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Seniors' Advisory Committee Annual Report

Presented by: Barbara Hahn, Past Chair, Seniors' Advisory Committee, Ruby Olson, Past Vice-Chair, Seniors' Advisory Committee, and Douwe Vanderwel, Vice-Chair, Seniors' Advisory Committee

RECOMMENDED MOTIONS:

1. That the Community Living Standing Committee recommend to Council that the Seniors' Advisory Committee's 2021 Year End Report provided as an attachment to the April 11, 2022 agenda report titled "Seniors' Advisory Committee Annual Report" be received for information
2. That the Community Living Standing Committee recommend to Council that the Seniors' Advisory Committee's Proposed 2022 Priorities:
 - Seniors' On-Line Application Review
 - Gather seniors' feedback on their experiences in accessibility to City facilities
 - Monitor the impact of COVID-19 on Seniors
 - Provide feedback on the Companionship and Mentoring Program
 - Provide feedback from community experiences

be received as information.

ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL (OR COMMITTEE) DIRECTION OR MANDATORY STATUTORY PROVISION

The Seniors Advisory Committee Bylaw 26/2018, provided as an attachment to this Agenda item, requires that an annual report be submitted to Council.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The Seniors' Advisory Committee (SAC) Bylaw 26/2018, requires that an annual report be submitted to Council. The SAC 2021 Annual Report provides a summary of the Committee's activities and advice to Council during the year and the proposed priorities for 2022.

Report Date: April 11, 2022
Author: Brittany Switzer
Department: Legislative Services
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer (Interim): Diane McMordie
Chief Administrative Officer (Interim): Kerry Hilts

SENIORS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

2021 YEAR END REPORT

The 2021 Seniors Advisory Committee consisted of 7 members from the community.

2021 Committee Members: Barbara Hahn – Chair, Ruby Olson – Vice Chair, Douwe Vanderwel, Randy Black, Randy Wolstenholm, Donna Sawchuk, Diane Ellis (resigned) and Bakhshish Kang (resigned).

Highlights of 2021:

1. As the COVID-19 pandemic continued to spread across the country, Committee meetings were held remotely using the ZOOM platform. Members reviewed and discussed the following topics between January and December:

➤ **COVID-19 Impact on St. Albert Seniors -**

- In January, the Committee wrote a letter to Council outlining their concerns with the lack of transparency with the Province of Alberta's COVID-19 immunization Plan, specifically the phased immunization program, immunization distribution and public awareness and its potential impact upon the Seniors community.
- In March, Barbara Hahn and Ruby Olson participated in a stakeholder engagement session hosted by the City's COVID-19 Recovery Task Force and provided responses to their questions and feedback on the Task Force's Interim Report.
- In March, the Committee wrote a thank you letter to Council for the great job the city did in keeping the Red Willow Trail System well maintained over the winter which allowed many Seniors to get outside for exercise, fresh air, and socially distanced visits.
- In March Committee members attended a virtual town hall presented by Josephine Pon, Minister of Seniors and Housing and Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Chief Medical Officer of Health, discussing the latest information regarding COVID-19 and its impact on Seniors and the Alberta Government's vaccination program.
- In May, Committee members reviewed the survey results regarding the "Impact of COVID-19 on Seniors in St. Albert" from the St. Albert Seniors Association.
- In May, the Committee wrote a letter to the City's COVID-19 Recovery Task Force with seven suggestions for ways the city could memorialize those in the community who died from COVID-19, the majority of those being Seniors and to also honour health care and front-line essential workers.

➤ **Traffic Bylaw Changes -**

- In preparation for the Public Hearing on February 16, 2021, the Committee reviewed the proposed Traffic Bylaw Changes and the concerns raised by Ruby Olson and Barbara Hahn at a virtual focus group meeting in September 2020. It was decided that no further action needed to be taken by the Seniors Advisory Committee on this matter.

- **Municipal Development Plan –**
 - In 2020, the Committee reviewed the MDP from a Senior’s perspective and provided feedback for consideration by the Flourish Committee. It was decided that no further action needed to be taken by the Seniors Advisory Committee for the March 15, 2021, Public Hearing.
- **Senior’s Advisory Committee 2021 Priorities –** The Committee agreed to work on the following priorities:
 1. Impact of COVID-19 on St. Albert Seniors including current issues, post-COVID and future preparedness.
 2. Joint Project with Youth Advisory Committee on creating Intergenerational opportunities for Seniors and Youths in St. Albert.
- **Seniors’ Week Declaration -**
 - On April 28, 2021, the Committee in partnership with the St. Albert Seniors Association made a written request to the city to declare June 7-13, 2021, as Seniors’ Week in St. Albert.
- **World Elder Abuse Awareness Day Declaration -**
 - While preparing written responses to questions from the Policing Committee, the Committee learned about the rising issue of Elder Abuse in the community from Stop Abuse in Families (SAIF) and decided to raise awareness on this growing problem.
 - On April 30, 2021, the Committee in partnership with SAIF and the St. Albert Seniors Association made a written request to the city to declare June 15, 2021, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day in St. Albert.
- **Riverbank Landing Development –**
 - The Committee reviewed the latest renderings and information on the proposed Riverbank Landing Development in the Oakmont neighborhood. It was decided that no further action needed to be taken by the Seniors Advisory Committee for the June 9, 2021, Public Hearing.
- **Proposed North to South Transit Route –**
 - The Committee reviewed and discussed the positives and negatives of a direct north to south transit route and compared it to existing transit routes. SAC agreed that the cost of the proposed route is prohibitive and does not provide the taxpayer or transit riders with much additional value. It was decided that the Seniors Advisory Committee would no longer support this initiative.

➤ **Affordable Seniors Housing**–

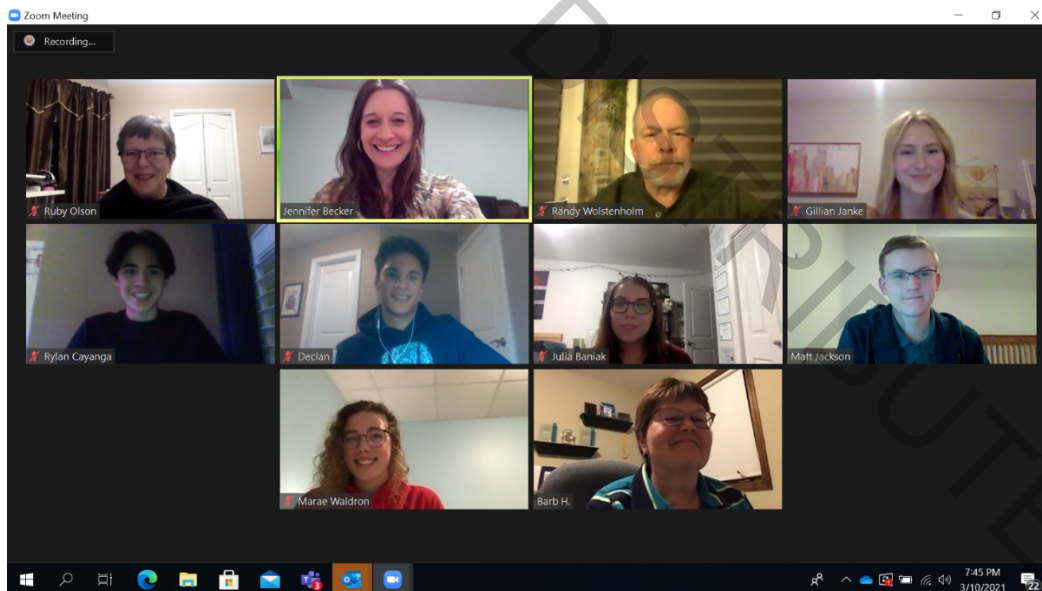
- Marnie Lee met with the Committee to advise them of her new role as the City’s Social Housing Specialist and provide an update on Affordable Seniors Housing, Rental Assistance Program, and the Home Sharing Program.

➤ **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)** –

- Zane Hamm, Inclusive Systems Specialist, with Women Building Futures provided the Committee with a brief introduction on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). The Policing Committee asked whether the Seniors Advisory Committee would support asking the city to create an EDI Committee. Upon discussion, the Committee agreed that the city should implement EDI in its workplace and in its HR policies and procedures first and once completed, then an EDI committee should be formed to look at policies and procedures that affect the community.

2. **Seniors Advisory Committee and Youth Advisory Committee 2nd Annual Joint Meeting**

The meeting was held remotely on March 10, 2021. Committee members discussed creating a sub-committee to facilitate a Mentoring Program where Seniors and Youths could spend time together to socialize, share experiences and knowledge, play games and sports, and help each other. Members also discussed how their respective Committees stay in touch with their demographics, how COVID-19 has impacted them and Affordable Housing.



3. In March, Committee Members attended the following meetings:

- On March 18, 201, Committee Chair attended the Interagency Meeting for community-based organizations providing services to Seniors and Youths in St. Albert. Attendees shared issues, community trends and the impact of COVID-19 on the demographics they represent. Learned that grandparents who parent are looking for programs/supports in St. Albert.

- On March 23, 2021, Committee members attended the Policing Committee Meeting and discussed the impact of COVID-19, isolation, scams & frauds, and elder abuse on Seniors in St. Albert. SAC followed up by submitting written responses to questions asked by the Policing Committee.
4. In April, Committee Members attended the following meetings:
- On April 12, 2021, Committee Chair attended the Community Living Standing Committee meeting to present the Seniors Advisory Committee 2020 Annual Report and priorities for 2021.
 - On April 23, 2021, Committee Chair met with Jan Tworek of the St. Albert Seniors Association to discuss the results of the COVID-19 Survey completed by Seniors in the community in December 2020.
 - On April 29, 2021, Committee members Ruby Olson and Barbara Hahn attended a virtual session on “Creating Age-Friendly Communities in Alberta” presented by CORE Alberta. The communities of Innisfail, Lethbridge and the City of Edmonton presented what they did to become age friendly communities and how your community can start working towards being an age friendly community too.
“Design for the young and you exclude the old. Design for the old and you include everyone!”

“Learning of age-friendly communities’ activities was so encouraging. It is truly amazing what can be accomplished and how inclusive a community can be for ALL if there is the heart and commitment to do so.”
5. In May, Committee Members attended the following meetings:
- On May 11, 2021, Committee members met with Cindy de Bruijn and Pierre Rocque to discuss the City’s financial outlook, revenue generation and change management.
 - On May 19, 2021, Committee Chair met with Will Steblyk from St. Albert Transit to discuss the proposed North to South Transit Route and associated costs.
 - On May 28, 2021, Committee Chair met with Jan Tworek of the St. Albert Seniors Association for an update on happenings at the Seniors Centre during Seniors’ Week and over the Summer.
6. The mayor proclaimed June 7 – 13 ,2021 Seniors’ Week in St. Albert and proclaimed June 15, 2021, as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day in St. Albert. Due to COVID-19 safety protocols, St. Albert Seniors Association President, Winston Lane attended the ceremony and accepted the proclamation on behalf of St. Albert Seniors.



Proclamation

Seniors' Week & World Elder Abuse Awareness Day 2021

WHEREAS we recognize that seniors have made, and continue to make, many contributions to strengthen our community and our daily lives. They are a vital part of our families, giving generously of their wisdom, experience and love, and;

WHEREAS St. Albert's seniors are valued members of society and it is our collective responsibility to ensure they live safely and with dignity, and;

WHEREAS more seniors are independent and active, and by challenging the stereotypes of aging, are leading the way for future seniors. A more positive attitude toward aging is creating new opportunities for new seniors, and;

WHEREAS St. Albert's seniors are guaranteed that they will be treated with respect and dignity to enable them to continue to serve as leaders, mentors, volunteers and important and active members of this community, and;

WHEREAS we are all responsible for building a safer community for St. Albert Seniors. We must honour seniors for their skills, knowledge, experience and leadership, and;

WHEREAS it is appropriate that a special week be set aside to celebrate with seniors,

NOW THEREFORE on behalf of Council and the citizens of St. Albert, I, Cathy Heron, Mayor of the City of St. Albert, do hereby proclaim June 7-13, 2021, as Seniors Week and June 15, 2021 as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day in the City of St. Albert. I call upon all St. Albert residents to observe World Elder Abuse Awareness Day by learning the signs of elder abuse and commit to help seniors in our community stay safe. I also invite all St. Albert residents to join in the celebration of Seniors' Week to recognize the valuable contribution of seniors.

Dated this 7th day of June, 2021

Cathy Heron
Mayor, City of St. Albert
The Botanical Arts City



7. In June, Committee Members attended the following meetings:

- On June 22, 2021, Committee Chair participated in a community brainstorming open house by providing input, ideas, and feedback to the city as they prepare the 10-year Green Environment Strategy.

- On June 23, 2021, Committee members Ruby Olson and Barbara Hahn met with Matthew Jackson of the Youth Advisory Committee and representatives from St. Albert Transit to discuss the proposed North to South Transit Route.
8. In July, Committee Chair, wrote a letter in support of the City of St. Albert's grant application to implement accessibility improvements at the Fountain Park Recreation Centre. And on August 31, 2021, Committee members attended the Annual Board Appreciation Event.



9. In September, Committee Chair attended the following meeting:
- On September 8, 2021, met with Jan Tworek of the St. Albert Seniors Association for an update on happenings at the Seniors Centre during the Fall.
10. In November, Committee Chair attended the following meetings:
- On November 16, 2021, met with other Chairs of the Committees of Council and Cindy de Bruijn to discuss the City's 2022 Budget and service levels.
 - On November 19, 2021, met with Jennifer Becker from the City to discuss the creation of a Pilot Companionship and Mentoring Program to connect Youths and Seniors in the community.

Opportunities & Challenges in 2021

Opportunities

- As COVID-19 continued, SAC Members were still able to meet remotely using ZOOM.
- The Seniors Advisory Committee continued to foster a working relationship with the Youth Advisory Committee in 2021 by attending the 2nd annual joint meeting. Even though we agreed to work on a joint project at the meeting, there was no interest by the Youth Advisory Committee to form a Subcommittee to pursue the Connecting Generations Program. Acting alone, the Seniors Advisory Committee investigated what currently exists in the community and elsewhere and worked with FCSS to develop questions for their pilot survey.
- The Seniors Advisory Committee established a relationship with the Policing Committee by attending their March meeting and responding to their questions. We were pleased to see that one of our recommendations of a Safe Internet Exchange Zone was implemented by the St. Albert RCMP.
- The Seniors Advisory Committee developed relationships with both the St. Albert Seniors Association and Stop Abuse in Families during the year which resulted in Seniors Week and World Elder Abuse Awareness Day Declarations.

Challenges

- Two Committee members resigned in 2021 for work and health reasons.
- For new Committee members, the expectation was that Council would be seeking advice and input from this Committee on matters that Council is considering. In 2021 the focus of the Committee has been more on 'pushing' the interests of Seniors to Council than having Council 'pull' the Committee into discussions and the providing of advice. This has left new committee members feeling both underwhelmed and underutilized.

For long standing Committee members, Barbara Hahn and Ruby Olson, this is nothing new. From its inception in 2019, Committee members have been told that we're responsible to review Council's Strategic Plan, the City's Corporate Business Plan and Council meeting agendas and minutes for topics that may impact Seniors and it's up to the Committee to determine if it wants to advise Council on any such topics. A few times a year, the Committee is asked to attend meetings and provide input into matters impacting the community. And in between the Committee works on its priorities and pushes the interests of Seniors to Council because if we don't, who will? In 2021, the Committee did everything it was asked to do and more. But it hasn't been easy. Numerous times we were told that we can't discuss this, research that, or communicate with an organization because it's not within the City's mandate. We believe we're working within the mandate of our Bylaw, but our Council reps and city staff don't agree. To eliminate confusion and frustration, the city should consider changing Bylaw 26/2018 specifically sections 20 c) and d) to be more specific.

At the November meeting, we were told that going forward the Committee would only meet if there was something to discuss. If that rule had been applied during the last three years since the Committee's inception, we would have met only a handful of times and the Committee would not have completed its annual priorities and goals, met with the Youth Advisory Committee and the Policing Committee, heard about issues impacting Seniors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, service gaps, accessibility issues at city facilities and how to age in place so we can continue living in the community. Many of the interests and concerns of Seniors that were pushed to Council came out of discussions at our committee meetings.

If Council does not feel that a Seniors Committee can serve an advisory purpose, then disbanding the committee (and up-front acknowledging the inclusivity risks that presents to the decisions Council makes) should be considered.

AND THAT'S A WRAP FOR 2021

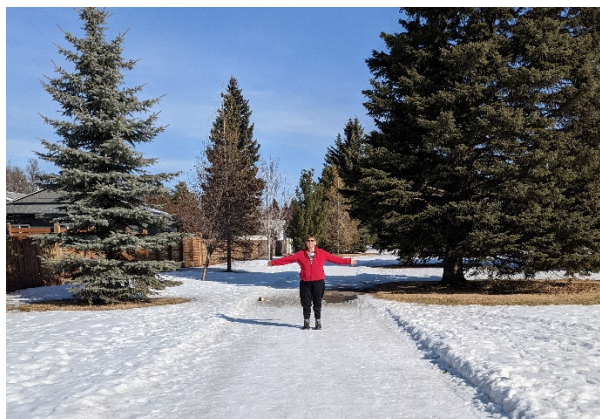
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2021 Priorities

1. Impact of COVID-19 on St. Albert Seniors:

Current Issues:

- The lack of information and clarity from the provincial government on its COVID-19 immunization plan was creating more fear, anxiety, and isolation for Seniors. This prompted the Committee in late January to write a letter to Council outlining their concerns with the lack of transparency with the Province of Alberta's COVID-19 Immunization Plan, specifically the phased immunization program, immunization distribution and public awareness and its potential impact on the Seniors community. The Committee requested that our concerns be raised with Alberta Health Services at an upcoming meeting with Council and with St. Albert's MLA's. ***"We aren't sure if our letter made a difference with AHS or the Provincial Government, but we were glad we voiced our concerns!"***
- In March, Barbara Hahn and Ruby Olson participated in a stakeholder engagement session hosted by the City's COVID-19 Recovery Task Force, answered questions posed by the Task Force and provided feedback on their Interim Report. ***"We were disappointed we hadn't received the questions earlier from the Task Force, so we had more time to prepare our responses. We were also disappointed that the Interim Report did not consider Seniors since our demographic was so negatively impacted by the pandemic."***
- In March, the Committee wrote a thank you letter to Council to recognize the wonderful job the city did in keeping the Red Willow Trail System well maintained over the winter with extra wide snow clearing and sanding to protect us from slips and falls due to the icing conditions. This allowed Seniors to get outside for exercise, fresh air, and the ability to have socially distanced visits with neighbors, family, and friends on the trails and in the parks. ***"Thanks Public Works and Parks and Recreation!"***



- In March Committee members attended a virtual town hall presented by Josephine Pon, Minister of Seniors and Housing and Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Chief Medical Officer of Health, discussing the latest information regarding COVID-19 and its impact on Seniors and the Alberta Government's vaccination program.
- In May, the Committee reviewed the survey results regarding the "Impact of COVID-19 on Seniors in St. Albert" from the St. Albert Seniors Association. The survey was completed by 584 Seniors in the community in the fall of 2020. Overall, the results were positive and showed that family, social and recreation are important to Seniors. ***"We wondered what the results would be if the survey took place in Q3-2021 after Seniors had to miss participating in their favorite hobbies and sports, miss socializing, and miss gathering with family and friends for celebrations for the last year and a half."***

Post COVID:

- March 11, 2021, marked the one-year anniversary since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. Communities in North America were sharing their ideas how they planned to honour those who lost their lives to the pandemic and show their deep appreciation for all health care and essential front-line workers. In May, SAC wrote a letter to the City's COVID-19 Recovery Task Force with seven suggestions for ways the city could memorialize those in the community who died from COVID-19, the majority of those being Seniors, and pay tribute to our amazing health care workers and essential workers for their courage and dedication during these extraordinary times. ***"We didn't hear back from the Task Force, so we aren't sure if our letter was even considered."***

Future Preparedness:

- **Ageing in Place**

The pandemic brought to light that there are safety issues with long term care and congregate living facilities. Many seniors have vowed that they will stay in their own homes for as long as possible and age in place. The question is How do you do that successfully? The answer: GET INFORMED. There's lots of things to consider so you need to get as much information as you can to make smart, informed decisions.

Barbara Hahn attended the following Ageing in Place Seminars:

- "Building an Ageing in Place Support Team" was offered on-line by Proactive Seniors and discussed the importance of having a team comprised of family, friends, volunteers, and professionals to help with your ageing in place plan.
- "Do You Stay Home, Or Do You Make A Move" was offered in-person at the St. Albert Seniors Association and discussed the question Is your home safe and accessible to meet your changing needs as you age?
- "20 Modifications To Make To Age Well In Your Home" was offered in-person at the St. Albert Seniors Association and discussed everything from lighting, bathrooms to doorways.

Ageing in Place sessions were also available at the St. Albert Public Library.

“Great that this information is readily available at no cost in our community so Seniors can get informed and make a plan!”

Ruby Olson completed the online session for **“Seniors Connect.”** This program operates in many communities, often through Seniors Associations or FCSS departments with the intent of providing social services intervention for Seniors who are believed to be at risk socially, emotionally, financially, or physically. Making the connections to provide supports, programs, and services that Seniors need to feel respected, and included helps to reduce isolation and loneliness.

With more Seniors living in the community and ageing in place, the Committee recommended to the Policing Committee that the St. Albert RCMP consider implementing the “Wandering Seniors Program” in St. Albert. This program and similar programs are in place in communities throughout Ontario to educate caregivers about what to do when a loved one wanders, how to prevent it from happening in the first place and the use of wearable devices to help locate lost seniors.

- **Bridging the Digital Divide**

It is vital that today’s Senior has the ability and the knowledge to access information as it changes quickly and much of it is no longer in print format. As many Seniors found out during the pandemic, it’s also essential to have a device to stay connected with family and friends, take on-line courses, attend programs, or have virtual appointments with doctors, lawyers, banking/investment professionals and others. These days you also need a device to order groceries and to purchase other goods and services for curbside pick-up. ***“From what we heard over the past year, many Seniors in our community now have access to devices and have had help finding out how to use them so they can stay connected, informed, and entertained.”***

And what about all the digital application or “Apps” available today. The Committee decided to review several Apps to determine if they are **“Senior Friendly”** after receiving the “Stayhome-Living App” from Council to review. As it would not be appropriate for our committee to recommend (or not recommend) any of the reviewed Apps, a report has been completed outlining the value of the Apps, as well as any potential concerns or potential opportunities that each of them presents.

This report will be presented to Council as part of a future deliverable and later provided to the St. Albert Seniors Association to share with its members.

2. Creating Intergenerational Opportunities for Seniors and Youths in St. Albert:

Existing Intergenerational Programs in St. Albert

- **Big Brothers Big Sisters of St. Albert:** Committee Chair met with Hannah Miller from the BBBS to discuss the Intergenerational Mentoring Project and what BBBS offers in the way of volunteer opportunities for adults working with youths ages 6-17. Adult volunteers are matched to a young person based on their interests and the commitment is one hour per week. BBBS is struggling to find volunteers and there are no Senior volunteers in St. Albert.
- **St. Albert Public Library:** Prior to the pandemic the library's intergenerational programming consisted of Lego Building and Children's Story Times at various Seniors Facilities in St. Albert. They also offered "Reading Buddies" where teens and adults volunteered their time to help children who struggled with reading and comprehension. During the pandemic, the library cancelled in-person programming but continued offering Reading Buddies with teen volunteers via the ZOOM platform. *"Hoping that Seniors can participate in Reading Buddies when it's safe to do so, as the pandemic has created many more children with reading difficulties."*
- **City of St. Albert – Community Services:** In 2019, the Youth Asset Coordinator with the city organized a "Connecting Generations Program" bringing together three seniors' facilities and three schools. Classrooms were selected based on their proximity to a seniors' facility to eliminate bussing costs. Students and seniors met monthly and participated in games, storytelling, crafts, science experiments, singing and music. The program was halted in 2020 due to the pandemic. The current Youth Asset Coordinator hopes to organize intergenerational programming in 2022.
- **St. Albert Seniors Association:** Does not offer any intergenerational programs.
- **Homeland Housing: Chateau Mission Court, Northridge Lodge and Northridge Place:** These seniors' facilities participated in the Connecting Generations Program in 2019. During the pandemic they received cards from schools and due to its popularity with their residents had a letter exchange with students from a local school. Once it is safe to do so, Homeland Housing will have students come back for in-person inter-generational programming.

Intergenerational Sporting Activities in St. Albert

- **Pickleball** - Pickleball is a racquet sport popularized primarily by Seniors. St. Albert has an active pickleball club that encourages the participation of youth through inclusion in their regularly programmed activities with seniors and other participants of all ages.
- **Golf** – While St. Albert doesn't have any golf courses within its boundaries, there are several golf courses in Edmonton and the surrounding counties. Golf doesn't offer anything formal as an intergenerational sport, but it is one that can be played well with Seniors and Youths, Par 3 courses, in particular, are popular with grandparents and their grandchildren.
- **Curling** – There is no formal intergenerational curling league at the Curling Club in St. Albert, but several Seniors assist with the junior curling leagues.
- **Disc Golf** – Newly introduced to St. Albert in 2020, disc golf is designed to be enjoyed by people of all ages, gender identity, and economic status, making it a great lifetime fitness activity.
- **Outdoor Rinks and Skating Freezeways** - Outdoor skating rinks and freezeways are a great way for people of all ages to stay active, enjoy the beautiful winter weather and have fun with family and friends. One suggestion, focused upon the skating freezeways, that would improve Seniors experience would be the addition of benches (for putting on / taking off of skates) at the freezeways would be appreciated. In addition, it appears that the freezeways are not as well maintained as other skating facilities (freezeways are badly sloped and very rough). Again, this would improve seniors safety at those facilities.

Intergenerational Programming in Other Communities

- **Garden of Generations program in Surrey, BC** – brings together youths and seniors from across Surrey to plant vegetables at the community garden and later will be harvested and donated to support vulnerable youths and seniors. The program helps create diverse life experiences and recognizes the value of all individuals and their contribution in building a healthy, active community.
- **Linking Generations Program in Sherwood Park, AB** - was created in 2004 and provides mentored and structured visits aimed at building relationships between local seniors and youth. The program brings generations together to share knowledge and life experiences and encourages volunteering and social responsibility in youth. Linking Generations creates connections between seniors and youth by nurturing friendships.

- **LINKages Connecting Generations Society in Calgary, AB** – was created in 2014 to facilitate innovative intergenerational programs and services that encourage involvement, transfer of knowledge, and capitalize on the strengths of youth and seniors to foster strong Alberta communities. LINKages connects youth and seniors in a spirit of cooperation, friendship, and respect where both generations benefit from sharing their experiences, skills, and knowledge with an aim to:
 - build bridges between generations by connecting young people and seniors in ways that are mutually beneficial,
 - develop volunteers and engage citizens through community involvement
 - foster and celebrate age-friendly communities through personal development and learning
 - overcome ageist stereotype

FCSS Pilot Project

- On November 19, 2021, Committee Chair, Barbara Hahn met with Jennifer Becker from the City to discuss the creation of a Pilot project **“Companionship and Mentoring Program”** to connect youths and seniors in the community.

Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) had been hearing at Inter-agency meetings and from the Mental Wellness Working Table that there are some isolated and lonely seniors in the community and that many youths are struggling. Perhaps these two demographics can help each other. But first it needs to be determined if there is enough interest in the Community to start a pilot project. To gauge interest, Jennifer and Barbara developed seven survey questions.

In December, FCSS asked Seniors and Youths interested in participating in the Pilot to complete a brief survey by answering questions about their preferences, availability, and interests. The survey ran until January 7, 2022. FCSS heard from over a dozen residents interested in the pilot program and is currently meeting with them to explore next steps.

“Now more than ever it is recognized that intergenerational connections are not simply a nice to have option but are a need to have priority to maintain the physical, mental and emotional health of all generations.”

2022 SAC Priorities:

Foreword

As part of the initial meeting of the 2022 SAC a discussion around priorities for the committee was held with newly appointed City Councilors to the Committee Sheena Hughes and Mike Killick. At that time it was indicated that the City would not be completing Strategic Planning and that the need to draw upon the Seniors Advisory Committee (SAC) would likely not occur until April.

With this in mind, the Committee exchanged e-mails on potential topics for completion in 2022. Although the list is currently very short, the Committee will continue to monitor a variety of sources (St. Albert Community Vibes Newsletter, Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council, St. Albert Seniors Association as examples) for issues to be advising Council upon.

At this time the Committee has identified the following issues that we will be advising Council upon:

1. Seniors On-Line Applications Review – a report was presented to the Committee in 2021 and will be finalized and published in 2022 for Council (and others) to review.
2. Seniors Access to Parks and Recreation Facilities – the initial commentary here was that many of the parking lots at P&R Facilities have been poorly plowed and this presents a challenge to many seniors. Further, although discounts are available to Seniors for access to City facilities, seniors are often challenged to fully utilize the facilities when they are in competition with younger and more able-bodied individuals. The Committee will be providing advisory to Council on the potential for creating “Seniors Only” hours. If Costco can do it, so can the City.
3. Continue monitoring the COVID effect upon Seniors – although 2020 and 2021 had a lot of emphasis upon the effect COVID is having upon the mental and physical well-being of Seniors, the Committee feels that it is imperative to continue to provide oversight on issues that the pandemic is presenting to our Seniors community. The Committee will provide a mid-year report on potential improvements that will support both the physical and mental well-being of Seniors.
4. Continued follow-up on the FCSS Companionship and Mentoring program – initial steps were made in 2021 to establish a formal companionship and mentoring program for both Youth and Seniors in St. Albert. In 2022 the Committee would like to establish a ‘field trial’ for such a companionship and mentoring program in the City.

As we continue through 2022 the Committee will work closely with our Council representatives and provide input and response as appropriate.