



May 23, 2019

Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Room 201"
901 N. 9th St.
Milwaukee, WI 53233

Honorable County Supervisors:

We are writing to express our great concern regarding the Wisconsin Policy Forum's recently published study, "Young at Heart: Exploring the Future of Senior Centers in Milwaukee County."

We certainly support the Milwaukee County Department on Aging's efforts to regularly reassess senior centers' operation, programming, engagement, and outcomes. Like other community investments, senior centers should be held accountable to quality standards and performance outcomes. However, this study does not focus on these well-accepted aspects of best practice analysis.

Instead, the issue of building cost is immediately conflated with the need for senior centers. The report indicates that each of the five County-owned senior centers were classified as being in good condition relative to short-term needs but then, the report startlingly indicates that all of them will have to be replaced by 2022, a mere three years from now. We wonder how buildings that needed repairs will go to requiring full replacement in such a short time period.

That said, the rest of the report is then layered on the building question. The entire report is set in the context that a full \$24 million will be required by 2022 to replace the apparently decrepit and dangerous senior centers currently being used by thousands of Milwaukee's older adults every day. We think this huge number intentionally sets the stage for the centers' dismantling.

A careful analysis of the senior centers in Milwaukee requires a detailed examination of demographic trends (there is some mention of census data but no in-depth analysis), a careful review of engagement patterns over the past 10-20 years (where has membership increased/declined and why), a discussion of programming offered vis a vis the characteristics of the aging population (what efforts have been made to provide dynamic and interesting programming), and a hard look at community partnerships (how have the senior centers been used to co-locate services provided by non-profit and other organizations).

Most importantly, a report basically sounding the death knell for senior centers absolutely must solicit the extensive and in-depth views of seniors, both those served by the centers and those in the community who are not yet users. An analysis would also need to include a review of accessibility of services; one of our members seeking to join a senior center could find no mechanism online for obtaining membership or class registration



information. One wonders if lack of access to information may play a major role in the declining numbers cited in the report.

The League of Progressive Seniors urges the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors to slow down decision-making regarding the future of the senior centers and to not allow the urgency of the annual budget process to drive decisions which could have lifetime consequences for thousands of seniors.

We fear that a rush to judgement is underway and that this report fuels the conclusion that the senior centers are too expensive to operate. We urge the County Board to strongly consider the formation of an impartial, objective, and collaborative work group to thoroughly examine the senior centers' historic and future role as resources for Milwaukee's growing older adult population. A more thoughtful and inclusive process would give the senior centers and their constituents the careful attention they deserve.

Sincerely,

League of Progressive Seniors

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