

West Ashley Senior Services Coordinating Committee (WASSCC)

17 August 2011

Attendees: Terry Brown, Christine DeStefano, Bill Greenhill, Diane Hamilton, Jan Harman, Dave Harris, Lauren Minors,

Location: Meeting was a tour of the Faith Sellers Senior Center (Dorchester Seniors, Inc.), Summerville.

The attendees participated in a guided tour of Senior Center provided and led by Jean Ott, Executive Director. Following the tour Jean facilitated a discussion meeting.

Dorchester Seniors, Inc., is a private, non-profit organization established in 1980 by Dorchester County Council to provide services for the senior population in Dorchester County. Dorchester Seniors operates two senior centers in Dorchester County, one St. George and owned by the City of St. George, and the one being visited in Summerville owned by Dorchester County with some collaborative ownership by the City of Summerville. Both of these centers were opened in 2002. The Summerville facility encompasses 15,000 sq. ft. of space and is constructed in the form of a quadrangle with a main hall that follows the quadrangle form; spaces are constructed interior and exterior to the hall in its full length. The main entrance is spacious with a welcome desk, gift shop and lounge/gathering area.

The facility had the following features/spaces/activities:

- Land/site donated by the City of Summerville, an original/core section of the building was an armory purchased by the City and donated to the Senior Center project, the structure was built/expanded by the County which currently maintains title.
- 15,000 sq. ft. and opened in 2002
- Serves 200 seniors per day, hours of operation are 0830-1700, Monday-Friday
- Costs \$700,000 a year to operate
- Funded primarily by tax millage from County, and as such membership is free to Dorchester County citizens age 50 and above
- Facility can be/is rented for events, e.g., church services, receptions, etc. during non-operational hours. While reportedly this provides some financial benefit the staff/volunteer effort this requires is sometimes overwhelming
- Has large parking area that was overflowing at the time of our visit
- There is a city tennis center next door that is used by the Senior Center for outdoor activities.
- Gift shop is on a consignment basis (75% owner, 25% Center) and is managed by volunteers.
- Significant space in terms of use and rental is a 5,000 sq. ft. hall that seats 325 for sit-down dining and can be divided into three separate large activity spaces
- The most important operational investment is in quality staff.
- Large commercial kitchen (used primarily for federally subsidized senior lunch program and home delivered meals)
- Fitness center is small with high demand/use. It is "use at your own risk" without a trainer or professional monitoring; to do otherwise significantly raises the cost/opportunity for liability.
- Ceramics room with full kiln, but kiln not used much. Doubles as card room.
- Separate arts and craft/multi-purpose use room. Doubles as card room.
- One room doubles as a lounge w/pool table and library
- Good sized computer room (nine stalls/computers) that is also used as a conference room; this is where we met for our discussion time.
- Most popular activities are exercise related and cards; card games go most of the day
- Need to have at least one activity room identified as a working lounge with WI-FI, desks, tables.
- Activities include classes, discussion/learning groups, dance, exercise, cards, day trips.
- Center has a fleet of 15 passenger vans, mostly used in support of federally funded service programs, but also used for day trips of no more than 1.5 hours one-way.

- Heavily supported by volunteers with over 250 volunteers currently active. Many support the federally funded senior services, but many also support the activities and administration of the Center itself
- LINKS (rural bus service) could serve the Center, but there is no demand.

During the discussion meeting Jean Ott made the following points:

- In building a Senior Center focus on exercise space and a fitness center. And if possible access to a walking area is important (Walking Club)
- In designing a Center pay great attention to creating an inviting, pleasant, useable entrance area, inside and outside
- Designing in a cafe that is easily accessible to the entrance is a great idea/need
- Be certain to design in more than adequate and easily accessible/useable storage space
- Obtain land of sufficient size to permit lots of room to grow
- Lots of interior space is needed because activity schedules are not spread throughout the day but are heavily concentrated in the mornings
- If volunteers feel valued and have responsibilities that utilize their talents, skills and interest they will be available by the droves
- Liberally utilize volunteer input, member/community surveys and advisory groups to provide input, evaluation and as a constant source of ideas
- Have separate thermostats for each space; zones are fine/less expensive but they will never satisfy the individual needs/preferences of groups on a space-by-space/activity-by-activity basis
- The largest waiting list is for use of computers in the computer lab. Careful attention needs to be paid to the design and details of a computer lab including wireless, but a wireless system separate from the Center's office wireless system, e.g., roominess, stalls, height of computer ledge, working space in each stall, 15 stations or more and even room to expand.

**Next Regular Meeting: Wednesday, 14 September 2011, 0930-1100, at the
Bees Ferry Recreation Center**