

Home Maintenance and Repair

November 13, 2018 Focus Group

Summary Notes

On November 13, eleven (11) community members participated in a Focus Group (FG) convened by Orcas Senior Center (OSC) to respond to questions and discuss their insights regarding Home Maintenance and Repair (M&R) for seniors on Orcas Island. Lynnette Wood facilitated the FG. John Slater recorded responses on prepared newsprint, and Sara Boyle took additional notes. The group convened at 6:30 PM.

Participants were asked about their recent home maintenance needs and experiences. Responses included yard maintenance, appliance repair, plumbing, chimney sweeping, gutter cleaning and electrical repairs. Sources they had turned to for M&R issues included Yellow Pages, Facebook, Buy-Sell-Trade, Orcas Chamber of Commerce, Lahari, Sunrise Volunteers, Word-of-Mouth and bulletin boards. Urgent issues relied on personal connections and the Chamber.

Participants were asked to cluster M&R services based on ease in accessing services. Easily accessed services included chimney sweeping, appliance repair, gutter cleaning and septic services. Difficult services to obtain included furnace repair, roofing, electrical and plumbing. Obtaining a licensed and bonded contractor was deemed difficult as was service in remote locations. Services of movers, yard workers and painters were also difficult to access.

Participants reported that they desired M&R providers to be licensed, reliable, fair in pricing, trustworthy, professional and having good communication skills.

FG members then discussed a number of potential approaches / solutions to improve access for seniors. Two concepts emerged: an OSC operated M&R (handyman) service and variations of a resource list like "Angie's List". The resource list notion raised several questions about ways to manage it, provide incentives to providers for serving seniors, and assure access and quality.

Several other ideas were suggested including a M&R business "incubator", a handyman co-op, and business development seminars. Workshops for seniors addressing how to work with contractors, insurance companies and use of a homeowner's manual were also suggested as ways to empower seniors, especially "elder orphans" and widows. OSC could provide a consultation service to develop maintenance plans with individual homeowners.

The issues were not seen as unique to seniors, however, financial and physical limitations were seen as increasing the barriers for elders in accessing service providers.

A list of M&R needs/requests frequently received by OSC included: grab bar installation, ramp installation, general home repair, roof and gutter work, electrical/wiring, plumbing (water heater, toilet replacement), lighting improvements, insulation, replacement of heater/stove, home cleaning, remodel homes to age in place, appliance repair, and a resource directory.

This information will be used to guide future services and resource development anticipated by OSC and its community partners, so that seniors may age safely in their homes vs. relocate off-island.