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## Not your father's senior center

### New Raleigh facility will aim 'to serve three generations of older adults'

**THOMAS GOLDSMITH, Staff Writer**

Raleigh's new senior center will cater to the perennially young at heart.

Shuffleboard? Sorry, wrong mind-set.

New centers with a cafe atmosphere and a fitness emphasis are drawing wide attention as more traditional sites threaten to lose appeal for the coming wave of baby boomers. Raleigh's new senior center, for which City Council members will select a design consultant today, will mirror its traditional Five Points setting outside, but reflect new thinking inside, planners said.

"The exterior of the building will look 100 years old, but the interior is 21st century," Raleigh Parks & Recreation planner Stephen Bentley said Monday at the Whitaker Mill Road site.

If council members approve the proposal, the building will be designed by the Raleigh firm HH Architecture, with help from senior center specialists Lifespan Design Studio in Lebanon, Ohio.

New senior centers being built around the country may offer Wii computer games, food courts and other youth-inspired innovations, but planning must also consider factors like older drivers' need for roomy parking spaces.

"The reason and the goal for senior centers today is much broader than it used to be," Lifespan owner Douglas Galloway said. "Serving a 100-year-old is different from serving a 50-year-old person. The center is trying to serve three generations of older adults."

On Monday morning at the current Whitaker Mill Senior Center, Andrea Vassilos, 61, was playing table tennis with a group that included Elvia Marsh, 91.

Two tables occupied the center's largest space, one that constantly gets maxed out with requests for exercise classes. Residents echoed national trends, asking for space to accommodate physical activities as well as classes.

"I'd like to see a gym, so they could have things like volleyball and badminton," Vassilos said.

Marsh, who has been coming to the county-owned center for 20 years, said room for new classes would be welcome.

"I've taken quilting and all sorts of other things, but you get to the point when you've done it all," she said.

Galloway, who has helped plan 40 senior centers around the country, said newer buildings may require subtle differences in amenities and marketing.



Lottie Haase, 80, left, and Grace Symes, 79, play pingpong with friends at the Whitaker Mill Senior Center in the Wake County Human Services building in Raleigh. The city plans a new senior center adjacent to the building.  
Staff Photo by Takaaki Iwabu

"Today's current older adults ... go to a senior center to do activities," he said. "The baby boomers do activities that happen to be at senior centers. What we want in a senior center is more flexibility -- changes in hours, weekend hours, morning hours."

Many who use the centers may still be working.

As an example of forward-looking planning, a Lifespan center designed for a community in Washington includes "an auditorium with telescoping theater seating system, food court and cafe, classrooms, art studios, games room, medical model adult day-care center, drop-in childcare center and self-contained fitness center," according to a brochure.

### **Bonds approved**

It also has a price tag that exceeds \$10 million.

Raleigh voters approved a \$7.7 million bond package last fall that will be divided between the 20,000-square-foot building planned for Lassiter Mill and a 3,500- to 4,000-square-foot center at Millbrook Exchange Park. Council members agreed to the satellite location after hearing from North Raleigh residents who didn't want to travel to the Five Points area for activities.

"I am very confident that as this moves along, the seniors will be happy," Bentley said.

A tentative schedule calls for construction to be complete in February 2011.

"We did have seniors say we want this to be ready right away," Bentley said.

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