

# FiftyNorth Board of Directors Future Planning Committee Phase 1 – Report and Recommendation September 26, 2019

## Introduction

FiftyNorth continues to be a popular destination in Northfield and from the surrounding communities. With the member count increasing year after year, today's members use FiftyNorth differently than they did even 10 years ago. The member focus is on being actively engaged in maintaining their physical and mental health. Our members are experienced, accomplished, and eager to keep learning. They demand the best from staff, and in return are provided a variety of activities that are entertaining, informative, and challenging. Being active and maintaining health is important to the older adult. The Center's facilities and programs, specializing in programs that are adapted to the interests of the older adult, provide the tools and ways for older adults to work on maintaining their health. The numbers of members and uses at the Center supports that maintaining a healthy lifestyle is important to today's older adult.

There is rich diversity in both the people served, and the variety of programs, activities, and events offered. All programs show an increase in usage. The total number of memberships currently is 1,946 and is expected to be over 2,000 by year 2020. The active participation of members, community, medical users, and intergenerational groups demonstrates the strength and vitality of the organization. It is a welcoming and comfortable place for older adults to be. Members and participants are engaged, and demonstrate that they have a feeling of ownership of the Center.

The challenge today is not simply about a need for additional square footage, but about the quality and the use of the space. In order to better enable FiftyNorth to offer programs that are interesting, and challenging to each group of members, it is necessary to create more flexible, accessible and technology-enabled activity, learning, and gathering areas. The number of people age 65+ is predicted to continue to increase every year until the year 2030. FiftyNorth must be positioned and equipped in space and programming to satisfy the current members and accommodate the numbers of potential new members.

## Demographics

FiftyNorth will continue to be a key “growth driver” for the Northfield population and economy.

- Northfield demographics predict an increase in population age 55-85 through 2030.
- The population currently aged 45-54 totals 2,100 ensuring our key source of future membership growth by the year 2030.
- Excluding the colleges’ student population, adults over age 55 constitute 32.8% of the Northfield population.
- With the planned expansion in programs and facility, membership at FiftyNorth is expected to grow from 1,946 to 2,500 members or more by year 2030.

## Background

Our inception as a center, some 43 years ago, began with the simple need for a senior congregate dining program and help with transportation. Over the decades, acting on input and observation with trial and error, we’ve gained knowledge, wisdom, and experience. Our success and failure was and will always be an investment in what we are. Each year brings opportunities to learn and share; new horizons to explore. We are an organization whose course is to continually transform the center in ways that reflect and serve the values and needs of older adults in our communities. A center that is alive and in the moment. Vital. Vibrant. Present. Open.

FiftyNorth has evolved from an organization, Northfield Senior Citizens, Inc. that has historically had people involved in the organization that have recognized when change is needed, identified it, and have had the tenacity to successfully implement a plan to institute the change. Incorporated in 1976, it has long been supported by the Northfield and surrounding communities. Throughout the years, there have been needed moves made into new spaces to accommodate the growing number of members and new program interests. The center located to the Northfield Community Resource Center, 1651 Jefferson Pkwy, in October, 2000. At that time, space included an activity room, card room, fitness room, a pool, lobby, and staff office space. In the past eighteen years additional building space has been leased for classroom use, as well as several major efforts made to reconfigure the existing space to accommodate increased programming needs for fitness classes, art classes, fitness room use, and locker room space.

FiftyNorth has out-grown its facility space. All space is being used to the maximum use. This allows for current programming to continue, but no new programming can be added. To address this issue, the Board of Directors appointed a task force, Future Planning Committee, in August, 2018.

The purpose of the Future Planning Committee is to determine what is needed to improve FiftyNorth's accessibility, flexibility, and efficiency and thereby provide better program-focused spaces

## Objectives

The committee considers its work to be accomplished in four phases: 1. Fact finding; 2. Space design; 3. Financing, capital campaign and partnerships; 4. Construction and reconfiguration.

In Phase1, the committee's objectives include:

1. Increase the flexibility of our space to allow for quick changes to programming and members' need.
2. Determine the programs wanted in the future to meet members' needs.
3. Identify gaps in meeting member needs in current programming, i.e. transition teams, referral and information center, and community advocacy.
4. Evaluate staffing structure and capacity to be successful in the work required.

To accomplish these objectives, the committee began by reviewing and updating the FiftyNorth mission and vision statements as follows:

**FiftyNorth Mission Statement:** Inspiring and empowering members and community users to engage in activities that nourish the mind, body and spirit.

**FiftyNorth Vision:** To serve our community by providing a vibrant, financially healthy, fully equipped center thriving with people fifty and older who are proving that age is just a number- by exploring, participating in, and enjoying a wide range of activities that promote healthy, engaged living- and collaborating with community partners to provide opportunities for members and community users.

Both statements were approved and adopted by the FiftyNorth Board of Directors, July 2019.

## Milestone 1 – Determine the Process:

The committee agreed on various methods to gather information and data including:

- Utilization of data already available from other initiatives.
- Listening groups comprised of
  - Stakeholders
  - Community people who don't belong to FiftyNorth – various ages.
  - Random samples of active members
  - Random samples of inactive members
- Table in lobby with info and questionnaires available to interested members
- One on one discussions with targeted community members
- Visits to other centers in Minnesota and states.

**Milestone 2 – Gather Information:** Information was collected, compiled, and categorized according to needs identified in Space and Programs.

## **Milestone 3 – Analyze Information, Formulate Conclusion, Make Recommendation, Create and Present Report**

### **Learnings**

What we have learned is that members value opportunities to come together in small and large groups for conversation, support and learning. There is a desire for small and large gathering spots, for quiet areas for reading or one-on-one conversations, and for areas set aside for activities like book clubs or grief support groups. We need to serve all types of members – the older, more traditional long-time members and the not-yet-retired younger new members and all those in between. Members want a larger lobby area for check in and socialization. And an improved check-in system. More physical activities are needed – more classes for current offerings, new activities such as pickleball, a walking track, fitness rooms with more room and more machines and an additional fitness studio. There are trends in fitness that we cannot explore and/or offer because of the limits in space in the fitness room and the on-going schedule of the Fitness Studio.

Being connected to community groups as partners, sponsors, and users is important. Renting space to community users and groups provides additional income to FiftyNorth and provides community gathering spaces. Partnering organizations within the NCRC utilize FiftyNorth space for major events such as Operation Joy, Operation Backpack, Thursday Table, Retired Teacher luncheons, Pre-school graduations, etc. Other nonprofits rent space for meetings, health fairs, employee benefit fairs; FiftyNorth members and community groups rent space for family parties, celebrations. Space is rented weekly by Weight Watcher groups; Making Waves Swim School rents the pool on Sundays to provide swim lessons to hundreds of children; and several churches have held services here until they secure permanent space. Additional and/or reconfigured space will better serve and allow for more use by community groups to use FiftyNorth space in off peak hours.

From this information the committee prioritized items to be recommended for exploration in Phase 2, programming that we currently offer, and items to be discussed as a future possibility.

## Priorities for space:

### High

- Expand parking spaces
- Expand the fitness room; add more equipment; increase utilization of personal training program; offer post-rehab services; floor space to work-out.
- Expand locker rooms; create wet and dry locker rooms
- Add a walking track
- Multipurpose space – eg: pickle ball courts; expanded ping pong space; group offerings
- Fitness Studio space to accommodate scheduling more than one class at a time
- New café/coffee shop model in the lobby
- Re-design front entrance to improve accessibility, account for temperature.
- Improve check-in system/entry space to assure that all users check-in
- Enlarge the Art Studio – accommodate art classes, wood working, quilting, crafts, etc.
- Create smaller spaces – reading nooks; quiet conversation area
- Improve HVAC – heating and cooling systems
- Improve security – key system
- Enhance IT systems and connections – charging stations; faster internet
- Multiple, flexible use, classroom space
- Storage for all spaces

### Medium

- Woodworking Shop
- Kitchen for cooking classes
- Fireplace
- Theater

### Low

- Equipment for off-site activities – camping, canoeing, skiing, climbing
- Billiards table room
- Therapeutic pool designated for walking/lap swimming
- Space for massages, manicures, pedicures

### Identified items being addressed now

- Need for a designated staff person to provide information and referral for service needs. FiftyNorth staff is partnering with Age Friendly Northfield, and City of Northfield to hire a FiftyNorth position to develop a resource list of service providers, offer 1:1 conversations about how to connect with providers, and develop partnerships with providers to assure resource list is current and accurate.
- Schedule includes extended hours to accommodate members who are working.
- Adding early morning fitness classes is planned in the fall schedule.

## Conclusion

For older adults Northfield is ahead of the game in many regards. Money Magazine in 2014 named it the “Best Place to Retire”, and Kiplinger Personal Finance in 2017 published an article titled “Why Northfield, Minn is a great place to retire”. For many retirees, Northfield is the community that rises to the top in their search for where to live. Retirees new to FiftyNorth mention that learning about FiftyNorth was a contributing factor in why they chose to relocate to Northfield. The Northfield older adult population has a number of economic impacts on the City of Northfield. They are of course consumers and thus utilize the various business and commercial services provided by Northfield firms. They are likely to consume more local services since they do not travel outside Northfield for employment. They tend to consume a substantial portion of medical expenses and are thus responsible in part for the extensive medical care facilities available in Northfield. The consumption of local goods and services of course provides substantial employment in Northfield. This retirement community contributes significantly to local property taxes and they are low consumers of public services such as schools, police protection, welfare services, and roads. They are likely to be high consumers of libraries, health services, education, and artistic performances.

FiftyNorth is an important hub for many older adults. It has 1946 members and averages 350 people a day in and out of the center. With leadership from its members it has evolved over the years to provide impressive breadth and depth in programming. At FiftyNorth, age is viewed as a time to learn, grow, be active, and enjoy life. FiftyNorth is an important voice for advancing older adult concerns in the city and has been a driving force in developing Age Friendly Northfield.

Age Friendly Northfield is a grassroots effort to assure that Northfield is a good place to grow up and grow old. Age friendly communities deliberately consider the wellbeing of residents at every stage of life, especially older adults, and recognize that cities have a big role to play in helping us all fulfill the tremendous potential of aging, and determining the steps to becoming a better place to grow older. Age Friendly work is creating communities where people can remain active and connected at all stages of life. This description is the epitome of FiftyNorth – what it stands for, and strives to provide for the members and community.

FiftyNorth is a long-time established organization in Northfield. Its importance in serving the older adults in the community is well documented and demonstrated by the continual growth and support of the membership and community. It is important for this role to continue. FiftyNorth’s future must be positioned and equipped in space and programming to satisfy the current members, community users, and accommodate the numbers of potential new members.

The high priorities listed should be considered for future programming at FiftyNorth. In drawing this conclusion, the committee considered the number of responses that were received for each item, the comments that were collected from current members, community members, staff, and the research conducted on what the next group (generation) of members/customers will want and expect for programming and facilities at FiftyNorth. With this said, items listed as high priorities will be considered first, but items are not guaranteed to be included in the recommended design or space plans.

The Future Planning Committee will start Phase 2 by selecting and contracting with an Architectural team that has demonstrated expertise and experience in designing spaces with like purposes as FiftyNorth. The committee will work with the Architectural group to determine a master space plan for the NCRC building, working with the other organizations in the building, City of Northfield staff, and by incorporating the priorities utilizing the current FiftyNorth space, extended space in NCRC building and/or new constructed space; the feasibility of the project; and the estimated cost for a redesign and construction project.

## **Recommendation for Phase 1**

The Future Planning Committee recommends that the FiftyNorth Board of Directors accepts the Future Planning Committee's report and conclusions for Phase 1 and directs the committee to begin work to set objectives in Phase 2, the design stage.

Respectively submitted by:

Future Planning Project Team,

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