

POINT IX

SENIOR CITIZENS

"GIVE TOP PRIORITY TO IMPROVING THE LIVES OF SENIOR CITIZENS IN DETROIT BY:

1. ASSIGNING TO A STAFF ASSISTANT, WHO WILL BE OVER 60, THE RESPONSIBILITY TO COORDINATE AND OVERSEE THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES TO DETROIT'S SENIOR CITIZENS;
2. IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF POLICE PROTECTION FOR OUR OLDER CITIZENS;
3. PROMOTING EXPANDED USE OF LOW FARES ON THE DSR BY SENIOR CITIZENS, IN PARTICULAR ESTABLISHING FREE BUS SERVICE TO HEALTH FACILITIES;
4. PROVIDE AID TO SENIOR CITIZENS IN THE PREPARATION OF THEIR VARIOUS TAX RETURNS AND OTHER PAPERS THROUGH THE USE OF CITY OPERATED "SERVICE-MOBILE", EMPLOYEES TO AID THE SENIOR CITIZENS;
5. EXPAND AND MAKE MORE EFFECTIVE THE INSPECTION OF NURSING HOMES, AND OTHER FACILITIES USED BY OLDER CITIZENS TO BE CONDUCTED BY THE HEALTH AND BUILDING INSPECTORS."

1. Staff Assistant to the Mayor

The Task Force recommends that this Staff Assistant have some professional education in the field of gerontology, or at least have experience in working with older persons. We do not believe age 60 should be a rigid criterion for selection of the Staff Assistant, and recommend that this age be dropped to 55 for persons with outstanding qualifications.

The responsibilities of this position and the tie-in between this position and the Detroit Senior Citizen's Commission and Advisory Council need to be carefully thought out. The Task Force recommends that:

- A) The Staff Assistant should function as a liaison between DSCC and the various municipal departments which have a direct impact on senior citizen life styles, to assure that these other departments give attention to concerns and suggestions of DSCC about ways they can more effectively deal with senior citizens.

- B) The Staff Assistant should be knowledgeable of state and federal matters affecting senior citizens, in close cooperation with DSCC staff, to assure that the Mayor has opportunity to take appropriate action on these matters.
- C) The Staff Assistant should promote the recruitment of people with training in gerontology in all municipal departments which deal with senior citizens, and the training of present staff in these departments in gerontology, perhaps with the assistance of DSCC.
- D) The Staff Assistant should have a special coordinative or supervisory role, with the Central Information System for Seniors which is recommended later in this report.
- E) The Staff Assistant should facilitate communication between the Mayor's Office and DSCC and Advisory Council in several ways, including possibly attending their meetings.

2. Inspection of Nursing Homes

The Task Force recommends this be done by the Detroit Health Department rather than the State Department of Public Health, because of the significance to local control of such facilities. While we understand the decision has been made by the Governor to have State Inspection, supposedly based upon federal law, we also understand that the federal law can be interpreted to permit local licensing.

The argument for local control is based on the following:

- 1. Most of the nursing home beds are in the city of Detroit;
- 2. Increased responsiveness to complaints from nursing home patients and their families, when the Mayor's Office is responsible for the program;
- 3. Access to information and response can be obtained more expeditiously;
- 4. The City could be reimbursed by the State for local inspection;
- 5. In the past, local inspections have been more rigorous than the State's, and have been made without advance notice to the institution.

3. D.S.R. Fares

The Task Force had several recommendations in this regard which were transmitted to the Transportation Subcommittee, and which are reflected in that section of this report.

It should be emphasized here, however, that "no-fare" DSR transportation should be available to senior citizens during non-rush hours, if the Alpha Corporation type of service cannot be made available to seniors citywide.

4. Improved Police Protection

The Detroit Senior Citizens Commission and Advisory Council has established a Senior Citizen Safety Task Force to recommend safety measures, techniques, programs, etc., for seniors with the cooperation of the Detroit Police Department and United Community Services. The Task Force recommends that:

- A) The Senior Citizens Safety Task Force should be continued;
- B) Membership of the Task Force should be changed to more fully reflect the ethnic and economic populace of senior citizens in Detroit;
- C) Full time staff should be provided this Task Force by either the Detroit Police Department or the Senior Citizens Commission. Funds may be available from either Law Enforcement Administration (LEA) or ACTION.
- D) The "I. D. Card" program for senior citizens, which is being investigated by the Detroit Police Department should be implemented so that all senior residents in the city use these cards in check cashing, to curtail check thefts.
- E) The Senior Citizens Commission and Police Department should be aided in development of special transportation to banks and health and shopping facilities in high crime areas in the city.

5. Preparation of Tax Returns

We are concerned that a mobile unit may not reach a significant number of seniors and may not be economically feasible. There are a number of other ways to assist senior citizens in preparation of tax returns which may be more feasible.

The Task Force recommends that implementation of the tax mobile should be deferred, and initial emphasis be given to other alternatives such as:

- 1) City Neighborhood Improvement units, Libraries, Parks and Recreation Centers, and other appropriate city offices should be utilized as information centers. The new Staff Assistant and the DSCC should see that these staffs have the necessary materials and information.
- 2) Existing senior centers, churches, union halls, and shopping centers in parts of the city with concentrations of seniors can be more fully utilized to cooperatively assist seniors with tax returns.
- 3) The Michigan Department of Treasury should be asked to expand its radio and TV campaigns, including use of ethnic media, and to cooperate in (1) and (2) above.

Additional Recommendations:

- A) "THE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS CONTINUATION OF THE DETROIT SENIOR CITIZENS COMMISSION AND ADVISORY COUNCIL, WITH ANY REAPPOINTMENTS NECESSARY TO EQUITABLY REPRESENT THE SENIOR CITIZEN POPULATION OF THE CITY;
- B) THE TASK FORCE ALSO RECOMMENDS, WITH THE HIGHEST PRIORITY, THAT A CENTRAL INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR SENIOR CITIZENS BE ESTABLISHED WITHIN THE DETROIT CITIZENS COMMISSION."

The Commission currently provides some "information and referral" service to seniors, through office staff and the "Project Ethnic Senior Find" Vista program, but this service does not have enough staff, does not have bilingual staff, and is not highly publicized. To be effective, the Commission's program needs:

- 1) A simple, understandable name;
- 2) A minimum of four staff, including bi-linguals;
- 3) A simple phone number (like 911) - and we'd suggest 247, standing for Community Information System;
- 4) To be able to "follow up" on each referral to be sure that seniors get the services they need;
- 5) To be able to ask other city departments to contact seniors to offer a needed service, instead of simply telling seniors what department to call. Other city departments should be required to report results back to the Commission on all referrals from the Commission.
- 6) To publicize the C.I.S. program through established monthly bulletins, and radio-TV-newspaper media - especially foreign language and ethnic media.

Some funds for this program may be available shortly through Title III of the Older Americans Act, administered by the Wayne County-Detroit Senior Citizen Services Network.