

Senior Citizens Advisory Committee (SCAC) 2023 End of Year Report

Written by Cathy Wilson
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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to highlight the 2023 goals, activities, and accomplishments of Morris Township's Senior Citizens Advisory Committee (SCAC).

Background

Per its founding [Ordinance](#), SCAC was formed to *"make recommendations to the Township Committee regarding the needs of senior citizens and assist in fulfilling those needs - especially in the areas of transportation, housing, medical care, and related issues affecting seniors."*

SCAC met for the first time on April 11, 2022. In lieu of an End of Year Report for 2022, a Progress Report was submitted to the governing body on August 18, 2022, [click here](#) to review the report.

This Progress Report was written prior to year-end to complete a reporting requirement that was part of Morris Township's successful effort in 2022 to obtain certification through the Sustainable Jersey (SJ) program. By establishing "an age-friendly initiative committee" (SCAC), Morris Township earned SJ-certification points in the larger action category of "Community Design for All Ages."

For more information on SCAC's contribution to Morris Township's 2022 SJ certification work click [HERE](#).

SCAC's 2023 Members

- Linda Bertuglia
- Edna Bruder McGrath
- Carol Greshko (President Morris Township Seniors Club)
- Rita Guibert
- Sam Pagano
- Noel Robinson
- Barbara Sebiri
- Mary Voehl
- Cathy Wilson (Township Committee Liaison and SCAC Chair)
- Donna Guariglia (Honorary Township Committee Member)

2023 Meeting Schedule

SCAC held meetings every other month on the following dates in 2023. All meetings were held from 3:00-4:30pm in person at Town Hall and/or by Zoom.

- January 23
- March 27
- May 22
- July 24
- September 27
- November 27

Agendas and Minutes

The agendas and minutes of all SCAC meetings can be found [HERE](#).

SCAC's 2023 Goals

In accordance with its mission and purpose as outlined in its founding ordinance, SCAC's work in 2023 centered around the completion of three major project goals:

- Needs Survey
- Focus Group Event
- Website Construction

SCAC's 2023 Activities

Needs Survey

From its inception, a top SCAC priority was to gather information about the needs of our seniors by conducting a Needs Survey. Throughout 2022, the Survey Sub-Committee (headed by Noel Robinson) researched possibilities and shared/discussed draft content and questions with the full SCAC membership.

In late January 2023, after months of deliberation, SCAC finalized its Needs Survey questions and content.

From early February through mid-April 2023, this survey was distributed to Township residents electronically (via the Township's email - the Municipal Messenger - and on the Township's website) as well as in person at various events via hard copy. Responses were obtained from 589 residents.

The results of the Needs Survey can be viewed [HERE](#).

Focus Group Event

The task of developing, organizing, and implementing a focus group event (a large and challenging project) was a centerpiece of SCAC's work in 2023.

As with the survey, Noel Robinson led a sub-group that spent a great deal of time working offline from SCAC's regular meetings to develop plans for making SCAC's Focus Group Event come to life.

Planning for this event raised many considerations that had to be addressed, including:

- 1) Logistical challenges: how to make space at Town Hall for multiple small groups to meet during business hours?
- 2) Content challenges: Which topics to focus on? How to structure the questions? How to connect the focus group questions with the survey results?
- 3) Additional implementation challenges: how to enlist volunteers to assist with facilitating the small group discussions and recording the results? How to train these volunteers?

The Focus Group Committee spent many hours working amongst themselves, with other SCAC members, and with Township staff to address every issue that needed attention.

These efforts culminated in SCAC's Focus Group Event which was held at Town Hall on the afternoon of October 10, 2023. At that time, 41 Township seniors gathered in small groups of 8-10 people and discussed their responses to the following questions:

1. Think about some factors (services, opportunities, community characteristics) that contribute to a positive quality of life for older adults in our Township. What suggestions do you have for actions, programs or services that would better address the needs and interests of Morris Township's seniors?
2. What are the strengths of the social/recreational and educational activities in the Township? What would you suggest be added or changed?
3. If the Township provided transportation for seniors, for what would you use it? In five years do you see yourself needing transportation to live in Morris Township?
4. What additional topics would you like to bring to SCAC's attention that better address the needs and interests of Morris Township Seniors?

More information about the planning that led to this Focus Group Event (and the results that came from it) can be found in a separate report that SCAC submitted to the Township Committee in December 2023. That report can be accessed [HERE](#).

Website Construction

Another centerpiece of SCAC's work in 2023 was constructing an informative and user-friendly [web presence](#) for seniors on the Township's website.

From its inception, SCAC had always viewed website construction as a key component of its work in helping to address the needs of Morris Township's seniors.

Beginning in 2022 and extending throughout 2023, SCAC's Website Sub-Committee, headed by Mary Voehl, spent countless hours doing background research and collecting resources for inclusion on SCAC's webpages.

In line with its founding purpose, SCAC has worked to develop a web presence on the Township's website that compiles and presents in one location existing resources that are of interest to seniors on such topics as: Transportation, Health/Medical, Housing, and Social/Recreational/Educational Activities.

SCAC found an especially large number of resources in the Social/Recreational/Educational category. These resources are included under the sub-categories of: Lifelong Learning, Morris Township Senior Club, Performing Arts, Technology Resources, Trips, and Volunteering.

SCAC is proud of the work it has done to compile, in one easy-to-access location, a variety of resources that seniors will find interesting and useful in meeting their needs and interests on a variety of topics.

Ironically, like so many other existing resources that seniors would find helpful if they knew about them, SCAC's web presence is not well known.

In the year ahead (2024) - and in line with the recommendations that came out of the Needs Survey/Focus Group Report - SCAC will work to find ways to build greater awareness and use of the web presence they have worked so hard to create.

SCAC's webpages can be accessed from the Homepage of the Township's website (click on Government, then Senior Citizens Advisory Committee) or by clicking [HERE](#).

A Word about SCAC's Final Report on the Needs Survey/Focus Group Event

In December 2023, SCAC submitted to the Township Committee a final report on the findings of the Needs Survey and Focus Group Event that were conducted in 2023.

This report (which can be accessed [HERE](#)):

- Explains more fully how the Needs Survey and Focus Group Event were developed and conducted.
- Includes links to the raw data from both.
- Identifies and clarifies the needs that emerged from analyzing the Survey and Focus Groups results.
- Outlines advisory recommendations for addressing the needs of Morris Township's seniors.

As detailed in this report, a pervasive "input finding" was widespread lack of awareness of resources that are already available to meet seniors' needs in many different areas. For example, on the need for better communication (which every focus group identified as THE top concern), many focus group participants were unaware of one of the Township's most important communication resources – the Municipal Messenger (its email system).

Throughout this report, SCAC's newly created web presence is cited as a useful resource for addressing the needs of our seniors in many different areas. How ironic that literally none of the focus group participants had even heard of SCAC's website construction work!

These are two examples (of many) that illustrate why a key recommendation of this report is to find ways to build awareness of resources that already exist but are not well known. This is one of many recommendations outlined in this report that SCAC will work to address going forward.

The contents of this report can be viewed as a "road map" for guiding SCAC's work in the year ahead – and beyond.

Conclusion

Looking back: by accomplishing the three project goals it set for 2023 (survey, focus groups, website construction), SCAC has made great progress in identifying and addressing the needs of Morris Township's seniors.

Looking forward to 2024 and beyond: building on its progress to date, SCAC will continue to work collaboratively with residents, with staff, and with other groups and organizations in our community to make quality of life for seniors who live in Morris Township the best it can be.