

Published: Apr 22, 2009 02:00 AM  
Modified: Apr 22, 2009 07:48 AM

## New centers to focus on older people

### Buildings were designed to suit the needs of aging residents

**BY THOMAS GOLDSMITH, Staff Writer**

Let's face it: A senior center is meant for older people, not for kids.

And that was the thinking that has gone into the designs of Raleigh's two planned centers, which were unveiled last week at a Raleigh Parks and Recreation event.

Both a larger center on Whitaker Mill Road and a smaller center at Millbrook Exchange Park will have a number of features specifically aimed at making the centers more enjoyable, easier to use and safer for older people.

"We are not building a building for everybody; we are building a building for you," Chris Horner, project manager at HH Architecture, told older Raleigh residents who gathered for the April 14 meeting at Hayes Barton United Methodist Church.

Some community centers in Raleigh parks are so crowded with children and teens that older people hesitate to attend activities there, audience members said. Except for occasional meetings of community groups, the new centers should be specifically reserved for the older crowd when they open in 2011, parks representatives said.

Douglas Gallow, a design specialist from Ohio-based Lifespan Design Studio, said elements of the centers that will be designed to suit the needs of older people include: Easily accessible parking spots and wide sidewalks. Floor finishes design to provide few trip hazards. Extensive use of natural light to cut down on glare. An interior that is easy to navigate. Halls wide enough to let two wheelchairs pass.



A rendering of the Raleigh Senior Center, at Whitaker Mill. This view is toward the entry. Contributed



A rendering of the Raleigh Senior Center, Millbrook Exchange Park. Contributed

Grab bars and wide stalls in restrooms. Members of the audience weren't shy about making suggestions for improvements at the centers.

"How much trouble would it be to add a covered entrance for cars?" North Raleigh resident John Floreth asked about the Millbrook Exchange Park center. "It makes a big difference for seniors."

Parks officials promised to consider adding a covered drop-off for Millbrook, something that the Whitaker Mill plans already include.

Some of the center's features are directly tied to earlier requests and specifications --from residents in other public hearings and from council members.

"In siting the senior center, there should be as little disturbance as possible to the trees and natural areas," council members said in a January 2008 resolution authorizing the city to purchase land from Wake County for the Whitaker Mill center.

Horner, the architect, said that goal will be met.

"It was really nice to be able to tuck the building under some old-growth trees," Horner said at the public hearing.

At earlier meetings, people requested a billiards room, and one is planned for the second floor at Whitaker Mill.

Some members of the current Whitaker Mill Senior Center made it clear that they liked their current facility. That building is owned by Wake County and will be turned over completely to county use when the new center is finished.

"It does look a lot like the building next door, and that was our charge," Horner said of the planned 19,000-square-foot center.

The buildings also will feature an environmentally sensitive design and exceed the access requirements of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, designers said.

[thomas.goldsmith@newsobserver.com](mailto:thomas.goldsmith@newsobserver.com) or 919-829-8929

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Lottie Haase, 80, left, and Grace Symes, 79, play ping-pong every Monday with their friends at Whitaker Mill Senior Center in Raleigh. A new senior center is planned adjacent to the building. Takaaki Iwabu, Staff photo by Takaaki Iwabu



Some residents are worried that this area next to the senior center on Whitaker Mill Road would disappear if a new center is built on the site. Staff photo by Jason Arthurs