

The Results Are In

SURVEY SAYS: WEST ASHLEY RESIDENTS WANT THEIR OWN SENIOR CENTER

By Warren Cobb
Community Editor

Since a group of four or five concerned citizens first met in early 2009 to begin gauging interest in a West Ashley area Senior Center, the idea has taken off like wildfire. Now dozens of volunteers are involved and the West Ashley Senior Services Coordinating Committee (WASSCC) is in serious negotiations with two possible sites, as well as securing funding to build a new facility.

And it would seem there are plenty of older West Ashleyans who are ready to take advantage of such a facility. For the past several months, the WASSCC has been gathering information via the online "Senior Survey" as it has become known. Last week, the WASSCC released the results.

Perhaps the most surprising result of the voluntary Senior Survey was that nearly 499 people responded. The information gathered will be used to determine what kind of facility is built and the kinds of programs the citizens of West Ashley would like to see. There were 80 questions designed to elicit "very likely," "moderately likely," "somewhat likely," etc. type responses. Seventy-seven percent of respondents were women, 81 percent were white, 17 percent African-American. A majority were ages 60-69 (44 percent). About 7 percent were 80 years old or older.

To get right down to the nitty gritty, 77 percent of respondents said they would utilize a fitness facility, 68 percent a walking trail. Sixty-eight percent said they'd like to take classes on stretching and flexibility, 64 percent said they'd like to have a personal trainer on site, and 46 percent said they would participate in "Dancercise/Zumba."

Sixty-three percent of respondents said they would use the facility's library, 62 percent said they would like the facility to have a café/

sandwich shop. Sixty-five percent said they would like to have guest speakers, 58 percent said they'd like college-level lectures, and 41 percent said they would take language classes.

Sixty-one percent said they would take day trips. Fifty-eight percent wanted the senior center to offer social events. Fifty-one percent of respondents said they would take craft classes if offered, 48 percent would take art classes, 44 percent would take part in reading groups.

Fifty-two percent said they would like for the facility to offer legal assistance, 48 percent would like Medicare counseling, 43 percent financial counseling, 34 percent tax preparation help, and 30 percent want a life coach. Twenty-one percent of respondents said they would be willing to pay \$45 to \$54 per year as an annual membership, 19 percent said up to \$24, 11 percent said \$100 or more.

As for hours, 71 percent want to see the facility open 1-6 p.m. on Sundays. The vote was split for the other days of the week, but the majority wanted to see the facility open every day of the week for at least four hours.

Charleston City Councilman and WASSCC member Aubry Alexander says the survey has helped the committee identify the needs of the community, which help determine the type of facility they're looking for. "That will determine square footage. How much space is needed for offices, workout rooms, art rooms, etc.," he says.



Officials say there was a huge response to the West Ashley Senior Services Committee survey, which found, among other things, 77 percent of respondents said they would use the fitness facility, and 90 percent said they would be willing to pay a membership fee

Alexander also said the survey helped to steel the interest and commitment of the City and County of Charleston, each of whom has offered government personnel to help with site planning issues and grant opportunities.

As for the facility itself, Alexander says the building would probably be 20,000 square feet, give or take, which is about twice the size of the Lowcountry Senior Center on James Island. The WASSCC is in negotiations with two West Ashley institutions for land on which to build a center. "We've got two organizations that have approached us and made generous offers. We are working with both of them. Hopefully we'll have their proposals by late September.

Unconfirmed reports suggest the two sites in question are located on the campuses of the Jewish Community Center on Raoul Wallenberg Blvd., and St. Francis Hospital on Henry Tecklenburg Drive.