

Creating a National Model for Age-Friendly Neighborhoods

By Patricia Powers Thomson and Susan Sedgewick

Cities rarely have access to large tracts of underdeveloped land or to the unique opportunity they present to create something remarkable—to leverage the collective knowledge of experts, visionaries, and citizens to develop a world-class urban space. This is the opportunity Hill East offers the District.

As the city develops Hill East, the large tract abutting RFK Stadium and the Anacostia river, we hope it creates a multi-generational mixed-income neighborhood that is senior-friendly. When it comes to taking care of seniors, DC is in the middle of the pack. We rank 19th in the Milken Institute’s *Best Cities for Successful Aging*; 9th in AARP’s *Most Livable Places at 50+*; and 58th in WalletHub’s *Best Places for Retirees*. We’re doing okay, and thanks to the work of

organizations like Age-Friendly DC, we’re doing better than in the past. But okay isn’t good enough. Developing Hill East with the following three elements, will help make our city a national model for senior living.

World-Class Geriatrics Center

DC needs a world class geriatrics facility, and Hill East is an ideal location. As a branch of one of the city’s outstanding medical centers, a “Hill East Center for Geriatric Medicine” would provide world-class health and rehabilitation services to seniors, as well as training and research programs.

Senior-Friendly Housing Options

Hill East should have both market-rate and subsidized residences suitable for seniors. Suitability means incorporating universal design features (e.g., grab bars, wide hallways, roll-in showers), as well as one-level living options and grade level entries for townhomes.

For seniors who can no longer live independently and choose to move to an assisted living facility, we envision a state-of-the-art facility, coupled with several integrated “Green House homes.” When necessary, seniors can transition to one of these homes and receive skilled nursing care in home-like settings without leaving their families, friends, and neighbors. (See www.thegreenhouseproject.org) Finally, Hill East should include affordable housing for personal care aides, home health aides, and other low to moderate-wage staff working in the

community. These staff are essential. Enabling them to live near where they work (while concurrently working to improve pay and benefits), is a win for the staff, those they support, and the larger community.

Services to Facilitate “Aging at Home”

According to AARP, the vast majority of older adults want to stay in their homes and communities as they age. Not only is aging-in-place preferred by seniors, it is less expensive for families and for taxpayers. With the right incentives, Hill East can become a *provider-hub* for the following services, creating synergies and improving delivery across the city:

Homecare Services. Many seniors who are relatively healthy still need the help of personal care aides to assist with the activities of daily living. Others need the support of home health aides, as well as visiting nurses and visiting physicians. These services can be integrated with the Geriatrics Center or provided by independent agencies located in the community.

Homecare Training and Internship Program. There is a serious shortage of home health and personal care aides. Hill East would be a great place to locate a training and internship program to ensure a strong pipeline of qualified aides while also increasing employment opportunities for DC residents. This program could be run by the “Hill East Campus” of an existing educational institution serving not only seniors, but the entire community.

An Adult Day Health Center with Memory Care (ADHC). ADHCs provide a range of programs for seniors with physical and cognitive challenges. They also provide respite for family caregivers. ANCs 6A, 6B,

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Hill East Center for Geriatric Medicine	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Health services for older adults
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Geriatric training programs
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Geriatric research programs
Age-Friendly Housing Options	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Market-rate and subsidized residential units suitable for older adults
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Assisted living facility, coupled with integrated Green House homes
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Affordable housing set-asides for homecare aides working in community
Services Hub to Facilitate “Aging at Home”	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Homecare services (e.g., personal care aides, home health aides)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Homecare training and internship program
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Adult day health center (ADHC)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Hospice services
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Quality-of-life services: senior-friendly recreational facilities, transportation, and life-long learning programs

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and 6C have all advocated for an ADHC. Taking their support a step further, ANC 6B worked with Capitol Hill Village and Felice Development to secure \$225,000 to help plan, design, and fundraise for such a center.

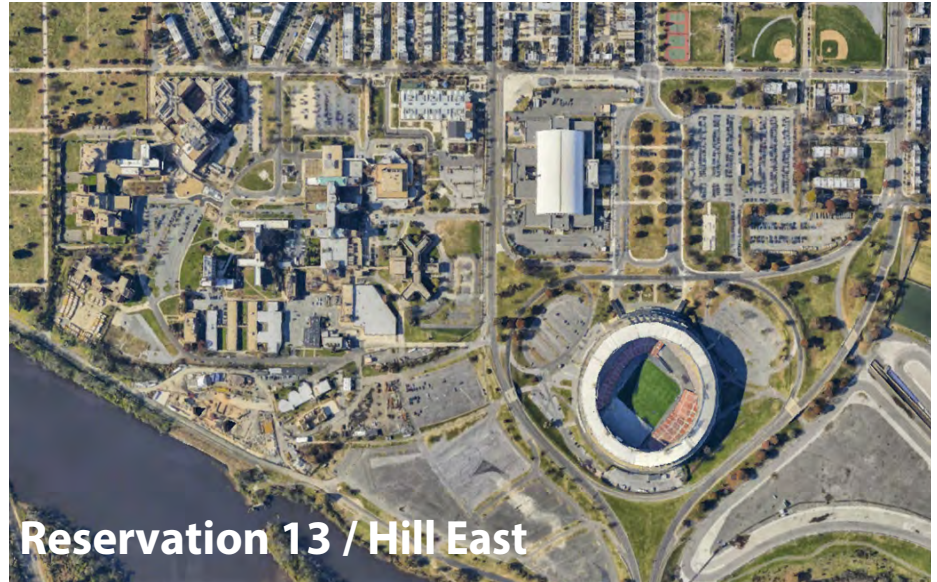
Hospice Services. According to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Medicare beneficiaries are less likely to die in hospitals, and more likely to die at home. As people near the end of their lives, in-home hospice services attend to their palliative, emotional, and spiritual needs.

Quality-of-Life Facilities. Finally, we hope Hill East will include senior-friendly recreational facilities, transportation, and life-long learning programs, all of which are important for maintaining independence and health.

The need for the above will only grow as the population of older adults grows, and as concerns about future pandemics make previous models of senior care untenable. Making this vision a reality will require the collaboration of many stakeholders, and strong leadership on the part of the city. Indeed, development has already started, and a new “request for proposals” has been released. We hope the city will look favorably on proposals that incorporate the above ideas.

Hill East offers an unparalleled opportunity to create a world-class urban space that embraces older adults as part of a thriving, socially and economically diverse, intergenerational community. Let’s take full advantage of the unique opportunity we have been given to become a national model for senior living.

Patricia Powers Thomson and Susan Sedgewick are members of the Capitol Hill Village Board and its Advocacy Team.



FAST FACTS ON AGING IN DC

- Seniors are one of the fastest growing segments of the population.
- 34% of registered voters in DC are at least 50 years old (31% in Ward 6, 46% in Ward 7, and 36% in Ward 8).
- Nine of ten registered voters in DC, age 35 and over, believe it is important to remain at home as long as possible even if they need long-term care services (AARP).
- 86% of registered voters in DC, age 35 and over, support increasing funds for services that help people remain in their homes and communities as they age (AARP).
- Aging-in-place is preferred by seniors. It is also less expensive — for families and for taxpayers.
- COVID-19 has underscored the benefits of aging-at-home, or if that is not possible, in small home-like settings like “Green House” homes. According to a recent article in *Forbes*, 42% of all COVID-19 deaths have taken place in nursing homes. Per the *Journal of Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine*, death rates in home and home-like settings were less than 1% compared to 11% in traditional nursing homes.