THE 2012 SENIOR SUMMIT


AARP Oklahoma
Oklahoma County Government
Oklahoma State Homebuilders Association

View the full report online:
Introduction

In the next sixteen years, millions of Americans, the Baby Boomers, will exit the workforce and enter retirement. As a result, the nation will experience one of the largest demographic shifts in history. In Oklahoma, the senior citizen population is projected to rise 66 percent by 2030.¹ The demographic shift will increase the demand for services consumed by seniors, particularly housing and health care.

The growing senior population requires seniors, their caregivers, and their families be informed of housing options. The full report² on the 2012 Senior Summit provides necessary information for seniors, their caregivers, and their families.

2012 Senior Summit

The Senior Summit is a large focus group consisting of seniors, community leaders, planners, builders, and developers invited to learn, educate and participate in discussions about issues directly affecting the aging population. The morning session is designed for senior participants and the afternoon session for professionals who care for specific needs of the senior population. The 2012 Senior Summit was convened by AARP of Oklahoma, Oklahoma State Homebuilders Association, and Oklahoma County government, with assistance from United Way of Central Oklahoma.

Previous Senior Summits encouraged broad discussion on multiple areas of interest. The 2012 Senior Summit aimed to narrow the discussion to one particular focus area, senior housing. Three housing options were presented and seniors were invited to share their thoughts, concerns, and preferences on each housing option. The three options discussed were:

- Aging in Place/Universal Design
- Co-Housing
- Retirement Communities/Assisted Living

¹U.S. Census, 2010 Population Projections
²The full report provides: general demographic information, overviews of the three housing options, and feedback received from the participants on the housing options.
Aging in Place/Universal Design

Michael Thomas, an expert in interior and exterior home modifications with the use of “barrier-free designs” in home remodels presented.³

A growing number of retirees desire to remain in their own homes throughout retirement. According to a 2010 AARP survey, 89 percent of respondents 50 years of age and older wish to remain in their home through retirement.⁴ The Aging in Place philosophy recognizes changes in mobility, brought on by aging, necessitate a proactive approach to home design.

The Aging in Place movement aims to increase at-home retirement for senior citizens by making the live-in environment safer. Universal design incorporates functional modifications to existing homes in order to make residences easier to use for seniors. Universal design promotes comfort, safety, independent living, allows residents more flexibility in the use of their homes, and prevents injuries.⁵

In Summit feedback sessions⁶, a majority of seniors expressed a preference for universal design.

Downsides, or concerns, identified with Aging in Place:

• No control over potential deterioration of the neighborhood
• No support immediately available if needed
• Proximity to needed services
• Transportation challenges
• Most homes require modification to accommodate changing needs over time
• People will become less able to handle their own maintenance and upkeep over time, and perhaps less able to afford to pay for those types of services from others

³Please find a checklist of home remodel ideas and tips beginning on page 5.
⁴AARP 2010 Study
⁵Details of proposed remodels are included in the full report.
⁶A feedback session is a meeting organized to present work in progress in order to gain feedback.
Co-housing is broadly defined as housing which provides residents with an active role in the design and operation of their community. Co-housing is a residential development designed to emphasize community interaction and respect individual privacy. It allows seniors to avoid the isolation so often associated with older age.

Community models vary by location, but most share a common set of principles: resident engagement in the planning process; a common house and other facilities owned jointly; a physical design that encourages interaction among residents; and collaborative community management that recognizes the shared needs of residents. Design features typically allow for easy access by all levels of physical ability. Additionally, communities may include optional studio residences in the common house for home health aides.

In the Summit feedback sessions, senior participants expressed interest in co-housing because it potentially subverted certain downsides of Aging in Place. Co-housing offers a strong sense of community along with the satisfaction and control of home ownership without many of the aggravations associated with home ownership.

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7 A co-housing example, Oakcreek Co-housing, Stillwater, Oklahoma, may be found in the full report.

8 The Co-housing Association of the United States lists five key factors of a successful co-housing operation, which can be found in the full report.
Retirement communities take many forms. Comprehensive facilities, such as Epworth Villa, provide a broad continuum of services, which allows a resident to receive increasing levels of care as needed over time (Independent Living, Assisted Living, Memory Care, Skilled Nursing, Long-Term Care, and Rehabilitation Services). Different facilities offer different types of floor plans, such as an apartment-style, or cottage style dwellings. In addition to a variety of floor plans, retirement communities offer life-long learning opportunities, transportation, physical fitness programs, libraries, classes, and other features aimed at keeping people active and engaged.

In Summit feedback sessions, the most significant appeal was the assurance that a seniors’ needs would continue to be met as they changed over time. Additionally, seniors found retirement communities appealing because the frustrations of home ownership are eliminated. Seniors equate retirement communities with traditional nursing homes. Therefore, it is important to visit, see the options, and understand what each has to offer. Overall participants liked the concept of both co-housing and retirement communities but were concerned with cost.

**Conclusion**

In brief, a majority of the senior participants desire to age in place. However, many participants acknowledged that home modifications would be necessary. As a result, home remodeling ideas were well received. Upkeep of a home was a concern for a majority of participants. Cost revealed itself as the number one concern associated with co-housing and retirement communities.
Checklists for Aging in Place

Top 10 No-Cost Improvements for Independent Living:

1. Open blinds and curtains to increase natural light.
2. Place exposed electrical cords (telephone, computer, television) along walls.
3. Remove clutter from stairways and walkways to prevent falls.
4. Set hot water heater to 120° to reduce energy costs and prevent scalding while bathing.
5. Remove rugs and furniture that may increase the chance of falling.
6. Place frequently used items in accessible places.
7. Check carpeting to ensure it is firmly attached.
8. Arrange furniture to allow for easy passage in hallways and living areas.
9. Check outdoor walkways for loose masonry and slick areas.
10. Trim overgrown shrubbery to increase visibility from doors and windows.

Top 10 Home Improvements Under $100.00:

1. Replace light bulbs with Energy Star bulbs for reduced costs and increased efficiency.
2. Install smoke/carbon monoxide detectors on all levels of the house.
3. Install nightlights in all living areas, bathrooms, and hallways.
4. Use suction bathmats and anti-slip floor strips in bathing areas to prevent falls.
5. Replace knobs on cabinets and drawers with handles for use by arthritic residents.
6. Replace traditional light switches with rocker-style light switches.
7. Install easy-to-grip handles on all doors.
8. Install handrails on both sides of all staircases.
9. Install hand-held adjustable showerheads.
10. Mount stability-bars next to toilets and bathing areas.
Checklist for New Home Design

*Smart Design Livable Homes’ Shared Solutions America, Great Ideas for Better Living, identify the following factors to consider when building a new home:*

**Exterior Features:**

☐ Provide an obstacle free walkway at least 36” from the front doorway to the vehicle or parking area.

☐ Provide at least one no-step entrance to the home, which may be accomplished with careful grading of the walkway run.

☐ Walkway grading should not exceed a pitch or angle producing 1’ of rise for every 20’ in length.

☐ Install secure handrails on steps and porches.

☐ Build a covered overhang entry for protection from inclement weather.

☐ Consider an optional package shelf at front entranceway for parcels, groceries, etc.

☐ High-visibility address numbers, illuminated if possible.

☐ Front door should be 36” wide and a maximum ½” high threshold with beveled edges.

☐ Lever-set easy to grasp front door handle with dual-function release deadbolt preferred.

☐ Provide a 5’x 5’ level clear space both outside and inside of main entry.

☐ Full-length sidelights at entry or double peepholes (one at normal height and the second 42” high).

☐ Install a doorbell that can be heard throughout a house.

**Interior Features Throughout:**

☐ In multi-story homes consider a bedroom & bathroom on the ground floor and stacking two closets for a future elevator install.

☐ All doors should be 34” to 36” minimum width.

☐ All floor thresholds should not exceed ½” height and have beveled top edges.

☐ Provide easy-to-grasp lever style door handles 36” high.

☐ Use lightweight interior doors.

☐ Provide 18” minimum space between in-swing sides of doorway.
Interior Features Throughout (continued):

- All hallways should be at least 42” to 48” wide (minimum 48” clear width for VA Specially Adapted Housing).
- Use commercial grade, non-slip, easy to maintain flooring surfaces and low-pile or loop carpeting over thin dense commercial type padding throughout the home. (No VOC materials).
- Avoid small throw rugs. Large area rugs should have anti-slip backing.
- Window sills in living, dining, and bedroom areas should be 30” from the finished floor.
- Install non-glare skylights to provide day light wherever possible.
- Thermostats should have large numbers and controls, and be mounted 53” from finished floor to center of thermostat (48” height optional for wheelchair user).
- Provide adjustable-height poles and shelves in all closets.
- Avoid elevation changes throughout house.
- Select furniture with rounded corners that allows for easy movement.
- Employ color contrast between door jambs & adjacent walls, avoid dark colors.
- Install automatic night-lights in bathrooms and pathways from bedrooms to bathrooms.
- Choose products and finishes that minimize maintenance and upkeep. Select materials that do not produce volatile organic gases.

Lighting and Electrical Throughout the Home:

- Provide lighting to illuminate exterior paths to entrances.
- Light fixtures should have electronic ballasts and linear or compact fluorescent lamps in 3500k to 4100k color range.
- All electrical outlets should be grounded and mounted 12” to 16” from finished floor to center of outlet.
- All light switches should be large rocker-type, preferably illuminated and mounted 42” from finished floor to center of switch, at the entrance of each room.
- Install energy-saving “automatic vacancy sensor” wall switches in bathrooms and closets. Also applicable to exhaust fan switches in bathrooms and laundry.
- Provide telephone jacks in all rooms mounted 12” to 16” from finished floor to center of outlet. Consider a wall-mounted phone in bathroom, laundry, and kitchen for convenience and safety.
- All light fixtures and window treatments should provide glare-free lighting.
Kitchen:

☐ Provide a 5’ diameter of clear open space in kitchen.

☐ An L or U-shaped counter, 34” to 36” from finished floor, with the sink, cook-top, and oven works best and allow moving heavy or hot items safely.

☐ Use easy to maintain materials such as laminate, granite, quartz, or other durable countertops. Avoid dark colors and ceramic tile as the tile grout collects mold and is difficult to maintain.

☐ Radius or bevel all counter corners for safety and consider contrasting border edge color to improve visibility for individuals with sight impairment.

☐ Provide at least 18” to 24” of clear countertop surface at both sides of cook-top and sink and at least 24” of clear countertop surface at one side of refrigerator and built-in oven.

☐ Cabinets should have VOC-free box construction. Avoid materials containing formaldehyde. All lower cabinets should have full extension drawers, except under sink and cook top which should be finished and fully accessible.

☐ Sink & cook-top lower cabinets should have a clear open space underneath approximately 30” x 27” x 19”.

☐ Cabinet doors and drawers should be easy to open and have easy-to-grasp handles or knobs.

☐ Use 170° hinges on cook-top and sink cabinet doors to allow maximum access.

☐ Insulate all exposed waste and hot water lines.

☐ Mount upper cabinets 15” from counter top instead of the standard 18”.

☐ Consider the option of using glass doors on upper cabinets for content visibility.

☐ Dishwasher unit should be elevated at least 6” to 9” height from finished floor.

☐ Wall-mounted oven should be installed 48” from finished floor, and center shelf should be level with adjacent countertop. Select self-cleaning and convection features.

☐ Provide heat resistant surface counter-top adjacent to oven.

☐ Consider using a free-standing microwave set on counter-top for ease of use.

☐ Over-range units are too high and potentially dangerous.

☐ Floors, walls, and cabinet sides under sink and cook-top should have finished surfaces.

☐ Sink should be at minimum 18 gauge stainless steel with 6” deep basins and drains in rear.
**Kitchen (continued):**

- Sink faucet should be single-lever, or ergonomic dual handle, high arc, pull-out spray head.
- Install whole-house anti-scald valve at outlet line side of main hot water heater, set at 120° maximum (100° for people with spinal cord injuries).
- Mount kitchen exhaust fan control switch where accessible when seated.
- Provide fluorescent lighting under upper cabinets.
- Provide fluorescent recessed or surface ambient lighting fixtures with electronic ballasts and lamps in 3500k (preferred) to 4100k range in kitchen.
- Select easy-to-maintain water and slip resistant floor surface materials in light color for kitchen, laundry, and bathrooms.
- Mount a kitchen fire extinguisher in an easy-to-reach location, have it periodically serviced.

**Bathrooms:**

- Bathroom entry door should be 34” to 36” wide.
- Provide a 5’ diameter clear space in bathrooms, or a T-shaped 3’x 5’ with 2’ x 5’-T space.
- Resilient floor surface material is recommended such as contract or commercial grade, no-wax slip-resistant sheet vinyl in light color. Avoid using ceramic tile for floor, counters, and shower walls.
- Provide in-wall plywood or blocking reinforcement to allow later installation of stability-bars with 250lb load support capacity around all tub, toilet, and shower walls.
- Install sturdy towel bars in case of need to grasp during a fall (250lb minimum load).
- Bathroom sink cabinets should be 30” x 27” x 19”.
- Mount mirrors and medicine cabinet with bottoms directly above rear backsplash.
- Bathtub should have non-slip bottom, and a 24” minimum full-length seated drying space.
- Offset bathtub and shower levers near the entry side. Mount control valves at 38” to 40” from center of control knob or handle to floor.
- Provide a curb-less shower unit with minimum 36” wide by 60” long non-slip base and sufficient room for an optional 48” x 60” unit.
**Bathrooms (continued):**

- Install a detachable hand held shower unit with a 6’ long flexible hose and water shut-off button or lever. Mount on a secure heavy-duty vertical slider bar unit, able to support a 250lb load.
- All shower walls to have “in-wall” plywood or blocking reinforcement to allow later installation of stability-bars (minimum 250lb load support capacity).
- Install exhaust fan with correct airflow capacity and quiet 1.0 or less sones noise level operation controlled by a separate vacancy sensing switch with an automatic motion sensing.
- Toilet should be elongated and 16-1/2” to 17-1/2” high.
- Consider using a free-standing microwave set on counter-top for ease of use.
- Over-range units are too high and potentially dangerous.
- Floors, walls, and cabinet sides under sink and cook-top should have finished surfaces.
- Sink should be at minimum 18 gauge stainless steel with 6” deep basins and drains in rear.

**Bedrooms:**

- Provide fluorescent lighting in all closets, mount switch directly outside closet doorway.
- Closet doorway to be at least 36” wide.
- Provide high-quality fluorescent light fixtures mounted on the ceiling in each bedroom, and table-top and wall mounted task lighting. Consider Energy Star fan/light combo units.
- Provide 36” clear space on two sides of the bed and 60” clearance on the closet side.
- Provide a telephone jack near the bed in the master bedroom.
- Mattress height should not exceed 22” from finished floor to mattress top for easy entry.

**Laundry & Utility Room:**

- Select a washer and dryer with front-load and front-mounted, easy-to-use controls. Platform-mount the washer and dryer approximately 9” from finished floor.
We express our deepest appreciation to the presenters who shared information on the three housing options:

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