STRATHCONA COUNTY

Seniors' Supports and Services Project

Stakeholder Conversations Full Report
August 2021

Strathcona County is taking efforts to respond to the needs of seniors in the community. Through the combination of a research and public engagement, Strathcona County is working with community to identify what opportunities and services currently exist for seniors, and where the County can provide further supports. The focus of this project is on age-friendly approaches to gathering spaces, mental health, wellbeing, recreation, transit, housing, and volunteerism.

Engagement Results

From June – August 2021, Strathcona County hosted community conversations to collect a more robust understanding of the experiences of seniors in the County. Five stakeholder conversations were held with individuals representing seniors, and senior-serving groups and organizations.

The stakeholder conversations were focused on questions about the current and future needs of seniors, and opportunities for meaningful connection and participation in community. The following questions and probes were asked of participants:

1. In an ideal world, (acknowledging that we're not in an ideal world) what is your vision for what Strathcona County could look like for the variety of need of older adults?
   - What would support you in making this vision happen throughout the years?
2. How can we support seniors to become/remain active participants in community?
   - How can we honor the seniors in our community?
3. When and where do seniors have meaningful connection in the community?
   - Is a seniors-only hub an option?
   - What are the benefits of a seniors-only space?
   - What are barriers to seniors forming meaningful connection in community?
   - How could those barriers be minimized?

This document outlines the key themes and findings from those stakeholder conversations. The comments and conversations did not necessarily follow the structure of the questions; therefore, the conversations are presented by theme rather than by question. These findings will be used to inform the final report to Council at the end of the year.

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Sense of belonging and inclusion for seniors

Theme	Comments
Seniors need to be supported to feel a sense of belonging and inclusion	I am a little intimidated at Millennium Place and I'm a younger, active senior. I'm just not as comfortable there. ...
	Not a place where seniors are just allowed in at this time because it's our quiet time when we don't have the kids here
	We see seniors that are here and don't have many connection; moving to Sherwood Park in later years to be close to family but don't have many connections. Moving into a new community you don't have history and deep relationships.
	Seniors community is disjointed. You belong to different clubs. Club mentality. Having openness and connection would be my vision.
	It doesn't matter your age. Everyone wants to feel needed. Everyone wants to get involved.
	Seniors who are independent and living in their own homes no longer feel they are contributing members to our society, linking seniors provides a feeling of contributing to society and still have a connection
	So you don't feel you're stepping into the room alone...
	People feel comfortable when a friend is with them, that's a point for the seniors' hub
	Friendship - you may not want to share with a stranger that I can't afford something.
	There's a shyness. Hard to join a club. We found instituted a peer buddy system. Everybody gets somebody their age who knows how to operate the machines. The dining rooms. Come and meet my friends. Take that and apply to a bigger community. Almost walk them through the door and find the seat. It's that hurdle – reluctant to join without knowing anyone. It takes that little bit of comfort.
	When you talked about isolation and socialization. A lot of people don't get it until you're at the age when you have to get it. If you're at the working age, that's awesome, but when you're not. Now you're not seeing people everyday at work. You've got a different environment, different activities. When you get older, where do you go to have some type of interaction like that.
	You don't have that constant interaction with people. And the worst is when

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	you go past that, the more insular you become.
	You need a safe place you need a place where you feel safe and comfortable and you get engaged with something you might not have been.
	You need some type of facility where you can do a comfortable drop in with someone from your same age demographic.
	Places where you can be with other people. That place isn't there right now.
	I think it's some place where you can go and opt in or out of activities. That's up to you. If you did a drop in, you're likely going to be comfortable with the people you're around. I feel comfortable sharing. I feel comfortable engaging in whatever activity is it. Playing cards or playing pickleball or whatever it happens to be.
	It's something where you can drop in and try it out and see if you can become engaged with a new activity or with new people.
	I almost feel like a piece is missing to match seniors with seniors.
	Making those connections and once you have those connections. It's all a wheel. Once you get the ball rolling, that's when great things start to happen.
	Seniors looking for connection. I don't think seniors would say that they need a place to go to make friends.
	They won't readily admit that they are lonely, but you will hear through the conversation that that's exactly what they're experiencing.
	They just want something to call their own place, this is where I'm comfortable, this is where my friends come.
	Need people at a facility, whoever it is that's there, if they're volunteers or staff, for them to be wonderful, kind, caring people. For everyone that's going into whatever that facility is for them to feel welcome … and that there's a comfort level for them. Lots of people if they choose to go to a new class or join a new group there's always that unease, about where am I and what do I do next, to make sure it's welcoming
	Informal meetings seem to be wished for . version of meetups. A lot of meetups in Edmonton. Eg: coffee drinking seniors. Wide and specific groups
	Some wanted single senior groups – not just to find a partner, but single alone and I can't break the clicks
	The cultural connections are a tough one. How can we be inclusive of all cultures? Make meaningful connections with all cultures.
	Greeted by your name that sense of belonging increases to much.
	The places (senior centre) are huge and yet so personal and get connected.
Connection points in the community	It's a connected community. We look at isolation – such a driver and determinant of health and outcomes. and loss of social engagement and skills. The connection both socially is important.

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Got to know a lot of people and it's been nice. I also live in a condo building. We used to be able to get together. Haven't for a long time. It was a nice community. People need to talk to each other. To get that community feel.

Gathering and socialization year round is important.

The connection piece. No matter your ability you have a place to belong and participate fully.

We want to get together to just be together.

Seniors felt part of not just senior's community.

In these times, connection is a key thing that they go for. Knowing your neighbours. Having familiar faces you can rely on and trust. Valued by a lot of seniors. Some of that is lost due to COVID. Face to face. Is there space to come just to connect.

Living in the house comes at a cost – isolation.

What is coming up is they are finding that loneliness has been massive. People feel their health is suffering. A lot of them haven't gone anywhere. Lots of anxiety regarding socializing. Social pieces will be very important.

I work with a widows' group. I have noticed that some are afraid to come out. How do you help them feel confident enough to see other people? They are fear driven.

The loneliness portion of COVID is most concerning to me. Certainly, a lot of loneliness. Missing social gatherings.

It's really a place to make those connections to move forward.

There are a lot of seniors who are very involved, and we see a lot of seniors who are isolated and not able to leave their home.

Something that is a concern for us is seniors living in their own home, isolated, invested in doing more for those seniors, those folks that are living in social isolation are being proactively identified would be an ideal state for me.

I would like to have people come gather with different abilities. Have good conversation with social gathering at a good place like the seniors 55+ club.

While seniors have been going through all this COVID, it's the isolation and lack of contact. Seeing someone. Being able to unload.

Dverything is done in silos, churches, individual support groups, seniors are not getting out to meet other seniors in the community with like minds/interests, they are sticking with people they know and going to the silo connections, as a senior myself I want to be challenged and want to still meet new people, I want to get out of my room, I think connection can be increased so much, we need to think out of the box and start working together to build different connections

	For a lot of them, their families live far away. They haven't been able to see their families or their friends. Their husbands are in the care facility and haven't been able to see them. The feelings of overwhelming. It doesn't go away, it just grows. It does no good for your emotional health, and your physical health.
	Once you start building connection, you see someone doing the spin cycle. Or someone to start a walking group with. It all has to start somewhere. It's taking that first step.
Recognition of seniors' value in the community	I want to see greater awareness of the contributions and the needs of seniors now...
	I don't think the overall community has a good sense of what it's like to age, that we're not old and senile and useless and don't have anything to offer anymore, that it's quite the opposite, we're a wealth of information, and a wealth of experience, and the greater community would benefit from knowing that
	A place that honours our history, maybe think more about how to bring seniors into the organization into more, plug in the volunteering between Linking Gen and Volunteer Strathcona, seniors go into classrooms and volunteer with kids, comment from principal on the difference a senior made to a child who was struggling at home ... bringing some history to life
	How do we continue to find and honour meaningful engagement in the broader community, how do we continue to drawn on their wisdom, how do show value in a community that may not recognize value because they are not contributing to the bottom line, how do we as a community show value and wisdom, how your life has so much value and meaning
	The power of story and capturing life wisdom from the past generation
	Seniors are saying we've lived and contributed, we're old. So what. We want to contribute to where we're going right now
	I think a sense of, this community cares about us.
	We try to empower seniors to make independent choices to improve their own wellness and satisfaction. Not us saying this is how we fix this, it's them saying this is how they fix this. This could be an avenue to build on the expertise of seniors
	Seniors have lots to offer.
Solutions to support seniors feeling welcome and included	Maybe meeting with parks and recs, and festival place, and GARC, and figuring out where to bring more of a senior's focus activities, more of a simple space where people can go to the same space and feel comfortable there. Maybe can rent festival place for senior's dances. Places in the community that can be focused more on the older adult group while we go through this process.

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	Look into creative solutions, like partnering to use buses to transport seniors to events.
	Providing the spaces for connection. They want to connect. If you build it, they will come.
	Canada day is just too much. Accessibility issues. How can we create Canada day for them.
	Figuring out ways to reduce some of those barriers so that older adults view they can participate. Not just shoving them into Canada day, but in a way that works for them.
	Family orientated vs inclusive to seniors. A lot of our events are family and children. And seniors being scared to be runover, too loud, finding a bench to sit down
	People start to withdraw. How do people feel safe enough to still participate and still come out and enjoy activities. Inclusion. Mary didn't come to puzzle night because Mary forgot.
	Facilitation of meaningful connections/involvement to larger community.
	Seniors need their own place,
	Interim space now, where seniors can come together and can help inform what a longer term space would look like.
	Seniors need to be heard. Let's not think about them as a bunch of whiners. They want to be happy, and they want to be happy in this community.
Intergenerational spaces	Having a variety of groups involved in the conversation. E.g. multigenerational. To make sure we understand how we can actually interact together.
	There's interest in intergenerational piece. Rewarding for all ages. E.g. young kids, parents the families. Like to see that still in our future. I can also see why seniors only space is important. Some kind of hybrid blend is what I see.
	I would love to see a blend of intergenerational and seniors' space.
	We've heard success stories with a multigenerational community hub approach rather than a seniors hub … example of Linking Generations where a multigenerational approach is working …

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Considerations for supports, services, and spaces to meet seniors' needs

Theme	Sample Comments
Specialized considerations for supports, services, and spaces to meet seniors' needs	They just want to be somewhere that isn't really busy, or really noisy, or really active or difficult to get to.
	One thing that gets in the way is the ability of seniors to communicate. Hearing, vision loss. All those things can get in the way. In a social environment, she can only hear noise.
	Accessibly, whether that means running a bus, or is accessibility means something in the mail. Those are all accessibility issues. Don't make it difficult for people to get into the building.
	Accessibility is an issue … many seniors are still driving … narrow spots can be a challenge … can't open doors so they can swing body out safely and not risk a fall or whacking the door next to them … forget a walker … need Costco sized parking stalls
	A lot of times they're not going to come out and say 'look I don't understand what you're saying' they're just going to look at you dumbfounded. A lot of times someone with a hearing issue isn't going to say that.
	Accessibly needs to be really incorporated into any facility that's meant for seniors and right now it's not.
	It's a challenge to go to loud spaces, isolating when you can't hear/participate, need to accommodate those invisible disabilities
	At Millennium Place someone tried to organize a coffee place but the noise level is extremely high throughout the building … as we grow older, vision, hearing go … need different eyes on services …
	Technology can be an enabler and obstacle. Always have face to face important. Provide training for technology or providing services that can help them.
	Transportation is key and key to building social connections.
	Not all are tech savvy. How do we get information out to those who do not use computers. Is there a number they can call?
	We can create activities, and assume we are doing the right thing. We need to keep in mind some barriers – hearing, sight, mobility, these limit access to services. We need to take these things into consideration. How do we provide both access and knowledge to take advantage of these situations?
	Visible and invisible disabilities. E.g. Mobility is visible, memory loss, pain, hearing are invisible. Sometimes hearing aids make things worse. They may only catch a few words. Need to speak slowly and clearly.

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	My ideal vision is that seniors are in a different category. They have different abilities and flexibility.
	I don't want the vision of just playing cards. Have more vision of facilities like a literacy program. Addressing the mental health, seniors adult abuse.
	Some sort of training education for seniors. Sometimes also may not be ashamed to tell you. Some sort of consciousness so they can tell you. Like FCSS. Where they can confide privacy issues.
	Access is a huge issue. How do people get access? To things like shopping, medical and recreation services.
	A lot of seniors are stuck in their homes because they can't afford to go anywhere else
	Ways to encourage more healthy aging opportunities, how are we making sure people are getting access to appropriate services
	From a transit perspective, worked really hard to be 100% accessible but our community is not, example Aspen and Sherwood drive, difficult to bring people in with a bigger vehicle and turn a bus around. In a perfect world I would like to see our community being 100% accessible too.
	Then we have those in the middle from 75-85. Some are on computer but they're starting to face barriers because they don't know how to use technology. Then we have the older seniors who are completely reliant on the newspaper and phone calls. Of course we all know once you start making a phone call, there are so many barriers. By the time they finish they are exasperated they feel left behind.
	Access that seniors would have. One thing where we fail. Seniors quite often don't have the technology to access what is presently being put out on websites. Vast majority of seniors - don't assume that seniors are tech savvy. Many seniors don't have a cell phone.
	Varied info – from tech to paper. Make sure we are reaching different learning styles
	Isolated. Nervous. Transportation. Sound.
	Seniors getting the sense that the computer has value. We're leaving some of them behind.
Centralized point of services and supports	Things are scattered all over here … not a central meeting place for people to go
	Long-term you need a place for seniors to come … seniors centres are hubs, active, vibrant …
	The County does a good job of offer programs for seniors but they are all over the place, we need like city of Edmonton with small/large seniors centres, the idea of a Hub, which I think is a great idea.
	I'd like to see us more of a hub so people can come here [rural hall] for somethings. Then a group can go into Sherwood park and play pickleball and yoga or whatever. They can use us as a bus stop and go as a group together.
	Coming together to share knowledge, share what works, for someone to find it in one spot,

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	Look at lessoned and value in hub one place where everything can be. What if we had one place and one stop shop it would be a lot easier. People are phone us and asking about long-term care – there isn't just a place we can go and we all become those little resources centre.
	Vision for a single place. It's not just recreation. There's a whole bunch of programs and services and comradery that happens in those facilities. And you really don't understand that until you go to one or you're in that environment where you're not interacting with your colleagues every day.
Affordability as a barrier	The financial repercussions of these opportunities
	Cost
	Sherwood Park generally has a high-income level, but seniors may be on fixed incomes … access to programs is tied to how much disposable income a senior has … if you have to pay for parking, or pay for transportation to get there, do you have enough left for registration fees
	I'm more concerned about the people who can't' afford to get there and buy a membership and take a taxi to get there. I think the well-off seniors with means, seniors who are very active, they need a place to go. But I'm kind of thinking about that other group. They've always sort of been left behind and they will continue to be left behind. In a hub, whether it's a refurbish or new construction. Very clear programming to reach out to people to make sure that they're not left behind.
Connection and accessibility for rural residents	Seniors in the rural areas are having challenges. If its in town then they still can't connect. We need to hit those rural areas and have shuttles and access for rural folks. I've heard they are still attached to the paper copy. Mixed on emails. Not homogenous approach. Variety of ways to approach.
	Sometimes there's an event they are interest if it happens in rural. Its so difficult getting to rural areas. Not access to those event so they become separate entities. Limitations from mobility bus.
	Rural seniors and urban seniors may face different challenges. Our municipality is big. Transportation can be challenging.
	Importance of transportation, especially for seniors living in rural areas. Supports physical and mental health.
	Location of centres are accessible and are localized, we can't forget SC is a large area, prioritizing to make locations as highly accessible as possible so physical location is not a barrier, coordinate transportation
	What I'm running into out here [rural], everything is online. There's all kind of things online. We have a whole bunch of seniors who don't do online. So they aren't getting that information.
	It did come up for a Senior only facility, needs to be accessible transit wise, and easy to get to and get around. Needs to be accessible to rural areas as well.
	We drive, we have to drive because that's the only way we can get anywhere. What happens out here, as soon as you don't feel comfortable driving anymore, you move into a facility somewhere else
Gathering spaces to be with and connect with	Important for seniors to interact with their peers for mental wellbeing … critical to health and wellbeing

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people your own age	A place where you can start to form relationships and then can build out from that.
	Creating flexible space that allows community to get to know each other. No silos. Ideas of anybody coming to a community space and being able to do their wellbeing.
	We want to go to someplace where we can meet with people of our own age
Connecting with people with common interests	When they can connect with like interests. You can't put all seniors in the same bag. There's lots that have different interests …. They want to find people they can connect with that have the same interests as them, maybe it's a monthly dance, common ground that they can connect with others who have the same background or vision or interests … yet still open to new experiences.
	Doing things together when you have a common interest, like pickleball, golfing … I think about Silver Birch, so many great spaces to just be, you can make friendships in a common area.
	Widows group – because they have a common experience, they have a lot of support for one another.
	One thing we forget, when seniors talk to seniors, they can share common memories. Some family members can't relate to these stories.

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Coordination of information and services

Theme	Sample Comments
Coordination of information	Where can I go in the community? Its education and getting out to key leaders.
	Want to see seniors as full and active participants. Getting information. How do I get info online? It's confusing. How do I navigate the noise from what's online? Awareness of what's available and then figuring out how to get there.
	Sounds like it is hard to get that information. Are you playing a facilitator/connector role with families? Yes. It is definitely an important piece of the process.
	Not all are tech savvy. How do we get information out to those who do not use computers? Is there a number they can call?
	Getting information out. Conversation about silos within different organizations. Seniors Find something they like, and stay within that bubble.
	How can we spread out and interact with different cohorts?
	Just being in facilities, not just seniors asking about finding services. People are looking for things for their parents, neighbours. What can we set up in advance? What is available outdoors, cultural /arts opportunities? Lots of people want clarity on what resources are available.
	Critical to upgrade the website so it is dedicated to seniors, everything together/need to know what else there is, they have little patience in terms of wanting all the information.
	It was challenging to find all of the information we needed, having a website with quick lings where everything is in one place
	We have to come up with a solution where they can call one number. Yes there are places. FCS plays a big role. But there has to be enough information accessible.
	More communication. I'd love to see a seniors' website that we can all contribute to and share with each other. Share information with each other.
	We need an increased awareness of programs and services in the community - you don't know what you don't know, once you know that can change your perspective, and your desire to participate increases ...
	Where do seniors get their information on a reliable basis ... different places

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	have different info, there isn't one place to call
	A lot of things are already happening, but the problem is access.
	Lack of access to information. Strathcona website. Partnering agencies. Great. However the seniors that I spoke do most did not have access to online.
	Strikes me that we need a way for all the seniors centres to communicate and be on the same page. So that there is a program at one, the other should know about it
	If there is programming that's done by the County, it should be well advertised to the seniors. Perhaps the website isn't' enough. I don't look at the website to see what programming is available.
	But I also don't know where to go. I've even on the County website but I don't know how to navigate it so I just don't bother.
System coordination	Having these activities to cross and interact with each other, lots of shared opportunities and knowledge. We aren't tapping into enough. The more I get involved with different groups it sparks and we cross connect. These types of gatherings and sharing's and building facilities and resources. I understand financial challenges. The need is now but we take too long so in the meantime share resources.
	Similar to the Social framework this is a good way to connect – initial group that find value in connecting. I know we started pre-COVID but we could reactivate to connect.
	There needs to be a helping hand. Can't be left to themselves. Has to be coordinated programming. It's a matter or someone starting that work and helping them to make the connections.
Vision, plan, and action moving forward	To have an actual vision and plan, an action plan, for moving forward
	Council needs to put it in words and set a timeline, not just say it and forget it.
	Needs to be a phase where there's an open and honest dialogue between the County and seniors about the implications, consequences, costs of the ideas of the hub proposal
	Make sure it aligns with the community as a whole because they have to support it as well because they're paying a cost as well … to try and get consensus and alignment with all stakeholders at every level and to start talking about some of those more challenging conversations of those next steps and what it actually means … the implications and considerations of what opening a large community hub might present …
	A more open and transparent dialogue, a back and forth conversation that will need to happen.
	Need to land on a pragmatic solution and engage the community in the conversation. There's a case to be made, but we need to be pragmatic

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	Look at Sherwood park. Family orientated. As we are making that shift to being more seniors. Making that mindshift to incorporate seniors in all that we do. E.g. Canada day activities are family orientated. We missed that piece. If you are part of our community. Inclusive to them.
	Seniors will age too, aging will change the demands for the centre ... how do you keep it relevant ... it's exciting to not just look at now but to look to the future.
	Well it's all very fine to create a hub, but most people can't stand each other, so what are we going to do about that? It's about programming to do the outreach to those seniors. Just to create the space won't be enough. It has to be managed properly.
	Needs to be sustainability, sustainability has to be in there
Collaboration and sharing resources	Looking at what's there already. We've got so many resources how do we link them together as a seniors I know what they are and what available. Not wanting to recreate the wheel.
	Collaboration and resources and share them
	I guess in Camrose they have "get to know day" – bus and what if we built on that. You get to know the county and learn what the services and programs are. A way to show what we have in the county and what exists.
	From and outreach point of view, yes. Can people access amenities and pass info on to seniors. Friends as connectors.
	Awareness. Learning what is happening in our community.
	How do we have a centralized location, information resources? We have been running a program with the Alzheimer's society, and it is phenomenal, but how do we let people know about it? We can run it in multiple places.
	What else are we missing that is not well known? How do we get the information to everyone? Community understanding of the resources available. Not just to seniors
	They get possessive of the services they accessed because they don't want it to go away.
	And information sharing, which they aren't very good at doing.

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Supports to age in your own community

Theme	Comments
Seniors aging in their own homes and community	Look at the determinants of aging, how do we meet the physical, mental, social needs of older adults to stay independent and be able to live in their own homes longer
	By the time people need support their financial or health situation is dire, they could have been supported proactively, not aging as well as they could be – an earlier intervention could have kept them in their homes longer
	Currently looking into a provincial program to help seniors stay in their own homes. Those kinds of these things are all of the ways we can do a better job all the way around of helping our seniors.
Providing caregiver support	Supporting caregivers in an appropriate way and ensuring caregivers are getting their needs met in a way that is respectful of their needs.
	In the proactive approach it is often the caregivers who need that extra help having to do with transitions from when you can drive to when you can't, not mobile enough to be in our house anymore, hearing well.
	Caregiver piece – adult children.
	Caregiver support is huge. There was definitely burnout. Need to take care of caregivers.
	The important role that family members play in helping seniors thrive. The fact that by supporting family caregivers, we are actually supporting seniors. Allows for family members to focus on visiting, not caretaking.
	It's [COVID] made it more of an issue. It's increased. Happy to do it. Because I believe grandparents have a role to play with their families. That's been hard on me.

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What's Next?

The analysis of these conversations, as well as the results from the Seniors' Supports and Services Survey, will be used to inform the final report to Council at the end of 2021.

For the full list of responses, see the Full What We Heard Report.

Find more information about seniors supports and services at strathcona.ca/seniors

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