

**Jeffco Strategic Plan for Aging Well – “Focus Group” Discussion  
Jefferson County Council on Aging Meeting, March 12 2009**

The focus group discussion began at 3:20 p.m. – leaving 40 minutes remaining in the meeting - so the questions to be asked were modified, as was the amount of time allotted per question. Three minutes were allotted to each discussion question. Individual participants were asked to draw from a box the names of the topics to be addressed. Participants were asked to stay for 10 additional minutes – to 4:10 – so every Work Group topic could be addressed. The group was told that the discussion was being recorded. Everyone was invited to participate and provide their thoughts and input into the process. Due to time constraints, many additional questions on “trends” and “accessing/finding services” will be put into an online survey (e.g., Survey Monkey) that JCCoA members can respond to – or it will be available in other formats for people to complete. Work Group Topics are described below in the order in which they were addressed.

## **Transportation/Mobility**

**What can Jefferson County do to provide better transportation/mobility for seniors who continue to use their own vehicles?**

### **Responses/Input**

- FasTracks needs to be a priority because even if seniors drive they may not care to drive into an urban area like Denver – lots of people agreed on that idea
- Better and larger signage
- Better widespread promotion of the AARP driving courses
- Accessible parking – current handicapped parking spaces, lots of people park there who shouldn’t and there is a lack of enforcement
- Improve signs especially at every major intersection – need to be large and clearly marked because confusing for people turning left – specific examples were given of problem signage
- Better roadway markings/lines needed. Suggested one phone number citizens can call to report problem road lines, signs, etc. – like pot hole reporting
- Vehicle assessments specially designed for seniors – make sure people’s cars are safe to drive – mechanics would do this – free or low cost is ideal
- Encourage carpooling among seniors
- Publicize and utilize computer assessments of your driving – you may learn you have some issues
- Require driving tests for people starting at age 80 – lots of discussion on this one – many would fight this age-based requirement – someone said law already requires drivers over 66 to take a test

Focus Group facilitated and summarized by S.D. Bozinovski

**What can Jefferson County do to provide better transportation/mobility for seniors who are unable or do not wish to use their private vehicles?**

**Responses/Input**

- Bring back the RTD Call-n-Ride – Arvada lost the program due to lack of funding – was never available for everyone living in Jeffco – someone said it wasn't well-used – RTD was looking for higher group ridership – it was mostly individuals who used it – minimal number of riders needed was never attained in Jeffco
- Give Seniors' Resource Center more money for transportation
- Provide more funding overall for senior transportation services in Jeffco
- Give companies or hospitals awards/grants for providing transportation for their clients, employees, etc.
- Re: walking – improve time at all crosswalks to allow older people to walk across the street
- Have more enforcement of “turning vehicles yield to pedestrians” – those making right turns often hit seniors
- Increase education of seniors who walk - to wear reflective clothing when they're walking – especially where there are no sidewalks – don't talk and walk at same time
- Enhance and expand the volunteer driver program – seek more grants from foundations, county, others
- Increase community awareness of the Share-a-Ride type programs – also, increase neighbors helping neighbors – people should think of each other more

**Basic Needs – Edie Richey told the group basic needs involves access to services, information & referral, safety, income and financial support, food and clothing, and legal services.**

**As you get older, what kinds of things do you want your community to do so you can maintain your independence for as long as possible?**

**Responses/Input**

- Making the roads safer so people can drive
- There are some neighbors helping neighbors already happening – but need to expand options available for personal care
- Increase and expand emergency funds for older adults (and not just for the homeless) – most available emergency funds are designated for women and children
- More senior high rise food banks that bring food TO the buildings
- Increase availability and funding for reasonably-priced home maintenance for seniors such as cleaning gutters, snow removal
- More volunteers needed to assist seniors with these kinds of home maintenance needs

## What contributes to your personal sense of safety?

### Responses/Input

- Lighting, lighting, lighting – should meet fine line between not offending neighbors while keeping people safe, in public parking lots, at bus stops, lack of lighting may be due to existing codes as well as lack of money – not in my back yard mentality also
- Improve ability of seniors to contact someone quickly if help is needed - some buy monitoring services – many cannot afford
- Need Senior Liaison in each city police department – someone who concentrates on senior communities – now only Arvada has this within Jeffco
- Provide education and do in-home assessments on fall prevention (both inside and outside of home – sidewalks, lighting, etc) – could county fund? Or could county work with others (e.g., West Metro, foundations, DRCOG) to develop grants to do home safety

**Housing – Donna Mullins explained the group is focusing primarily on identifying gaps in kinds of housing available for seniors in Jeffco such as Medicaid-funded, affordable housing, subsidized independent, etc.**

## How do you think the increased aging population will impact the housing market?

### Responses/Input

- As older population increases, demand will escalate for variety of senior housing options
- There will be more wait lists
- Housing that seniors need is highly individual – need something for all income levels, abilities and need levels, desire to maintain aspects of home – like a yard, etc.
- Will need more comfortable places for seniors to live that do not include all of the chores seniors are unable or no longer want to do
- Affordable is a major part of this
- Need to build more ranch-style, one floor homes that are truly accessible - no steps anywhere
- Bathrooms and kitchens truly accessible – wider, walk-in showers, use Universal Design guidelines
- Increase awareness that making homes ADA, or Universal Design during construction is much cheaper than doing it later on
- Request to look at those who make too much to qualify for any housing subsidies, but who still have trouble affording housing – mid-level incomes
- Two story homes will decline in value while ranch homes will increase in value?
- Property tax revenue may decrease for county as houses age resulting in less local funding for subsidized senior housing in coming years?
- Municipal codes need to be reviewed and revised taking account of the aging of the population

**What do you think the biggest issue/problem in the affordable senior housing market will be in the next fifteen years?**

**Responses/Input**

- Jeffco will need lots more affordable, low-cost, no maintenance apartments and living units for seniors. Jefferson County Development Corporation Advisory Committee has grants for people based on their income. Committee has more appeals to build senior housing than it knows what to do with
- Economy has negatively affected ability of people to purchase homes, and investments have declined significantly
- When seniors sell, they might not be able to buy any appropriate replacement housing
- People who thought reverse mortgages would help will lose out financially due to future home appraisal levels?
- There will be insufficient numbers of affordable living units for seniors given the expected demand – even now, demand exceeds supply & availability
- Definition of “affordable” has changed and will change again in the future
- Seniors who can no longer take care of a big house won’t be able to find an affordable alternative to that big house
- Could housing be made more “adaptable” to change along with its dwellers as they age? For example – some independent buildings need to adapt to become assisted living perhaps as their residents age in place. Create more NORCs? Does it make sense for this community adaptation to take place? Can buildings and staff handle it?
- Jeffco needs low-cost secured units for people with dementia. There is no assisted living that accepts Medicaid for people with dementia in Jeffco. Only one facility like this exists in the entire Metro area at present and it is considering closing. Southern Jeffco particularly needs this type of facility.

**Social & Civic Engagement – Nancy Wellnitz told the group they are trying to promote community connectedness, including volunteering, employment, education, & personal connectedness.**

**Upon retiring, do you plan to volunteer, and if so, what types of opportunities would bring you the most satisfaction?**

**Responses/Input**

- Some expressed amazement at how contented lots of seniors appear to be doing nothing but sitting at home complaining about what is going on
- No matter what efforts are made – agreement that some people won’t get involved in any way – but available opportunities can be better publicized
- Evergreen area has an incredible number of great volunteers of all ages – some days more than are needed

- Training for volunteers must be comprehensive and well done – a real volunteer program needs to exist. Give volunteers all tools they need – including good supervision
- Need to place volunteers in areas in which they have some skills and enjoy
- Appears that volunteers are receiving greater recognition now – more appreciation is being shown
- Volunteers will be asking for more professional types of volunteer opportunities such as web design – this might be relevant more to certain geographic areas within Jeffco
- Encourage older people to learn to use the electronic technology available. Bringing people up to speed on computer technology will help with community and civic engagement

**If you have to work 10 years longer than you expected, what types of things would you look for in a job to make it more tolerable?**

**Responses/Input**

- Less stress – want more peace and satisfaction, less struggle to climb to the top – focus is not on building your resume any more
- Want to feel that we are contributing something (to the community, to the organization, etc.) by what we're doing – whether volunteering or working
- Others don't mind the stress - but need lots of flexibility during the week and when the day begins and ends (coming & going to work) – ideally available for all ages of workers – more flexibility would help workers regardless of age
- Available and affordable transportation to the job – so don't have to deal with driving to get there – regardless of time of day needed
- Reduced number of expected work hours per week to a more reasonable level – no longer want to work 60 hours per week
- Take advantage of the wisdom that older people have
- Show appreciation by offering more healthcare and other benefits
- Available carpooling to work
- Need federal policy changes to allow more non-taxable Social Security earnings for older people – huge issue for older people wanting to/needing to work

**Physical and Mental Health – Colleen Shemesh described some of the gaps and barriers in this area including accessing medications & medical care, lack of physicians accepting Medicare-Medicaid patients, wait lines to get into see Specialists, people using ER rather than having to wait too long to see their Primary Care doctor, palliative care, behavioral health care-related, etc.**

**How do you define physical and mental health?**

**Responses/Input**

- “I can do what I want to do, whatever that is.” Lots of agreement with that statement
- Choice
- “You’re able to adapt – it doesn’t get better – you just have to learn more skills of adapting so you can be as functional as possible.”
- People with medical backgrounds define it as related to a person’s vital signs – your heart is not building up plaque, etc. So many preventive tests are now available to see the reality of a person’s physical and mental health.
- Self-motivation to take care of yourself
- Knowing about your family history so you can take appropriate steps to be healthy
- “To do what you want to, when you want to do it.”
- “You do things to promote your own health.” “Now that you have your statistics (on heart rate, cholesterol, etc.) what are you going to do about it?”
- Expand health promotion to home bound seniors to get them moving – as it can make a big difference in people’s health and lives.

**What are the gaps or lack of services you see in your community for physical and mental health?**

**Responses/Input**

- Poor communication and coordination resulting from having too many different doctors, pharmacies, tests, etc., seeing one patient and not sharing information about the individual’s care. Some health care companies (e.g., Kaiser, Secure Horizons, Senior Care of Colorado, etc.) and non-profits (e.g., SRC) are attempting to do better care coordination. With more funding in the future, more care coordination will be needed and will undoubtedly occur.
- “Give us options rather than having the insurance companies tell us how to do it.” Current perception is that most health insurance companies focus on quantity rather than quality. Customer is more interested in quality. Choice is critical for us.
- Fewer and fewer doctors are willing to take new Medicare patients. Most think the reimbursement rates under Medicare are too low. And Colorado is one the lowest.

**Caregiving and Supportive Services – Dianne Hitchingham said this group is looking at what do caregivers need - people who are younger caring for people who are older, as well as seniors caring for younger people who are disabled – it goes both ways.**

**What support services do caregivers in Jefferson County need most, that they aren't getting (or getting enough of) now?**

**Responses/Input**

- Respite care, respite programs, affordable respite care
- Need more overnight respite care (SRC has done in past) so caregiver can get a break
- SRC closed overnight respite care due to inadequate reimbursements
- Nursing Homes and Assisted Livings might offer overnight respite – but it is usually very expensive
- Increase availability in Jeffco of Red Cross's 9-module training for caregivers
- Need increased publicity of programs that are available to help caregivers
- Consumers don't educate themselves – we're not good shoppers – need more about what they might need and where to get it – way before the crisis hits – discussion re: why do people wait? They shop around and compare cars, houses, electronics, but not on care and services!
- Most employers don't provide the flexible scheduling caregivers need – some in Jeffco do
- Need safe volunteer exchange program – bartering?

**Are there areas of Jefferson County that you feel are lacking caregiver support and services?**

**Responses/Input**

- Someone stated – “There are lots of things being offered – but we have to drag people into stuff.”
- Mountainous areas – like Coal Creek Canyon for example – there is nothing in the way of senior services. Jeffco-Gilpin-Boulder county lines – causes problems with 3 counties in one canyon. A lot of it is not very accessible. Service providers will only go to a certain limited area. Pockets exist (in Golden Gate Canyon, Eldorado, Coal Creek Canyon) that just aren't served at all
- Southwest Jefferson County – including some rural areas – where access to senior services is limited
- Providers have to decide whether to help 8 people in the urban-suburban areas or 1 person in the mountains or rural areas for the same cost
- There was discussion about whether residents should expect the same level of services regardless of where they choose to live in the county. The group did not agree fully on the answer to this question. Some residents will believe all taxpayers should get services regardless of where they live or how much it will cost. Landowners in these areas pay lots of taxes. Some suggested charging those who live in remote, difficult-to-access areas more for services – sliding fees perhaps