Growing Older in Fort Collins –
Silver Tsunami as a Golden Opportunity

Summary Report from Initial Event held on November 10, 2011

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Colorado State University
CENTER FOR PUBLIC DELIBERATION

Expansion Initiative
BUILDING FOR A STRONGER COMMUNITY
Fort Collins Senior Center

Community Foundation of NORTHERN COLORADO

City of Fort Collins

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Executive Summary

- Over 140 community members gathered at the Lincoln Center in Fort Collins to hear presentations about the changing demographics in the US, CO, and Fort Collins, and to participate in facilitated discussion about how Fort Collins should react to these changes and what sort of community we want to create for our older residents.

- Clearly transportation was seen as the most important issue as participants concerning how our community needs to react to the changing demographics, appearing in answers to almost every question. More public transportation around town was most often mentioned, but also regional transportation and the importance of walkable communities.

- Affordable health care and affordable housing were also consistently mentioned throughout the evening. Participants did mention that currently health care is a strength of the community, but that strength was described more in terms of quality, not affordability.

- Current strengths seemed to focus on existing opportunities for seniors, both in terms of outdoor opportunities and cultural opportunities. When asked for improvements, additional activities did not receive much attention.

- Interest in intergenerational connections was also mentioned throughout the evening, though to a lesser extent. Many commented positively on the fact that students were engaged in the process.

- Participants chose "learner" (after "traveler") as the second most important role they want to play (behind traveler), and the importance of educational opportunities appeared across many of the questions, but not consistently.

- Volunteering and contributing to the community was seen as a critical part of retirement and growing older. When asked what people were most excited about doing when they were at that stage of life, volunteerism was mentioned most often in open ended questions.

- Participants that attended seemed particularly connected and engaged in the community. We may need to think about how to get less "plugged in" participants to be a part of the process. Having future meetings at the Senior Center could potentially help.

- Participants were satisfied with the event and called for the conversation to continue and a plan to develop. On the ending survey, 49 participants marked "very satisfied" and 35 "satisfied." Only one person marked "no opinion" and one marked "unsatisfied." No one chose "very unsatisfied."

Part 1: Description of Event

On Thursday, November 10th, 2011, 141 community members from the Fort Collins area joined staff and students from the Fort Collins Senior Advisory Board (SAB), the Fort Collins Senior Center, and the CSU Center for Public Deliberation (CPD) to hear presentations about the changing demographics involving a significant growth in the percentage of population that will be over 50, and then participate in facilitated small group discussions concerning how our community should respond to these coming changes.

The first part of the meeting involved three presentations:
- Welcoming remarks, Doug Hutchinson, former Mayor of Fort Collins
- "Demographic Trends, Our Growing Aging Population," Elizabeth Garner, Colorado State Demographer (her powerpoint is posted online, see below)
- "Keeping Fort Collins Great, Visioning the Future of Healthy Aging" Janine Vanderberg, JVA Consulting

In her presentation, Elizabeth Garner provided an analysis of demographic data from the 2010 U.S. Census to explain how our community will change as the baby boom generation enters their retirement years. Garner explained that Colorado is in the top 10 of fastest growing states in the country, and the fastest growing region is the North Front Range. Larimer and Weld counties are seeing the highest numbers of people over age 65 relocating from other states. Colorado has been a younger state historically, so the impact of silver tsunami will be greater here.

Closer to home, the State Demography Office predicts that the number of Larimer County residents who are 65 and older will increase 140 percent in the next 20 years. This aging demographic is forecast to increase from 35,000 in 2010 to 90,000 in 2040.

Baby Boomers currently represent 37% of the workforce and many have no plans to retire. Their generation has always influenced the economy, and will now drive economic demands in several industries, including healthcare, accessible housing, transportation, education, insurance, and banking. Their activities will also have impacts on public finance and policy.

Garner encouraged citizens and stakeholders to consider our aging population as we plan for the future, as this is a major demographic shift that cannot be ignored. She explained that all age groups must be considered when thinking about how our community will plan for the future of aging well in Fort Collins.

Janine Vanderburg's presentation focused on challenging common assumptions about the role of seniors in our community. She explained that the common notion of a growing 65-and-older demographic becoming a burden on society does not reflect national trends.

The baby boom generation has a lifetime of experience, wealth, and knowledge that can be harnessed to create positive change in our community. As Fort Collins works to prepare for helping the aging demographic, the aging demographic will also work to prepare to help Fort Collins. Vanderburg encouraged the audience to use the talents and wisdoms of older adults to solve community problems.

Vanderburg explained that making Fort Collins more accessible for the aging population will benefit the community as a whole. For example, affordable transportation is important for seniors who no longer drive as well as for students and people in poverty who cannot afford a vehicle. Universal design aids not just the physically challenged, but also mothers with strollers. Good street signage has been shown to improve tourism.

Vanderburg concluded by noting that, instead of a silver tsunami, think of this as a silver mine.

After the speakers, participants worked with CPD student associates to discuss a series of questions so we could gather data on public views about the changing demographics in our community. Overall, four forms of data was collected from the process. First, when participants RSVP'd, they were asked to answer three questions that later became the focus of the small group discussions. We asked the same three questions when people checked in, providing those that did not answer them online a chance to provide answers. The answers to all these pre-meeting questions are provided below. Second, volunteers and students from the CPD took notes from the 22 separate tables. Those notes were utilized to identify additional key themes and ideas. Third, wireless keypads were utilized to ask to overall group some questions and gather quantitative data. The results from those questions have already been posted and are available online. Fourth, participants were asked to complete a post-meeting survey with a series of questions. Those answers are provided in Part III of this report.

This summary report focuses on some of the highlights of the material. Additional reports, including the demographer's powerpoint and all the raw data from the event, are posted online at http://www.seniorcenterexpansion.org/silver_tsunami.html and http://www.fcgov.com/cityclerk/silver-tsunami.php.

The second event for the series will be held at the Fort Collins Senior Center on March 1, 2012. For more information, call the Senior Center at 970-224-6026 or visit the website for www.seniorcenterexpansion.org.

Part 2: Highlights from Key Pad Data

At the event, wireless keypads were used to capture quantitative data from the room overall. We asked a serious of questions to get a sense of the "grade" people would give Fort Collins right now on several areas relate to older residents. These categories were drawn from the Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults (CASOA) report, which is available online at http://www.larimer.org/seniors/lcoa.htm. The results from those questions are below:

How would you grade Fort Collins' readiness in terms of ___ for older residents? Participants gave each category a grade, and below is the mean score (1 = A, 2=B, 3=C, 4=D, 5=F)	
Productive Activities	1.94
Overall Quality of Community	2.21
Health and Wellness	2.26
Community Information	2.31
Community Belonging	2.40
Community Design and Land Use	3.18

On the CASOA report, these same characteristics were ranked as follows (on a hundred point scale):

Overall Quality of Community	74
Productive Activities	67
Health and Wellness	67
Community information	60
Community and Belonging	59
Community Design and Land Use	57

Community design and land use was thus ranked the lowest on both surveys, and productive activities and health and wellness were ranked the highest. These quantitative results matched the qualitative results from more open ended questions.

Another question asked on the keypads focused on people's identity for when they are older: **What do you want to be when you reach 50+? (Pick top 3 identities)**

	Responses	
	(percent)*	**(count)**
Traveler	50.79%	64
Learner	48.41%	61
Volunteer	46.83%	59
Recreater	26.19%	33
Employee	24.60%	31
Grandparent	20.63%	26
Helper	20.63%	26
Just be.	18.25%	23
Arts Patron/Artist	16.67%	21
Reader	15.08%	19
Totals	100%	363

* Percent is the percent of participants that chose each option (so the count divided by 126). Each participant was allowed to choose 3 of the options.

We also asked participants at the end of the process about what they would want to see happen. The categories for this question were developed from the pre-meeting surveys, were this question was asked in an open ended manner.

In 10 years if we got things right, what happened? (Pick top 3)

	Responses	
	(percent)	**(count)**
Increase transit options	51%	64
Housing (affordable and designed for seniors)	51%	64
Embraced diversity/more interaction across ages	43%	54
Mixed-use community centers	30%	38
Created a plan	28%	35
Transit connections to regional cities	26%	33
Health care facilities, including assisted living	26%	33
Created opportunities to learn	13%	16
Listened and respected Boomers	10%	12
More activities	7%	9
Totals	100%	358

* Percent is the percent of participants that chose each option (so the count divided by 126). Each participant was allowed to choose 3 of the options.

Part 3: Summary of Easel Pad exercise

In small groups, we asked the participants the following question:

> **Imagine it is 10 years from now, and Fort Collins is recognized nationwide as the community that got it right and reacted beautifully to the changing demographics by creating the ideal community for older Americans. What happened? What did we do? If you like, you can utilize the categories from the Community Readiness Chart to help you think about potential areas of improvement.**

Each table first developed a list on easel paper for their table, and then discussed the items on the list. At the end of their conversations, they were provided with 3 sticky "dots" to place next to the three items of the list they each individually felt most strongly about. The easel sheets from all the tables with the dots in place were then displayed in the front of the room for participants from the other tables to be able to see the lists and votes from the other tables. The data below identifies each list, with a count of the number of dots each item received. Each individual lists was sorted by the number of dots.

Themes from "Imagine in 10 years" question	# of groups	# of dots
Transportation	15	67
Housing	11	37
Health care	12	28
Jobs/economic opportunities	5	15
Intergenerational connections	6	13
Seniors more connected	5	10
Improved senior services, more collaboration/efficiency	3	8
Walkable communities	5	7
Poverty	2	7
Voluntary opportunities	3	7
Caretaker education	2	7
Educational opportunities	3	6
Universal design/access	3	6
Self-sufficiency	3	6
Safety	2	2

Part 3: Themes derived from written survey questions:

Pulling from the data from both the pre- and post written surveys provided at the end and online (full text of all the answers are available in the data report), we identified key themes to get a sense of where the most energy lied. The numbers in the parenthesis highlight how often that themes was present in the surveys.

Question: Fort Collins has received many awards and accolades for being a great place to live, including many awards that specifically celebrate Fort Collins as a great place to retire. For you, what is at least one thing about Fort Collins that helps make it a wonderful place for older residents? When we are at our best, what do we do well?

Themes identified in the answers:

Trails, parks, outdoor opportunities (19)
Quality health care (16)
Cultural activities (15)
Climate/weather (10)
Senior Center (9)
Educational opportunities (8)
University (6)
Senior services (6)

Values seniors (5)
Safe community (5)
Volunteer opportunities (4)
Beauty/scenery (3)
Recreation opportunities (3)
Quiet/relaxing (3)
Friendly (3)
Old Town (2)

Question: For all of us, we need to be thinking of the years we grow older as a time to live our dreams, to challenge ourselves, to embrace what might be, to experiment, to invest ourselves in other possibilities. Regardless of your current age, what are you most excited about doing with your time during that stage of your life (50+)?

Themes:

Contributing to community/volunteering (31)

Travel (23)

Classes/learning (9)

Working (8)

Family/friends (8)

Outdoors (7)

Hobbies (4)

Read (4)

Grandchildren (4)

Art (3)

Music (3)

Restaurants (2)

Mentoring (2)

Question: What do you see as the most important next step(s) for our community to address this issue?

Continue dialogue, develop plan (18)

Transportation (15)

Housing (3)

Health care (2)

Intergenerational connections (2)

Question: Two of the primary resources we have in Fort Collins to address these issues is the Senior Advisory Board and the Fort Collins Senior Center, cosponsors of today's events. One goal of the broader project is to provide them clear feedback about what they should be focusing on and what sort of programming or changes the Senior Center should incorporate into plans for expanding the facility. Based on your conversations today, what would you want them to focus on?

Transportation (11)

Housing (6)

Health care (5)

Communication/outreach/awareness (5)

Intergenerational interaction (3)

Question: There are many other key players involved in creating an ideal community for older Americans, including but certainly not limited to city, county, state, and federal government; the private sector; the non-profit sector; educational institutions; faith-based organizations; and community groups. Do you have any specific suggestions for actions for these or other entities?

Work together/collaborate (11)

Education/retraining (3)

Increase participation (2)

Housing (2)

Health care (2)

Question: Today's process utilized the concept of "Appreciative Inquiry" (AI), which is focused on identifying current positives to build upon, as well as imagining the possible future we want to create together. While AI does highlight the positives in order to spark a different type of conversation than the typical problem/solution format, we certainly understand that the demographic changes also bring with them several concerns and potential problem areas. Are there in particular concerns or problems you didn't get a chance to discuss today that you want to bring to our attention?

No additional concerns (7)	Housing (2)
Transportation (3)	More focus on low income issues (2)
Health care (2)	More focus on disability (2)

Question: Having attended this event, what one thing would you MOST want people to know about this issue?

Communicate importance/awareness of demographic changes (12)
Communicate that we are working on it (7)
Continue process/planning (4)
Communicate optimism (4)
Increase awareness of elders in poverty (2)
Recognize growing crisis (2)
Importance of intergenerational connections (2)