

REMARKS For June 10, 2015 Housing Committee Meeting

Sullivan Chamber, City Hall 5:00 pm – 7:00 pm

Good evening. Tonight, the Housing Committee is conducting a public hearing to discuss and explore possible ways in which the City of Cambridge could pilot an LGBT housing program. Of particular concern to me, and the emphasis for tonight's discussion, is the need for LGBT-friendly *senior* housing.

To properly frame our discussion, we must first acknowledge that the LGBT community has made tremendous strides in the decades since Stonewall. That event marked a turning point in this country, after which the LGBT community gradually fought its way out of the periphery of society and helped push this country into being more tolerant and inclusive. Prior to this leg of the Civil Rights Movement, a same-sex couple would be risking life and limb merely by daring to openly date, cohabitate, or set up a life together. There were no legal rights or protections for same-sex couples, nor were same-sex couples allowed to speak on their partner's behalf to physicians when illness struck. Yet little by little, decade by decade, we have unquestionably made great progress in ensuring that members of the LGBT community are no longer looked upon as

“children of a lesser god,” and untold numbers of people have been feeling more and more able to live their lives as they see fit. We have come a long way.

And yet, in 2015, there is still work to be done. Some of those who have benefitted from the societal shifts over the past few decades are beginning to reach an age where retirement, worsening health, and nursing homes increasingly enter the conversation. Documentaries like “Gen Silent” have begun highlighting scenarios where those who have openly lived as LGBT individuals for decades are now living in nursing homes that are not necessarily LGBT friendly, or are dealing with less enlightened home health aides – and these folks are now feeling pressured to play down aspects of who they are. Suddenly, they may not feel able to display a picture of their spouse, or they may feel the need to use ambiguous pronouns when discussing their personal lives with their healthcare attendants.

In short, we’re seeing an alarming development where people are being forced BACK INTO THE CLOSET because the tolerance, compassion, and acceptance that exists in much of our society has not yet necessarily reached all of the elder care services that so many of us – gay, straight, and everything in between – may ultimately come to rely upon as we grow old.

This is the context for tonight's discussion, and this is why I want Cambridge to start examining programs that a handful of other communities across the country have begun exploring in recent years. There does appear to be a need for housing that is designated as LGBT-friendly, particularly for seniors. The question before us, then, is how can we best address that need? I have provided four articles that build on some of what I just gave as my preamble, and I've invited you all to get this conversation STARTED. I want to hear your thoughts on what the need is locally, what the possible programs might look like that we could explore, and what potential barriers may exist. I want to stress that this is only a STARTING point, and that right now, I really am most interested in teasing the issue out a bit more. With that, I'd like to go around the room and have everyone introduce themselves, and then I'd like to open the floor for our guests to chime in with their thoughts.

LGBT Seniors in California Lack Affordable Housing Options

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Bay Area Reporter/New America Media , News Analysis, Matthew S. Bajko , Posted: Apr 22, 2014

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Photo: *A rainbow painted fence encloses Openhouse's future affordable housing site for low-income LGBT seniors in San Francisco. (Rick Gerharter/Bay Area Reporter)*

For links to the entire LGBT elders series see Part 1.

SAN FRANCISCO—Midlife and older lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender (LGBT) residents of cities across the country are facing a lack of affordable housing options as they age.

Demographers estimate there are at least 3 million LGBT seniors age 65 or older currently in the United States, with the population projected to double by 2030. As their numbers increase, LGBT seniors' access to housing, whether

San Francisco Home Crunch
Worse Due to Evictions

Upwards of 20,000 LGBT seniors ages 60 and older live in San Francisco, a number expected to reach 50,000 by 2030.

However, a 2013 survey of 616 LGBT San Francisco residents ages 60 to 92, conducted for the city's San Francisco's LGBT Aging Policy Task Force , found less than 7 percent of the respondents were living in senior housing, assisted living facilities, nursing homes or in an age-restricted community. Almost nine in 10 resided in a house, apartment or condominium.

The report, titled "Addressing the Needs of LGBT Older Adults in San Francisco: Recommendations for the Future," notes that 30 percent of the seniors surveyed had incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (only \$11,670 for 2014). And two-thirds were concerned they would be unable to remain in their current housing and could be forced to relocate.

The task force, which completed its work in March, called on San Francisco officials to build more

affordable housing for LGBT seniors. It proposed that the city work with the S.F. Land Trust to set up "at least one" LGBT senior housing co-op and to build 200 very low-income units in the city's Castro district for LGBT seniors with incomes less than 30 percent of the area's median income.

But building enough affordable housing for LGBT seniors to meet their expected needs in coming years "isn't very realistic," said Bill Ambrunn, a gay attorney who chaired the task force. He noted the city's severe land constraints.

The task force also recommended that city officials focus on protecting LGBT seniors from being evicted from their current rent-controlled units.

Furthermore, the task force called for funding to improve housing conditions in apartment buildings and single-room-occupancy hotels where many lower-income LGBT seniors, many living with HIV/AIDS, currently reside.

"Whatever is necessary to prevent a senior from being evicted is what the city should be doing," said the task force's chair, Bill Ambrunn.

--Matthew Bajko

it be in retirement communities or assisted living facilities, will become "increasingly critical" noted the Equal Rights Center in a special report it issued in February.

"As the number of older adults increases, as well as the number of LGBT seniors living openly, many with their spouse or partners, the need for more housing options that allow older LGBT people to live in a safe and comfortable environment becomes increasingly important," stated the report, titled "Opening Doors: An Investigation of Barriers to Senior Housing for Same-Sex Couples."

Projects Underway

Nonprofit agencies in a number of major U.S. cities are working to address the shortfall by building designated housing for low-income LGBT seniors. Projects are currently underway or have opened in such places as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Chicago, Minneapolis and Washington, D.C.

But the buildings, ranging from nine units to more than 100, are nowhere near enough to address what is needed, according to agency executives, housing activists and LGBT aging experts.

"Housing is the number one need for our clients. When they come in and meet with one of my team managers, absolutely the bottom line need is housing," said Kathleen Sullivan, the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center's [www.lagaycenter.org/] director of senior services.

The L.A. center recently announced it was merging with Gay & Lesbian Elder Housing, which built the 104-unit Triangle Square LGBT senior housing project in Hollywood. When it opened in 2007, it was the nation's first affordable housing development of private, individual apartments for LGBT elders.

Seven years later it is set to open a 39-unit building dubbed The Argyle, in collaboration with AMCAL Multi-Housing, Inc. Built for low-income families of all ages, a portion of the units are expected to be occupied by LGBT seniors.

An estimated 65,000 LGBT seniors 65 and older live in Los Angeles and two-thirds of them live alone, according to local agencies. More than 70 percent of Triangle residents are living at or near poverty level and struggle to cover expenses for housing, food and medication.

Among the 3,000 clients ages 50 and older who access the L.A. center's senior services program, 46

percent live on less than \$2,500 a month, and 20 percent make do on less than \$1,000 each month.

Sullivan, 48, an out lesbian, interviewed residents for her doctoral thesis in gerontology at Oregon's Portland State University focused on LGBT senior housing developments.

"In these communities the seniors noted it was the first time they ever felt comfortable and at ease. They didn't have to look over their shoulder or be worried about talking about their partner," Sullivan said.

More than 300 people are on the waiting list for a unit at Triangle Square. The average wait for an opening is two-to-three years.

"It tells me we certainly don't have enough housing," said Sullivan.

Recognizing the need for more affordable housing options for its senior clients, the L.A. center in February acquired a property across the street from its Village complex where it plans to construct a mixed-use housing project. The plan for the three-acre site fronting McCadden Place is to build up to 80 units for LGBT seniors, 40 apartments for previously homeless youth, a senior center and space for intergenerational programming. The center aims to raise about \$25 million, Sullivan said

Openhouse to Break Ground

In San Francisco the long-awaited Openhouse LGBT senior affordable housing project is expected to break ground later this year. The agency's 55 Laguna development of 110 rental apartments for low-income seniors, which it is building in partnership with the nonprofit Mercy Housing, will be split between two buildings.

One of the structures is the historic Richardson Hall, built in 1924 as part of what became San Francisco State University, to be renovated to include 40 of the units (one-bedrooms and studios), retail spaces and new office quarters for Openhouse.

"We hope, and our goal is, to have the place pretty much filled by December of 2015," said Openhouse Executive Director Seth Kilbourn. Although Openhouse is marketing the project as the city's first LGBT senior housing complex, any older adults who meets the financial eligibility terms will be able to apply.

The second building, a new construction to start in October 2016, will house 70 units of housing, all 1-bedrooms, on five floors. With 14 of the units set-aside for seniors living with HIV or AIDS. The ground floor will feature activity space, an exercise room, and a large social space for community events and programs.

Bartholomew T. Casimir, 73, and his spouse, Edward Rulief Kelley, who is in his 60s, have seen many of their older gay male friends decamp from San Francisco for Palm Springs in search of cheaper housing and more social connections. But the couple, renters in the city's Richmond district, would prefer to live out their remaining years in the city.

"We have a wonderful cottage apartment. Hopefully, we will be able to stay there," said Casimir, who was born and raised in San Francisco. "All my friends from the 1970s and '80s are living in Palm Springs. I don't want to live there."

The couple has discussed possibly moving into the Openhouse project, but is uncertain if it would fit their needs.

"We like having our own house," said Casimir, who is hopeful that once 55 Laguna opens its doors it will foster more activism among the city's LGBT senior community. "I just think that communities are so important, especially in the LGBT elder community. That doesn't exist, and hopefully, this Openhouse project will change that."

In its just completed five-year plan, Openhouse has prioritized working with mainstream developers of senior housing in San Francisco to ensure they are providing safe environments for LGBT residents.

"There is no reason we can't help LGBT folks form communities at these other developments," said Killbourn.

"We need more units for sure, but we also need policies and protections for seniors to live where they live now," he said. "If we can do that it will allow more people to stay in the city with some sense of economic security."

Matthew S. Bajko wrote this article for Bay Area Reporter through the MetLife Foundation Journalists in Aging Fellowships, a program of New America Media and the Gerontological Society of America. For related coverage, see the Special Report, "SAN FRANCISCO'S ELDER GHETTO: Old & Poor in Tech City."

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A Philadelphia apartment building may be a national model for low-income LGBT seniors

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PHILADELPHIA (AP) — The suspicious questions and puzzled looks started as soon as Sidney Meyers, 74, put in his applications to live in a sun-dappled Florida retirement community. Was he ever married? Why not? No children? No grandchildren!?

PHILADELPHIA — The suspicious questions and puzzled looks started as soon as Sidney Meyers, 74, put in his applications to live in a sun-dappled Florida retirement community. Was he ever married? Why not? No children? No grandchildren!?

It was challenging to find a place to live, because the residents and landlords all knew he was gay, he said. Would he be having “guests?” several asked, often with raised eyebrows.

“It was painful because I had no proud pictures of grandchildren to show off. In my generation, gay men weren’t allowed to adopt children, let alone marry,” Meyers said. “We weren’t even allowed to exist.”

But today, after deciding that several other communities in Florida weren’t for him, Meyers has found a home where he can be proud of his life. He lives in the John C. Anderson apartments, a six-story building that opened recently in Center City here and caters to low-income seniors in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, or LGBT, community. Many are pioneers of the gay rights movement.

The project, affectionately called “the gay-dy shady acres” by residents, is being hailed as a model for similar federally backed housing projects in the District and more than a dozen other cities across the country.

This initiative is part of a broader campaign by the federal government to address what officials say is growing housing discrimination based on sexual orientation. The trend is due in part to more gay Americans being out of the closet, officially married and more aware of their rights than ever before, said Gustavo Velasquez, assistant secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity at Housing and Urban Development.

Since last year, HUD has received 150 allegations of housing discrimination based on sexual orientation. The first nationwide study of LGBT housing discrimination, released by the department last year, found that heterosexual couples were favored over gay male couples and lesbian couples nearly 16 percent of the time.

In the coming months, federal officials said they plan to dispatch the first LGBT “fair housing testers” across the country, modeled after testers who have traditionally posed as prospective tenants to see whether there is racial discrimination.

While the government has long brought cases against housing discrimination on the basis of race and religion, federal officials say sexual orientation and gender identity are the new front lines.

The Anderson apartments already have a 100-person waiting list. And that number is likely to grow. About 1.5 million Americans who are 65 or older identify as LGBT, with that number expected to double by 2030, according to the Institute for Multigenerational Health.

As in many senior-living complexes, many of the residents of this 56-unit building use walkers and scooters — but here they are often decked out with feathery hot pink boas and rainbow flags.

On a recent afternoon, Meyers zipped through the pumpkin-colored halls on his red-and-black motorized scooter, which he uses since being diagnosed with an inoperable hernia.

He showed off his latest hairstyle — the top of his gray hair dyed the red, yellow, blue and purple hues of the LGBT pride flag — to a group of radical feminist lesbians who were playing mah-jongg in the community center and to a transgender woman who was watering a patch of moonflowers in the courtyard garden.

"It's fabulous, honey," called out Elizabeth Coffey-Williams, a creamy-skinned redhead and retired 1970s transgender film star who appeared in the 1972 cult hit "Pink Flamingos." She also had one of the first sex reassignment surgeries in the country at Johns Hopkins University.

"Oh, Elizabeth's just a wonderful neighbor. This is so much better than Boca," said Meyers, referring to the town in Florida. "It's saved my life."

A former Army private first class, Meyers once worked as a jewelry designer and wrote gay erotica under a pen name. He said he spent a lifetime feeling like he did not fit in and grew bitter because he never realized his dream of becoming a parent. But this self-described "chronic kvetch" has found that, since he moved into the building, he has been "flat-out optimistic and even happy."

On this recent afternoon, a gay Buddhist priest led a meditation session for residents in the roof-top garden. In the community room downstairs, a former dance teacher, Deirdre McLaurin, 62, who said she's finally able to openly say that she's lesbian, relaxed next to silver-haired John S. James, who worked for the National Institutes of Health in the 1960s, taught at Montgomery College and published the first AIDS treatment newsletter.

"Being out was so dangerous back then that when I attended a protest, the newspapers would only show my pants in pictures because I would get fired by the government if anyone knew I was gay," said James, 73.

Today, that same government is taking steps to equalize access to housing for LGBT people.

The Fair Housing Act, which explicitly bars several forms of housing discrimination, does not specifically include discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. But the Obama administration says this discrimination may still be covered by the law.

In 2012, the administration required that federal housing assistance and mortgages insured by the Federal Housing Administration be provided without regard to perceived sexual orientation or gender.

The establishment of the Anderson apartments was the making of Mark Segal, a maverick and early gay activist who in the 1960s belonged to the radical Gay Liberation Front. He called the Anderson project "one of the most important things I've ever done."

Over an oversized matzo ball soup in a Jewish deli, Segal — a lightning-fast-talking bundle of caffeinated energy who's constantly recognized on the Center City streets — recounted how he had pitched the idea of the housing project to Obama. When Obama came to Philadelphia in 2010, Segal was part of a group that met with him.

"I told him that this was the 'first out generation,' the brave pioneers who were out fighting for the cause and weren't able to get jobs with 401(k) plans," he said. "They lost many of their friends and support networks to AIDS. Their families disowned them for being gay."

Today, he told the president, they can't afford to live in the gay neighborhoods their lives inspired. Obama

put him in touch with HUD officials.

As Segal told the tale, deli patrons kept coming up to him to thank him for all he has done for the gay community.

The housing project has been classified as “LGBT friendly,” so it does not exclude anyone. (There are a handful of straight residents, many of whom have LGBT sons and daughters who they want to be able to visit without judgment.)

The rental apartments are bright one-bedrooms with oversize windows. To qualify, seniors must earn between \$8,000 and \$33,000 a year. The project was built in partnership with Pennrose Properties, which specializes in affordable housing. It received \$6 million from the state, \$2 million from Washington and \$11.5 million in low-income federal tax credits, according to Segal.

Segal said his favorite feature in the apartment complex are the vast, walk-in “drag-queen closets,” which he said symbolize the community being out in the open.

The bright lobby has a life-size portrait of the project’s namesake: John C. Anderson, a first-term city council member who died in 1983, at age 41, reportedly from AIDS.

Every floor is decorated with framed black-and-white photographs of the 1969 Stonewall riots — demonstrations following a police raid on a gay bar in New York’s Greenwich Village that helped launch the gay rights movement — and other protests with activists bearing signs that read, “Homosexuality is not a sin” and “Gay Power!”

Susan Silverman said that even though she’s 65 and walks with a cane, she’ll always be the “radical lesbian feminist” who protested against the Miss America pageant and worked alongside Segal with the Gay Liberation Front.

She moved here from a walk-up studio apartment in Brooklyn that she had rented for 40 years, attracted by the lesbian-friendly atmosphere and affordable rent — not to mention the elevators and on-site laundry.

“It really resonated with me,” she said while sitting in the lobby library.

Just outside, in the garden, Roosevelt Adams, 67, was setting out a breakfast tray with fresh coffee and pastries. He said he moved here from another apartment in Philadelphia after his landlady threatened that if he brought a male date by, she would “call the police.”

He no longer worries about that. He may actually meet someone in the building and go on a date, he said. This time, with his neighbors cheering him on.

Emily Wax-Thibodeaux is a National staff writer who covers veterans, veterans’ affairs and the culture of government. She’s an award-winning former foreign correspondent who covered Africa and India for nearly a decade. She also covered immigration, crime and education for the Metro staff.

LGBT Senior Housing Options

 caring.com

Dave Singleton

Moving to an assisted living home should never mean stepping back into a closet.

That seems obvious to those of us living out and proud lives in post-Stonewall Riots America. But fears of rejection and of being ostracized are ever-present realities for many seniors in -- or considering moving to -- shared senior living communities.

Find Assisted Living That Fits You

One Man's Fear

I saw the fear firsthand when I volunteered at a senior living community in Washington, D.C., a few years ago. Steven was 71 then, with round John Denver glasses, longish silver hair, and an agile mind, but he was dealing with the aftermath of two strokes, which left him unable to walk and in a wheelchair. I said hello and, after a few minutes of small talk, he told me he was gay and uncomfortable in what he thought was a homophobic environment.

"I lived the last 25 years of my life as an openly gay man in Dupont Circle," he said. "Then I came here this year because there was nowhere else to go, and I'm scared to be myself. Gay people are either invisible to, or unwanted by, the people here. So I stay quiet."

I asked the management if they specifically trained the staff to support LGBT residents, and the director nodded in somber admission of the problem. "We're working on it," she said.

The Rise of LGBT Senior Housing Options: A Clear Need

She's not the only one "working on it."

LGBT senior housing options have gained steam in the last decade, led by the rise of older LGBT baby boomers.

"I get calls from LGBT seniors who ask, 'Where can I go where I know I will be safe and treated fairly?'" says Chris McLellan, writer and coordinator of Senior Services for SunServe Social Services in Broward County, Florida, which serves the LGBT-dense population of Fort Lauderdale.

Of course, this forward-thinking movement to create LGBT-friendly retirement communities, with built-in acceptance and a supportive environment, makes sense. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force estimates 3 million LGBT elders live in the United States, and that number will double by 2030.

"There is a real need for this housing," Michael Adams, executive director of SAGE (Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Elders), told the *New York Times* recently. The need isn't just based on numbers. He was commenting on the results of a recent study in which the Equal Rights Center in Washington enlisted testers in ten states to pose as either gay or straight couples and make phone calls to senior living facilities. In almost half of the cases, the same-sex couples faced discrimination from housing agents, who didn't mention the vacant units presented to straight couples.

Once you're actually living in a home, it's often the little things that are troubling. "For example, someone sits down at dinner at a typical home and asks you on the spot about your wife and kids," says Steve Krege, COO of Northstar Senior Living, which manages the LGBT-focused Stonewall Gardens in Palm Springs, California, set to open in September 2014. "Do I tell the truth or not? Will they think differently of me? You don't want to put someone in that situation, especially when the majority of 70- to 80-year-old residents may still feel the pull of the closet."

Finding the Right Community

It's only natural that most people want to live and age in places where they feel welcome and respected.

"For LGBT people, especially those with a lengthy history of having been stigmatized, ostracized, and victimized because of their LGBT status, finding a place that will feel safe can be very difficult," says Hilary Meyer, director of National Programs for SAGE (Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Elders), which maintains a list of LGBT-specific senior housing projects that encompass all levels of care, ranging from independent living to skilled nursing.

"Currently, there are very limited options," says Molly Gallaher, vice president of operations for Oakmont Senior Living, which operates Fountaingrove Lodge in Santa Rosa, California, one of the first continuing care retirement communities (CCRCs) for LGBT seniors and their allies.

But the real question is, can we provide more prejudice-free and inclusive facilities for the aging LGBT community, where they feel as much sense of community as other residents?

5 Ways to Create More Options and Better Communities Now

Given LGBT senior housing options popping up all over the country now, what have we learned from earlier challenges that will help these new efforts be successful? Here are five ways to create healthier, happier LGBT senior living options:

1. Learn From Past Mistakes

The sporadic success of LGBT senior homes over the last decade has puzzled me. Especially with the growing LGBT older population, how could there be a problem? Plans for about two dozen retirement communities aimed at the LGBT population were scrapped, due, in large part, to the collapse of the real estate market. But that's not the only reason they didn't work. Some LGBT senior homes closed for economic reasons. Others morphed into residences for the general population, due to location. The Rainbow Vision community in Santa Fe -- which opened in 2006, declared bankruptcy in 2011, and is now a mainstream assisted living community -- is an example of one such home. "Some just weren't built in the right demographic," says Northstar Senior Living's Krege. That makes sense. For example, why would LGBT seniors who found safety and community in urban areas want to be isolated? "There's a burgeoning LGBT community in Palm Springs," says Krege. "So creating our new housing in Palm Springs, where 50 to 60 percent identify as LGBT, according to our research, tells us, 'Go where the community is.'"

2. Create More Education and Awareness

"The struggles encountered in the early days of LGBT senior housing projects were, to a large extent, attributable to a lack of public support," says SAGE's Meyer. "But in the years since the first LGBT housing projects were initiated, our culture has become increasingly accepting of LGBT people, and better educated about our unique needs and experiences. We've learned that public education is a critical first step in these projects." While there's been progress, it's important to point out where it's still needed. For example, many may not know that, while private and public housing offer protections on the basis of race,

color, national origin, religion, gender, disability, and familial status, there are no explicit protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity for LGBT individuals under the Fair Housing Act.

3. Integrate to Create More Options

"My personal belief is that we need more integrated facilities," says SunServe Social Services' Chris McLellan. "While there's certainly a need for LGBT-specific housing, I think we should look more toward LGBT-friendly housing where they show 'LGBT-competence' -- meaning their staff and management have been trained and certified in managing LGBT seniors."

Business-wise, this makes sense.

Market and cost issues for LGBT senior housing are similar to those of senior homes across the board. You pay more based on metropolitan versus rural, and also based on the type of services needed, type of home (e.g., independent, assisted living or skilled nursing), and amenities (e.g., high-end versus basic). But LGBT-specific housing isn't viable in some areas, and some may simply prefer being with a mixed group, which means more LGBT-inclusive (or "friendly") homes. First, those homes have to pass the test.

"If businesses are going to go after the LGBT dollar, they can't just put a gay flag on their window and say they're accepting," says McLellan. "If you have a staff of ten and not one has worked with -- or is a member of -- the LGBT community, how do they know the nuances for what the LGBT need? It's trendy to get on the bandwagon of being 'gay friendly,' but it's how you demonstrate it that counts."

4. Require Training

LGBT-sensitivity training should be required for all senior living communities that want to make their LGBT residents feel safe and comfortable.

Local and national LGBT advocacy organizations such as SAGE provide cultural competency training so that even those without an LGBT-specific focus will be able to create the safest, most welcoming and respectful communities possible. It seems to be working.

"We've done competency assessments and policy reviews and then had success with LGBT senior sensitivity training in several locations, including Five Star Premier (Pompano Beach, Florida) and Five Star Park Summit (Coral Springs, Florida)," says McLellan. "We've heard from the LGBT singles and couples in the facility that this training made a positive difference. That in and of itself provides a comfort zone for seniors evaluating their prospects. Like in any other business, your best sales people are those who've already purchased."

Is It Time for Assisted Living? Let Us Help

5. Foster a Sense of LGBT Community

I am not saying that every LGBT-friendly senior living facility needs a Donna Summer disco night, but then again, why not?

"At Fountaingrove Lodge, the activities and events are geared toward what the residents want, so the social calendar is packed with great LGBT events and activities," says Oakmont Senior Living's Molly Gallagher. "These include attending pride celebrations, a flag-raising ceremony for Gay Pride Month, a dance party with the band Pride and Joy, and a trip to the de Young Fine Art Museum. Many LGBT seniors had to live in the closet for so many years, or lost their jobs due to being gay. They want to live their golden years out and proud!"

It's heartening to see progress and know there will be greater awareness and fewer concerns about

inclusion facing LGBT seniors in 20 years. But there's still the issue of today, as I learned during visits to the Washington senior home where I'd met Steven. Last time I saw him, he told me he'd noticed a few improvements.

"The staff seem like they're a little more open, and I came out to a couple of them," he said. "One told me about her lesbian aunt who may move to assisted living soon."

Progress can't come quickly enough.

LGBT-friendly senior housing opening across U.S. cities

usatoday.com

Sean (who didn't want to give his last name), left, a resident of the new Town Hall Apartments, chats with friends Darcy Simmons, center, and Ed Lund, another Town Hall Apartments resident, at a neighborhood bar. (Photo: John Zich, USA TODAY)

CHICAGO — In his younger days, Ed Lund struggled to live openly as a gay man.

But as Lund, 69, enters his golden years, he has found a place where he is certain he will be comfortable. He's among the charter residents moving into the newly opened Town Hall development in Chicago, one of the first affordable, LGBT-friendly housing communities for the elderly in the country.

"This feel likes home," says Lund, who came out as a gay man during the AIDS epidemic and lost his job of 15 years in the early 1980s after his boss learned his sexual orientation. "As you get older, it just feels more comfortable to be around people who understand and share your background. It's also nice not to have worry about letting something slip out."

As lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people age, cities and LGBT advocates are grappling with how to deal with the needs of a generation that came out of the closet in more complicated times.

Perhaps the most sensitive issue for older gays and lesbians, particularly the poor, is housing discrimination. LGBT advocates also lament that the country's elderly-care services haven't evolved as quickly as the general population, which national polls show is increasingly accepting of gays and lesbians.

Communities are addressing the issue. With the opening of Town Hall, which had more than 400 applicants for 79 studio and one-bedroom apartments, Chicago became the third city in the USA since last year to open housing catering to low-income LGBT people.

Similar housing developments in Minneapolis and Philadelphia, both of which opened late last year, also received far more applicants than they could accommodate. Two more LGBT-friendly projects for low-income seniors are in the pipeline for San Francisco and Los Angeles, which opened the first such development in 2007.

Officials with the Center on Halsted and the Heartland Alliance, the two Chicago-based organizations that spearheaded the Town Hall project, say they are also exploring building another LGBT-friendly development in the region. The organizations screened applicants for Town Hall.

The push for LGBT-friendly housing comes as the gay rights movement has made huge strides.

Same-sex marriage advocates have racked up 20 victories in courts over the past two years. Twenty states and Washington, D.C., as well as more than 150 cities and counties across the USA, have laws prohibiting discrimination against LGBT individuals.

PROGRESS AND DISCRIMINATION

The former Town Hall building was a police station for many years before becoming one of the first LGBT-

friendly, low-income housing communities for the elderly in the country. (Photo: John Zich, USA TODAY)

Despite the progress, the population faces higher rates of housing discrimination than their straight peers. A Department of Housing and Urban Development study published last year found that in 50 metropolitan markets, heterosexual couples were favored by landlords over gay and lesbian couples 16% of the time.

LGBT advocates say the discrimination is more pronounced for the elderly. In testing of elder housing in 10 states, 52% of lesbian, gay and bisexual applicants faced adverse treatment, including being shown fewer rental options and being quoted higher rents than heterosexual couples shopping for apartments, according to a 2014 study published by the Equal Rights Center in Washington, D.C.

Focus on the issue comes at a time when the elderly LGBT population is growing. About 3 million Americans 65 or older identify as LGBT, and that number is expected to double by 2030, according to the Equal Rights Center.

"When you look at the developments that have been built so far, it accounts for only about 500 units across the country," says Barbara Satin, a Minneapolis transgender activist who was involved in the push for LGBT-friendly senior housing there. "There is still an enormous demand that needs to be filled."

MARKETING TO LGBT

Modesto "Tico" Valle shows off part of the first floor space at Town Hall Apartments. (Photo: John Zich, USA TODAY)

Prospective residents don't have to be gay to be eligible to rent at any of the housing developments across the country, but the projects have been heavily marketed to the LGBT community. All residents have to meet age requirements and remain below an income threshold.

At the new Chicago development, seniors are connected to services and programming provided by the Center on Halsted, one of the nation's premier LGBT community centers.

The center is next door to the apartment building. Services include computer classes, HIV testing and classes on nutrition. There are plans for matchmaking.

For some poor, older LGBT people, the housing is attractive because it assures them that they can grow old in a place where they don't have to worry about hiding their sexual orientation. It's not uncommon for the LGBT elderly to feel that for their safety, they have to go back into the closet late in life, Satin says.

Lucretia Kirby, who moved into the recently opened LGBT-friendly complex in Minneapolis, met her late partner at another affordable housing development in nearby St. Paul. After the two began dating, Kirby says, they were harassed by other residents and were targets of threatening notes slipped under their doors.

Kirby said she complained to managers but little was done. When the new LGBT-friendly Minneapolis development began accepting applications, she jumped at the opportunity to move.

"If I would have continued to live there, I would have died emotionally," she says. "I was going down a road where I would have killed myself."

In Chicago, the gleaming new Town Hall construction was built on the site of the Police Department's old Town Hall district station, a controversial symbol of the once-seething tensions between the city's police and gay community.

That station was at the center of police raids on the neighborhood's gay bars and clubs during the 1970s

and 1980s. Some of the area's older gay residents still have unpleasant memories of spending a night in the Town Hall district holding cell, says Modesto "Tico" Valle, executive director of the Center on Halsted.

Most of the old police complex was demolished to make way for the modern development with sweeping views of the Chicago skyline, but the builders maintained the façade of the old Town Hall entrance — a reminder of the complicated past.

"It is very powerful to know we are reclaiming history," Valle says. "We are creating something beautiful with it."

The family dining room at Town Hall Apartments. (Photo: John Zich, USA TODAY)

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Agenda For June 10, 2015 Housing Committee Meeting

Sullivan Chamber, 2nd Floor of City Hall

5:00 pm – 7:00 pm

The Housing Committee will conduct a public hearing to discuss and explore possible ways in which the City could pilot an LGBT housing program.

- I. Opening Remarks from Councilor Simmons**
- II. Remarks From Invited Guests**
- III. Remarks from Housing Committee Members**
- IV. Public Comments**
- V. Councilor Simmons Closing Remarks**
- VI. Meeting Concludes**