



AustinUP Community Conversation: What makes a neighborhood age-friendly?

Date: March 5, 2016

Location: Wildflower Terrace in Austin's Mueller neighborhood

Facilitator: Mary Anne Connolly, principal at MACMedia. She also is founder of @changehoweage Twitter and Facebook feeds.

Number of attendees: 34

General Notes

- Many attendees lived in the Mueller neighborhood or close to it. Other neighborhoods mentioned: 78750, 78731, Oak Hill and Barton Hills.
- Austin isn't perfect, but events like this can help. Austin needs to do more of this kind of outreach, to gather "stories, not statistics."

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

- The Mueller neighborhood is wonderful for seniors. For example, there is a beautiful park right across the street. Some sidewalks have problems, but these can be solved.
- Catellus needs to know that the benches they've installed are uncomfortable. I don't think they had seniors in mind when this neighborhood was developed.
- Seniors like to get outside and sit in the shade, surrounded by flowers. Easy access is important.
- Pathways here (at Mueller) are hard rock, which means that they are slippery. There is little shade.
- Some of the parks don't have benches. Seniors like to have tables, too. Only the far ends of the building (Wildflower) have access to ramps and curb cuts for wheelchairs, etc.
- An "edible landscape" would be great, i.e., vegetable gardens. But please make sure they include raised beds and that they're accessible to wheelchairs and other devices. A greenhouse would be nice.
- Lighting is important.
- Sidewalks need to be safe, with curb cuts. The city needs to be more wheelchair-friendly...i.e., no rock paths. Our governor uses a wheelchair. Austin of all places should be better about this.
- We definitely need better sidewalks – especially downtown.

Transportation

- We chose a condo off Mesa Drive in Northwest Hills specifically in order to be able to walk to grocery stores, church, bus stops and banks.
- When thinking about neighborhoods, city planners need to think about destination....i.e., where do people want to go and *need* to go?
- Bus stops need to be covered and should include a place to sit.
- We don't have a culture that embraces public transportation. How do we promote it better – not just for seniors, but for all?
- Millennials aren't really that into cars either. Having this in common with seniors should help with the promotion effort.
- In Mueller, walking to HEB from Wildflower Terrace is not doable.
- I lived in Dellwood when the airport was still here. We advocated for more bus stops and a grocery store next to Wildflower (where seniors live). I'm sorry that bus #32 only runs every half hour and isn't wheelchair-accessible.
- CapMetro has a Reduced Fare ID Card for those 65+, but it needs to be better promoted.
- By 2030, temperatures on average will be eight degrees hotter in Austin. Outdoor spaces and transportation will need to take this into consideration.
- Being able to get outside is crucial to our health and well-being.
- There needs to be advocacy around ensuring transportation for seniors. The private sector needs to get involved to provide, for example, transportation to/from dialysis units, to/from grocery stores, etc.
- CapMetro has to start thinking in more progressive ways. For example, use more mini-busses and vans instead of large busses. They should serve the needs of all residents, not only those in the central business district, tourists, etc.
- Drive a Senior has started a van service. Limited use right now.

Housing

- Even though Wildflower is a community for those 55+, the architects of this building didn't think about seniors. There are no automatic doors for those with disabilities. The garbage is a long way from resident apartments. Ceilings here are nine feet high, which is nice; but that means that the cabinets are also high, i.e., hard to reach.

- I'd like to see more "naturally occurring" retirement communities located within the neighborhood, i.e., people who live in close proximity who carpool together, shop together and look out for one another. Rental units could be reserved for seniors. Let's create pockets of these senior communities all around Austin.
- Senior neighbors could serve as babysitters for other neighbors.
- In order to age in place (or age in community), apartment buildings need to be adaptable for seniors. We need efficient, respectful, responsive management. But affordability is important. Possibly incorporate various levels of rent based on income.
- Licensing and insurance are issues for "continuum of care" facilities – which presents a challenge to affordability.
- Retirement communities aren't desirable for all. But whatever housing option you choose, it has to be affordable. That's the main problem right now. We don't have enough affordable options for taking care of our seniors. If the community also includes younger residents, that might help.
- In Mexico, there is a nursing home where every resident has a job. Four nuns are able to run this facility (that is home to 150) because everyone pitches in.
- Capital City Village is one model that could help.

Social participation

- Change the concept that "Nobody listens to old people."
- I live in an intergenerational environment (Mosaic at Mueller), but social participation options are limited. If we don't create social participation, it doesn't happen. We need to speak up more.
- At Wildflower, we create our own social activities. You have to do things for yourselves. We have a dinner at least monthly as well as a Tai Chi class. You have to include everyone and encourage them to get involved. Ani started a meditation class. Another resident started an "urban polers" activity. We're successful because there is a high concentration of seniors here.
- Where there isn't a high concentration of seniors, the City should create "centers" in neighborhoods to provide options for seniors to come together and do things for themselves.
- Builders get tax breaks for building affordable buildings, but they should also provide services and support for seniors.

- Some communities have “memory care units” with various levels of service, but they don’t do enough to engage their patients.
- I got my dog from Seniors for Seniors (Austin Pets Alive) – senior animals are adopted by seniors. We should explore the positive capabilities of seniors.

Respect and Social Inclusion

- At an affordable senior housing complex in CA, children helped or “adopted” seniors. It was an intergenerational community, which was great because you got to know and interact with families.
- Here in Wildflower, our management is younger. They have to be more patient with seniors. We have to take power ourselves and communicate.
- There is “purchase power” in the senior demographic.
- Wildflower management pays for a social worker to visit the building one day a week. She refers us to appropriate agencies and private services. Family Eldercare also does this.

Civic Participation and Employment

- Seniors have to take it upon ourselves to go out and get involved. We have to recognize the power we have. We have to remember that voting is essential.
- There was a graduate student study not long ago here at Wildflower that measured (and encouraged) civic participation among seniors, e.g., writing letters to the editor, finding resources for seniors, etc.
- We need to have more education about advocacy and more opportunities for volunteering.
- Possibly promoting the work of Austin’s Commission on Seniors can help.

Communication and Information

- Provide other communication options in addition to computer-based.
- Make phone calls and create opportunities for more face-to-face contact. There’s a movement among young people to have more face-to-face communication. Perhaps we can work together on this.
- Sometimes the communication gap is not generational, it’s just a skill-set.
- Eyesight issues come into play for seniors using technology.

- Organizations like Health Occupation Students Association (HOSA), Aging2.0 and Music & Memories partnering with the Department of Aging indicate that the connection and promotion is happening.
- You have to get to know people to find out what their needs are and their preferred mode of communication.
- The City should extend free Wi-Fi across Austin, so we're not beholden to cable companies. College students, millennials and seniors share this issue/concern.
- Young people often become entrepreneurs because they can't get traditional jobs. Some are working with seniors to collect stories and wisdom. Seniors should be encouraged to share their stories.

Community Support and Health Services

- We should go beyond that which is required by ADA.
- Helpful news: Urgent Care (which usually accepts Medicare) recently opened across the street from Wildflower.
- CapMetro provides fairly easy access to hospitals.
- Some Wildflower residents have nurses, physical therapists, veterinarian services, etc., who make "house calls." This is good.
- Dental, hearing and vision are major issues for seniors, because Medicare doesn't cover them.
- Capital City Village has volunteers who accompany seniors to doctor appointments.
- A lot of seniors are moving here and this is a huge transition for them. The families don't know how to help. There should be services specifically for these transplants.
- Reston, Virginia...22090, "a place for everyone" might be a good example for Austin.

About AustinUP

AustinUP (www.austinup.org) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that was formed as a result of the Mayor's Task Force on Aging. Working with local and regional business and civic leaders, non-profit service organizations, boomers, seniors and caregivers, AustinUP is a multi-generational, collaborative effort transforming Austin into an age-progressive, age-innovative community. For more information, contact Teresa Ferguson, teresa@austinup.org or 512-963-3191.