THE ELDERLY AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

A Study of Elderly Housing

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A special thanks is extended to all who have helped me throughout the thesis year. Thanks to Stan Mendelsohn who introduced me to the various aspects of elderly design. Thanks to Alfredo Medair who was always there with invaluable guidance and patience.

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The elderly population is the fastest growing age group in the country today. The fact is that presently only 9% of this age group live in planned elderly housing. Many other individuals who would benefit greatly from this type of housing are not able or are not willing to live in this environment because of various psychological, economic, or other reasons. Now to best satisfy this situation and improve the elderly living conditions of today is the goal of my thesis. I would like to see the elderly be able to have their own say in their community. The element of personal choice is very important.

After analyzing various types of elderly living environments from the tightly supervised aging home to the elderly individual in a rural house, I have discovered that many are unhappy with their living situation. I have determined that the issues of individuality, independence, and the atmosphere of a "home" are just as important to the aging as are the issues of services and security. So, for the people who would like to live in a planned environment, I have created a program where the elderly will be encouraged to express their own personal concerns as a group in order to shape their own community.

I have labeled this program a "renovated residential community." The program will renovate various houses in an existing neighborhood in which the elderly will reside in group living situations. The central program will offer support and services only if requested. So in the end, the plan will enrich the neighborhood with new life, as well as provide a more ideal living environment for the elderly to reside in.
INTRODUCTION

ANALYSIS OF EXISTING ELDERLY COMMUNITY
- Advantages of Planned Housing
- Security
- Interaction
- Services
- Mobility of elderly
- Disadvantages of Planned Housing
- Financial considerations
- Organization of services & activities
- Effects upon others
- Atmosphere of Home vs. Institution
- Questionnaire
- Observations of Existing Communities

ANALYSIS OF EXPERIMENTAL COMMUNITY
- Renovated Community Housing
- Example of Renovated Housing
- Development of community
- Funding
- Services
- Disadvantages of Renovated Housing
- Entering the community
- Security
- Advantages of Renovated Housing
- Comforts of home
- Scale & individuality
- Community living

PROGRAM OF THE COMMUNITY

MASTER PLANNING

PROGRAM OF THE HOUSING

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR FUTURE COMMUNITIES

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Site Selection

Site Analysis
The elderly age group of today is the fastest growing age group of all. We must prepare to be able to furnish housing for this increasingly demanding group. Today nearly 30 million Americans are 65 or older. By the year 2020, that age group will have almost doubled in size.\(^1\) And the elderly have many needs particular to their age group. Some live alone and some have physical disabilities. Both of these needs demand special attention, physically and spiritually. In addition, the current generation of seniors is more affluent than ever before. Their average household income is $16,279, they own 40 percent of the financial assets held by the nation’s families and 75 percent of them own a home.\(^2\) With the older American now having more money to spend, a wide variety of housing types has evolved to fill the broad needs of this group. Retirement housing and communities, congregate housing, various types of planned housing, and other experimental housing projects are big issues today.

Most of the people who can afford to live a comfortable retirement have alternative sources of income besides social security. They work part-time, own stocks and bonds, and receive pensions. But there are elderly who have to live off of social security alone. And there are many individuals in this situation across the country. They have trouble paying bills and find it difficult financially to provide for general maintenance of their house and other possessions. Both the rich and the poor should be able to live in an environment suitable to their needs.

The fact is that only 5 percent of people 65 and older live in institutions and 4 percent live in planned housing. This leaves almost 90 percent of the elderly who live in different types of residences across America.\(^3\) This is not all bad. Many people prefer to live in their own residence. The idea of “home” is very important. It is so strong that most of the elderly would rather stay at home and deal with everyday burdens than to move into planned housing. Many stay at home because of sentimental reasons. That is where they lived and raised a family. Their roots are located there. It is traumatic for many to move into planned housing. Some see this as the last step in their lives. So many of these individuals enter into a depression. And even if they are still relatively healthy, they are forced to watch their friends decline in health every day. Finally, to live in planned housing is a tremendous financial burden, even for the more affluent elderly. Money and health are the two top concerns of the aging.
The typical elderly individual has a preconception that all planned housing communities are hospital-like in nature. This is not true. There are many communities out there that cater to the elderly's needs rather successfully. Four Seasons Retirement Center in Columbus, Indiana is a local and fairly successful example of planned housing. But these examples are placed few and far apart. And waiting lists are long for these popular communities. But the typical planned housing complex is not as successful and is what the elderly envision. Their preconceptions are basically correct. For their money they would rather stay at home and live as they had for years.

For planned housing to become more attractive to the elderly, visions of "home" need to be incorporated into the facility. This way, the move from their old home would be made easier. A way to do this is to look at the typical home. Most homes are open, bright, cheerful, and personalized with mementos from the past. Planned housing should have as many of these qualities of "home" as possible. Allowing a large amount of natural light to penetrate inside would be an asset. Some elderly complain that their housing units are small and dim. Morning light would give the aging a new reason to rise and greet each and every day with a refreshed attitude. Other elderly have the hobby of plant growing or gardening. Window gardens would allow natural light to enter and also provide a place growing area year-round. Gardens outside might want to be included. The elderly would then have different tasks at different times of the year. Therefore, the residents would then experience the element of change throughout the season. The elderly should be able to interact with the outdoors. Just like most of them did back at "home". If they are tucked away in a dreary room identical to their neighbor's, they might show a lack of motivation and individuality. Their living unit needs to be at a residential scale, just like "home", and allow for personalization. These are a few ways that "home" can be incorporated into planned housing.

Security----

Security is one of the advantages of planned housing. Elderly people often live alone. They are vulnerable to various acts of crime just because of this reason. A large amount of the aged population are also frail, female individuals. This makes them particularly vulnerable. And living alone, these people often have a great fear of crime. The occupants of planned housing find great security in their living units. This is important particularly at night when they sleep alone. However, the sense of security is also felt during the day for individuals particularly in urban areas. Not only in security from crime important, but also knowing someone else is near in case of medical emergencies.

Interaction----

Interaction with people of all ages is important for the aged. Often, the person living alone back home is restricted to the indoor, due to a lack of mobility. They might talk on the telephone, but don't really get to visit many others during the day. This is sad. In planned housing, the physically restricted are able to move about to visit, participate in planned activities, or just to sit back and watch others. If a particular individual does not feel like socializing because he or she is not feeling well, they should be able to go straight to their living unit without confronting others. Interaction is important, but so is independence and the idea of personal space.

Services----

The services provided for the residents of planned housing is also helpful. As old age limits mobility, he or she slowly becomes unable to accomplish daily chores. They might find it impossible to take care of the yardwork, housework, and other activities necessary to keep a household in decent order. In planned housing, help is available to help with these tasks. And banking, doctor, daycare are usually available in these types of communities.

Mobility----

Planned housing is great for those who are restricted in mobility. Planned housing is great for those who are restricted in mobility. Planned housing is great for those who are restricted in mobility. Planned housing is great for those who are restricted in mobility.
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Mobility of Elderly----

Planned housing is good for the less mobile

building, personnel and neighbors are on hand

to help. A well-designed facility should take

The above were primarily advantages to

planned housing. Now I will address the dis-

advantages associated with this type of living.

Unfortunately the disadvantages outweigh the

advantages which could partially be the reason

so many prime candidates for planned housing

Financial Considerations----

Financial considerations are at the top of

the list. Even an elderly couple living com-

fortably can feel a financial strain when they

move into some sort of a planned community.

A majority of people sell their houses and pay

cash for their entrance fees. Then there are

the monthly maintenance fees. And as health

begins to decline, the bills really start to

rise. So, living in typical planned housing

is a tremendous financial drain to everyone.

For example, at the Four Seasons Retirement

Center in Columbus, Indiana, one must pay

$15,000-$21,000 to enter and $650-$750 a month

just for a studio apartment. For a two-bedroom

apartment, the entrance fee is $35,000-$55,000

and the monthly fee is $680-$710. Three meals

per day for one person costs $285 per month.(4)

Charges for laundry and other services bring

the total bill to an outrageous amount. To stay

in the nursing wing costs even more. Four Seasons

is one of the more costly facilities around

the state. But it illustrates the point that

planned housing can become very expensive.

Organization of Services & Activities----

Another flaw in the system as far as I

am concerned, is that all services and activities

are planned for one and for all in the same

generic way. Everyone is treated basically the

same. The idea of individualism seems to be

lost. The occupant is totally taken care of.

I believe the occupant needs to take care of

someone, if not their own selves. But the

treatment is prepared and handed out to everyone

on a set schedule. I feel if particular individuals

do not want these particular services, they

should not be furnished to them. Some might

not be able to totally care for themselves,

but others might be able to do some things for

themselves. If daily necessities are constantly

provided, what is there left to do by the residents?

They have taken care of themselves in their

own way all of their lives and now suddenly

they are not allowed to anymore. Or if they

are allowed to, they are constantly under supervision

by others.

Effects upon Residents----

In some residents, this treatment has many

effects. Personalization and identity is somehow

lesioned. Some feel a lack of self-worth. And

some continue on to slip into a state of depression.

Their life is all behind them. Their life is

slowly coming to an end. I think independence

should be promoted more. Being in a community

such as this seems to emphasize this "end of

life" syndrome. At the Four Seasons Retirement

Center, we were greeted by Ms. Betty, the Asst.

Administrator. She welcomed us by saying, "We

provide care for our residents from the day

eyen enter until the day they die." This seems

to be the universal attitude.

For the more independent and healthy retirement

couples, they have problems, also. The recently

retired person just embarked on the last major

portion of their lives. They are around other

elderly couples who they become good friends

with. They then have a sense of discomfort in
seeing some fellow residents decline in health, wondering how they would manage financially, and otherwise, should they require the far more expensive health care.

Atmosphere of the "Home" vs. the Institution----

Other problems with planned housing is the institutional atmosphere in many of the typical facilities across the country. They remind one of a hospital. Halls are impersonal with hard floors, and doors are all alike aligned equidistant from each other up and down the hall. Personalization is certainly absent here. It is in this type of facility where leaving "home" behind has its worst impact. Residents are assigned a room just like everyone else's room. The resident lacks motivation and isolates him or herself from the surroundings. The planned housing needs to be flexible enough so that pieces of "home" can be brought with the residents. Then the space can be tailor-made to fit the needs of the individual. Dr. M. Powell Lawton notes, "the task of the environmentalist is to find the best solution for older people, but to make it possible for each older person to create or to choose the type of environment that is most fulfilling."(5) Dr. Lawton is one of the leading researchers of elderly living and is the Director of Research at the Philadelphia Geriatric Center.

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

With a firm grip upon the issues that are to be dealt with, I went straight to the elderly themselves to listen to their concerns and comments. I made a simple questionnaire to distribute about to the occupants of planned living communities about the Muncie area.

I designed the questionnaire to tell me what the residents of these communities like and dislike about their environment and what improvements they would like to see made in order to bring in more of the atmosphere of "home". In the appendix, I have included a copy of the questionnaire which I have distributed. Of the results, the strongest response from the elderly was that they wished their living units had larger kitchens, just like their kitchens back "home".

**OBSERVATIONS OF EXISTING COMMUNITIES**

I felt it to be very beneficial to visit the living environment personally to gain a first-hand experience into the atmosphere the elderly were living in. A group of three thesis students concerned with gerontology visited a number of facilities. We visited Four Season's Retirement Center in Columbus, Indiana, Westminster Place(Muncie), Gilleespie Towers(Muncie), and Fountainview Place(Muncie). I photographed and talked with administrators and residents in these communities.

1) Four Seasons is a facility for the independent elderly with a health center providing care for the residents as they decline in health. It is located in a suburban neighborhood of Columbus. The facility, is one-story and all living units are connected with a hall which shifts its path from side-to-side. All apartments have an exterior door with a porch outside. The dining/entertainment space is in the focal area and a Chapel is the most prominent structure form the outside.

2) Westminster Village is a facility for the independent elderly with a nursing center for health care. The community is located in a rural area in Delaware County. The focal space is the lounge and kitchen, which is beside the lounge. This is a well-equipped facility which has established a good deal of respect for the Muncie area.

3) Gilleespie Towers is a seven-story structure located on the outskirts of downtown Muncie. The apartments are for the low to middle income bracket.

4) Fountainview is a ten-story building for seniors. The apartments are for low income and are in the downtown Muncie area. These residents were very vocal as they feel the atmosphere of their facility is not up to par. If they could move, they would love to move to a more comfortable and relaxed environment. Comments about the move were: "There isn't enough room to move around for more than one person at a time."
Fountainview Place is a facility on the outskirts of Muncie. It is a nursing facility for middle to low incomes and many residents are in wheelchairs.

These visits to the planned housing communities were very valuable to gain knowledge of the atmosphere which was present in each of the facilities. Each place had its own particular quality about it. And it was also valuable to visit with the elderly and to listen to their comments about their living conditions. Generally, the more money the elderly individual has, the more happier he is, because he is able to afford to live in more costly communities which have more to offer.
Next, compare the typical planned housing community to the following renovated housing communities. I do believe it is the case when the best architectural and programmatic solution (basic planned housing), is compared to the elderly being able to create their own living environment (renovated community housing), the advantages are evident.

The classic example of this type of housing is the Philadelphia Geriatric Center's Housing. The Center renovated nine houses. The three occupants of each house share only the entry and the living room, with each person having a bath, kitchenette, and the bed and sitting room in his or her own unit. Mild support is offered only if requested. An emergency telephone is provided and if wanted, meals, housekeeping services, and some recreational activities are provided.
Development of Renovated Housing----

The above example is relatively the same idea which I wish to implement. I want to start a program. This program can receive federal assistance if organized correctly. This program needs to select a site in the middle of an appropriate neighborhood. The program will buy a house or two and will renovate it conducive to elderly living. Just as in the Philadelphia Geriatric Center. At the same time, the program will build with its funds, a central community center with basic offices and community services for the elderly. The specific services of this community center will be flexible, bending to the needs of the residents. With time, the elderly will require different necessary and convenient functions. Then they will be provided at the program director's discretion. Meanwhile, the facility will buy another house when available and will renovate it also. Residents will pay rent. And applicants will be screened for compatibility in order to select housemates. The development of this community will take many years to mature. But the point is that the services are built around the elderly's needs. In the typical planned housing community, the elderly are set in an environment where needs and services are already furnished based upon the planner's best knowledge. That community might look nicer and make a good deal of profit, but the renovated housing community will cater to the elderly's personal needs much more efficiently.

With the development of a community, a pattern will develop. Neighbors who begin to associate, people will be outdoors, and will be able to enjoy life at their own pace. Maybe over time, sidewalks between neighbor houses will be requested. The program will be there to honor these requests. Or maybe fifteen years into the future, a park might be requested and constructed. Maybe a shuttle to community services will be requested. The residents will be able to choose themselves.

Funding----

The Philadelphia Geriatric Center received funding from Section 236 which was created by the housing act of 1968. This program provided subsidies to reduce the interest paid by mortgagors for multi-family housing projects and, in turn, reduced rates to tenants. The mortgage was also insured by HUD. Since the beginning, HUD has been able to pay the difference between the tenant's contribution and actual operating costs for a limited number of projects. The Section 236 program could possibly be used to fund my project also, or at least to get started and to provide services and amenities requested by the residents.

Services----

Other services could include making contacts to meals-on-wheels through the facility's office. The same could apply for in-home doctors and house cleaning services requested. The office would serve as the link to these services. It will next discuss the particular advantages and disadvantages associated with this type of housing.

Entering the Community----

One of the disadvantages is that the residents will still have to move away from their "home" into this other house. But the move should be less traumatic than moving into typical planned housing. And it would be easier to transfer some of the memories and "roots" from "home" and place them in their new home. But, there is an advantage. Imagine a 60 year old couple already living in the community when the program moved in. In 15 years, this couple would not have to move, but could stay in the program and still have their "home" all in one.

Security----

Security might also be compromised in this type of housing. The type of neighborhood the facility is placed in will play a big role in security.
security. Also, since 3 or 4 individuals will be located under one roof, there will be safety in numbers. And an emergency telephone and alarm could be provided.

ADVANTAGES

Conforts of Home

But the advantages are that the basic atmosphere of a normal home life is still present. This makes it psychologically easier to adjust to the move. And services are provided to each individual only if requested. The residents are able to cook and clean if this is desired. If not, cleaning services will be made available. So they still have their independence and self-reliance.

Scale and Individuality

The housing units are at a residential scale, just like "home" is. And each house is individually different. Repetition is avoided. An the residents actually have their own backyard and a nice porch to sit upon.

Community Living

The elderly will be a part of a community. Not only their own elderly community which is supported by the community center, but they are a part of the neighborhood about them. Since the development of this program chooses various houses scattered around the area, age integration between the neighbors will exist. The elderly will still feel alive. The community will grow itself. It is by the elderly and it is for the elderly.
The location of the elderly renovated community is just as important as any other feature of community design. For simplification purposes, I chose to locate my design project in an existing neighborhood in Muncie. Rural areas are generally inadequate as far as satisfying the services needed by the elderly. So, I searched for the ideal urban or suburban community. The neighborhood needed to be in close proximity to shopping/grocery areas, parks & recreation areas, medical facilities, and public transportation routes. By process of elimination, I narrowed the possible neighborhoods down to 2 or 3. I chose the existing neighborhood at the corner of White River Blvd. and Tillitson Ave., both because of the favorable neighborhood and of its nearby supporting facilities and services.
The existing community is of a middle-class population with residents of varying ages. The houses are in average condition, mostly one-story, but some are 1½-story and 2-story. The neighborhood is located behind a strip of commercial establishments to the south and west which are along the highways. Apartments, a nursing home, a bus stop, professional and medical buildings, grocery stores, and a drug store are all within easy walking distance from the heart of the community. An abandoned railroad bed runs from east to west through the community. A park lies along the White River, just south of the neighborhood. This park offers people-watching, softball, picnic shelter, playgrounds, and a walking path along the river.
The goal of this community is to provide the services needed by the elderly population and to be able to integrate them into the existing neighborhood so that not only will the elderly benefit, but the residents of the neighborhood will benefit, also. A founding group of administrators will establish their office in the neighborhood. They will either buy and renovate a house, or build a new house which is tailor made to fit the elderly individual or individuals. Then the new tenant will pay monthly rent toward maintenance and any services used. These services might include anything from traveling doctors, to meals-on-wheels, and from window washers, to volunteer services of all kinds. So, the elderly will be cared for in a neighborhood in an individualized fashion only when and only if needed.
A park adjacent to an elderly community provides opportunities for increased social activity and interaction. In my design, I have attempted to connect the elderly community to the park along the White River. One solution for this design problem is to tie the two together using an axis, or road which is lined with trees which seem to flow out of the park across the road and into the neighborhood so as to bring the "park" atmosphere and all its advantages of the park into the heart of the neighborhood. The trees of the park are scattered naturally until they approach the road and the axis to the neighborhood. At this point, the trees act as a funnel to direct the park northward. The trees react to the rigid grid of the streets and align themselves, spaced equally apart, along each side of the road. The trees then continue north to define the two-block area which is the central area in the neighborhood.
There are many elderly looking for different living conditions. I have designed the housing to fit a variety of different living situations. Some elderly are fairly young and very mobile while some are older and have some troubles getting around. Some are male, and some are female. Some are single, and still some are married. Many elderly look for a 2-story home, while others prefer a house without stairs.

Each of these conditions require a different type of home. And I have designed 2-story, 1-story, new, and renovated homes, each flexible in nature in order to adapt to each of the individual lifestyles.

The new houses were designed from scratch. The house is fairly long and narrow in plan to fit in small, but deep lots in between existing houses. A service core and bathroom is located in the center of the house. The living areas circulate around the core against the outside walls in order to maximize natural lighting and ventilation. The plans are easily adaptable to suit a variety of arrangements. The house is handicapped accessible and the bathroom is planned so that grab-bars could be added if needed.
As an alternative, I have developed a 2-story option for the elderly to choose from. This house has the elderly living and sleeping areas downstairs and the upstairs is sectioned off for live-in help from SSU college students. Also, if the site allows for two houses to be built side-by-side, I have planned for a shared greenhouse and shared garden which the tenants of adjacent properties could use together to promote interaction.

(Student) 2nd floor

(Elderly) 1st floor
The renovated housing is designed more with a group living situation in mind with a group size of three. However, this could vary depending on individual conditions. These houses are a low-cost conversion and show what can be done with a minimal amount of money. The integrity of the house remains intact so that it still fits into the context and the “image” of the house is still to fit right in with the other neighbors. However, it should be stressed that before an actual renovation could take place, architect/occupant meetings would have to occur in order to gain the future residents' needs, concerns, and compatibility for each other.
The layout is designed to be easily navigated. The main living areas, including the kitchen and living room, are located on the ground floor, making it convenient for family gatherings and entertaining. The bedrooms are located on the upper floor, providing privacy and quiet for the residents. The home is situated on a corner lot, offering a nice view of the surroundings. The design incorporates large windows to allow plenty of natural light into the interior. The garage is accessible from the side of the house, providing easy access for parking.

The overall design is focused on creating a comfortable and functional living space. The choice of materials and finishes is intended to create a warm and inviting atmosphere. The use of natural materials such as wood and stone adds to the overall aesthetic of the home. The layout is designed to be practical, with ample storage and organization to keep the space clutter-free. The home is also designed with energy efficiency in mind, with the use of insulation, energy-efficient appliances, and low-flow fixtures to reduce energy consumption and lower utility costs.
The siting of the community is strategically located so many resources are accessible by walking. However, other means of transportation are needed during inclimate weather or for destinations outside the community. A public bus route runs one block away from the heart of the elderly community, with an existing bus stop two blocks away. However, a stronger relationship between the community and the bus route is desired.

It is proposed to simply divert the route of the bus to the center of the community, one block from the current route. Then a bus stop could be provided at that convenient area. An abandoned railroad track and bed runs directly through the center of the community. This track provides an opportunity to unify the area and to create a feature which would draw the population together for public interaction.

A proposed solution to the old railroad bed is to develop the linear element as an attraction and community trademark by using an old refurbished railroad car as a trolley and coffee shop. This unique feature can be "stationed" along Tillotson Ave. and attract the public to the coffee shop as well as the elderly population. Or, the train can slowly move back and forth from east to west of the community making various stops along the way. In this mode, the train will not only function as a transportation element, but also as a magnet for interaction.

The suggested stops along the track will provide access to the shopping area, community center, bank, church, a nursing home, and the White River Plaza.

Also needed is a means to push the axis, or road, northward from the White River Park. Conversely, a means to terminate the axis once it reached the neighborhood is needed.

My proposed solution is to realize the axis starts at the entrance to the community off of White River Blvd. and terminates at the intersection of Cole and Ethel Streets at the focal point of the community. The paving material of the intersection at this focal point is of brick pavers to signify the significance of the intersection as well as to reminisce back to the days of brick streets. In the park, shuffleboards can be added. And the empty yard to the west side of the park could be utilized as the "elderly yard" featuring a gazebo and exhibition area for shows, get-togethers, and other activities.

Also needed is a network of walks and sidewalks throughout the neighborhood. I propose to repair and utilize any existing sidewalks and construct new walks where necessary. The surfaces should be textured to provide slip-resistant surfaces when wet or slick.

It is also desired to give special treatment to the intersections where the community sidewalks cross the streets so that travelers know that they are in an unique area. One way to satisfy this need is to simply extend the surface material of the sidewalks right across the road at each intersection.

Also, the existing pathway along the White River could be utilized by the elderly who need to walk for health purposes. Distances markers might be posted to those who must walk specific distances.

And a shaded area along these walks is needed along with a place to sit, rest, and converse with others. It is proposed to simply place benches in shaded and invitingly landscaped areas at various points along the paths.
The design of the community is not designed to accommodate people who are not happy. It includes a selection of facilities and has been designed to what the community will be. My community will be accessible in this way. No circulation is up and the Site plan is the first key condition. After the elderly design is in place, scale and accommodation to the community will be made.
The important thing to design to is the elderly and their particular needs. Simply do not design a community without regarding the people who will use it, and expect them to be happy. The elderly group of our nation is a select group which deserves special attention and has many needs particular to their age. As long as we design for their needs and listen to what the elderly have to say, before we design, the community will be a success.

My design proposal for an elderly renovated community in Muncie, Indiana is what can best be accomplished in this particular neighborhood in this portion of the city of Muncie. Under no circumstances could these designs be picked up and be placed in another community successfully. Site planning and site analysis is one of the first keys to a successful community, and these conditions are different for each neighborhood. After this is established, listen to what the elderly have to say, research their needs, and design a flexible environment, both at the housing scale and at the community scale in order to accommodate various situations which respond to the elderly and surrounding resources. This will be the beginning of the successful renovated community for the elderly.
2 Ibid., p. 72.
4 Brochure from Four Seasons Retirement Center, 1901 Taylor Rd., Columbus, In., 47203.


PERIODICALS----


"Congregate Living," Progressive Architecture, August 1981, pg. 64-68.

