

SENIOR COMMUNITIES

comfort

Wellness Through Design

NOURISHMENT + AIR + LIGHT + FITNESS + **COMFORT**



Ankrom Moisan

{ PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE }

{ OPERATIONS }



{ MARKET NEEDS }

We design for wellness by finding opportunities to flexibly adapt for changing situations while maintaining physical infrastructure, operations, and marketing. Wellness is resilience that relies on constant attention punctuated by periodic adaptations, and so we've divided our insights into two operational tracks: Normal and Adaptive.

COMFORT

A SAFE PLACE

When joining a new community, we look for familiarity and connection. Whether that be through relationships or our personal space, connection makes us feel good. Innovative technology, especially in emergencies, creates a safe and social environment in which we want to live. Recognizing the building’s beauty and how it positively impacts each individual and community as a whole is the definition of comfort.

- 5.1** EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION
- 5.2** INTERNAL COMMUNICATION
- 5.3** VISITORS
- 5.4** BEAUTY
- 5.5** SOCIAL

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Empowering residents through supportive and reliable systems.



Communication is more than a nice website; it means providing opportunities for residents to express themselves to the larger community. It is about empowering residents to remain active participants in the world around them and continue to make meaningful contributions to society.

Physical infrastructure for external communication can take many forms, from the obvious like signage and network servers; to the subtle, such as the way the campus integrates with the surrounding community.

Communities that communicate well with their neighbors have a much easier time when they want to make changes such as an expansion or in program modification. Supportive neighbors go a long way when asking for city approvals.

With an ever-increasing number of ways for residents to stay connected, it's become increasingly important for facilities to know and maintain their communications infrastructure. It is not enough to provide today's latest technology; communities perform better when they are able to adapt to new technologies and innovations. This means having staff that can understand and evaluate the latest offerings and can implement them effectively.

NORMAL OPERATIONS

Increased opportunities



{ MARKET NEEDS }

Increased visibility



{ PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE }

Increased performance



{ OPERATIONS }

ADAPTED OPERATIONS

Increased safety

One of the biggest advantages to leaving your single-family home and moving to a Senior Living Community is how much safer this environment can be. Informing current and potential residents about the safety features of the building, such as emergency generators, monitored fire alarms, and wander guard systems can be a motivator for individuals that may be reluctant to leave their family home.

Increased communication

Communication is vital in addressing emerging and critical situations. A community should have multiple ways of communicating with outside stakeholders. Cell phones don't always provide the desired coverage so DAS systems can be considered to provide additional coverage. (See Resiliency: Light)

Critical communications infrastructure should have power back-up, ideally on a generator, so that communication is not lost during extended power outages.

Increased understanding

While the most important communication during an emergency is to the residents, communication with others outside the facility is almost as vital. Critical communication systems such as fire alarm notification should be tested regularly.

Facilities staff should understand the ways in which the facility is connected to the information infrastructure. Many modern pieces of equipment include data connections allowing for everything from remote monitoring to system management. With this comes the possibility of "back doors" into the facility network. Digital access should be controlled just like physical access.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

With helpful wayfinding tools and informed staff, residents will thrive.



5.2

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

The need to support resident self-expression can, at times, appear to clash with the need to present an organized and coherent environment. Communities designed and committed to resident empowerment find ways and places for resident expression that harmonize with the rest of the campus.

In addition to the amazing work by community communications directors, the way a facility is laid out and maintained communicates volumes.

Clean and well-maintained physical facilities communicate professionalism, health, and committed staff.

Integrating resident facing staff work areas, such as nurses' stations, activities directors, and food service into common areas communicates welcome and access.

Choice of materials for flooring, walls, and ceilings can complement signage and wayfinding. Skilled architects and interior designers can use these tools to communicate everything from where someone is in the building to which areas are for residents and which for staff.

Modern technology provides many ways for communities to communicate. From internal television channels, to WiFi, to digital signage, to smart phone apps, it's easier than ever to keep in communication.

Communication is also about ways and places for the residents to express themselves. Resident art galleries, theater productions, and lectures, all provide outlets that empower residents and allow them to express themselves.

Entry shelves and memory boxes give residents a place to express themselves and identify their home.

NORMAL OPERATIONS

More personality



{ MARKET NEEDS }

More maintained



{ PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE }

More innovation



{ OPERATIONS }

ADAPTED OPERATIONS

More transparency

Clear internal communication is critical in a crisis, as it doesn't take much for rumors and fears to spread. Good communication about difficult circumstances can mitigate negative effects and help stop rumors.

Residents that are informed and empowered can be part of the solution to stop the spread of misinformation.

More tools

Several important tools allow staff and residents to communicate in an emergency.

Communities with a shelter-in-place strategy for fire response should have a public address system (often included in the fire alarm equipment) to communicate instructions and the all-clear.

Nurse Call / Help Call systems with pull cords in all restrooms, and pendants if possible, help staff and first responders.

Notification systems can be installed that alert if certain doors are open or closed, if a resident is in a restricted area, and in some cases can even lock doors to reduce elopement risk.

More compassion

Communications systems should be tested regularly and during non-ideal times. Our office had architectural staff at a community to prepare for some remodel work when a wildfire began to threaten the building. The public address system was attempted but many residents were unable to hear it. Facilities staff ended up enlisting all hands, including our staff, to go door-to-door and notify residents to prepare to evacuate. Fortunately, the winds shifted, and no evacuation was needed but the lesson was learned to test the system in non-ideal circumstances and have a back-up plan in place.

5.3

VISITORS

Designed from the start to be a welcoming and convenient place for everyone.



5.3

VISITORS

As marketing departments can attest, making visitors feel welcome is one of their best marketing tools.

Semi-common spaces (private dining rooms, activity areas, and guest apartments) are valuable marketing tools. They allow residents to bring in friends and family to experience the community and what it offers.

Often apartments in communities are smaller than homes that the residents are moving from, making hosting friends and family more difficult. Many communities provide semi-common spaces, such as private dining rooms, activity areas, or even guest apartments so that residents can continue to host visitors.

Even during normal operations it's important for the campus to have some idea of who is coming and going. An easy to find entrance and check in location, along with downplaying restricted entrances, communicates where to check-in.

Having a fewer entrances allows staff to monitor them more easily, to greet visitors and helps in maintaining security.

Operationally, staff that knows and can recognize residents and other staff goes a long way in being able to reach out and welcome visitors.

Staff can support resident-led gatherings, or plan events open to friends and family.

NORMAL OPERATIONS

More welcoming



{ MARKET NEEDS }

More efficient



{ PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE }

More reliable



{ OPERATIONS }

ADAPTED OPERATIONS

Better support

Loosing connections with friends and family is a great concern of residents considering a moving into a Senior Living Community. Communities that can show how they support those relationships, especially trying circumstances, will be better situated.

Better organization

While the approach to visitors in a time of crisis will depend largely on the nature of the situation, a few concepts are widely applicable.

Fewer, well located, access points provide make it easier to monitor or restrict access when required.

Better tools

Facilities staff should understand how to lockdown their community. For an urban high-rise, this may be a simple matter of checking a few ground floor doors. More suburban and rural communities will have more ways in and out.

Visitor logs and front desk staff are a vital tool. Knowing who is in the community and where they are going to be can help staff direct their efforts in an emergency.

5.4

BEAUTY

Not just externally reflected, but also how people internally feel entering and experiencing a room.



5.4 BEAUTY

Other than the staff, nothing communicates a community brand faster or with more definitiveness than the state of the physical facilities.

Beauty gives residents something to be proud of and connects them to the community.

As designers we think and talk a lot about the aesthetics of our projects. Yet visual appeal is only one aspect of a beautiful design. True beauty in buildings is about the experiences of the users and how the design supports those experiences.

Spaces should be designed around the desired experience. Are you walking down a hallway or in an art gallery? Are you sitting on bench to rest or are you looking out of a window at a bird's nest?

Coherent design is calming, as one space leads logically into the next and they all feel like part of the same whole. Disconnected designs are jarring at best, and can be stressful or confusing, especially to those whose cognitive functioning might be reduced.

One of the most common design issues we run into is when various renovations and updates have been done in isolation, without looking at how they relate to each other. A long-range strategic plan and/or design standards can go far in maintaining a constant vision. It helps to keep smaller capital improvement projects all on the same page across time and staffing changes.

NORMAL OPERATIONS

More consideration



{ MARKET NEEDS }

More thoughtful



{ PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE }

More planning



{ OPERATIONS }

ADAPTED OPERATIONS

More integrity

What does beautiful marketing look like in a crisis? Beauty is not only about the way things look, it is also about how they make us feel.

Beauty shows that someone took the time to care and communicates dignity.

More peace

When facing challenges, it can be tempting to believe that beauty needs to take a back seat. However, beautiful spaces can play a vital role during a crisis. Best practices in crisis management caps the number of hours any one individual should be in high stress situations, this avoids burnout and the errors that come with it. In a similar fashion, beautiful spaces can provide space and calm in stressful situations and serve as a way for staff and residents to recharge.

More fun

Finding beauty in challenging circumstances can help ease some of the difficulties. In the mid-2010's our office had a project at an existing Senior Living Community. Just as excavation finished, the area received record breaking rains that continued for months, flooded our excavation, caused some flooding in the surrounding community, and left standing water all over the campus. Both the contractor and staff began putting small rubber ducks in the puddles that they were working on as a way of communicating to the residents that they were aware of the issue and brought some smiles as well.

5.5

SOCIAL

Communal spaces enable healthy behaviors among residents, staff, and visitors.



Understanding how to make a community a place where residents invite their friends, is often the most cost-effective marketing tool an organization can have.

Physical infrastructure can go a long way in supporting and facilitating healthy social interaction. Are there places for spontaneous gatherings? Formal gatherings? Small gatherings, large ones? Where is the heart of the campus? Is it a place everyone feels welcome? Are different social interaction styles supported?

A healthy social environment is not like constructing a building, where you put the pieces together and you have a building. A healthy social environment is grown, not built, and needs to be tended and nurtured. Staff plays a critical role in nurturing and maintaining this environment.

NORMAL OPERATIONS

More cost-effective

More interaction

More assistance



{ MARKET NEEDS }



{ PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE }



{ OPERATIONS }

ADAPTED OPERATIONS

More value

More care

More reassurance

A healthy community can weather storms and keeps its residents involved and empowered. Engaged residents can reach beyond the walls of the community to continue to achieve their goals and showcase the value that senior living provides.

Crises that impact the social fabric of a community come in all shapes and sizes. Recognizing and maintaining spaces and features that support healthy social interactions help blunt the impact of such challenges. Often in responding to a crisis, spaces and places will be repurposed. Care should be taken to evaluate the social impacts of losing those spaces, and to find other places for the displaced activities, or to provide other options for maintaining community.

When crises impact a community, it can be difficult to maintain the feelings of common identity; especially when spaces or activities that reinforced identity are unavailable. By recognizing this impact, staff can work to mitigate it.

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