

## CAFE: The Center for Age-Friendly Excellence

*Advancing Livable Communities for all Generations*



### East Palo Alto Town Hall Meeting Older Adult Residents Age 55+ September 4, 2024 at 1:30 – 3:00 pm

Total Participants: 42 (29 women, 13 men)

English speaking: 14 (10, 4)

Spanish speaking: 28 (19, 9)

East Palo Alto Family YMCA

Facilitator, English speaking participants: Cynthia Nakayama

Notetaker (English - 2) CAFE: Vicki Cormack, Cynthia Nakayama

Leading Spanish speaking participants: Ruben Abrica, City Councilman

Notetakers (Spanish - 4): Ruben Abrica, City Councilman

Shiri Klima, Assistant City Manager

Erika Macías-Vázquez, Age-Friendly Task Force Member

Carlos Romero, City Councilman

### **Communication and Information**

#### **Unmet Needs:**

- **Promotion and Awareness:** There is a lack of awareness and promotion of events, programs, resources, and services for older adults, especially those from culturally diverse backgrounds. Many are unsure where to find this information.
- **Technology and Digital Literacy:** Older adults need training on how to use smartphones and other technologies. This training should be offered in multiple languages.
  - Training should include how to use cell phones for emergency notifications.

## Potential Solutions:

- **Information Dissemination:** Implement multiple methods for disseminating information, both online and in hard copy, using large fonts and multiple languages. Consider diverse formats such as: Television, kiosks, bulletin boards, and flyers distributed at senior-friendly locations.
  - Ensure information is available in all major languages (e.g., English, Spanish, Chinese Mandarin, Tongan)
  - For instance, the Senior Center currently prints materials in English and Spanish but could boost engagement by including Mandarin.
  - City notifications may be available in multiple languages, but other agencies should adopt this practice consistently.
- **Technology Training:** Provide education and training for seniors on how to use smartphones and basic technology. Offer intergenerational sessions where younger people assist older adults in navigating electronic devices and online services like on-demand transportation.
  - Provide access to computers for those who don't have them and offer training for interested individuals.
  - Ensure that technical training is delivered in comfortable settings, such as seniors' homes, to encourage participation.
- **Centralized Webpage for Seniors:** Develop a dedicated webpage for older adults that consolidates links to relevant resources, services, activities, and age-friendly information.
  - Use platforms like Facebook to share information broadly with the community.
- **Senior Information Hub:** Create a dedicated Senior Information Center, available 24/7, or establish a Central Office in the City where anyone can visit for help. Ensure translators are available to assist non-English speakers.
- **Laminated Resource Sheets:** Provide laminated resource sheets with large font that can be placed on the refrigerator. These should include helpful resources, services, and emergency numbers, with vital information color-coded for clarity.
- **Friendly Visitor Services:** Offer Friendly Visitor services that deliver information both verbally and in hard copy to seniors. Provide a refrigerator magnet to hold essential information, particularly for homebound individuals.
- **Inclusive City Council Meetings:** Ensure City Council meetings are accessible by providing translation services in multiple languages and closed captioning for those with hearing impairments.

## Transportation and Mobility

### Unmet Needs Related to Transportation:

- **Limited Access to Medical Transportation:** There is no direct transportation from the Village and Garden areas to medical facilities, except through University to Pulgas. Services are also needed between East Palo Alto and Belle Haven.
- **Safe and Reliable Transportation:** Older adults and people with disabilities require safer transportation options for essential trips like medical appointments, grocery shopping, and church.
- **Lack of Information on Transportation Services:** Older adults need more education on available transportation services, including how to use them and where to call for information.
- **Safety Assurance for Families:** Families need reassurance that their older family members will be safely transported to and from their destinations.
- **Transportation Challenges:**
  - There has been no assessment of community transportation needs, and the current traffic conditions are unsafe, with one-way streets, dangerous parking situations, and poor walkability. An elderly resident was recently hit by a car and killed.
  - Conflicting transportation plans from agencies like the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and SamTrans exacerbate the issue.
  - Mobile resources and transportation are only available to those visiting the senior center, limiting access for others.

**Potential Solutions Related to Transportation:** *(See also Communication and Information)*

- **Expand Public and Private Transportation:**
  - Provide accessible and affordable transportation options through regional planning and funding initiatives.
  - Assess community transportation needs and develop safer, more efficient routes.
- **Create a City Transportation Guide:** Develop a comprehensive guide outlining available transportation options, including cost, frequency, and routes.
- **Outreach and Education:** Conduct outreach to educate residents on how transportation systems work.
  - Distribute flyers to selected families, providing this information to both older adults and their family members.
  - Advertise updated transportation services on city buses, the Senior Center bus, at bus stops, and throughout the City (e.g., supermarkets and restaurants).
- **On-Demand Transportation for Older Adults:** Establish an 'Uber-style' transportation service for older adults, or expand on-demand bus services to operate outside East Palo Alto.
- **Resident Survey:** Survey residents to identify which routes, days, and hours are most in demand for transportation services.

- **Intercity Collaboration:** Collaborate with Menlo Park city government to develop cooperative intercity transportation services.
- **Accessible Transport:** Provide well-equipped transportation options for older adults and people with mobility challenges.
- **Safety Assurance for Senior Transportation:**
  - Introduce tracking devices for older adults, with possible financial assistance from the City/County.
  - Create Uber/Lyft-type services for older adults where both the driver and passenger are tracked through a City-sponsored app, ensuring a transparent trip history.

### **Unmet Needs Related to Walkability**

- **Crosswalk Safety:** A recurring concern is the need for better safety markers at crosswalks.
- **Poor Sidewalk Maintenance:** Broken and uneven sidewalks are a widespread issue, affecting accessibility.
- **Dangerous Traffic Conditions:**
  - Cars often fail to stop at crosswalks and stop signs, particularly at University and Bell Streets, with many drivers speeding and even performing illegal maneuvers like donuts.
  - Flashing pedestrian lights, such as those on Bay Road, are frequently non-functional, contributing to pedestrian safety concerns.

### **Potential Solutions Related to Walkability:**

- **Enforce Traffic Regulations:** Strictly enforce traffic rules at crosswalks and stop signs to improve pedestrian safety.
- **Survey on Sidewalk Conditions:** Have the City conduct a survey to identify uneven or broken sidewalks.
  - Utilize resources like the AARP Walk Audit Toolkit to evaluate walkability: <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/getting-around/aarp-walk-audit-tool-kit.html>
- **Increase Police Patrols:** Assign more police patrols to intersections with high traffic danger.
- **Reflective Clothing Education:** Educate pedestrians, particularly older adults, on the importance of wearing reflective clothing for increased night visibility.
- **Install Speed Bumps and Warning Lights:** Add speed bumps and pedestrian warning lights to key streets to slow down traffic and increase safety.
- **Use Cameras to Deter Illegal Driving:** Install street cameras to monitor and reduce illegal driving behaviors, such as speeding or performing dangerous stunts.

## **Housing**

### **Unmet Needs**

- **Accessible and Affordable Housing:** There is a significant lack of accessible and affordable housing options in the area.
  - Rents are too high and some places are overcrowded.
  - Need housing alternatives, there are some "under cover" housing situations, unhoused seniors
  - Seniors require centrally located resource hubs and one-on-one assistance to navigate housing issues.
- **Limited Senior Housing:** There is an insufficient supply of senior housing, with no local skilled nursing facilities or board-and-care options. Seniors often need to seek care outside the county or in Redwood City.
  - Nursing homes outside East Palo Alto have been reported to mistreat seniors, especially those from diverse ethnic backgrounds. There is a strong need for more local facilities.
  - Seniors with mental health challenges need specialized housing support.
- **Home Maintenance Resources:** Seniors lack access to affordable and accessible home maintenance and repair services.
  - Many older adults are unable to find resources for home repairs, particularly those struggling with fixed incomes and limited emergency savings.
  - Numerous housing units and apartments lack ramps and other modifications for seniors with mobility issues.
- **Financial Education and Assistance:** There is a need for financial guidance and support for senior homeowners.
  - Some seniors are unable to afford major repairs, such as roofing, and need financial assistance.

### **Potential Solutions:** *(See also Communication and Information)*

- **Expand Access to Low-Income Housing:** Provide resources and education to help older adults find low-income housing options.
  - Develop and distribute a guide or list of low-income housing resources.
  - Educate residents on affordable housing options, such as <https://smc.housingbayarea.org/>
- **Housing Workshops and Advisors:** Offer workshops and classes to help seniors navigate housing options, apply for low-income housing, get on waiting lists, and complete applications.
  - Provide access to advisors or counselors who can assist older adults with housing-related questions.
- **Increase Low-Income Senior Housing:** Advocate for and build more low-income housing specifically designed for seniors.

- **Financial Education and Assistance:** Provide older adults with financial education and assistance options.
  - For older adults who need home repairs, consider offering guidance on using Home Equity Lines of Credit (HELOC) to access home equity.
  - Advocate for reduced property taxes for senior homeowners.
  - Provide rental assistance to seniors in need.
- **Increase Local Licensed Care Homes:** Bring more licensed care homes to East Palo Alto. Currently, there is only one licensed care home, housing six women.
- **Affordable Home Repair and Modification Services:** Increase awareness of affordable, trustworthy home repair and modification services, such as:
  - San Mateo County Housing Repair Programs <https://www.smcgov.org/housing/housing-repair-programs>;
  - Rebuilding Together <https://rebuildingtogetherpeninsula.org/>
  - Create a list of vetted, reputable contractors that seniors can trust for home repairs and maintenance.
  - Provide inspections and build ramps for older adults with mobility challenges.

## **Social Participation**

### **Unmet Needs:**

- **Expanded Activities for Seniors:**
  - Need more diverse and engaging activities, including:
    - Field trips and new types of events.
    - More intergenerational programs to foster connections between younger and older generations.
    - Culturally relevant and age-diverse activities such as music, entertainment, outings, and social events that resonate with a broad spectrum of seniors.
    - Regular classes on nutrition, mental and physical health, and local resources.
    - Instructional exercise classes designed for seniors.
- **Outreach to Combat Isolation:** Currently, there is no consistent outreach to seniors, and efforts to reduce isolation and loneliness are lacking.
  - Consider a weekly visitation program for seniors in their homes.
  - Host "meet and greet" events at places like the Senior Center or EPA Library.
  - More safe and comfortable spaces are needed for seniors to enjoy entertainment and socialize.
  - Programming should highlight the talents and contributions of older adults.
- **Limited Information and Interactive Opportunities:** There is insufficient communication about available events, and not enough interactive activities to engage seniors.

- **Family Reassurance on Safety:** Families need assurance that their loved ones will be safe traveling to and from the Senior Center on the Senior Center bus.

**Potential Solutions:** (see also Communication and Information)

- **Survey Older Adults:** Conduct a survey to identify what additional programs older adults are interested in and the times of day they would prefer to attend. Implement targeted outreach to older adults at their residences.
- **Expand Senior and Intergenerational Events:** Provide more senior-focused events and outings, with interpreters available to ensure inclusivity on trips.
- **Empower Seniors to Lead:** Encourage seniors to organize their own activities in public spaces, fostering community connections. Create opportunities for seniors to teach and motivate each other by offering stipends for leading classes and activities.
- **Culturally Inclusive Programming:** Offer events specifically designed for diverse cultural groups, such as Spanish-speaking seniors, and ensure that bilingual events are regularly available.
- **Interpreters at the Senior Center:** Hire interpreters to be on-site during Senior Center hours, following the model of Menlo Park's Senior Center.
- **Host Healthy Cooking Competitions and Workshops:** Organize cooking competitions and nutrition workshops focused on healthy living.
- **Offer Senior-Friendly Fitness Classes:** Expand offerings to include a variety of fitness classes similar to those provided by Menlo Park's Senior Center, such as folklorico, salsa, Zumba, and aerobics.
- **Regular Mental Health Workshops:** Host mental health workshops addressing topics like grief support, stress, depression, and isolation, along with brain fitness activities.
- **Transportation to Large Events:** Ensure reliable transportation is provided to and from large community events to encourage participation.
- **Use Refrigerator Magnets for Communication:** Distribute free, colorful refrigerator magnets that provide important information and encouragement for participation.
- **Enhance Meal Delivery Services:** Expand meal delivery programs to also serve as a resource hub for disseminating information on available community services.
- **Engage Homebound Seniors:** Work with agencies to develop criteria and strategies to engage homebound seniors through outreach, activities, and services.
- **Partner with Agencies for Seamless Services:** Establish partnerships with other agencies using a "no wrong door" approach to ensure that seniors can easily access a variety of services without barriers.
- **Family Reassurance and Engagement:**
  - Offer opportunities for families to visit the Senior Center and learn about its safety protocols.

- Host open house events to welcome new families and introduce them to the Center.
- Create virtual resources such as a YouTube video tour or a 360-degree virtual tour of the Senior Center and EPA.
- Contact families the day before each senior trip, providing detailed information to ensure peace of mind.

## **Respect and Social Inclusion**

### **Unmet Needs:**

- **Feelings of Exclusion and Disrespect:** Many seniors feel they are overlooked and excluded, particularly those who are homebound, lack transportation, or have physical limitations. They often believe they have nothing to offer or that their contributions are no longer valued.
  - Seniors desire to be of use, but are not regularly asked to contribute their wisdom, knowledge, or experience.
  - As people reach a "precious age," they may feel disposable or like they are being taken for granted, which leads to further isolation and loneliness.
- **Lack of Opportunities for Connection:** Seniors need more opportunities to combat isolation, feel appreciated, and share their talents with others.

### **Potential Solutions:**

- **Create Welcoming Models of Inclusion:** Adopt successful models like Second Harvest, which fosters a sense of belonging and purpose for everyone involved.
- **Leverage Faith-Based Organizations:** Many local residents seek help from faith-based organizations, which can provide health care navigators and other forms of support, such as the Fellowship of Faith in East Palo Alto (EPA). Encourage partnerships with these organizations to promote inclusive care for seniors.
- **Promote Positive Messages About Seniors:** Government agencies, nonprofits, and other institutions should create campaigns that highlight the value of seniors and emphasize their ongoing contributions to society.
- **Develop Intergenerational Programs:** Create more intergenerational events that bring seniors and younger generations together for meaningful engagement. Examples could include:
  - Programs where students help seniors learn new skills, and seniors in turn teach youth valuable life lessons.
  - Inclusive events where people of all ages can participate, such as high school students playing games with seniors, or hosting activities like "breakfast bingo" and performances for older adults with disabilities.
  - Senior proms where seniors and young people enjoy meals, games, and performances together.



- Explore restarting programs like the Stanford student televisiting program during the pandemic, which offered social interaction for seniors remotely.
- Partner with local schools to establish ongoing opportunities for interaction between youth and seniors, fostering mutual respect and understanding.
- **Education and Awareness:** Bring in experts on aging to educate seniors, the broader community, and the public on the value and contributions of older adults, and how to foster greater inclusion.
- **Culturally Inclusive Programs:** Offer English classes to non-English speaking seniors and ensure all communications provide appropriate translations and interpretations, promoting inclusivity for all.
- **Recognition and Appreciation Programs:** Consider starting programs like SCORE, which celebrate the ingenuity, wisdom, and accomplishments of older adults, providing them with opportunities to be recognized and appreciated.

## **Civic Participation and Employment**

### **Unmet Needs:**

- **Limited Employment Opportunities for Seniors:** There are very few opportunities for seniors seeking employment. Many express a need for job training programs tailored to their needs and skill levels.
- **Confusion Around Earning Limits for Social Security Recipients:** Many seniors are unsure about how much they can earn without affecting their Social Security benefits. Clearer guidelines and education on this issue are necessary.
- **Volunteering Barriers for Seniors with Physical Limitations:** Volunteer opportunities tend to be available only for those in good health or who are more assertive. There is a lack of options for seniors with physical disabilities or mobility challenges.

### **Potential Solutions:** *(See also Communication and Information)*

- **Educate Employers on Hiring Older Adults:** Promote the benefits of employing older adults and not limiting their involvement to volunteer roles. Highlight the valuable skills and experience that seniors can bring to the workforce.
- **Provide Financial Education:** Offer workshops that help seniors understand Social Security earning limits, retirement benefits, and other financial matters. Ensure that financial education is accessible to homebound seniors through online resources or home visits.
- **Publicize Volunteer Opportunities:** Increase awareness of volunteer roles with local government, schools, and community organizations. Use diverse communication channels, including flyers, online platforms, and community centers, to reach more seniors.
- **Expand Job Training Programs:** Offer "how to engage" training; these are currently offered at the library and Senior Center.

- **Promote Intergenerational Volunteering:** If the City partners with local schools, create intergenerational volunteer opportunities. Seniors could mentor students, assist with school activities, or share their expertise in specific subjects.

**Strengths mentioned:**

- There are already numerous volunteer opportunities available in the community for seniors who are able and interested in participating.

**Community Support and Health Services**

**Unmet Needs:**

- **Insufficient Health Services:**
  - The community is underserved with only one health center (Ravenswood) and one dental center, but no vision clinic or pharmacy.
  - There are no urgent care facilities, making it difficult to access care on short notice.
  - Long wait times for medical appointments are a common issue.
  - Pharmacies often take too long to fill prescriptions, forcing seniors to make multiple trips.
- **Lack of Health Resources in Spanish:**
  - There are no healthcare directories or guides available in Spanish, limiting access for non-English-speaking seniors.
- **Financial Barriers to Healthcare:**
  - Health insurance covers only the bare minimum, leaving seniors with little financial support for essential healthcare services.
  - Many residents cannot afford the healthcare services they need, including ambulance services, with no available alternatives.
  - Some seniors distrust healthcare providers, leading to avoidance of necessary medical care.

**Potential Solutions:** *(See also Communication and Information)*

- **Establish a Drop-In Clinic:** Create a clinic with adequate staff to handle walk-in patients and reduce wait times for urgent healthcare needs.
- **Improve Communication Between Healthcare Providers and Pharmacies:** Strengthen coordination between clinics, doctors, and pharmacies to minimize delays in treatment and prescription processing.
- **Develop a Bilingual Healthcare Directory:** Create and distribute a comprehensive healthcare services directory available in both English and Spanish. Ensure it's accessible at senior centers, nonprofits, and other community spaces.
- **Offer Health and Nutrition Seminars:** Partner with local clinics and hospitals to provide educational seminars on nutrition, preventive health, and managing chronic conditions. Include CPR and first aid training as well.

- **Promote Use of Medical Alert Devices:** Educate seniors about medical alert bracelets, necklaces, lifeline devices, and fall detection systems. Offer guidance on in-home medical care and caregiver services.
- **Host Senior Health Expos:** Organize health fairs and expos to connect seniors with local resources. Involve organizations like San Mateo County to raise awareness about available healthcare services.
  - Examples:
  - Help at Home 2024: [www.smchealth.org/helpathome](http://www.smchealth.org/helpathome)
  - San Mateo County Community Handbook (English and Spanish): <https://www.smcgov.org/hsa/community-information-handbook>
- **Increase Financial Assistance for Healthcare Costs:** Advocate for more government or private financial assistance programs to cover healthcare expenses.

### **Strengths Mentioned:**

- The community has had successful Senior Expos in the past, which should be re-established to provide critical resources and services to older adults.

### **Outdoor Spaces:**

#### **Unmet Needs:**

- **Lack of Accessible Outdoor Areas for Seniors:**
  - There are too few outdoor spaces where seniors can walk, be active, and feel safe. While the Baylands offers some green areas, these are not easily walkable and thus underutilized by seniors.
  - No designated areas specifically for seniors to gather and enjoy.
  - Seniors often feel unsafe traveling to and from parks, and there is inadequate security in the parks themselves.
  - There are no organized outings or activities in parks specifically geared toward seniors.
- **Insufficient Resting Areas:**
  - Lack of benches in parks and public spaces makes it difficult for seniors to rest during walks.
  - Public spaces, including the Baylands, need amenities that cater to both older adults and children.
  - Clean, safe, and accessible public restrooms are lacking.
  - Many public areas and facilities are not ADA compliant, limiting access for seniors with disabilities, wheelchairs, or walkers.
- **Enforcement Issues:**
  - Garbage cans are often left on sidewalks and streets, cluttering public spaces.
  - Abandoned cars are left on streets and in neighborhoods, further diminishing the safety and appeal of outdoor spaces.

## Potential Solutions:

- **Increase Access and Maintenance:** Improve and maintain the pedestrian bridge over Highway 101 to make outdoor areas more accessible.
- **Organize regular outdoor activities:** such as group walks, outdoor movie nights, storytelling sessions, or other social events.
  - Existing parks like Martin Luther King Jr. Park and Joel Davis Park could be used for these activities.
- **Improve Safety and Amenities in Parks:**
  - Enhance security in parks and improve the walking paths in the Baylands, ensuring safety for all walkers.
    - Trim and manicure bushes and shrubs to increase visibility.
    - Enforce park safety regulations and consider adding video surveillance to parks and walking trails.
    - Work with regional partners to develop and improve public open spaces, including Cooley Landing.
    - Ensure that walking paths are accessible for people of all mobilities, creating routes from East Palo Alto to the water.
- **Enhance Accessibility for Seniors and People with Disabilities:**
  - Install yellow markers at all crosswalks to improve visibility and safety for pedestrians.
  - Ensure that all park restrooms are clean, safe, and accessible for people of all abilities, including ADA-compliant features.
  - Conduct a city survey to identify locations where benches are needed in parks, along trails, and in other public spaces.
- **Enforce Public Space and Safety Codes:**
  - Increase enforcement of city codes regarding garbage cans left on sidewalks and streets. Residents can file complaints using the city's Code Enforcement Complaint Form: <https://www.ci.east-palo-alto.ca.us/econdev/page/code-enforcement-complaint-form>
  - Address abandoned cars:
    - If a car is abandoned on private property, it must be registered, operable, moved every 7 days, and legally parked in a driveway. Complaints can be submitted through the Code Enforcement Complaint Form: <https://www.ci.east-palo-alto.ca.us/econdev/page/code-enforcement-complaint-form>
    - If the car is on a public street for more than 72 hours, residents can report it to parking enforcement by email at [parkingenforcement@cityofepa.org](mailto:parkingenforcement@cityofepa.org) or by phone, providing details like the car's location, license plate number, and description. More information can be found on the Parking Complaints Page: <https://www.ci.east-palo-alto.ca.us/police/page/parking-complaints>

## **Emergency Services**

### **Unmet Needs:**

- **Limited Awareness of Emergency Services and Planning:** Many seniors are unaware of the city's existing emergency plan.
- **Need for Immediate Police Response:** A recurring concern is the need for immediate police response, with a real person answering emergency calls 24/7.

### **Potential Solutions: Preparedness for emergencies**

- **Increase Public Awareness:**
  - Promote the city's emergency plan and resources, including the emergency page on the City website.
  - Provide basic training on emergency protocols, with workshops at senior centers and nonprofit organizations to raise awareness of how to respond in emergency situations.
- **Host Annual Preparedness Events:**
  - Organize a yearly health fair or city event that focuses on emergency preparedness. This event could include the distribution of emergency backpacks and training sessions for attendees.
  - Involve youth to help seniors set up notifications via SMC Alert. Train seniors to teach others how to sign up for city and county notifications.
  - Encourage local businesses to donate materials for emergency preparedness kits, and engage volunteers to assemble and distribute these kits.
  - Invite representatives from the Fire Department to attend, providing a checklist of items to include in emergency backpacks.
- **Offer CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) Training:**
  - Provide CERT training to older adults to increase their emergency response capabilities and preparedness within the community.
- **Improve Emergency Notifications:**
  - Ensure all emergency alerts and notifications are available in Spanish and other prevalent languages in the community.
  - Since many seniors rely on television for news, publicize emergency information and alerts on local TV channels.

### **Strengths:**

- A positive takeaway from the Town Hall (Spanish-speaking group) is that many participants are already signed up for SMC Alert.