



## **TOWN OF SIMSBURY**

# **PROGRAMMING REPORT FOR FUTURE SENIOR/COMMUNITY CENTER**

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Background of Study**

In the summer of 2015, the Town of Simsbury invited Dr. Manoj Pardasani to explore and evaluate plans for building a new senior center in Simsbury. In collaboration with representatives from the Town of Simsbury, a comprehensive plan of study was established.

Dr. Pardasani is a leading expert on senior centers in the United States. His research on senior center designs, programming, and impact have been widely published and disseminated in the senior center field. He has served as a consultant and advisor to several public and private organizations that provide community-based services to older adults.

The aim of the study was to gather evidence from multiple sources and stakeholders about need and viability, and provide data-informed recommendations to the Town of Simsbury on plans for a new senior center.

### **Study Design**

The study took place in several stages:

*Stage #1:* An exploration of the changing demographics of Simsbury and Connecticut and a review of a consumer survey and reports commissioned by the Town of Simsbury.

*Stage #2:* An overview of innovative models of senior centers in the US.

*Stage #3:* A telephone consultation with representatives of the Town of Simsbury and project architects to evaluate their concerns and goals.

*Stage #4:* A visit to Simsbury to meet with several stakeholders that included –

- A meeting with representatives of the Town of Simsbury.
- A tour of the current senior center and a meeting with the staff, administrators and participants.
- A tour of the Town Library, Parks and Recreation facility, the Performing Arts Center and consultations with their respective administrators.

*Stage #5:* A second visit to Simsbury that included –

- A focus group session with participants and non-participants of senior center from Simsbury.

- A presentation on innovative senior center models (structures and programming) to the Aging and Disability Commission.
- A meeting with representatives of alternate proposed sites for the new senior center.

## **Recommendations**

In Simsbury, the current population is pegged at approximately 23,000 individuals, of which 15% (3,300) are 65 years of age and older. If the “graying” of the population in Simsbury follows the national trend, the number of individuals aged 65 and over will double in the next few decades. These estimates are based on the assumption that there will not be an influx of additional older adults to Simsbury from other areas. According to 2010 Decennial Census Report issued by the Connecticut State Data Center, the population of individuals 65 and older will increase by 35% between 2010 and 2025. Given the rapid growth in the population of people over 50 in Simsbury, programs and services targeted to this segment of the population are essential.

The current senior center facility is inadequate (viz. safety and space issues) and not viable for expansion of clients, programming and services. Additionally, the current participant pool is aging and not being replaced by a “younger” cohort. Efforts should be made to develop programming that can attract more individuals in their 50s and boomers (adults in their 60s). There are several attractive resources in the community such as the Library, Performing Arts Center and the Parks and Recreation facility that offer services and programs of interest to older adults as well.

Based on an extensive review of stakeholder discussions, current trends in aging and innovative senior center models, the following recommendations are being offered:

- (1) A community-center that caters to all age groups would be ideal for Simsbury – given the demographic profile of the community.
- (2) Building a brand new facility would provide the opportunity to strategically design the space with a diverse array of programs, activities and future income in mind.
- (3) An expanded slate of programs and services would attract younger seniors (60+) as well as those in their 50s and early retirees. The focus of the programming, in addition to programs currently offered at the senior center, should focus on 3 major areas: Health & Wellness, Continuing Education/Arts and Volunteer Opportunities.

- (4) A brand new facility that is state-of-the-art could not only enhance that section of downtown but also attract new members.
- (5) A fitness center and health facility could provide income, in addition to renting space.
- (6) The library offers many programs that also attract older adults – therefore collaborating and coordinating with them in a comprehensive manner would be essential. Also, joint service agreements with the Performing Arts Center and the Parks & Recreation department would greatly expand program options for members.
- (8) Collaborating with various businesses in Simsbury would provide opportunities for programming and resources (such as a restaurant tasting menu, wine sampling, etc.).

## **Conclusion**

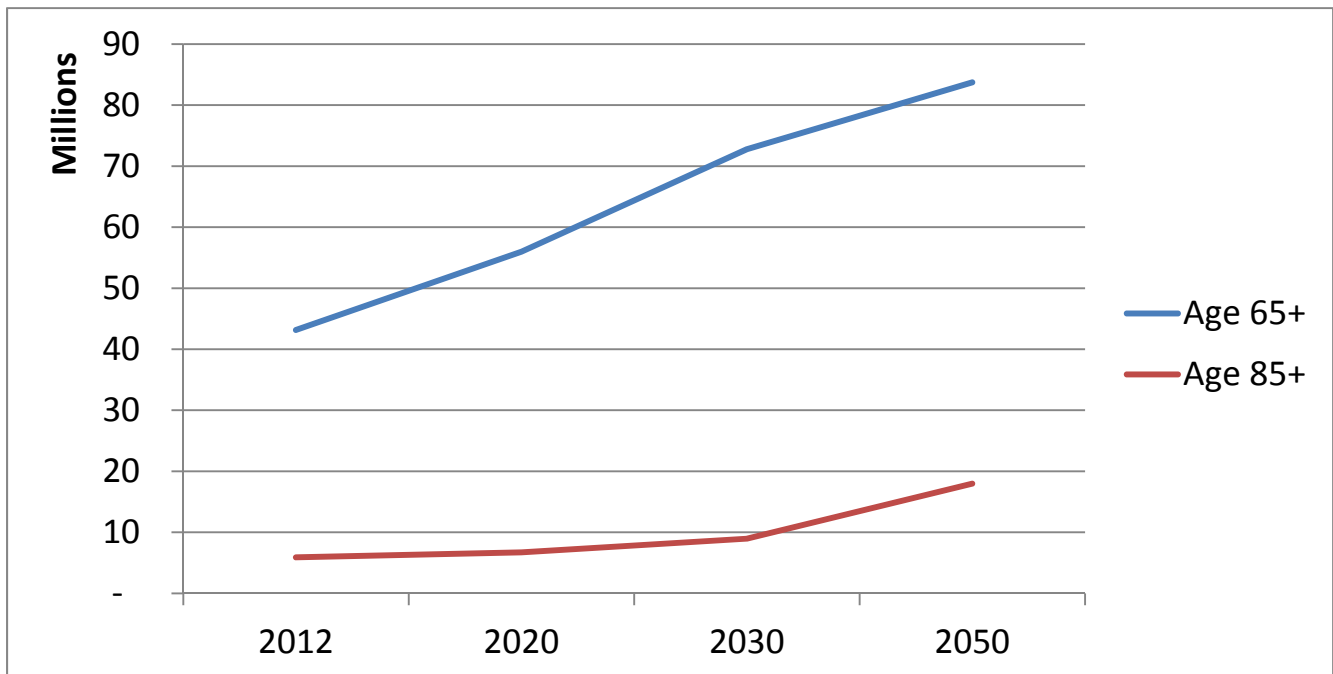
A brand new, senior/community center with expanded programming and services will serve as a vital focal point in the community. It has the potential to act as a valuable resource and provide a sustainable, critical and innovative model of service. The senior/community center could enhance the downtown area and the overall health and wellness of the community.

## Programming Report For Future Senior/Community Center

### **The Graying of America**

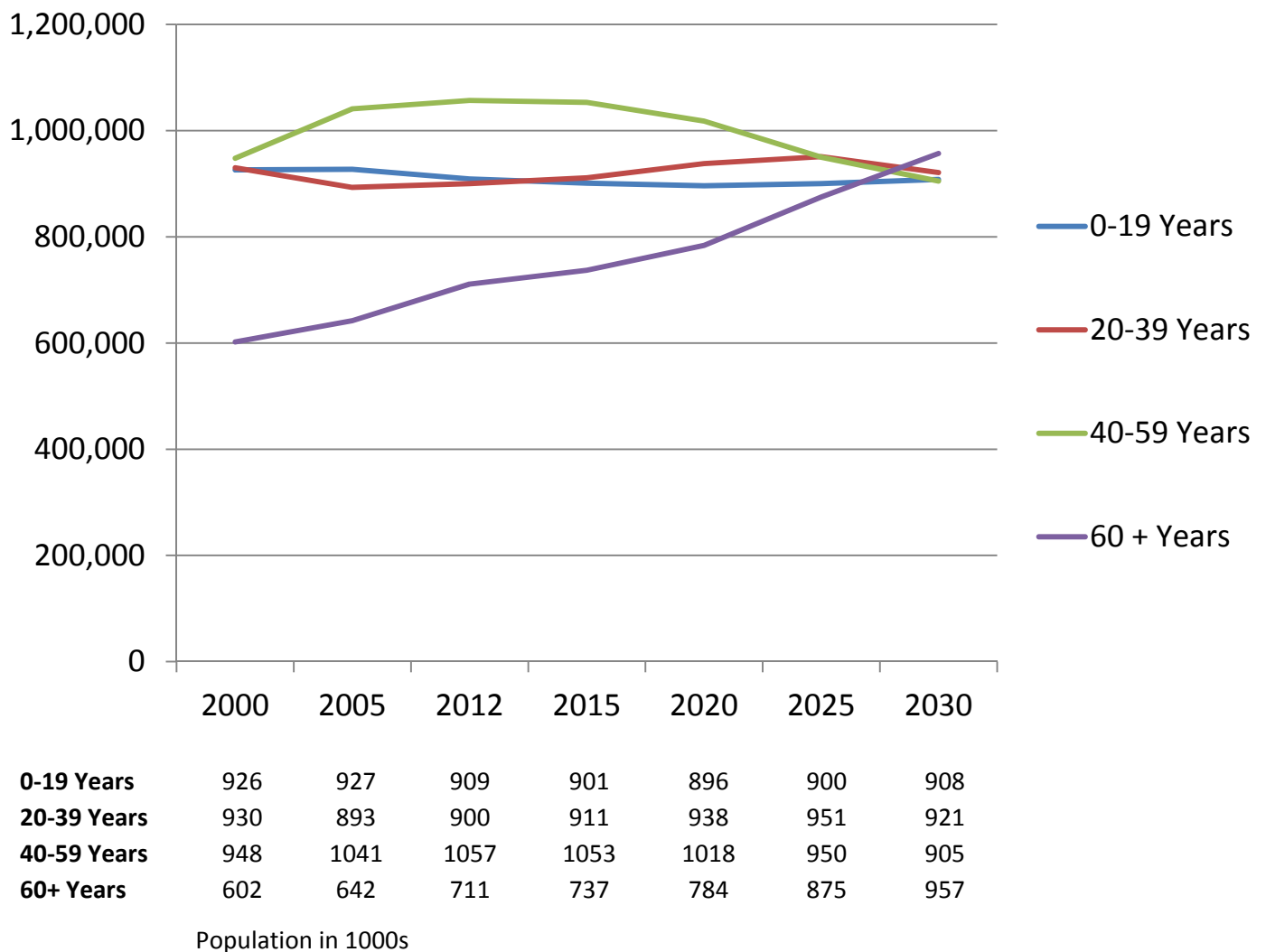
Between 2012 and 2050, the United States will experience considerable growth in its older population. In 2050, the population aged 65 and over is projected to be 83.7 million, almost double its estimated population of 43.1 million in 2012. The baby boomers are largely responsible for this increase in the older population, as they began turning 65 in 2011. By 2050, the surviving baby boomers will be over the age of 85. By 2030, more than 20 percent of U.S. residents are projected to be aged 65 and over, compared with 13 percent in 2010 and 9.8 percent in 1970. The number of people aged 85 and over, is projected to grow from 5.9 million in 2012 to 8.9 million in 2030. In 2050, this group is projected to reach 18 million.

**Figure 1: National trends in aging**



In Connecticut, the proportion of the population that is 60 and older is growing more rapidly than other components of the population. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that nearly 26 percent of Connecticut’s population will be 60 and older by the year 2030, an increase of 30 percent from 2012.

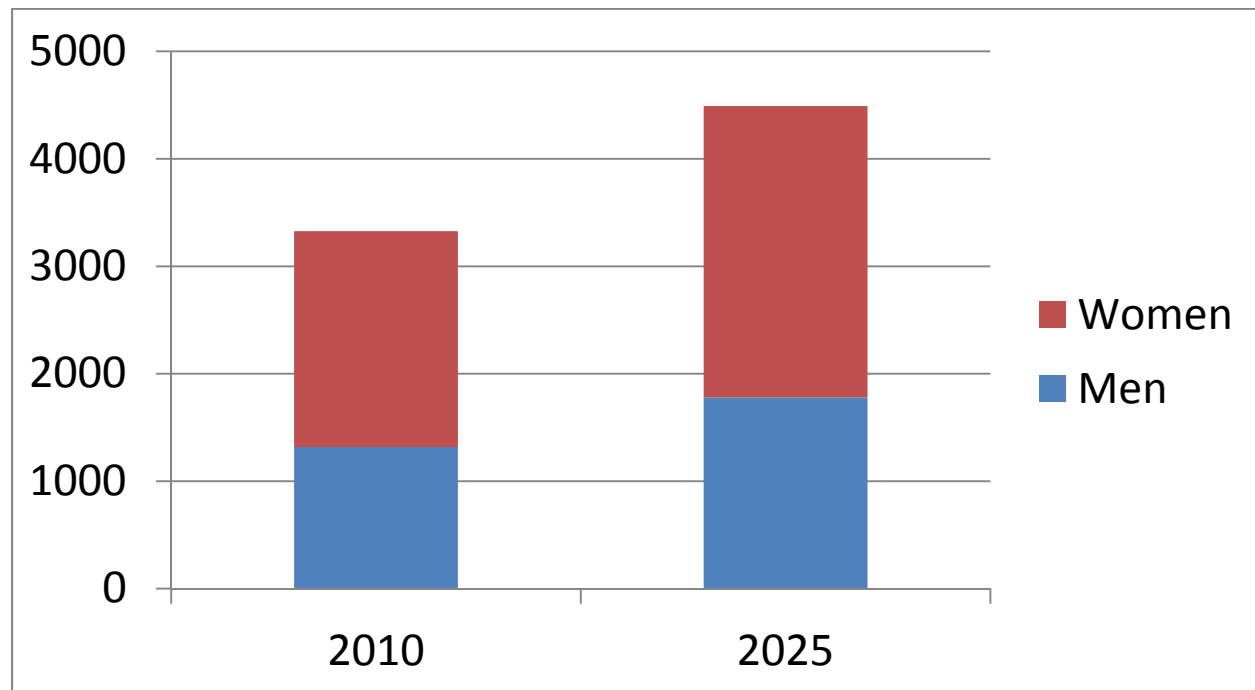
**Figure 2: Aging Trends in Connecticut**



In Simsbury, the current population is pegged at approximately 23,000 individuals, of which 15% (3,300) are 65 years of age and older. If the “graying” of the population in Simsbury follows the national trend, the number of individuals aged 65 and over will double in the next

few decades. These estimates are based on the assumption that there will not be an influx of additional older adults to Simsbury from other areas. According to 2010 Decennial Census Report issued by the Connecticut State Data Center, the population of individuals 65 and older will increase by 35% between 2010 and 2025.

**Figure 3: Growth in the Aging Population of Simsbury (35%)**



### **Background on Senior Centers**

Nationally, a network of 11,000 senior centers serves a diverse cohort of community-dwelling older adults (AoA, 2000; Krout, 1998; Leest, 1995; NISC, 2005; Pardasani, 2004). Wrapped around the core service of a free lunch meal, senior centers provide a complex array of recreational, nutritional, fitness, educational and social service programs to promote independence and enhance the quality of life of those they serve (Krout, 1998; NISC, 2005; Pardasani, 2004).

According to the Administration on Aging (2000), senior centers were conceptualized as community focal points and are “both the first and the foremost, source of vital community based social and nutrition supports that help older Americans remain independent in their

communities.” It was envisioned that senior centers would enhance the independence and well-being of community-dwelling older adults by providing vital services such as nutrition, health education, recreational programs and social services (AoA, 2000; Krout, 1998; Leest, 1995).

### **Senior Centers: The Evolution**

Since the opening of the first senior center, the William Hodson Senior Center in 1943, senior centers have expanded, diversified and evolved significantly in terms of programs and services (AoA, 2000; Krout, 1998; Leest, 1995). The numerical growth of senior centers in the last few decades is matched by a growth in the number and diversity of programs and services offered by senior centers (Pardasani, 2004b; Strain, 2001). Programming has evolved in relation to changing needs and user characteristics (Calsyn & Winter, 1999; Demko, 1979; Harris & Associates, 1975; Lun, 2004; Mitchell, 1995; Miller et al., 1996; Netzer et al., 1997; Ralston 1982, 1983, 1984, 1991; Tuckman, 1967). Senior centers, depending on their size, budget and programmatic focus, may range in design from recreational clubs or nutrition sites, to traditional community-based senior centers and large, multipurpose senior centers (Krout, 1985; Leanse & Wagener, 1975; Ralston, 1983; Taietz, 1976). The five most common categories of senior center programs are nutrition, health and fitness, recreational, volunteer opportunities for older adults and social services (Aday, 2003; Gavin & Meyers, 2003; Gelfand, Bechil and Chester, 1992; Krout, 1985; Leanse & Wagener, 1975; Pardasani, 2004b; Skarupski & Pelkowski, 2003).

### **Models of Senior Centers**

In 2009, the National Institute of Senior Centers (NISC) appointed a New Models Taskforce to identify emerging and innovative models of senior centers. Applying a multiple-case study approach to a national survey sample, six innovative models were identified by members of the New Models Taskforce (NMTF). The following are the six models of emerging senior centers as highlighted by our nationwide study and their defining characteristics:

## 1) Community Center



- Diverse and comprehensive programming
- Programming to be offered at multiple sites through partnerships with other agencies, public utilities and businesses, e.g. 'Centers Beyond Walls'
- Provide inclusive programming and activities for all ages and abilities
- A state-of-the-art health and fitness center
- Programs that encompass health, recreational, educational, cultural, nutritional and social service needs
- Use of consistent and intensive program evaluation and needs assessments
- Use of alternative names instead of 'Senior Center'

## 2) Wellness Center



- Focus on healthy aging (physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual and environmental)
- Use of evidence-based health promotion models
- A state-of-the-art health and fitness center
- Steady participation in health-related research protocols
- Use of innovative technology and current knowledge to promote health
- Significant collaborations with healthcare providers in the community
- Coordination with healthcare professionals, universities, research institutions and pharmaceutical companies



### 3) *Lifelong Learning/Arts*



- Focus on intellectual stimulation, continuous learning, personal growth, and enhanced quality of life
- Programs and activities offered at multiple sites – not necessarily within a senior center
- Highly skilled, competent and experienced cadre of staff and volunteers
- Programs that are inclusive, comprehensive and innovative
- Significant collaborations with educational institutions like universities, colleges, elder hostels, libraries, etc.
- Trips to various destinations based on subjects being offered



### 4) *Continuum of Care/Transitions*



- Senior centers play a vital role as the focal points of coordination of information, access and service delivery to the aging population.

- Comprehensive services and programs that meet the changing needs of consumers as they “age-in-community” – usually located in retirement communities.
- State-of-the art services that are characterized by incremental, as well as structured plans that allows for greater dependence on resources and focus as participant’s age – planned transition from independent living to assisted living to skilled nursing.
- Services/Programs grounded in evidence-based theory and practice.
- Inter-disciplinary, comprehensive collaboration with healthcare institutions, healthcare providers, AAA’s, State Offices of Aging and Mental Health, researchers, educational institutions and community-based service providers to create a unique system of care.

### 5) *Entrepreneurial Model*



- Focus on philanthropic funding rather than public funding to support the senior center
- Generating earned income – offering a cadre of retired professionals as paid consultants to the community or members creating objects/products for sale
- Positioning in the marketplace as a focal point
- Use of successful business models from the for-profit and non-profit world
- Use of technology to enhance effectiveness and efficiency
- Contemporary, ‘hip’ facilities that are new or remodeled
- Very consumer driven -open non-traditional hours to attract diverse consumers



## 6) *Café Model*



- Retail approach to programs – located in a restaurant or café setting
- The town café is the centerpiece
- Programs may be offered at other sites
- Smaller, neighborhood-based focus
- Cafes are open to all community members – allows for introduction of new participants to other programs and services
- Members may work in the cafes as volunteers or paid staff



## **Research on the Benefits of Participation**

Health and wellness programs are fast becoming a core interest of many large, multi-purpose senior centers, with an increase in health-related intervention research (Beisgen and Kraitchman, 2003; Hayunga, 2004; Pardasani, Sporre & Thomspen, 2008; Ryzin, 2005). These studies have focused on prevention of falls and minimization of injury risks (Baker, Gottschalk & Bianco, 2007; Reinsch, MacRae, Lachenbruch & Tobis, 1992; Li et al, 2008), walking (Sarkisian, Prohaska, Davis and Weiner, 2007), resistance training (Manini, et al., 2007), line dancing (Hayes, 2006), increasing healthy eating habits (Hendrix, 2008a), diabetes self-management (Hendrix, 2008b), Tai Chi (Li, et al., 2008), physical activity and exercise (Fitzpatrick, et al., 2008). While demonstrating their physical health benefits, these interventions are costly and time-limited and, therefore, are not available to most older adults participants. Moreover, they have not examined mental health, loneliness, and life satisfaction as possible outcomes.

There is some evidence that participation in activities typically offered by senior centers (e.g., bingo, trips, arts and crafts, meal, etc.) may be related to the well-being of older adults. Researchers have found that senior center participants have better psychological well-being across several measures than non-participants, including depressive symptoms (Choi & McDougall, 2007), friendship formations and associated well-being (Aday, Kehoe, and Farney, 2006), and stress levels (Farone, Fitzpatrick and Tran, 2005, Maton, 1989). Some studies have shown that that participation in senior center programs are related to greater self-esteem, life satisfaction and perceived social support, expanded social networks and reduced isolation, and improved perception of general well-being (Aday, Kehoe & Farney, 2006; Carey, 2004; Fitzpatrick et al, 2005; Leest, 1995; Maton, 2002; Meis, 2005; Seong, 2003).



### **Current Senior Center in Simsbury**

(1) Approximately 150 clients per day. Mostly 75 and older. More women than men.

(2) Meals served on Wednesdays and Fridays only.

(3) 5 rooms for attendees:

- Auditorium – 1<sup>st</sup> floor
- Lobby – 1<sup>st</sup> floor
- 2 activity rooms – upstairs
- Dining Room – lower floor (50-75)
- Craft Room – lower floor
- Kitchen/Pantry – lower floor
- Large Meeting Room – lower floor

(4) Issues with current senior center:

- Parking is limited and problematic, grounds uneven
- Ramp is narrow
- Inadequate space for activities
- Space for activities and general facility – unsafe, issues with mobility (too many levels and stairs)
- Exercise room – no showers
- Doorways too narrow
- Lack of storage
- Programming expansion limited by space

- Not attractive to boomers

(5) Strengths of current senior center:

- Administrators (Mickey, Kathleen) and staff
- Central location
- Loyal clientele
- Seen by current attendees as beneficial and vital
- Regular attendees (mainly older)

(6) Challenges for the current senior center:

- Facility is aging and not accessible
- Attracting more younger seniors and boomers (currently 26% are under 70)
- Programs may be limited (due to space, budget or resources)
- Lack of concerted marketing and outreach
- Building upon successful inter-generational programming
- Opportunities to expand collaborations with town businesses (fitness facilities, library, performing arts center, parks and recreation department, etc.)

**(A) Proposed New Senior/Community Center (non-specific location)**

**Opportunities:**

- Re-branding of “senior center” as a vital community focal point
- Attract “younger” and previously unattached seniors
- More attractive and engaging community space – possible rentals to other groups for income
- Increased programming for all cohorts of older adults – especially health, fitness, wellness, recreation and educational
- Safe and usable space
- Opportunities for inter-generational programming
- Bringing “community” to the senior center
- Potential for collaborative programming with local businesses, fitness facilities, library, performing arts center, parks and recreation department, etc.
- Resident Opinion Survey supported funding a new senior center including a significant proportion of those 60 and over
- Resident Opinion Survey supported a new location – with more folks interested in attending
- Free internet (wi-fi) access for community members



### **(B) Proposed New Senior/Community Center at the Performing Arts Center Site**

#### **Opportunities:**

- Brand new facility that is attractive to all age groups
- Collaboration with performing arts center on events and programs
- Potential income from renting space to artists, symphony and other town groups
- Facility with state-of-the-art equipment, space and fitness center
- Co-location of programming with the library
- A facility that will continue to be viable and central for decades

#### **Challenges:**

- Location/Site
- Proximity to Performing Arts Center (traffic, noise, parking, etc.)
- Doing the “same thing” but in a new space
- Resident Opinion Survey reported greater interest in an inter-generational environment

### **(C) Proposed New Senior/Community Center at the Andy’s Market Site**

#### **Opportunities:**

- New facility would not have to be built
- The current facility could be renovated with appropriate budget

- Would not be affected by events at the performing arts center
- Ample parking
- Centrally located (entrance from two main streets)
- Could re-vitalize downtown and remove an “unused” building

### **Challenges:**

- Location is good (central) but the physical appearance of the facility would not be attractive
- Ample parking but located in a “strip-mall”
- Community members may not find the facility attractive
- Physical space may limit the design of rooms and use of specialized equipment

### **Focus Groups with Participants and Non Participants**

Multiple stakeholder meetings and focus groups were held to solicit input and obtain feedback on programming topics. Specifically, meetings were conducted on July 7<sup>th</sup> and September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015, with focus groups of senior center participants and non-participants; a Special Meeting of the Aging and Disability Commission; meetings with town staff; and multiple site visitations.

- Both participants and non-participants noted that they would attend a senior center if there were more attractive programming
- Majority of those interviewed liked the idea of a “community center” as long as there was specialized programming for older adults and ample space for their activities
- Non-participants noted that they do not attend the senior center as they see no need
- Both participants and non-participants reported using the library for various events and programs – but they would be supportive of joint programming
- The participants offered the following reasons for attending – socialization, activities, something to do, volunteering, welcoming staff and central location.



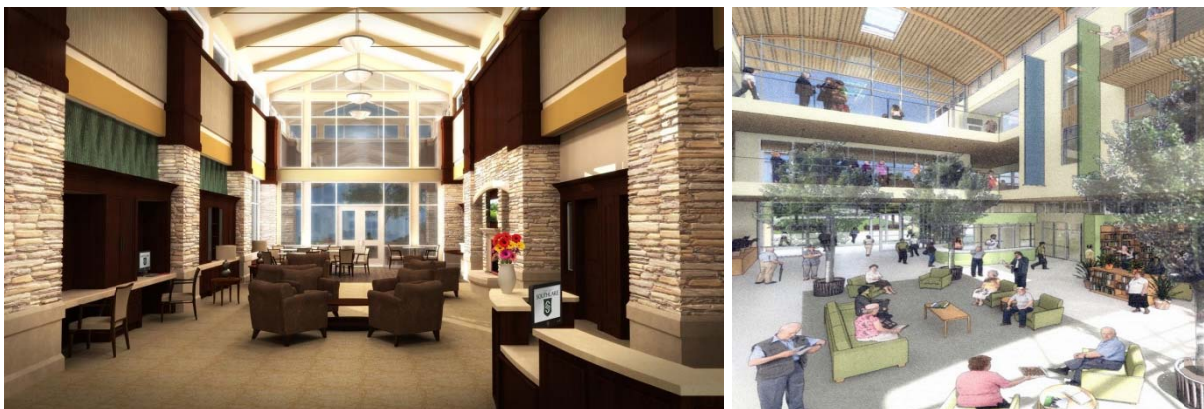
## Recommendations

*(1) A senior/community center that caters to all age groups would be ideal for Simsbury – given the demographic profile of the community.*



- A senior/community center with multi-purpose rooms and facilities would cater to the entire Simsbury community.
- Specific programs could be targeted to certain age groups (children, teens, single adults, parents and older adults), while some programs could be multi-generational.
- The senior/community center would be seen as the focal point in the community – a vital resource for health and wellness, age-friendly initiatives, inter-generational programming and education.
- A senior/community center would attract not only the current senior center participants but other older adults unaffiliated with a senior center, as well as boomers, early retirees and adults 50+.

*(2) Building a brand new facility would provide the opportunity to strategically design the space with a diverse array of programs, activities and future income in mind.*



- A two-story building would be ideal as it will provide ample space for all community activities and programs. Two levels also allow for separation of groups or programs

when needed. Elevators will be critical to ensure smooth flow of all participants, regardless of age and mobility restraints.

- Ample parking would be essential since the vast majority of participants will drive to the senior/community center. Parking for 150-200 cars would be ideal.
- A backyard patio with seating for 50-75 would enhance outdoor activities. Additionally, space for a community garden to be tended by older adults and local school children would be great.



- The following suggestions for space are based on the needs of all age groups, including older adults. The essential rooms/facilities critical are:
  - A large, open, two-story reception and sitting area with free Wi-Fi
  - Ample wall space (or gallery space) in the reception area to display community art
  - 4-5 meeting/activity rooms (seating 40-50 people)
  - A media room with a large screen TV for viewing movies, documentaries and Wii gaming
  - 1-2 small medical screening rooms for health screenings and information and referral services
  - A large arts room with space for a pottery kiln and a supply closet
  - A crafts room (with supply closet) for woodworking or to offer two arts programs simultaneously
  - A game room with activities to appeal to men and younger seniors.
  - A large dining room (that could be sub-divided as needed) that seats 200 people with a stage on one end and appropriate acoustics for performances and events – with additional rooms for supplies, acoustic equipment, and green rooms (2) for performers
  - A kitchen that is equipped for warming food and simple prep, a salad station and pantry
  - A storage room for the food pantry program

- A fitness center divided into three parts - one area for cardio equipment like treadmills, elliptical machines and stationary bicycles, a second area for weight training and a third open area or separate (wooden floors) for group exercises like yoga, Pilates, etc. - the exercise room could also be used for dance classes.
- A suite of offices for the administrative staff – 4 or 5 small offices with an adjoining waiting room
- Accessible parking and a covered portico for drop-offs and pick-ups.
- Additional space for storage

Additionally, if budget factors allowed, consideration could be given to:

- An area for a café on the main lobby level would attract younger seniors
- An indoor pool with blocked times for age-specific swimming classes





*(3) An expanded slate of programs and services would attract younger seniors (60+) as well as those in their 50s and early retirees. The focus of the programming, in addition to current programs offered at the senior center, should focus on 3 major areas: Health & Wellness, Continuing Education/Arts and Volunteer Opportunities.*

### Health & Wellness

- ✓ Health Screenings
- ✓ Nutrition Education
- ✓ Healthy cooking demonstrations
- ✓ Community gardens
- ✓ Health Education (healthful behaviors)
- ✓ Evidence-based interventions to promote health and minimize risks
- ✓ Group exercise programs like yoga, Pilates, Zumba, Tai Chi, Spinning, etc.
- ✓ Weight-training
- ✓ Swimming classes
- ✓ Water aerobics
- ✓ Senior sports league (basketball, softball, swimming, tennis, etc.)

### Continuing Education Performing Arts

- ✓ Partnerships with local colleges and the Town library
- ✓ Art History
- ✓ Literature
- ✓ US and World History
- ✓ Political Trends and Analyses
- ✓ Comparative world religions
- ✓ World languages
- ✓ Theater
- ✓ Musical Instruments
- ✓ Choral Group
- ✓ Music appreciation
- ✓ Poetry writing

### Volunteer Opportunities

- ✓ Must be meaningful and substantial
- ✓ After-school tutoring
- ✓ Community gardening
- ✓ Senior corps that consult with local non-profit organizations
- ✓ Volunteer with local schools, nursing homes, etc.
- ✓ A cadre of seniors and other community members who serve as an advisory group to the Senior/Community Center

*(4) A brand new facility that is state-of-the-art would not only revitalize that section of downtown but also attract new members.*

- The senior/community center could partner with the Performing Arts Center on joint programming for concerts and other events
- Town events and town hall meetings could be held at the new senior/community center
- Special holiday celebrations could be held at the senior/community center
- The library and the senior/community center could co-locate programs to reach out to wider audience
- Businesses could market their services at the senior/community center

*(5) A fitness center and health facility could provide income, in addition to renting space.*

- A fitness center could be used by members of all ages
- Multiple classes and diverse equipment would meet the needs of all age groups and abilities
- Would bring new seniors to the senior/community center who are only interested in fitness programming
- A hiking trail, if added along the river, could enhance fitness and wellness

*Things to keep in mind:*

(i) The senior center will continue to exist – it will just share space with other members of the community. However, with clever scheduling and programming, the various groups could be separated or integrated into the daily operations of the senior/community center. The senior center department should continue to offer its current slate of programs that are popular with attendees. Meals, an integral component of a senior center, should continue to be offered 2-3 a week.

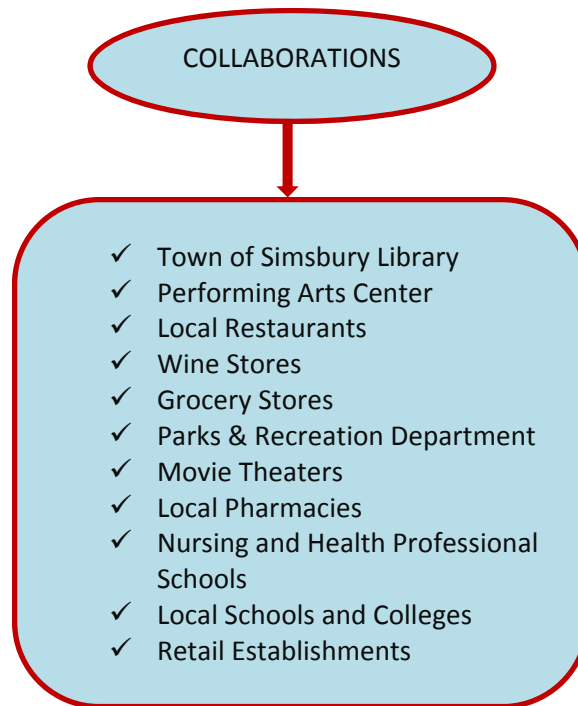
(ii) If a new location is chosen, the issues related to noise and parking would have to be addressed in the design. Current members may be upset by the change in location – but if they are loyal to the senior center – they would attend at the new site.

(iii) If the Performing Arts Center location is chosen, when performers are in town, the sight of trailers and equipment trucks may be intimidating and cause disruptions for members of the senior/community center.

(iv) The library offers many programs that also attract older adults – therefore collaborating and coordinating with them in a comprehensive manner would be essential.

(v) Agreements with the Performing Arts Center and the Parks & Recreation department would expand program options for members.

(vi) Collaborating with various businesses in Simsbury would provide opportunities for programming and resources (such as a restaurant tasting menu, wine sampling, etc.)



(vi) A marketing budget would be critical to get the “message” out to the community.

