

~ Support Services ~

Making Support Services a Priority in Tight Economic Times

This article is part of an ongoing series on innovative and promising practices that expand upon six domains featured in our publication, "A Healthy Community Perspective on Aging Well." The domains are: Varied Housing Options, Mobility, Community Involvement, Employment, Lifelong Learning, and Supportive Services.

The City of Kirkland is located in King County, Washington and has a total population of 45,682. The median age of Kirkland residents is 39.9 years which is slightly higher than the overall median for the state. To close budget gaps, many cities first cut funding for parks and support services. The City of Kirkland is an exception.

Kirkland and four neighboring cities are members of the Eastside Human Services Forum, a local initiative that promotes strong public-private partnerships to support human and social services. Instead of cutting budgets for parks and community services, these five cities together increased their total funding for these services for fiscal year 2009 – 2010. The increased funding will support current service levels, and add slightly more funding to emergency services, such as homeless shelters and food giveaway programs.

Public services, such as transit, become more important as people look for less expensive ways to travel to work and school. These services provide a security net for the most vulnerable residents in the city, including older adults.

In addition to the budget increases, a unique private-public partnership between the City and the local Evergreen Healthcare Hospital system resulted in a \$60,000 contribution from the hospital system to the city to support the following three key programs for older adults:

- **Evergreen Health Enhancement Program (HEP)** – Delivers services that help older adults manage chronic conditions, reduce isolation and loneliness, and provide positive activities to incorporate into daily living.
- **Northwest Senior Games** – Gives people age 50 and older opportunities to participate in athletic activities that promote healthy aging and social engagement.
- **Kirkland Senior Council** – Works to ensure that Kirkland is and remains a safe and livable community for residents age 50 and older.

The Kirkland Senior Council is active, and has successfully implemented a number of special projects and campaigns over the past year. Kirkland Deputy Mayor Joan McBride says, "Senior Council participation in regularly scheduled city-sponsored joint study sessions and on special ad hoc planning committees highlights important issues that the city council would not otherwise recognize. Senior Council participants bring a needed, unique perspective and level of expertise to the table."

Cities that plan ahead and build support for the growing number of older adults who will choose to "age-in-place" can realize a number of benefits. For example, older adults will contribute significantly to local economies. Recent polls suggest that retirees of the boomer generation will be more likely to volunteer their skills and expertise with local city agencies and philanthropic campaigns. Cities can take advantage of the increasing pool of community volunteers by establishing city council-appointed committees to provide guidance on meeting the needs of a new generation of older adults. Ideally these city council advisory groups would also coordinate with the local Area Agencies on Aging, which are



Walking programs abound in Kirkland.

typically administered through county social and human services departments. Cities that reach out to older adults, listen to their interests, concerns and needs, and provide meaningful opportunities for older adults to use their talents and experience to make a difference in their communities will experience many healthy community benefits!

The City of Kirkland has an impressive history of encouraging programs aimed at keeping its residents healthy and active. The city was named the "2007 Achievement Award Winner" as part of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's "Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging Awards" program. The award recognized the Kirkland Senior Council, along with the city's "holistic development approach that embraces 'walkable' communities, affordable housing, and transit-oriented development." The City of Kirkland is a leader in promoting opportunities for residents in the planning and delivery of programs for older adults. 

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