

Community Associations Should Prepare Now to Accommodate Aging in Place

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Obstruct Fair Housing



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Michigan Community Associations Should Begin Preparing Now to Accommodate Senior Residents Aging in Place

By John D. Gwyn

As our population ages, condominium and homeowner associations continue to play a crucial role in meeting the evolving needs of older residents. Typically, management companies and boards of directors make up the individuals responsible for maintaining common-element spaces and may also be tasked with promoting the general well-being in their resident communities. As a result, they must adapt to ensure that services offered, as well as the overall infrastructure, align with the unique requirements of this aging demographic.

With the last of the baby boomers turning 60 in 2024, community associations should begin preparing now to deal with residents aging in place. The 2020 United States Census reports that Michigan has a population of over 2 million adults of senior citizen age, and that number continues to grow at a fast pace. Most of us would prefer to maintain our independence in our later years and avoid burdening family or friends with the assistance we may increasingly need daily.

For those who live in condominiums, community association managers and board members can address resident competency, health and safety, and various financial challenges that occur, and they may be a conduit to letting others know help is needed with certain residents. A priority should be to create more-accessible environments for those living in regulated housing environments. This might be as simple as providing ramps, handrails, and well-maintained walkways to accommodate mobility in a condominium complex. Another option is to organize walking groups and to be supportive of including those persons with varying mobility levels who are using electric wheelchairs or outdoor-use scooters.

Many people want the same things as they get older, such as to stay in their own home, maintain independence for as long as possible, and turn to family and friends for help when needed. For a lot of older adults and their families, there are legitimate concerns about safety, getting around, and handling daily activities. Residential organizations can assist by ensuring public spaces within residential housing, like community centers and parks, are easily reachable for those with limited mobility. Cre-

ating opportunities for socialization is vital, and associations and their management companies have plenty of opportunities to organize events specifically designed for older residents. A lot of housing groups engage in social networking through their online residential portals to arrange and maintain coffee mornings, book clubs, and gardening groups.

Neighborhood groups may already recognize the importance of health and wellness for older residents and tailor and organize specific programs to meet their needs. Fitness classes, health seminars, and wellness workshops not only address physical health but also contribute to a sense of belonging and social interaction. A multitude of residents live alone and are independent for as long as they can manage but often feel isolated and may be apprehensive to reach out to others when they are feeling lonely. When residents start to need elevated care, home-based support may be provided by informal caregivers, such as family members, friends, and neighbors. However, for many individuals, home care professionals are increasingly required. These professionals may assist with personal care for everyday activities, including bathing, dressing, and completing household chores. Currently, local Meals on Wheels programs are being utilized at a record pace for seniors in need. Most families do not realize that even those with higher income levels may qualify for benefits. Yet another alternative for residents to explore is grocery delivery services that cater specifically to seniors to ensure access to fresh and nutritious food without their having to leave home.

Not only are health and wellness solutions vital, but technological literacy is one of the most important challenges for some older residents. After the pandemic set in, many of us found ourselves relying on smartphones to scan QR codes at restaurants that had removed physical menus due to health concerns. A lot of older people are not comfortable operating smartphones or simply cannot read small screens and require simpler devices to make calls or access the internet. Some community associations with common spaces, such as meeting rooms or clubhouses, utilize workshops to assist residents in using smartphones, tablets, and other devices that can enhance connectivity and access to essential services.

Condominiums that offer a community pool have a unique opportunity to organize programs for seniors to engage in water aerobics classes and floating exercises. Poolside elements, such as comfortable lounge chairs and shaded areas, can be added to promote relaxation and socializing.

Transportation can be a significant challenge for older individuals who may not feel confident

enough to drive a vehicle anymore. Community associations should explore partnerships with local transportation and help to secure group discounts on ride-sharing services such as Uber and Lyft. These services provide convenient and affordable options for older residents to access medical facilities, shopping centers, and community events. Because metro Detroit is such a large metropolis, especially including the outlying suburbs, utilizing public transportation can be challenging and, therefore, finding volunteer driver programs and local Medicare transportation services becomes even more important.

For many residents aging in place, the challenge may be to find ways to engage themselves and fill their increased leisure time by volunteering or otherwise taking advantage of community service opportunities. Senior Community Service Employment Programs in Michigan, including Oakland County, can assist in training and providing public service opportunities for seniors in hospitals, in schools, and at historical sites. These programs provide an outlet for those at retirement age to work or volunteer on average about 20 hours per week. Some activities are paid positions, usually at the highest minimum wage rate. Also, those who serve without compensation may be reimbursed for expenses like transportation and meals. Community associations can assist in educating older residents regarding these opportunities by placing leaflets or other information in common areas.

Establishing camaraderie among those in need is essential to the overall health and well-being of any community. Adapting community associations to the needs of older residents is not just a responsibility but an investment in creating vibrant, diverse, and age-friendly communities. ^{4,12}



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