



City of Valparaiso
Active Adult Lifestyle Center
Task Force Study Group
Final Report to Park Board
April 28, 2021

Early in 2020, the Valpo Parks embarked on its 5-year Master Plan process, with plans for separate studies into several specific pieces of programming/facilities, including the Banta Senior Center. Before the processes could get into full swing, the COVID-19 pandemic hit causing delays until later in the year. Facilities were shut down and like the rest of the country/world, life as we knew it came to a standstill. Fast forward to late summer/fall when the Master Plan and other task forces began their work again.

In October, the Parks engaged Deb Butterfield Communications, Inc. to establish a task force and process to “Create a Model Senior Center” for Valparaiso’s older adults, with an examination of the current Banta Senior Center facility and programming, as well as the exploration of possible other options to locate a new or renovated center. The task force (listed in Appendix A) has met monthly since November 2020, with sub-groups looking into more specific areas including facilities, programming, and best practices.

Quickly the process evolved from a “Senior Center” to providing the best opportunities for residents to “age well” in Valparaiso, with an Active Adult Lifestyle Center at the heart of this concept.

The timeliness and significance of this study cannot be understated. Most recently, data from the City’s just-released Housing Market Analysis reported that the fastest growing age group is all seniors over 65 years-of-age, which grew by 47% from 2010-2018. The study further projects that **62% of housing growth in Valparaiso over the next 10 years will come from residents 65+!** These statistics support the data that has been collected by the Task Force over the last five months. Survey results from the general Master Plan process also indicate that between 30-35 of all respondents were in that same age category, with the 55-64 group representing the second largest.

The goals of this process were identified as:

- Determine interest and need – programming and facility.
- Help make Valpo a retirement choice/destination community – what will residents seek in retirement?
- Create a vision and strategy that can be implemented.

This report will include the following information:

- Community Input
- Best practices
- Facilities/site analysis
- Conclusions and Recommendations

Community Input

Input was collected from a variety of sources including focus groups and surveys of current Banta Senior Center members, Valpo Chamber members, Kiwanis members and the community at large. Particularly with the Banta member group, input was limited by the inability to conduct in-person focus group sessions and an inability/lack of desire to participate via ZOOM virtual input sessions. However, survey responses from Banta members exceeded 30% which provided strong input. As facilities re-open, additional in-person input can be gathered.

Survey Data

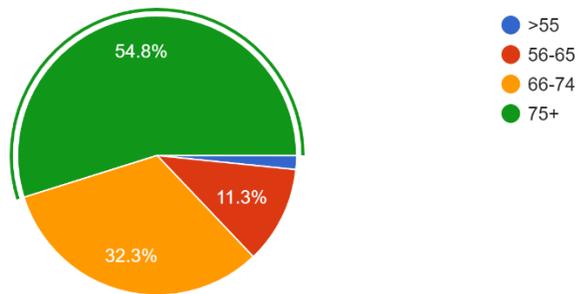
The full survey report is attached as Appendix B, with a comparison between Banta members and the broader community.

Not surprisingly, the Banta member group demographics were significantly different than the broader community – older, mostly retired, and actively engaged at Banta.

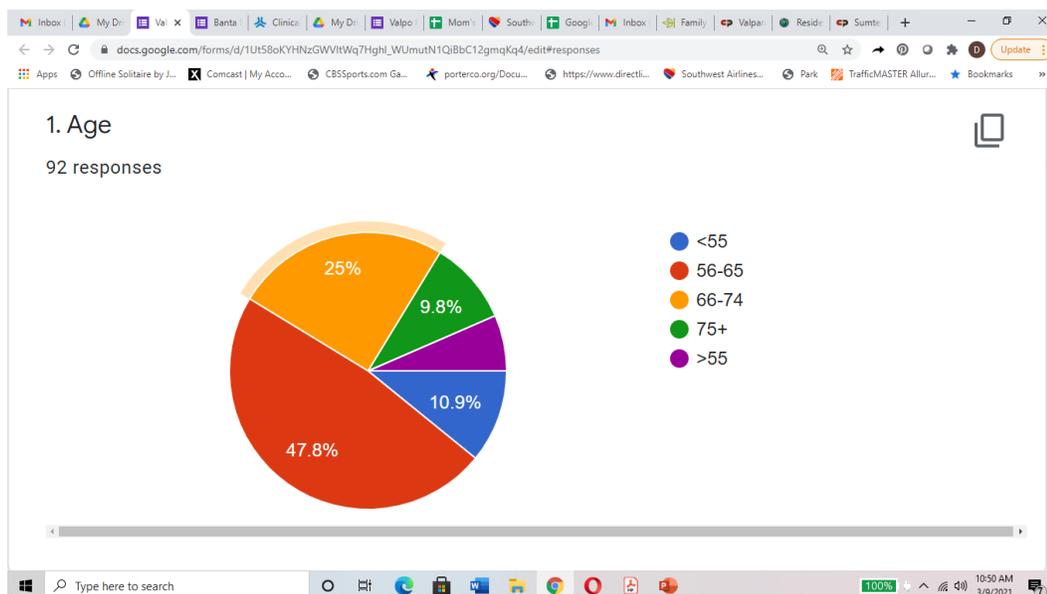
Banta:

1. Age

62 responses



Community:



Banta members are mostly retired (95%) while the majority of community respondents are working (63%). However, 37% of community respondents are retired, representing a larger potential and interest in participation in a new center.

Interestingly, a quarter of Banta members have lived in Valparaiso *for less than five years* and just over half for more than 20 years, while more than three quarters of general community members have lived in the City for more than 20 years.

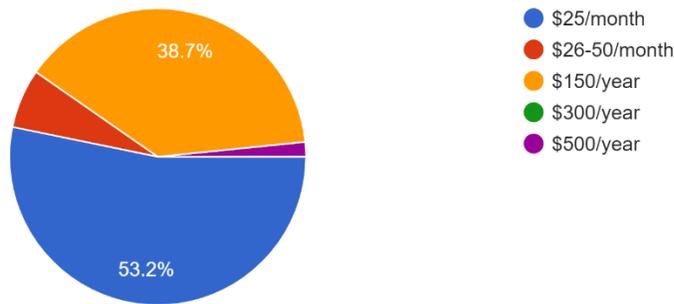
Banta members naturally reported high utilization and familiarity with the current Banta Center, while the broader community, although familiar with it (79%), reported no utilization (85%), representing a significant majority. Banta members gave the current facility more favorable quality ratings with nearly 80% rating it 8 or higher on a scale of 1-10. Only 14% of community members gave Banta a rating of 8 or higher, while 53% rated in 5 or lower. A conclusion one might draw is that at least from a perception basis, the broader community views Banta as mediocre at best.

Perhaps most importantly, the broader community indicated an overwhelming interest in participating – 95% -- if enhanced programming opportunities were offered. Nearly 60% said they would be interested in starting or joining a lifestyle group, defined as a group such as a book club, amateur radio club, theatre group, current affairs discussion group, computer club, woodworking club, etc. AND they indicated a willingness to pay a higher monthly or annual dues to become a member or for an enrichment program if additional fees were required. Even Banta members said they would pay higher than the current \$4 per month to be a member.

Banta Members:

17. What range of membership fee would you be willing to pay to access the facilities and/or programs?

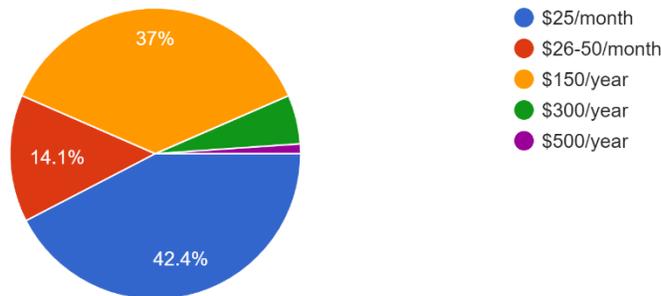
62 responses



Community Members

17. What range of membership fee would you be willing to pay to access the facilities and/or programs?

92 responses



A majority of both groups said they would be willing to pay additional fees for some programs (72% Banta, 87% Community).

Additional survey data specific to facility opportunities and facility components will be included in following sections of this report.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were held with limited participation specifically for Banta Center members, and separate groups with community stakeholders. Input from community stakeholders was more consistent and came from a broader community standpoint, weighing factors such as need, cost and location. Banta member input can be enhanced once there is an opportunity to have in-person contact.

General Focus Group Input (Location, Facility and Need Later in Report)

- Favorable input regarding a multi-generational facility but with reservations about a totally shared space. Leaning toward, at a minimum, a separate entrance and dedicated adult only programming space. Preference expressed for a shared campus, separate buildings, and parking.
- Strong recognition that not all adults want to be around kids.
- “Having a one destination area not only increases use of space all day but has those opportunities for overlap and shared experiences and exchange of knowledge and skills and can only build a stronger community.”
- Engage community non-profits, VU and others.
- Continuing partnership with the schools is important and offers intergenerational opportunities as well. Post COVID it is important to re-engage senior population into the schools with career service mentoring, etc.
- People have not looked to Banta widely to fill a need. Not a lot of awareness of Banta and more perceptions about who participates. Similar to perceptions BGC had years ago.
- Perhaps there needs to be more discussion about programming and what we want to do as opposed to deciding on a location for a center.
- It’s (Banta) pretty much remained the same over the last 20 years. We’ve known that we have this group of people that really needs and wants this place but yet we sense that there’s this whole other group out there that’s not interested in that kind of thing. (Banta as it is)

Best Practices

The Best Practices sub-committee found that “best practice” is in flux right now. Communities are moving away from the concept of “Senior Centers” and toward Aging-in-Place with active lifestyle opportunities. An article published by the National Parks Association in late 2019 titled “Senior Centers: Reimagining Aging and Exploring New Opportunities” (attached as Appendix C) quotes author and community activist Betty Friedan, “Aging is not ‘lost youth’ but a new stage of opportunity and strength.”

According to the article, results from a Google search of senior centers bring up names, such as “Active Adult Center,” “Lifelong Learning Center,” “Active Aging Center,” “60+ Activity Center.” This is an important shift, as nearly half of local park and recreation agencies target individuals 50 years and older for their older adult programming.

Emphasis is on:

- Improving Health
- Maintaining Quality of Life
- Creating an environment of social, mental, and physical well-being

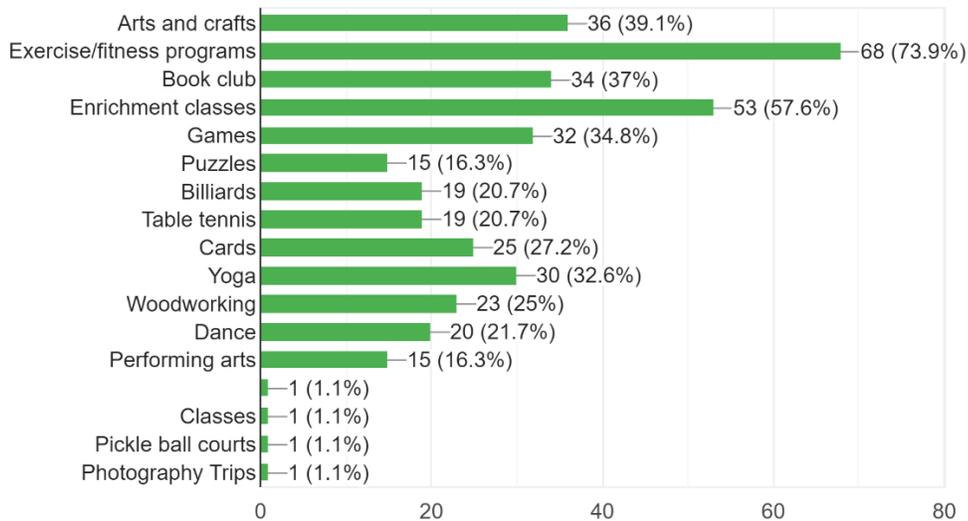
The committee found examples of renovated and new centers, stand-alone and combination community centers, and adult only and multi-generational. Common elements of newer centers included:

- Welcoming Space with conversation areas
- Large multi-purpose room
- Outdoor gathering space
- Indoor walking track
- Rooms for activities
- Limited fitness area
- Computer/technology room
- Coffee shop
- Mini health clinic
- Enrichment classes

The key take-away from this exercise was that best practice centers are born of community input and need. Input from the survey noted similar interests. Note the higher emphasis on health, physical and mental activities rather than traditional “senior center” activities such as cards, arts and crafts, and puzzles.

11. What types of activities would you participate in at an active lifestyle adult community center? (Check all that apply)

92 responses



Topping the list of desired amenities were:

- Conversational gathering areas
- Multi-purpose room
- Outdoor gathering spaces
- Outdoor firepit
- Indoor walking track
- Fitness center
- Mini health clinic
- Computer/technology room (Banta members specifically)

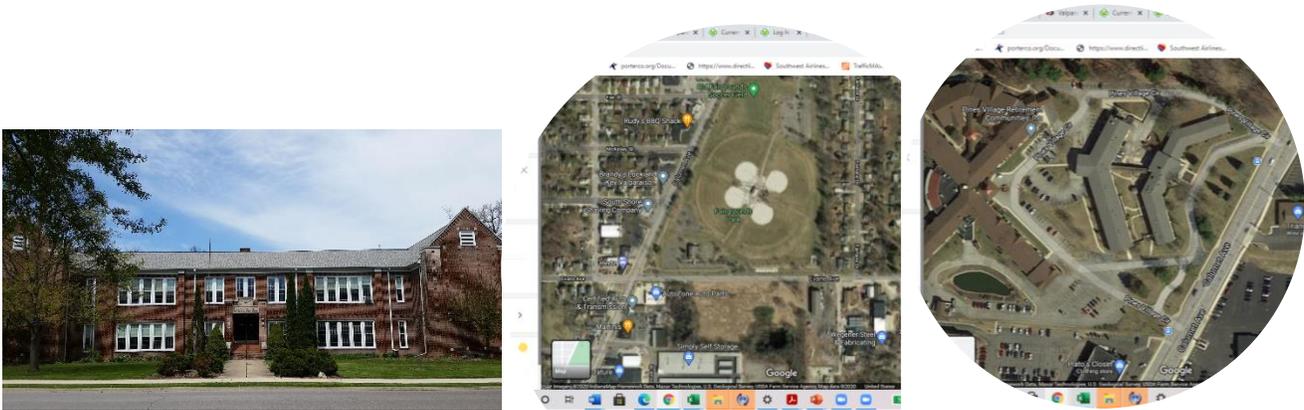
Facilities and Location

The Banta Senior Center has served Valparaiso’s older adults for more than 20 years. Banta is a former grade school building built in 1924 with approximately 14,000 square feet on two floors. It is located at the corners of Beech and Elm Street on the far northeast side of the downtown area of Valparaiso. It is tucked into a residential neighborhood and has a neighborhood park.

An assessment conducted in March 2019 by Shive-Hattery, Inc. revealed approximately \$3 Million in repairs and upgrades that needed to be made in order to bring the building totally current from a structural and mechanical standpoint. It did not account for any redesign of rooms and spaces based on desired utilization.

As a part of the current study process, the Valpo Parks engaged Abonmarche, Inc., an engineering firm, to look at Banta from a design/utilization standpoint, as well as two other opportunities that have been presented to the Parks for consideration.

The Task Force and this study consider three locations as options for an enhanced active adult lifestyle center: Banta Senior Center, co-occupation of a site with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Northwest Indiana on Evans Ave. directly south of Fairgrounds Park and Butterfield Pavilion, and the northside location at the former Whispering Pines Nursing Home that sits in front of Pines Village Retirement Community.



Each site/facility has advantages and disadvantages. The Abonmarche report provides as close to an “apples to apples” comparison of each site from a cost standpoint that includes renovation and new construction costs. Because the Shive-Hattery report had already been conducted, the \$3 Million cost to upgrade Banta have been used in this report. The renovation costs for the Whispering Pines facilities are significantly lower (\$110 vs \$212 for Banta).

The full facilities report is attached.

Community Focus Group participants had this to say about location and facility needs:

- Connectivity and accessibility are important.
- Most commented that Banta should be repurposed for another use; that any \$\$ spend in renovations would be better spent on a new facility.
- Similar impressions of Whispering Pines buildings that the buildings are “old & tired.”
- Favorable input regarding both the BGC and WP locations – both have good connectivity to parks and pathways.
- Banta and WP both give off an old and institutional vibe. If go with WP, would be best to tear it down. Pines Village had approached City/Redevelopment commission about helping to fund. If there are more partners involved to share the cost, it might be doable.
- The north location has a more connected feeling to the community, whereas the BGC site feels more industrial with a lot of fences and commercial buildings around.

Members of the Task Force toured Banta in December and had this input:

- Wasn’t a welcoming structure where you come in.
- Lighting is a problem.
- Not a comfortable vibe.
- Inherent issue with 2 floors.
- Can the building take repairs?
- Members there now have an attachment.
- Is distance a factor?

- Beautiful south entry that is not being used.
- Lots of disjointed parts.
- Sound is a minimal complaint

Cost is a significant consideration in deciding on where to locate this enhanced facility. Cost estimates range from \$5.2 Million to renovate and add space to Banta, \$6.4 Million for a new facility at the Boys & Girls Club site, and \$6.6 - \$8.8 Million for renovation or new construction at Whispering Pines. Demolition, asbestos removal, and site preparation drive up the costs at that location, while those expenses are minimal at the other two locations.

Recently, an issue concerning the number of parking spaces required at the BGC site has surfaced, raising questions about the viability of that option. While assumptions have been made that the two organizations would have different operating hours with minimal overlap, it is more likely than not that the Adult Center will grow its usage and hours of usage quickly, making overlap a bigger concern. And summer hours for both facilities will certainly overlap.

Focus group participants and task force members have commented that the BGC site seems more “industrial”, while the Whispering Pines site feels more “connected.”

Conclusions and Task Force Recommendations

Based upon all of the information collected to date and considering the extensive examination of building and site opportunities presented in the Shive-Hattery Banta evaluation report, and in the Abonmarche facility options report, the task force was asked to rate the three options based on the following criteria:

- Location – central, visible location that is connected. Access and accessibility are critical.
- Facility – able to accommodate programming that has been described, with welcoming and open spaces for gathering and multiple uses. Provides opportunities for flexible uses and growth.
- Cost – chosen site/building will offer the greatest “bang for the buck” from both capital and operating cost standpoint and will provide the long-term facility and programming goals that are desired. What can be funded? What public/private partnerships exist for each option that will enhance the affordability of the venture?
- Partner opportunities – the ability to partner is always a consideration for the Valpo Parks but is not the driving decision factor. Serving the needs and desires of the growing active older adult in the community is the priority.
- Marketability – what will signal a new and dynamic opportunity to the residents? Can Banta be “rebranded?”
- Conversational gathering areas

Using a scale of 1-10, the scores were:

- Location
Banta __25__ Boys & Girls Club __62__ Whispering Pines __70__
- Facility
Banta __21__ Boys & Girls Club __57__ Whispering Pines __73__
- Cost
Banta __25__ Boys & Girls Club __38__ Whispering Pines __58__

- Partner opportunities – the ability to partner is always a consideration for the Valpo Parks but is not the driving decision factor. Serving the needs and desires of the growing active older adult in the community is the priority.

Banta _19___ Boys & Girls Club _55___ Whispering Pines _59___

- Marketability

Banta _16___ Boys & Girls Club __63___ Whispering Pines __70___

106/21.2

275/55

330/66

Task force members then selected from the following options, with the majority selecting Option 2 and Whispering Pines as the most desirable opportunity to move forward with a new Center.

Option 1 __1___

- The Banta Center has served the community well for many decades but has a more useful future as a residential project, perhaps for senior housing as is suggested in the City’s Residential Market Analysis.
- Formal negotiations should begin immediately with both the Boys and Girls Club and with Pines Village to address questions that have surfaced in this process, and to determine which has the greatest potential from a financial perspective to provide the greatest value for the investment.

Option 2 __6___

- The Banta Center has served the community well for many decades but has a more useful future as a residential project, perhaps for senior housing as is suggested in the City’s Residential Market Analysis.
- While the Boys & Girls Club site provides a great synergy with its proximity to Fairgrounds Park and Butterfield Pavilion and offers a wonderful partnership opportunity, the concerns about parking, overlap of operating hours, and outgrowing the space are challenges that are too significant to overcome.
- Whispering Pines offers the greatest opportunities to create an enhanced facility in a vibrant and connected area. Its location in the “front yard” of Pines Villages is a natural fit. The Task Force recommends pursuing the Whispering Pines site as its preferred location and begin negotiations with the City’s Redevelopment Commission regarding site mitigation and Pines Villages regarding the site’s development.

Option 3 __1___

- The Banta Center has served the community well for many decades but has a more useful future as a residential project, perhaps for senior housing as is suggested in the City’s Residential Market Analysis.
- The Whispering Pines location is visible and connected in many ways to many community amenities. However, it too may bring with it community perceptions that cannot be overcome with a renovated or new facility. Traffic and access are a major consideration. The Task Force would position this location as a second-choice option.
- The Boys & Girls Club site provides great synergy with its proximity to Fairgrounds Park and Butterfield Pavilion and offers a wonderful partnership opportunity. While there are concerns

regarding parking and operating overlaps, the Task Force believes those can be addressed for the immediate future and solutions can be sought for the long-term. The Task Force recommends that negotiations begin immediately with the BGC to finalize the structure and terms of an agreement.

Option 4 __0__

- The Banta Center has served the community well for many decades and current members feel a strong attachment to the building and neighborhood. The City's Housing study supports an opportunity to develop related senior housing that can provide a feeder network of users of the Banta Center and create a vibrant and active new adult activity center. The costs to renovate Banta are significant, but still lower than new build or some combination of new and renovation. The Task Force recommends exhausting all options with Banta before looking at other properties.