



CASE IN POINT 2009

A Brighter Shade of Grey

Mississauga’s Plan for an Age-Friendly City

CONTRIBUTORS

David Kuxhaus MCP candidate, University of Manitoba
Michael Cleland MCIP RPP, Manager Recreation and Parks, Business Development

ABSTRACT

Like many communities across Canada, the City of Mississauga is experiencing a significant demographic shift. It is expected the number of its residents over 55 will increase from 20% to 38% in the next two decades.

“Older adults in Mississauga will lead purposeful and active lives...”
Older Adult Plan

An aging population will present new challenges for policy makers and planners. In response, the City of Mississauga has developed the Older Adult Plan, a blueprint for an accessible, age-friendly city.

This case study explores some of the emerging trends in planning and how they are reflected in the Older Adult Plan. This will include a review of the collaborative approach which crossed departmental lines within government and utilized the expertise of external organizations.

Engagement strategies designed to consult and connect with older adults and the development of a controversial recommendation to move towards an ability to pay model for certain services will also be examined within a planning and political context.



Background

With a population of 668,549, Mississauga is one of Canada's fastest growing cities. From 2001 to 2006, its population increased by over 9 %, making it the country's sixth largest city. Included in that growth is an ever expanding number of older adults, those aged 55 and older. Over the next 20 years, it is expected this demographic will number over 300,000 residents.

Many communities across Canada are seeing similar growth in the number of older adults yet few are taking action. A recent Canadian Mortgage and Housing Services report suggests "... few communities are preparing for this phenomenon to ensure that it is embraced in a way that enriches our way of life." (CMHC. Impacts of the Aging of the Canadian Population on Housing and Communities, 2008)

The implications of an aging population are significant. A 2003 report by Hemson Consulting outlined some of the issues facing Mississauga. The firm looked at how an increase in older adults would among other things affect service delivery, demand for recreation services and use of public transit. It also reviewed the built environment to see what the demand might be for bungalows, curb cuts and ramps at building entrances.

The report also made another important distinction within the older adult population. Often this demographic is treated as a homogenous group when it comes to policy formulation. The Hemson report, however, emphasized that they are in fact composed of "...different ethnicities, attitudes, beliefs, preferences and experiences." Moreover it is a demographic which can span four generations.

Realizing there was much work to do, the City of Mississauga commissioned the Older Adult Project. It is described as a future-oriented, innovative plan to guide the City over the next 10 years. It was recognized from the onset that public consultation would be important and that a comprehensive strategy was needed to engage groups. The cooperation of various governmental departments at different levels was also recognized as key.

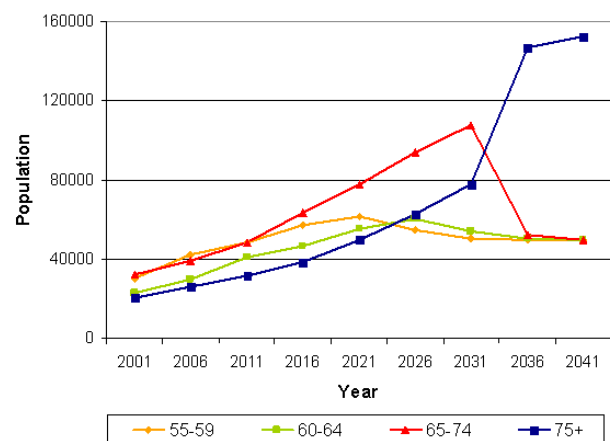
One size doesn't fit all

The older adult population can be divided into four groups:

- pre-retirement (55-64);
- young-seniors (65-74);
- mid-seniors (75-84); and
- senior-seniors (85+).³

Each cohort has different economic issues and social and leisure needs.

Forecasted Population Growth (2001-2031)



Source: City of Mississauga Demographic Forecasts (2003)
Statistics Canada Community Profile (2001, 2006)

Fast Facts on Aging

The UN estimates that by 2050, the proportion of the world's population over 60 will double.

In Canada, about 14 per cent of the country's population is over 65. That figure is expected to be approximately 24 per cent by 2036.

Facts of the Case

The strategy for the Older Adult Project can be broken down into four components; consultation, best practices, trends and demographic analysis and programming inventory.

While the focus of the project was on community services, its scope included corporate services, planning and building, transportation and public works.

Consultation

The community consultation was extensive and involved the use of many different engagement tools.

- A statistically significant Household Survey (400 responses), conducted via telephone
- Online web survey of residents 45 years of age or older
- Two search conferences (attended by over 100 residents and service providers)
- Key informant interviews
- Stakeholder surveys
- Staff workshop
- Outreach Questionnaire - City Staff Led
- Presentation to the Leadership Team
- Presentation to the Extended Leadership Team

Best Practices Analysis

A best practices exercise was undertaken to identify innovative programs, policies, and services for the older adult age group. Surveys were given to service providers in the cities of Toronto, Calgary, New York and Ottawa. Some of the key findings included:

- Ottawa has a Seniors Advisory Committee to identify barriers and form partnerships.
- The City of Toronto waives fees for recreation programs for older adults who are below the low-income cut-off.
- New York City offers a program called “Travel Training” that assists riders with disabilities to understand how to use local transit.

Older Adult Project Core Team

Michael Cleland
Ruth Denyer
Ruth Greenwood
Emily Irving
Jim Kettle
Steve MacRae

Julie Mitchell
Wendy Murdock
Gil Penalosa
Laura Piette
Evie Pryzbyla
Laurel Schut

Project Consultants

Monteith Brown Planning Consultants
Applebaum Human Services

Trends and Demographic Analysis

There are a number of important and emerging trends among older adults that must be factored into the plan. Some of the key ones include:

- Many have sufficient financial resources to participate in activities that interest them
- Strong emphasis on healthy living
- Interest in learning new information or skills
- Many will continue to work past the age of 65
- More likely to be involved in cultural, educational or hobby activities

The demographic analysis noted that ethnicity will be an important issue when dealing with older adults. According to Statistics Canada, the first language of 41.8% of residents' in Mississauga is neither French nor English.

Older Adult Programming Analysis

This involved looking at population counts and programming to decide which community centres should be a priority for additional older adult programming. Work was also done with the Region of Peel, to see how social housing and transportation programs could be improved and better coordinated.

Conclusions and Outcomes

The end product was a 51-page document entitled the Older Adult Plan. It was divided into five sections providing readers with an overview of the plan, its vision, goals and principles, action plans, implementation matrices and cost estimates.

Some of the important findings from the public consultations included.

- Transportation is the number one barrier facing older adults in the City;
- Older Adults would prefer not to be categorized by age, but rather by ability and mindset;
- There is a desire for a stronger sense of community for older adults- for example
- Creating hubs of activity, encouraging more volunteering, and promoting intergenerational and inter-cultural interaction;
- There continues to be support for funding a workable ability-to-pay model for fees to
- Access City services, programs, and/or facilities;
- Coordination with the Health Network in Peel to assist in meeting the needs of older adults is desired;
- Improved promotion of available physical and social activities and library resources were frequently requested;
- Greater focus should be placed on reaching out to community leaders to ensure different ethnic groups receive information from the City;
- Many volunteer and staff may require additional training to assist in understanding older adult needs and opportunities to support this age group; and
- There is increasing need to provide outreach and services to isolated and low income seniors to allow them to “Age in Place”.

The visions and principles of the Older Adult Plan were approved by city council in March 2008. The actions of the plan are worked into the operating plans of the appropriate government departments. Those operating plans must reflect what’s in the Older Adult Plan

Vision Statement

As an age-friendly city, older adults in Mississauga will lead purposeful and active lives, will live in their community with dignity, integrity and independence, and will experience a diverse range of lifestyle opportunities to pursue their personal interests

Principles

1. Support Individual Needs and Interests of Older Adults
2. Celebrate Life’s Older Years
3. Traveling Within Mississauga is Possible for All.
4. Complete Neighbourhoods Benefit Older Adults
5. Active Living and Lifelong Learning Enhance Older Adults’ Quality of Life.
6. Older Adults are ‘In the Know’
7. Public Spaces, Places and Programs are Age-Friendly
8. Age Will Not Be the Sole Determinant in Establishing Fees for Older Adult Services
9. Older Adult Volunteers Contribute Immensely to the Community.
10. Partnerships Strengthen Community



Lessons Learned

Collaboration

There were many different parties involved in the Older Adult Plan but the project didn't necessarily start out that way. Michael Cleland, Business Manager of Parks and Recreation, noted that initially its focus was on community services program. They soon realized, however, that it cut through a number of areas and departments such as transportation, corporate services, etc. This brought with it certain challenges as these different departments each have their own commissioner. However, commissioners were able to select who from their department would be part of the project team. This ensured that they would have a good connection to the project even though it didn't originate in their department. It also meant they would have someone with whom they were comfortable with as a liaison.

The collaboration extended beyond the local level and included the Peel Region. Mississauga already has a fairly close working relationship with the regional government which provides infrastructure such as roads and services such as social housing and an assisted transit system for people with disabilities. Cleland said getting frontline workers and middle level staff involved was important, adding that things can get bogged down at the senior level.

“It's good to get people involved who deliver the service.” - Cleland

It was also important to call on the expertise of outside groups. In this case, the project team looked to groups representing people with disabilities for advice and information to ensure buildings were accessible.

The collaborative efforts continued during the visioning session in which key words and ideas were gathered. The vision and goals were modified many times during the review process which involved the leadership team, commissioners and a private consulting firm before being endorsed by council.

Consultation

As noted earlier, the consultation process was extensive and utilized a number of engagement tools. At the beginning, the project team wasn't sure what kind of response they would receive as there was no single galvanizing issue. Background research was done by a private consulting company in advance to identify key issues. Also the City did some survey work to see if retirees were planning to stay in Mississauga year round in an effort to get a handle on the kind of services needed.

The traditional methods of engagement, such as workshops and public meetings, worked well but so too did some of the technological tools. It wasn't clear at the start as to how effective they might be given the level of computer literacy among older adults in general is not as advanced compared to younger generations.

Nevertheless some surprising results were realized. For example, over 480 people completed the online survey. Also, 92 per cent of those who participated in a telephone survey took the online survey when directed to it during the phone interview.

Cleland, the team leader, said the experience taught them that the level of computer literacy among older adults is perhaps higher than expected



Consultation (con't)

Given the results, Cleland said they will rely more on technology in the future when it comes to engaging older adults. In particular, more effort will be made to coordinate the telephone survey with the web survey so the tools could mutually promote each other. This will allow them to collect richer data and to do it in a more cost-effective way because interviewers will spend less time on the phone.

As for the web survey, some changes would include increasing the font size, making better use of bold type and making it shorter. It was only about 15 questions, but many of the questions had long lists which participants had to choose from.

The other aspect of the consultation process worth noting is the growing ethnic diversity within the older adult population. Mississauga, for example, has a large Tamil and Chinese population. It is important to reach out to those groups and to understand what programs or facilities they need. In some instances, their needs are filled by local associations. Engaging with the different ethnic groups can be labour intensive but valuable in the long run as it can help the City avoid duplicating services or provide ways for which it can improve services to these various groups.



Access Policy

Like many cities, Mississauga offers subsidized rates for older adults for a range of recreational and leisure activities. However, with the increase in the number of older adults, the City wondered how it would be able to continue to offer those discounted fees. Consideration was thus given to moving from an age-determinant system to an ability to pay model.

“Why should people receive a subsidy based on age if income is the most important determinant.”

- Cleland

Before trying to sell the concept to the public, the project team did some upfront work to try and gauge how such policy might be received.

The online web survey for the project found that 60 per cent of respondents were willing to pay increased user fees. Statistical information collected by the project team also identified that lone parents are up to three times more likely than older adults to be classified as low income, suggesting that there are others who may be in greater need of assistance.

During presentations to council, a graph showing current and projected costs of providing a subsidized rates over 20 years was used to show the impact on city finances. The project team also made the point that the political influence of older adults will increase as their numbers grow, making it more difficult to implement changes such as this in the future.

Finally, it was recommended that the changes be phased in. For example, those born prior to 1935 would continue to receive the traditional age-based subsidies. Those born between 1935 and 1954 would continue to receive a variation of the traditional senior's subsidy for five years to provide a transition period.

By doing some upfront research combined with a phased in approach, the team was able to get the public and council to accept what could have been a very controversial recommendation.



The City of Mississauga brands all of its planning projects. It is a way for the general public and project participants to recognize various initiatives. This was particularly useful for the Older Adult Project which took place over a two-year period. The symbol of an Oak tree was chosen for its strength and its symbol of life and community. The brown and grey multi-coloured dots represent the maturity aspect of older adults. The shift to brighter colours signify exciting and new opportunities and plans.

References

Canada Mortgage and Housing. (2008). Impacts of the Aging of the Canadian Population on Housing and Communities. Available online at: <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/>

City of Mississauga. (2008). The Older Adult Plan. Available online at: http://www.mississauga.ca/file/COM/Older_Adult_Plan.pdf

Cleland, Michael, (March 25 and April 17, 2008). City of Mississauga. Manager Recreation and Parks Business Development. Telephone Interviews.

Hemson Consulting. (2003). Implications of an Aging Population for City Services. Available online at: <http://www.mississauga.ca/file/COM/AgingPopulationReport.pdf>

Photos

www.mississauga.ca/file/COM/Older_Adult_Plan.pdf
www.paulainslie.com/images/Storefront/Storefr
www.uricelax.wordpress.com
www.ecommunity.com

