Overview
Each of the three focus groups had adequate respondents to provide a reasonably wide-ranging conversation. The Gladstone group tended to skew older and did not provide as much age diversity as the other two. However, the results of the conversations show significant overlap on issues and viewpoints among all three groups. Therefore, the Gladstone age spread does not diminish its value or contribution.

Each of the discussions had community-specific points raised and each had a community texture to it. At the same time, a remarkable number of issues were raised in all three groups, indicating that these are themes likely to be found in any focus group in the metro on this topic. The major concerns of the groups are quite clear. Solutions that participants offer to these concerns are often not specific in method and may be limited by the participants’ experience. Communities will face the challenge of applying creativity, innovation, method and specificity to solve the problems that the groups have raised.

It is clear that participants rely heavily on local government to solve the problems that accompany the demographic shift or that are exacerbated by the shift. To some extent, they see these problems as already afflicting the communities.

Many issues, as expected, are specific to the barriers of aging in place: how to stay in a home as long as possible, how to afford good medical care, how to get to key services without a car. Others, though, are directed at community services and infrastructure: access to community centers, strong neighborhoods, sidewalks and trails, public safety and parks. The proximity to the amenities of Kansas City, Mo., also factors strongly in their quality-of-life assessment.

The summary of the discussion is first directed at themes that crossed all three focus groups and seemed to be the object of the greatest consensus. The findings, though, are strictly qualitative.

Methodology
Three focus groups were held with the number of participants ranging from nine to 14. Each group was briefed about the coming shift in age demographics and then asked a series of questions regarding their lifestyles revolving around housing, work, recreation, health and access to goods and services. Each group also was asked to list the necessary attributes for a successful multi-generational community and the barriers that need to be overcome in their communities. Each group was given a written survey regarding housing modifications.

Focus Group Results
Primary issues raised in all three groups:

- Transportation
  In each geographic area, they see the lack of adequate public or private transportation services as a major impediment to aging in place. Participants uniformly and repeatedly raise this as a problem. They believe that their communities have many of the services needed as long as they are able to drive. If they cannot drive, that
access disappears and quality of life diminishes greatly. They believe public transportation is inadequate for work, shopping, entertainment or access to the other community assets.

- **Aging in place**
  Participants shared a strong desire to stay in their homes. They realize, though, that stairs, other housing barriers, lack of transportation or lack of support services may drive them out of their houses at some point. They often say that modifications, such as a stair lift or elevator could prolong time in the home. A concern is marketability of a house that has been altered significantly. Once forced from their homes, they are not certain sufficient options exist in the community to accommodate them. Another driver to staying put is that many have paid off their mortgages.

- **Safety**
  Public safety is a high priority. Several participants rated the perception of personal safety as a strong draw to their community. Overall, they believe the police forces are professional and responsive and provide a sense of security, which is fundamental to all age groups.

- **Community Centers**
  While some groups had higher participation rates at community centers than others, they all pointed to viable community centers as important to multiple generations. The community center should not just be a health club – although it should provide fitness programs and equipment – it should also provide programming for all ages. A place to gather, socialize, stay active and be intellectually stimulated is vital to aging adults. It helps if the center allows them contact with people of other ages rather than isolating them. Public space, whether community center, outdoor space or central gathering spot is important. It not only provides services, but provides the sense of a center for the community that has activities that bring the community together.

- **Pedestrian mobility**
  Again, the intensity of passion varied among the groups, but all agreed walkability is important. Walkability has two major components: infrastructure and destination. A significant number of participants walk for exercise and health – not necessarily destination specific. They want sidewalks that are kept in good repair and/or trails that are accessible. Destination means communities are constructed with services in walking distance of neighborhoods. Again, variable scores on how well the communities were doing in this regard. In terms of the trails or paths, bike paths or lanes are seen as attractive to all ages for exercise and mobility.

- **Parks**
  A multi-generational community must have a good park system. The discussion did not explore in depth the design, size or type of park. Parks are seen as attractive to all ages, including older adults. A place to take your dog is valued.

- **Neighborhoods**
  When describing the attraction of their communities, many participants said strong neighborhood identity is important. They feel a part of their neighborhood and believe the neighborhood can be a catalyst for engaging its residents, watching out for fragile seniors and organizing activities. Some described neighborhood activities as drawing out all ages.

- **Metro draw**
  Not surprisingly, an attraction of the first-ring suburbs is the proximity to the Kansas City metro and its entertainment and cultural amenities. Early in conversation, participants describe how quickly they can be at the Country Club Plaza, the Nelson-Atkins Museum or downtown. This is important for culture, entertainment and work. A healthy and vibrant metro center is a primary attraction. Losing access to the metro center by losing mobility is a concern.
• Support services
A variety of community services are essential to support an aging population and especially to keep people in their homes. These services range from nutrition (Meals on Wheels) to in-home health care. Seniors also see a need for other supports like access to “handyman” service that is trustworthy, reasonably priced and readily available, perhaps vetted by the city or neighborhood. Home maintenance is a continuing issue affecting aging in place. They wonder if everyone knows where to call for the support services.

• Finance
Financial issues fall into two distinct categories: affordability and investment. Seniors have concerns about their ability to meet the costs of aging. In fact, younger people share the concern about affordability. For seniors it revolves around rising costs on fixed income, including tax increases, and the high cost of health care, housing, nursing services and nursing homes or independent living. For younger participants, it is a question of the cost of health care and the viability of federal programs such as Social Security and Medicare.
On the investment side, seniors see a need for reliable, trustworthy financial advice. Trustworthy and with their “best interest at heart” are two key components of the equation. A volatile financial environment, scams that prey on seniors and the above-mentioned affordability issues fuel their concerns.

• Schools
Schools might seem to be the province of young families, but seniors universally said strong schools are important to multi-generational communities and deserved financial support. Schools draw families to neighborhoods and maintain vibrant communities.

• Work
Proximity to the metro is the attribute that makes work easy. People who live in first-ring suburbs consistently say the proximity gives them a short commute and easy access to a larger job market even if it is not specific to their own community.

• Volunteerism
Older adults see plenty of opportunities to volunteer. For that matter, so do the younger participants. They generally all believe that opportunity exists, volunteers are welcome and that this is a great way to stay active. A word of caution: the fact they were recruited for the focus groups means they are connected and active in some way. That alone may influence their views about access to volunteer opportunities.

• Active Life
Whether it is through community centers, volunteer opportunities, neighborhoods or other social networks, seniors believe that an active life is essential. The primary threats to an active life are lack of transportation, declining health, and lack of information.
The viability of information channels to senior citizens can affect both the giving and receiving end of volunteer activities. Increasing the information flow to seniors was a significant corollary to volunteerism.

• Involvement of younger people
Both older and younger participants point to a perceived problem in getting younger members of the community engaged in public life. All generations see advantages to organizing communities and activities so all ages mix and contribute. Seniors helping in schools, students helping in seniors’ homes, young families taking leadership roles in neighborhoods and community affairs, community centers that bring generations together in one place – these are all components of this concern. Matching needs and capabilities across generations is a community challenge, they believe. One participant said, “There aren’t going to be enough young people to go around. How will the lower numbers in certain generations affect public life?”

• Health care
Virtually all participants see adequate health care services available relatively close to them. The concerns are transportation and affordability.
• **Goods and services**
  Plenty of access to anything they need as long as they can drive. Some participants would like to see more options in their own community rather than or in addition to the community next door.

• **The cities and counties**
  As mentioned above, participants believe there is reliable public safety where they live. To varying degrees, they believe city government is responsive to its citizens. This was evident among the Gladstone group. Responsive municipal government is key to them. All groups more often mention local government as the provider of solutions rather than federal or state government.
  There is a strong affinity for their city. Raytown participants, though, are concerned about the city’s image, its perceived secondary status to Lee’s Summit and its potential decline. Johnson County participants came from multiple cities, so this aspect was not as pronounced.

• **Rental property**
  This subject splits in two widely different directions. On one hand, people are fearful of rental property because they see it as not maintained as well as owner-occupied homes. On the other, they see lack of affordable apartments as a deterrent to younger people moving into the community.

**Conclusion**
These themes are pronounced and repeated among the groups. The concerns are clear. However, as stated in the introduction, their solutions are limited to their own experience and will require more creativity.

More research into operational definitions is highly recommended. By example, participants expressed strong sentiment that parks are important to multi-generational communities. But this research did not have adequate time to explore the operational definition of a good park. Which features are more important: walking trails, a place for the dog, natural play areas for children, ball courts, open space or picnic areas?

Just as more research is needed to understand their preferences for parks – or to introduce to them options they may not have seen – further exploration of operational definitions will be required for a number of the other areas that are of concern to better prepare for creative solutions.

Local government, as noted, plays an important role in the lives of its residents of all ages and is the first resource they look to for reliable solutions.

During the focus groups, participants were asked to list the key attributes that are required of a true functional multi-generational community. They were also asked what barriers need to be removed at the community level. The full results of these two questions are attached as an appendix. Additionally, participants filled out a survey regarding housing alterations. That data will be provided separately.