

**Gulfport Communities for a Lifetime Blueprint:
Community Priorities and Timeline**

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Executive Summary

- Communities for a Lifetime is a Florida initiative to assist communities to plan and implement improvements that will benefit both younger and older populations. Communities undergo self-assessment and improvement that will enable residents to age in place or continue to live independently within the community while still benefiting people of all ages. The Mayor of Gulfport began this process by proclaiming on May 6, 2003, that Gulfport would become a Community for a Lifetime. The City Council authorized the Gulfport Multipurpose Senior Center to undergo the self-assessment process and the results were published in *Gulfport Communities For a Lifetime Focus Groups: Final Report*.
- From June-August 2006, the recommendations from this report were presented to the public in four meetings held at the Neighborhood Center, Stetson Law School, the Multipurpose Senior Center, and the Chamber of Commerce meeting at the Catherine Hickman Theatre. One meeting was videotaped and made available on Channel 15. A total of 82 people attended the meetings or watched the videotape and rated the recommendations. Of these, 78 indicated they were residents and are included in these analyses.
- Most participants were homeowners and had lived in Gulfport for 17 years, on average. They reported that they or someone in their household had trouble with hearing (21%), walking (22%), vision (16%), breathing (14%), or memory (8%). Eight percent of the participants owned a business in Gulfport. Participants were disproportionately older and female, two groups that are most likely to benefit from these recommendations.
- Eleven recommendations were ranked in the top six¹ and could be initiated in 2007 or 2008 with City Council approval and completed by 2009. These are listed below (in some cases two or more recommendations are combined):
 - a. Ensure that all municipal buildings are accessible for people with disabilities and large meeting spaces are equipped for people with hearing impairments.
 - b. Create a Commission on housing, mobility, and safety with a focus on transportation and safer streets.
 - c. Develop a volunteer network to help persons with disabilities to modify their homes.
 - d. Create a second Commission on health and long-term care with a special emphasis on working with local healthcare providers to offer a 24-hour clinic in Gulfport.
 - e. Develop and implement a “business for a lifetime” program.
 - f. Develop a list of reliable helpers and a volunteer bank (ways for volunteers to help each other).
 - g. Provide transportation to cultural activities in nearby cities.
- The remaining recommendations, which also have relatively high average ratings should be reviewed by the appropriate city departments and private businesses and considered within their future plans.

¹ Some recommendations had the same overall rating and were assigned the same rank.

Background

Communities for a Lifetime is a Florida initiative to assist cities, towns, and counties to create better communities for older adults and to plan and implement improvements that will benefit both younger and older populations. Communities undergo self-assessment and improvement that will enable residents to age in place or continue to live independently within the community while still benefiting people of all ages (Florida Department of Elder Affairs, 2006). The Mayor of Gulfport began this process by proclaiming on May 6, 2003, that Gulfport would become a Community for a Lifetime. As of April 2006, 100 communities in Florida have made this commitment (Florida Department of Elder Affairs, 2006). The City Council authorized the Gulfport Multipurpose Senior Center to undergo the self-assessment process and the results were published in *Gulfport Communities For a Lifetime Focus Groups: Final Report*.²

Based on demographics alone, Gulfport is already a community for a lifetime. One of four (28%) Gulfport residents is age of 65 or older. This is more than double the national average of one out of eight (13%). Residents of Gulfport have aged in place. Gulfport's older and disabled citizens and their caregivers reported many of the same concerns for independence and quality of life that have been reported in previous research in other communities. Free choice, maintaining one's identity through meaningful activities and being oneself, having sufficient resources and health or at least access to good and affordable healthcare, maintaining cognitive abilities, and connecting with others and the community have been shown to be important to quality of life in cross-national and national studies. And they were true among the 73 people who participated in the Gulfport focus groups. The focus groups went beyond defining a livable community to take the first steps for making Gulfport a community for a lifetime. They developed strategies that would meet the actual and expected needs identified in each group. These strategies were incorporated into a set of 16 recommendations published in *Gulfport Communities For a Lifetime Focus Groups: Final Report*.

From June-August 2006, the recommendations were presented to the public in four meetings held at the Neighborhood Center, Stetson Law School, the Multipurpose Senior Center, and the Chamber of Commerce meeting at the Catherine Hickman Theatre. The community meetings were listed in *The Gabber*, a weekly newspaper that serves Gulfport, and in Senior Center and Chamber of Commerce announcements. In addition, one meeting was videotaped and made available on Channel 15. A total of 82 people attended the meetings or watched the videotape and rated the recommendations. Of these, 78 indicated they lived in Gulfport and were included in these analyses. The participants (Table 1) were over-represented by women (91%), people age 70 and older (56%), and Native Americans (5%). They were representative of gay and lesbian citizens (8%), but less representative of Caucasians (72% rather than 89%), African-Americans (1% rather than 7%) and Hispanics (<1% rather than 4%). One-fifth of participants did not identify their race or ethnicity. It was not the intent to reach a representative sample through the community meetings but it was the hope that the meetings would attract individuals who would be most served by Gulfport becoming a Community for a Lifetime.

² Salmon, J.R. & Mills, W. (2006, June 6). *Gulfport Communities For a Lifetime Focus Groups: Final Report*. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida. Available at: http://www.ci.gulfport.fl.us/Special_Documents/Gulfport_Communities_for_a_Life_Time_Focus_Group_Study_June_6_2006.pdf.

Indeed, they reported that they or someone in their household had trouble with hearing (21%), walking (22%), vision (16%), breathing (14%), or memory (8%). Participants were homeowners (94%) and had lived in Gulfport for 17 years, on average. Eight percent of the participants owned a business in Gulfport.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Participants

Female	91%
Male	9%
GLBT	8%
African-American	1%
Asian-American	1%
Caucasian-American	72%
Hispanic-American	0%
Native American	5%
Other Race	1%
<u>Age group</u>	
18-29	1%
30-39	1%
40-49	10%
50-59	12%
60-69	19%
70+	56%
Average number of years Living in Gulfport (1-59 years)	17.4
Average household size (1-3)	1.4
Own home in GP	94%
Rent home in GP	6%
Problem hearing	21%
Problem eyesight	16%
Problem walking	22%
Use wheelchair	5%
Use walker or crutches	5%
Use cane	13%
Breathing problem	14%
Memory problem	8%
Mental health problem	0%
Other problem	5%
Business in Gulfport	8%
Business serves Gulfport outside of Gulfport	1%

Ratings and Rankings

The sixteen recommendations were printed on a form with directions asking each participant to rate the recommendation on a scale from 1 (highest priority) to 10 (lowest priority). Mid-way through the public meetings process, we changed the form to get feedback on three parts of two different commissions (recommendations 1.2 and 4.1), increasing the total recommendations to 22. Both versions are reported here (Table 2). The recommendations are described below under three broad areas of livable communities: health services and a caring

community; transportation, walkability, housing, safety and security; and shopping, recreation, and cultural activities. The average community ratings of these recommendations are noted in parentheses in Tables 2 and 3. Table 3 provides a rank order from highest (1) to lowest (15). These rankings are based on average ratings which were uniformly high for all 22 recommendations (2.07-4.66 out of a possible average of 1-10). Average ratings that were within .03 points of each other were assigned the same ranking.

Health Services and a Caring Community.

Goal 1: Improve access to reliable and affordable health and long-term care in Gulfport. This includes developing a directory of reliable helpers and a volunteer bank (rank=5), creating a commission on health and long-term care (rank=5) to assess the feasibility of a health clinic with 24-hour assistance (rank=4), adult day center (rank=7), and assisted living facility (rank=12) in Gulfport, and Town Shores homeowners considering establishing a Naturally Occurring Retirement Center in their community (rank=15).

Goal 2: Increase knowledge and use of existing and new services available through the Multipurpose Senior Center and other city, private, and voluntary entities. This includes developing a comprehensive marketing plan for the Senior Center (rank=10), encouraging *The Gabber* to be available through affordable subscription for shut-ins and those with disabilities (rank=7).

Goal 3: Increase the diversity of Multipurpose Senior Center clients. This includes increasing the diversity of the Senior Center Advisory Committee (rank=14) and providing programs and procedures to better serve and honor people of diverse backgrounds (rank=13).

Transportation, Walkability, Housing, and Safety.

Goal 4: Improve access to affordable, reliable, convenient and safe housing, transportation, and streets for people with disabilities. This includes creating a Commission (rank=3) on housing (rank=5), transportation (rank=2), and safer streets (rank=1) and developing a helping network to help people with disabilities to modify their homes (rank=3).

Shopping, Recreation, Cultural and Civic Activities

Goal 5: Increase access to cultural and recreational activities for people with disabilities. This includes providing transportation to such activities outside the city (rank=6), improving the infrastructure within the city (rank=11), increasing recreational activities for the younger disabled community (rank=8), increasing access to year-round swimming (rank=13), and increasing the availability of high interest businesses in Gulfport which were described in the meetings to be: K-Mart style dry-goods store, family restaurants, and ice cream parlor (rank=9).

Goal 6: Improve access to businesses and municipal buildings for people with disabilities. This includes ensuring all city buildings are accesivle and equipping large

meeting spaces with for people with hearing impairments (rank=1) and identifying businesses that are accessible and would receive a gold seal as a business for a lifetime (rank=4).

Prioritized Recommendations

All 22 recommendations were important to most of the participants at the community meetings. Average ratings were between 2.07 and 4.66 out of a possible average rating of 1-10 where 1 would be the highest. Even so, the city needs a blueprint to focus its energy and resources. These ratings as translated into relative rankings, provide that guidance. The top eleven recommendations could be completed by December 2009 (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 2. Communities for a Lifetime Recommendations

	N¹	Min	Max	Average Rating	Ranking
1.1: Develop a directory of reliable helpers and a volunteer bank.	72	1	10	2.54	5
1.2: Create a Commission on Health and Long-Term Care to assess the feasibility for health and long-term care services	69	1	10	2.58	5
1.2: Create a Commission on Health and Long-Term Care to assess the feasibility of 24-hour health clinic	22	1	8	2.46	4
1.2: Create a Commission on Health and Long-Term Care to assess the feasibility of an Adult day center	19	1	10	2.95	7
1.2: Create a Commission on Health and Long-Term Care to assess the feasibility of an Assisted Living Facility	19	1	10	3.47	12
1.3: Town Shores could establish one or more buildings to be a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC).	68	1	10	4.66	15
2.1: Develop a comprehensive marketing plan for the Multipurpose Senior Center.	71	1	9	3.13	10
2.2: <i>The Gabber</i> consider ways to increase readership among shut-ins and those with disabilities.	71	1	9	2.93	7
3.1: Increase the diversity of the Senior Center Advisory Committee.	71	1	10	3.70	14
3.2: Provide programs to better serve diverse backgrounds.	64	1	10	3.66	13
4.1.Create a Commission on Housing, Mobility, and Safety to make recommendations	64	1	10	2.41	3
4.1.Create a Commission on Housing, Mobility, and Safety to make recommendations on Housing	14	1	8	2.57	5
4.1.Create a Commission on Housing, Mobility, and Safety to make recommendations on Safer streets	15	1	10	2.07	1
4.1.Create a Commission on Housing, Mobility, and Safety to make recommendations on Transportation	15	1	10	2.20	2
4.2: Develop a volunteer network to help persons with disabilities to modify their homes in order to live with a disability.	73	1	10	2.38	3
5.1: Provide transportation to cultural activities in nearby cities.	67	1	10	2.73	6
5.2: Improve the infrastructure for access to the arts within Gulfport.	68	1	10	3.24	11
5.3: Increase the number of recreational activities for younger persons with disabilities.	71	1	10	3.00	8
5.4: Increase access to year-round swimming.	66	1	10	3.65	13
5.5: Increase the availability of high interest businesses in Gulfport.	65	1	10	3.05	9
6.1: Ensure that all municipal buildings be accessible for people with disabilities and that meeting spaces for large public meetings are equipped for people with hearing impairments.	71	1	10	2.10	1
6.2: Identify and make physical changes (e.g. entrances, bathrooms, aisles) needed for individual businesses to be a "business for a lifetime."	70	1	10	2.47	4

¹15-22 respondents evaluated the individual topics for the Commission separately.

Table 3. Rank Order Priorities from Most Important (lowest average rating) to Least Important

	N ¹	Min	Max	Average Rating	Ranking
4.1.Create a Commission on Housing, Mobility, and Safety to make recommendations on <u>Safer streets</u>	15	1	10	2.07	1
6.1: Ensure that all municipal buildings be accessible for people with disabilities and that meeting spaces for large public meetings are equipped for people with hearing impairments.	71	1	10	2.10	1
4.1.Create a Commission on Housing, Mobility, and Safety to make recommendations on <u>Transportation</u>	15	1	10	2.20	2
4.2: Develop a volunteer network to help persons with disabilities to modify their homes in order to live with a disability.	73	1	10	2.38	3
4.1.Create a Commission on Housing, Mobility, and Safety to make recommendations	64	1	10	2.41	3
1.2: Create a Commission on Health and Long-Term Care to assess the feasibility on <u>24-hour health clinic</u>	22	1	8	2.46	4
6.2: Identify and make physical changes (e.g. entrances, bathrooms, aisles) needed for individual businesses to be a “business for a lifetime.”	70	1	10	2.47	4
1.1: Develop a directory of reliable helpers and a volunteer bank.	72	1	10	2.54	5
4.1.Create a Commission on Housing, Mobility, and Safety to make recommendations on <u>Housing</u>	14	1	8	2.57	5
1.2: Create a Commission on Health and Long-Term Care to assess the feasibility for health and long-term care services	69	1	10	2.58	5
5.1: Provide transportation to cultural activities in nearby cities.	67	1	10	2.73	6
2.2: <i>The Gabber</i> consider ways to increase readership among shut-ins and those with disabilities.	71	1	9	2.93	7
1.2: Create a Commission on Health and Long-Term Care to assess the feasibility on an <u>Adult day center</u>	19	1	10	2.95	7
5.3: Increase the number of recreational activities for younger persons with disabilities.	71	1	10	3.00	8
5.5: Increase the availability of high interest businesses in Gulfport.	65	1	10	3.05	9
2.1: Develop a comprehensive marketing plan for the Multipurpose Senior Center.	71	1	9	3.13	10
5.2: Improve the infrastructure for access to the arts within Gulfport.	68	1	10	3.24	11
1.2: Create a Commission on Health and Long-Term Care to assess the feasibility on an <u>Assisted Living Facility</u>	19	1	10	3.47	12
5.4: Increase access to year-round swimming.	66	1	10	3.65	13
3.2: Provide programs to better serve diverse backgrounds.	64	1	10	3.66	13
3.1: Increase the diversity of the Senior Center Advisory Committee.	71	1	10	3.70	14
1.3: Town Shores could establish one or more buildings to be a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC).	68	1	10	4.66	15

¹15-22 respondents evaluated the individual topics for the Commission separately.

Five recommendations were ranked in the top three and could be initiated in 2007 with City Council approval and completed by 2008. These are presented below in three areas:

1. Ensure that all municipal buildings are accessible for people with disabilities and large meeting spaces are equipped for people with hearing impairments.

Responsibilities and Timeline: The City Manager and Department of Public Works should take the lead on ensuring accessibility of city buildings with a focus on the renovation of Scout Hall, and installing equipment for citizens with hearing impairments in City Hall, Multipurpose Senior Center, Catherine Hickman Theatre, Scout Hall, and Gulfport Casino.

2. Create a Commission on housing, mobility, and safety with a focus on transportation and safer streets.

Responsibilities and Timeline: The City Council should appoint volunteer experts and citizens to serve on a one-year Commission to address housing, transportation, and safety issues. This commission would take public testimony, and work with city and county services (e.g. PSTA bus system) to develop appropriate responses to the needs in this area. The recommendations would be implemented 2008.

3. Develop a volunteer network to help persons with disabilities to modify their homes.

Responsibilities and Timeline: The Multipurpose Senior Center, in collaboration with businesses and volunteer groups should develop a network to provide free or low cost home modifications for people with disabilities of all ages and provide outreach to these citizens to assure that they use this network in order to stay in their own homes.

Six recommendations ranked from 4th through 6th could be initiated in 2008 with City Council approval and completed by 2009. These are presented below in four areas:

4. Create a second Commission on health and long-term care with a special emphasis on working with local healthcare providers to offer a 24-hour clinic in Gulfport.

Responsibilities and Timeline: The City Council should appoint volunteer experts and citizens to serve on a one-year Commission to address health and long-term care issues. This commission would take public testimony, and work with city and county services (e.g. Area Agency on Aging) to develop appropriate responses to the needs in this area, especially a 24-hour health clinic. Although adult day care and assisted living facilities had lower rankings (7 and 12, respectively), the Commission would address these issues at the same time, especially given the relatively high percentage of community participants who indicated someone in their households had problems with walking, breathing, and memory, which are early indications of needing more formal long-term care that can be provided daily at an Adult Day Care center or 24-hours through an assisted living facility. The recommendations would be implemented in 2009.

5. Develop and implement a “business for a lifetime” program.

Responsibilities and Timeline: The Multipurpose Senior Center in collaboration with the Gulfport Chamber of Commerce should develop a way to evaluate Gulfport businesses in terms of access by people with disabilities. Businesses would be enticed to have their buildings evaluated in terms of access. The network developed in the 2007 to help homeowners modify their homes for disability could work with these businesses (for a fee) to make their buildings accessible by 2009.

6. Develop a list of reliable helpers and a volunteer bank (ways for volunteers to help each other).

Responsibilities and Timeline: The Multipurpose Senior Center should develop a way for people who need to hire individuals for services in their homes could identify reliable helpers through a web-based consumer program such as “Angie’s List.” In addition, the Center should develop a way for citizens to earn tokens through volunteer work with people with disabilities that could be used to pay for assistance needed now or in the future.

7. Provide transportation to cultural activities in nearby cities.

Responsibilities and Timeline: The Multipurpose Senior Center should identify ways to provide affordable and regular transportation to cultural activities outside of Gulfport.

The remaining recommendations, which also have relatively high average ratings (1=highest average rating), should be reviewed by the appropriate city departments and private businesses and considered within their future plans. These entities could refer to the Communities for a Lifetime self-assessment documents (this report and *Gulfport Communities For a Lifetime Focus Groups: Final Report*) to justify these activities.

Finally, the City must always be concerned about serving the diverse needs of its citizens. Two recommendations were ranked near the bottom of the list but still had average ratings of 3.7 (out of 10) and addressed diversity of the Multipurpose Senior Center. The City passed the Human Rights Ordinance in 2005 and part of that ordinance addressed public accommodations. The degree to which the Multipurpose Senior Center, in particular, can diversify its advisory committee and programs, will be a measure of the success of the HRO, at least among the senior or disabled communities.

The recommendation with the least interest was working with Town Shores to establish one or more of its buildings to be a “Naturally Occurring Retirement Community” which could offer services for aging in place to these condo owners. The city would not force a private community to make these changes, but it could, if asked, provide support for these changes. As that community’s average age increases, this recommendation may be revisited by members of the Town Shores community.

Table 4. Timeline for Implementing Top Eleven Prioritized Recommendations

○=begin work; ●=complete work.

Tasks	12/2006	6/2007	12/2007	6/2008	12/2008	6/2009	12/2009
City Council approves work to implement top 12 priority recommendations.	●						
City Manager inventories all public buildings and arranges for remodeling to ensure that they meet ADA standards.	○	○	○	○	●		
City Manager develops cost projections for providing equipment for people with hearing impairments in large public meeting rooms.		○	●				
Commission on housing, transportation & safety forms and collects data.	○	●					
Commission on housing, transportation & safety makes recommendations.		○	●				
Commission on housing, transportation & safety recommendations implemented			○	○	●		
Multipurpose Senior Center develops home modification network	○	○	○	○	●		
Commission on health & long-term care forms and collects data.			○	●			
Commission on health & long-term care makes recommendations.				○	●		
Commission on health & long-term care recommendations implemented					○	○	●
Multipurpose Senior Center in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce develop businesses for a lifetime program.				○	○	○	●
Multipurpose Senior Center develop “Angie’s List” style program for referral to reliable helpers.				○	○	○	●
Multipurpose Senior Center develop a volunteer bank program for earning tokens to get help by volunteering to help others.				○	○	○	●
Multipurpose Senior Center develop transportation to cultural activities outside of Gulfport				○	○	○	●

Conclusion

The community meetings held in Summer 2006 provided guidance to the City, private businesses, and volunteer groups to prioritize recommendations that developed from focus groups to address health, social service, government, education, and cultural needs of segments of the population who are living with or may live with disabilities or who are caring for people with disabilities in Gulfport, Florida. The age wave hit Florida decades before the rest of the country and Gulfport is one of its cities with the highest proportion of elders. One out of four Gulfport residents (28%) is over the age of 65. In response to this age wave, Communities for a Lifetime is a Florida initiative to assist cities, towns, and counties to plan and implement improvements that will benefit both younger and older populations. A total of 78 Gulfport citizens participated in one of four public meetings or watched the meeting on videotape during the summer of 2006 and rated 22 recommendations highly (from 2.07 -4.66 on a scale of 1-10). The top 11 recommendations could be implemented by December 31, 2009 with City Council approval in 2006. The remainder could be addressed by appropriate departments, businesses, and volunteer groups. The Communities for a Lifetime self-assessment reports provide ample support for all of these recommendations to be addressed in future years. Indeed, these reports provide a Blueprint for Gulfport becoming a Community for a Lifetime.