

Seniors petition Anderson to keep center, programs

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(Photo: Sheila Vilvens/The Community Press)

Hanging on a bulletin board in the Anderson Senior Center foyer are several signature laden petitions.

The petitions read: *"We the undersigned are part of the approximately 400 people who regularly use the Anderson Senior Center, which is vital to our senior community. We petition you to find another organization to operate our center so it can remain open with existing services and personnel."*

The message is clear. Those who frequent the Anderson Senior Center, 7970 Beechmont Ave., want it to remain.

John McCullough, 84, of Anderson Township, has been active at the Anderson Senior Center since retiring more than 20 years ago. One of his favorite activities is the woodcarving class. He's hopeful someone will be found to manage the center and to keep programs as they are and the building in place.

Senior Independence, which has managed the senior center since 2006, recently informed Anderson Township leadership that it will not renew its contract which expires Aug. 31. Anderson Township Administrator Vicky Earhart said that it's been confirmed through the Council on Aging that the meals on wheels and transportation services will remain available to Anderson seniors regardless of the center's status.

"We are still looking at options with regard to providing the various activities," she said. The township has received numerous questions regarding its future plans for the center. Responses to frequently asked questions are available on the township's website, www.andersontownship.org (<http://www.andersontownship.org>), its Facebook page and were made available at the front desk of the senior center.

Yet, concerns and questions remain.

The center itself should stay in place, McCullough said.

"I think it serves a good purpose," he said. There are many activities that take place at the club from the woodcarving group to cards, line dancing and more.

Anderson Township resident Ginny Hunter, 85, lives near the senior center and has used its services regularly for the past 19 years.

"I think we need a place for elderly people to gather," she said. The programs and activities are vital to many senior citizens, especially those who live on their own. Many rely on eating the healthy lunch that's served daily at the center.

"I hope they keep us in this building with the same programs we have now, and I'm all for the park board," Hunter said. "I'm all for them."

The township has approached the Anderson Township Park District, and others, about managing the senior center's social and recreational programs.

Anderson Park District Executive Director Ken Kushner said discussions so far have been general.

"This would be new for us," he said. "We don't make meals and we don't deliver people to places. We're just looking at programming things. Is it ideal? I don't know. We've got a lot of things to discuss."

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Park Board Member Angie Stocker said she's glad the park district is part of the conversation.

"I don't know that we can do anything. We're already busting at the seams," she said. The RecPlex and other spaces the park district uses for recreational programs are already heavily used and recent plans for expansion were unsuccessful. "We'll talk with them and see if we can support their effort, but I think it has to be their effort," she added.

Senior Center regular Delma Avel, 86, drives from Milford to participate in the activities at the Anderson Senior Center. Her friend, Gib Sutton, 94, lives nearby in Mount Carmel. Both spend many hours at the center. Sutton is in charge of decorations and Avel helps her. They're both hopeful the center can continue to offer the same type of programs. They enjoy chair volleyball and dance.

"This is our life," Sutton said. "This is where all our friends are," Avel added.

The township has no plans of closing the building where the senior center is housed, but is exploring other venues for offering senior services such as the RecPlex and Anderson Center, Earhart said. A decision has not been made regarding where senior services will be offered but they may ultimately remain at the current facility.

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