

City of Kirkland, Washington**Location:** King County**Population:** 45,682 (2007)**Ethnic composition:** 84% White, 10% Asian**Median age:** 39.9 years**Adults ages 45 to 64:** 13,702**Adults ages 64 and older:** 5,168**Percentage of adults ages 45 and older compared with total population:** 41%**Median household income:** \$76,055 (2007)**Other key information:** The median age of Kirkland residents is slightly higher than the overall median for the state of Washington.

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES | COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Industry: Local Government Agency**CHALLENGE**

Local governments and businesses across the United States have had to make tough decisions recently about how to reduce significant deficits and stabilize operating budgets. In the Kirkland area, the largest employers, Microsoft and Boeing, announced workforce reduction plans that included thousands of layoffs. At the same time, the City of Kirkland faced a biennial budget gap of \$19 million. To close budget gaps, many cities first cut funding for parks and for community services. Yet during difficult economic times, demand actually increases for parks and community services.

Older adults often cannot afford out-of-town vacations, even in a strong economy. Instead, they stay close to home, visiting such local attractions as parks, walking trails, and community swimming pools. Multigenerational families whose household incomes have dropped due to job loss or that are facing foreclosure on their primary residence are forced to seek temporary help from emergency food banks and shelters. Meanwhile, public services, such as transit, become more important as people look for less expensive ways to travel to work and school. In tough fiscal times, parks and community services might be viewed as “extras” or “nonessential,” when in fact these relatively inexpensive services provide a security net for the most vulnerable residents in the city. In addition, parks and community services departments provide human services, such as emergency food, employment, and shelter programs, that work to stave off homelessness or food insecurity for many families, including elders.

SOLUTION

The City of 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. Kirkland’s mayor serves on the forum’s executive board and plays a key role in forming partnerships that support policies for aging well in the community. Because of their commitment to the forum, these five cities decided not to take the obvious path and cut budgets for parks and community services. Instead, the cities together increased their total funding for these services to more than \$5.7 million in fiscal year 2009 – 2010. Following the policy framework established by the Eastside Human Services Forum, Kirkland city leaders decided to increase funding for human services by 8%, for a total of \$1.1 million for fiscal year 2009 – 2010, an increase of \$564,000 over the previous year. The increased funding will support current service levels, and add slightly more funding to emergency services.



As part of one public-private partnership, the local Evergreen Healthcare Hospital system contributed \$60,000 to the city to support three important 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 ages 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 ages 50 and older. In addition to providing a base of financial support, the City of Kirkland has taken a leadership role in promoting opportunities for residents to actively engage in the planning and delivery of programs for older adults. The Kirkland Senior Council is comprised of at least 11 volunteer members appointed by the city council. This unique, intergenerational group was formed in 2002 following a city needs assessment. The Kirkland Senior Council studies, reviews, evaluates, and makes recommendations to the city council and the city manager on issues of importance to older residents. According to the city's web site, the Senior Council, as part of the Active Living Task Force, also advocates for and supports local strategies (such as pedestrian and bike paths) aimed at promoting community-enriched physical activities as an integral part of everyone's daily life.

RESULTS

The Kirkland Senior Council is very active, and has successfully implemented a number of special projects and campaigns over the past year. Recent efforts include:

- A "Falls Prevention" educational campaign
- "Baby Boomers and Beyond: A Healthy Living Expo" targeted toward adults ages 50 and older
- A promotional campaign seeking to recruit older adults for local neighborhood associations
- A strategic initiative that encourages surrounding cities to establish their own senior councils
- A variety of educational video programs, such as "SWAY: How to Influence Your Elected Officials" and "Aging in Place in Kirkland: Universal Design in Housing is Good for Everyone"

The Senior Council shows how a city can stay in touch with the needs of older community members, coordinate with other organized groups working for older adults, and move beyond the familiar senior-center model to find fresh, effective ways to deliver services.

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. This is precious time for us.”

AGING WELL BENEFITS—SUPPORTIVE SERVICES/COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Providing an array of accessible support services is a good promotional strategy for attracting near-retirees and retirees to a city, and for retaining the current retiree population. 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. Retired residents invest in local banks and investment firms, and buy their food and essential goods at local shopping and retail centers. Older adults also contribute to civic life. Recent polls suggest that boomer retirees will be more likely to volunteer their skills and expertise with city agencies and philanthropic campaigns. Cities can take advantage of the increasing pool of community volunteers by establishing city council-appointed advisory groups that represent boomers, as well as the existing population of older adults (ages 65 and older). Ideally these advisory groups would also coordinate with the local Area Agencies on Aging, which are typically administered through county social and human services departments.

The City of Kirkland has an impressive history of encouraging programs aimed at keeping its residents healthy and active. Indeed, 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.”



PROMISING PRACTICES—LESSONS LEARNED

- Invest in local human services to strengthen the public safety net, especially for aging residents who are vulnerable in a deep recession.
- Form alliances with other local government agencies to address the challenges aging residents face.
- Pool resources from local businesses to support needed community services.
- Establish collaborative networks and working partnerships with a variety of stakeholders to strengthen public services.
- Create and support city council-appointed advisory groups as a strategy for attracting charitable foundation funds for city support services and planning activities.

REFERENCES

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

This case study is part of [Aging Well in Communities: A Toolkit for Planning, Engagement & Action](#). This toolkit includes a community planning overview; guides for resident surveys, public forums, and focus groups; case studies; and a list of aging-related resources. For the complete toolkit, visit <http://www.civicpartnerships.org/docs/services/CHCC/aging-well.htm>.

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