

CATALYZE SV

Designing for Seniors: Building Places that Prioritize Seniors

Event Summary

Event Date: Thursday, June 13, 2024
Location: 76 South First Street, San José CA 95112



Presenting Sponsors:





Executive Summary:

Background: In recent years, Catalyze SV members have been seeing [more](#) and [more housing projects](#) for seniors. So we planned an event with developers, designers, service providers, and community members about what features make new development projects welcoming and accessible for senior residents.

With the crucial support of our partners, Catalyze SV hosted an educational event on Thursday, June 13th from 3 to 6 pm to shine a light on this issue. Hosted simultaneously in person in Downtown San Jose and on Zoom, we discussed how developers and designers are designing projects and spaces that support seniors. In turn, participants then shared their input on the needs and priorities of seniors. Five facilitators were present to engage participants in constructive conversations.

Event Format:

- Registration and Welcome
- Featured Speaker: Don Weden, Retd. Principal Planner, Santa Clara County

Presentation, "Older is the new normal"

Don Weden highlighted the rapid growth of the senior demographic and emphasized the challenges and opportunities this aging population presents. He stressed the critical importance of housing affordability for seniors' wellbeing. Weden advocated for the creation of vibrant urban neighborhoods as a solution to housing affordability issues affecting people of all ages and income levels. His proposals included specialized housing designs such as wheelchair-accessible kitchens, pocket parks in denser areas, safer crosswalks at busy intersections, urban wildlife habitats, comfortable transit access with bus shelters, outdoor fitness stations, and dedicated senior centers. Weden underscored the responsibility current and future generations have in addressing these issues.

- Small Group Discussion & Report Back

The discussion focused on designing housing for seniors.

- How does Silicon Valley prioritize seniors today (programs, support services, community spaces, etc.)?
- What is something challenging for seniors in current housing design?
- Are there enough levels of senior housing in Silicon Valley to support the upcoming "Silver Tsunami"?

During small group discussion, participants emphasized the high cost of existing housing options and the critical need for financing affordable housing projects tailored to seniors' needs. There was strong advocacy for designing vibrant, multi-family apartments that support aging in place, addressing design challenges such as the pressure to create smaller units within budget constraints. Others emphasized that affordable housing should match market-rate quality and include essential services. The discussion also stressed the importance of Universal Design principles to ensure inclusivity and adaptability to seniors' changing mobility needs in housing environments.

- Panel 1: Roundtable/Fireside Chat #1: Architect and Developers

The following presented:

- [Katie Ackerly, Principal/Sustainable Design Director, David Baker Architects](#)
- [Samantha Meyer, Senior Project Developer, Eden Housing](#), and
- [Louis Liss, Associate Director of Real Estate Development](#), Eden Housing

- Visioning and Food Break

While participants enjoyed catered food from [Saji Mediterranean](#), CSV staff facilitated a Visioning Workshop to allow participants to write down and draw potential solutions to support senior living in developments.

The following questions were asked:

- What solutions would you like to see that support seniors/ older adults?
- What features of a project or the urban environment can help support the lifestyle of seniors?

During the visioning workshop, participants focused on enhancing senior living through 24/7 health monitoring and fostering community connections. They advocated for senior-friendly amenities such as nearby kitchens and mobile libraries, along with introducing ridesharing services and annual home visits for service sign-ups. Senior centers were highlighted as vital community hubs, promoting engagement and supporting caregivers. Discussions also addressed infrastructure improvements like wider sidewalks, level crosswalks, and accessible public spaces, as well as advocating for reliable public transport and civic programming tailored for seniors. The participants emphasized universal design principles, sensory rooms, adaptive exercise spaces, and the integration of smart technology for senior wellness and safety. Challenges identified included car dependency, inadequate community amenities, and accessibility concerns, while proposals aimed to improve housing, healthcare access, and online resources to enhance senior lifestyles and combat social isolation.

- Panel 2: Roundtable/Fireside Chat #2: Senior Service Providers

The following presented:

- [Janice Fujii, Director of Program Management, South East Bay, On Lok](#), and
- [Rebecca Turner](#), Skilled Nursing Administrator, Retired

- Q&A for all Panelists/Closing

Breakdown of Participant Engagement as of April 24th, 2023:

- 58 registrants via the Eventbrite link
- 30 individuals participated in person
- Another 5 participated live via Zoom
- The video received 27 views [on YouTube](#) (as of July 25, 2024).
- Survey Participation: 15 pre-event survey submissions, 6 post-event submissions

Major Themes from Participants' Input:

1. DESIGNING SPACE IN EACH HOME

Participants identified elements within the home that can create a safe and accessible environment for seniors. Participants highlighted specific challenges in current housing designs, such as cabinet heights, inadequate electrical outlets, bars to climb stairs or around the bathroom, and poor acoustics. Solutions often involve incorporating universal design principles and leveraging technology to improve living conditions.

2. DESIGNING SPACE IN THE BROADER COMMUNITY

Participants also identified the need to foster spaces that promote community and social interaction. There's a significant focus on designing affordable housing solutions, especially for seniors. This includes smaller, studio-style apartments that cater to aging in place, making it more feasible for seniors to live independently for longer. Elements in design that include communal areas, community gardens, access to senior centers, and other public spaces that encourage engagement and reduce social isolation. Participants also emphasized the need to design and cater to seniors with diverse backgrounds, including veterans, LGBTQ+, and those with disabilities.

3. INTEGRATION OF SERVICES

Attendees also acknowledged that designing for seniors is just the beginning and emphasized integrating services within housing complexes. This could include medical care facilities, socialization programs, rehabilitation services, and community-building activities.

4. TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Participants agreed that designs need to account for the needs of residents of all ages, aiming to create spaces that are adaptable to changing mobility needs as people age. This includes considerations like wheelchair accessibility and flexible living arrangements.

Survey Responses: (as of 7/24/24)

Post Event Survey

What was most interesting during the event?

- Featured Speaker (8/13)
- Small Group Discussion (7/13)
- Panel 1 Architect & Developer (6/13)
- Visioning Workshop (3/13)
- Panel 2 Service Provider (7/13)

What aspects of the event did you find least enjoyable or could be improved?

- Participants recommended having group leaders and possibly an artist for future visioning workshops.
- Participants expressed that the setup of the seating needed improvement.
- Attendees emphasized the need for more service provider attendance and awareness of caregiving issues.

Do you have any suggestions for future events in the series - Designing for Or any other event ideas.

- Expand the event size to accommodate more participants.
- Include topics on disability and considerations for multi-generational families.
- Request for more well-organized and well-executed events similar to this one.
- Explore AgeTech solutions for enabling older adults to age in place longer, such as remote patient monitoring for conditions like Dementia and Diabetes.
- Plan a follow-up session in 6 months to review changes and progress in designing for seniors.