

Report of the Senior Study Committee

May 16, 2019

Prepared by Jane Knodell, Chair of Senior Study Committee

I. Background

The Senior Study Committee (SSC) was created by a resolution of the City Council relating to “Establishment of a Heineberg Community Senior Study Committee”, adopted on August 27, 2018. SSC was charged with “. . . reviewing and making recommendations regarding the long-term provision of senior services that reflect the City’s commitment to meeting the needs of an aging population in a cost-effective way” . . .and with “. . . reviewing and making recommendations regarding the long-term financial sustainability of the Heineberg Community Senior Center that reflect the City’s commitment to meeting the needs of an aging population in a cost-effective way.” The SSC has completed its work and now submits this final report with recommendations to the City Council and Administration, as directed by the Resolution.

The members of the SSC were: City Councilor Jane Knodell (Chair); City Councilor Dave Hartnett; Jesse Bridges, United Way; Sarah Carter, Burlington Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront (BPRW); Kirby Dunn, HomeShare Vermont; Beth Hammond, Heineberg Community Senior Center; Gail Moreau, Heineberg Community Senior Center; Gary Rogers, BPRW; and Kelly Stoddard Poor, AARP. Cameron Segal, at LivingWell, attended many meetings and actively contributed to our work.

The SSC met six times, on November 5, 2019, November 28, 2018, December 12, 2018, January 16, 2019, February 20, 2019, and May 9, 2019. The work of the SSC was conducted in compliance with the requirements of the Open Meeting and Public Records laws. Three of these meetings were held at the Champlain Senior Center (located at the Old North End Community Center) and three at the Heineberg Community Senior Center, allowing us to benefit from the input and feedback from Senior Center participants. Before finalizing our recommendations, we held a meeting with Heineberg Community Senior Center participants and a meeting with Champlain Senior Center participants (on March 19, 2019 and March 20, 2019 respectively). The SSC appreciates the able staff support of Candice Holbrook, BPRW, and the cooperation and assistance of the BPRW leadership team.

The SSC’s recommendations are presented below, in the two categories included in our charge.

2. Recommendations regarding the long-term financial sustainability of the Heineberg Community Senior Center

The Heineberg Community Senior Center is currently not on a financially sustainable footing after losing grant income. It has continued operating in FY19 (July 1 2018-June 30 2019) by drawing down a savings account by \$24,138 and with a \$58,000 one-time grant from the City of Burlington. However, it is a flourishing and growing Center with over 500 aging Burlington residents taking advantage of its free and donation-based meals, programming, and services.

The SSC approached this task by first educating itself about the the programs, budgets, and operations of the Heineberg Community Senior Center and the Champlain Senior Center, currently operated by the City of Burlington's Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront Department. We concluded that there would be significant benefits to deeper coordination and consolidation of efforts between the two Centers in terms of sustaining programs for older Burlington residents in the New North End, and enhancing such programs citywide. We want to stress that while this recommendation focuses on the sustainability of the Heineberg Community Senior Center, it includes elements that benefit older residents throughout the city, thereby also addressing the broader charge to the SSC.

We recommend that the City of Burlington enter into a partnership with the Heineberg Community Senior Center to create two "campuses" for senior programming in the City of Burlington, one at the Champlain Senior Center and one at the Heineberg Community Senior Center. The key elements in this partnership, which would need to be further defined and specified in a memorandum of understanding between the two parties, are:

1. The Burlington Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront Department would manage the operations of the Heineberg Community Senior Center. One new limited-service FT Program Supervisor City position would be created at the Heineberg "campus." In addition, there would be a Seasonal/Temp Support position (15 hours/week). These staff would work with the staff at the Champlain "campus" to coordinate programs and services at the two campuses. They would also look beyond the walls of the two centers to expand senior services and resources throughout Burlington.
2. BPRW will assume responsibility for minor building and grounds maintenance, and custodial services. As the staff would be City of Burlington employees and run through BPRW, all payroll, accounts, receivable/accounts payable, taxes, and insurance would be run through the Clerk/Treasurer's office, as with all other Recreation programming.
3. The Chittenden County Senior Citizens Alliance (which is the legal entity that owns the building at 14 Heineberg Road) would maintain insurance coverage for the building, would continue taking responsibility for major building upkeep, and will to the best of its ability contribute funds toward the operations of the Heineberg Community Senior Center and towards enhancing access to senior programming citywide.
4. BPRW will gain use of 14 Heineberg Road outside of Senior Center hours (that is, outside of Monday-Thursday 10 am -3 pm). BPRW will be able to earn rental income from these uses, with the understanding that net proceeds will be directed toward operations of the Heineberg Center.

Please see Appendix I for a proposed Heineberg Community Senior Center budgets for FY20-FY22 (it also contains the actual FY19 budget). This budget proposal was developed by the Heineberg Community Senior Center members of the SSC and BPRW leadership and brought to the Senior Study Committee for its consideration.

Under this budget proposal, Heineberg Community Senior Center continues to operate in FY 20, FY21, and FY22 with:

- an on-going (not one-time) commitment of \$58,000 from the City of Burlington
- a continued draw-down of Heineberg’s saving account of \$26,731 in FY20, \$22,974 in FY21, and \$21,357 in FY22
- building space rental income
- additional fund-raising

There will be a yearly check-in between the parties about progress and plans moving forward. By creating limited service and seasonal positions, both parties retain flexibility and are able to fine-tune the partnership. Building rental income may be able to contribute more to financial sustainability than in the proposed budget, but this will only be known over time.

The Senior Study Committee voted to recommend this budget proposal to the City Council and Administration, with one amendment: that the City fund an additional \$26,731 for FY20 (additional beyond \$58,000), in place of the draw-down from the Heineberg Senior Community Center’s savings account.

3. Recommendations regarding the long-term provision of senior services

The SSC recommends the creation of a Burlington Council on Aging.

The rationale:

Demographic trends tell us that the number of Burlington residents over the age of 60 will grow steadily over coming decades. Community aspects such as housing, neighborhood design and transportation services must be considered when planning for older adults. A Council on Aging will raise awareness of the needs of this diverse group, and bring greater focus to and coordination of services and programs for older residents of Burlington, all of which will improve their quality of life and health, and reduce social isolation. The ultimate goal of this Council would be to allow all older Burlingtonians who want to age in place, to do so successfully.

Makeup of a Council on Aging

Unlike the commissions and boards of city government, whose members are appointed by elected officials and which are included in the city charter, we propose a Council made up of older residents and representatives of entities in Burlington that serve older residents. We leave it to the City Council and Administration to determine the optimal size of the Council on Aging, should our recommendation be accepted. We suggest that the following individuals and organizations be considered as members of the Council or resources for the Council:

- Residents of Burlington over the age of 60
- AARP
- HomeShare Vermont
- Cathedral Square and SASH
- Association of Africans Living in VT
- Chittenden Food Shelf
- State Health Department (someone with a nutrition and food background)

UVMMC/ Emergency Responders/VNA
Fletcher Free Library
YMCA
UVM Center on Aging
NPAs
Planner from the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission
GMT
BPRW staff
AgeWell VT
United Way
Vermont Center for Independent Living
Howard Center

Operations of a Council on Aging:

The Council would draw largely on the volunteer time of its members. It will require a modest “match” from the City in the form of part-time staff support and a meeting place.

The Council would be self-organizing and self-directing, and would bring forward recommendations to achieve the goals of the Council. The Council would also respond to requests from Burlington city government. The Senior Study Committee believes a good issue for early focus is housing: meeting the unmet demand for senior housing at different levels of affordability and support services in Burlington.

Objectives of a Council on Aging:

- Gain a better understanding of and keep City Council and the Mayor’s Office informed on the needs and gaps in services for residents who are 50 years of age and older in our community.
- Foster greater understanding of the diverse needs of older adults, encourage greater participation in community issues among older adults, and find effective ways to communicate and inform older residents about programs, services and resources.
- Advocate for an age-friendly/livable community for all ages and for opportunities that actively engage older residents.