by hosting listening sessions across the County. There were four in-person Listening Sessions located in most County Council districts: the Mt. Pleasant Ruritan Club, the Emmitsburg Senior Center, the Frederick Senior Center, and the Urbana Senior Center. In addition, there was one virtual Listening Session with three attendees. Average attendance at the in-person sessions was about 7 older adults and/or caregivers. The advisory board also received comments from two senior communities, Woodlands of Urbana, and Crestwood Village. These two senior communities represent 1,000+ seniors.

The Board envisioned the Listening Sessions with three goals:

1. To identify issues/concerns of seniors age 60 and older and caregivers living within the five county districts in order to successfully "live well in place" as they age.
2. To discern the different needs in services and to see if there were issues unique to the geographic area.
3. To communicate the issues/concerns identified to the County Executive, County Council, and the larger community for the purpose of decision making and policy development.

After reviewing the feedback, it became clear that there were five priority areas of concern.

1. Affordable Housing

This concern was across the County in terms of rent, rent increases, need for subsidized housing and general affordability of housing for seniors.

- Concerns about the availability and cost when it may be needed for Assisted Living and Skilled Nursing facilities. No low income Assisted Living in county.
- Concern about funding for the Maryland Housing Rehabilitation Program as person has waited since Jun 2022 to get actual service.

2. Transportation

This concern impacted seniors in very different ways.

- Seniors in the north needed transportation for those living in the country of main roads such as Sabillasville and the Emmitsburg areas.
- Several people mentioned being able to schedule TransIT in advance and those in the north needing TransIT PLUS taxi service.
- Transportation for medical escorted procedures for seniors. i.e., procedures with anesthesia such as colonoscopy, cataract surgery, etc.

- Background checks and liability insurance for community volunteer drivers to help seniors get to/from appointments and medically necessary escorts.

3. Handyman, Cleaning and Technical Support Services

These concerns were all in terms of availability and affordability.

- Some for fixing small problems to maintain their homes to heavy duty work seniors can no longer manage.
- Technical support, e.g., help with computers, phones, technical issues.
- Would consider student community service hours for these tasks.

4. Health and Caregiver Support Services

These concerns had some variation in terms of health care needs and services.

- Mental health counseling availability and affordability.
- Affordable Medical Alert system
- Assistance in financing in-home care due to high cost per hour, often requiring minimum of 4 hours, need options for intermittent care such as getting up in am and going to bed in pm.
- Support groups for caregivers of seniors themselves, adult children and parents.
- Respite programs on weekly and monthly basis.
- Funds for respite services to provide break for caregivers.
- Information and resources on caregiver support.
- Volunteers to “adult sit” while caregivers have time off.
- Background checks and liability insurance for those community volunteers.
- Hard to get medical appointments when needed for some seniors, especially when new to the area.
- Finding durable medical equipment that works for the person as well as the caregiver because most require purchasing, that is not refundable.
- Only one Adult Day Care Center in county.

5. Division of Aging and Independence

The concerns were varied. Many of the comments highlight the need for a Social Media/Marketing position within the Division of Aging and Independence.

- Meal on Wheels program especially needed in Unionville area.
- Several seniors in various locations asked about vans/buses from one Senior Center to another Senior Center to attend activities and special events.
- Vans/buses for seniors to attend county senior events such as Elder Expo.
- Lack of education and access to accurate information on senior services and programs.
- Properly funded senior centers for socialization to reduce loneliness.
- Larger senior centers, i.e., Urbana Park, Brunswick Park, Knoxville Regional Park.
- More planned activities for disabled/handicapped seniors including seated exercises via virtual senior center and trips with less walking.
- Combined virtual and in-person programs should have a microphone so those participating virtually can hear.
- Share virtual programs from other county senior programs.

Other

- Better internet access came from seniors in the northern part of the county as it limited their ability to communicate and gain information.
- Raise poverty guidelines.
- More funds for minority seniors.

In conclusion, it is clear that affordable housing is a real challenge in Frederick County and must be addressed urgently. Seniors will become homeless or move out of county and in some cases, out of state if actions are not taken in the near future to provide lower cost, affordable housing. Transportation programs have made strides in providing services to meet the needs of seniors, but it is clear there are still some unanswered needs. Affordable handyman services, cleaning and technical support as well as in-home health care, respite services, caregiver support and mental health services are growing needs and will continue to grow as people age in place. Almost all the concerns related to the Division of Aging and Independence require added services, including marketing and outreach that requires funding to meet the needs of the growing number of seniors as they age. It is clear that these concerns still need to be addressed in order to achieve Livable Frederick's vision for everyone to thrive in Frederick County.

The Senior Services Advisory Board will begin more in-depth discussions of the issues identified in the Listening Sessions in order to determine where we can have the most impact and what specific actions, we will be taking to affect change in the coming year.