

Senior Living Environments

Statistics that Demand a Response



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According to the AARP's Livable Communities website, **by 2030 one out of every five people in the United States will be 65-plus.** Until that time, the Baby boomer generation will reach retirement age at the rate of 8,000 a day¹, making a huge impact on how we plan and design. About one in four older adults has a cognitive, hearing, mobility, or vision difficulty. By age 85, however, more than two in three adults face at least one of these difficulties.²

For research-based landscape architectural planning and design, appropriate responses include:

- ✓ **Providing pleasant outdoor public spaces for people to gather.** Sidewalks, outdoor seating, safe pedestrian environments, shade.³
- ✓ **Make opportunities for social participation.** Loneliness, sadness, and isolation can be debilitating health conditions.⁴
- ✓ **Foster a sense of control by providing access to a garden space.** People seek nature-dominated settings to reduce stress. Make the garden visible from interior gathering areas.⁵
- ✓ **Include rehabilitation activities when possible.** Design so that physical therapists, occupational and horticultural therapists can work outdoors with recovering patients.⁶
- ✓ **Positive distraction through contact with nature.** Provide many opportunities for stimulation by sight, smell and sounds of the garden.⁷
- ✓ **Facilitate attention restoration through the design of outdoor garden spaces.** Coherence (*orderly & organized*), complexity (*a rich setting with many opportunities for sensory engagement*), legibility (*memorable components*), and mystery (*compelled to explore and discover*) all are important ingredients.⁸

¹"An Earth-Shattering Ka-Boom" *The Generation that Changed Everything it Touched – Including Old Age*, eBook by Governing Generations, accessed 11/17/14.

²Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, *Housing America's Older Adults - Key Facts*, accessed 11/17/14

³From AARP's *Livable Communities The 8 Domains of Livability* accessed 11/17/14

⁴Ibid

⁵*Therapeutic Landscapes*, Clare Cooper Marcus & Naomi A. Sachs, John Wiley & Sons, 2014, pg.24, 24.

⁶Marcus & Sachs, pg. 26

⁷Marcus & Sachs, pg. 27

⁸Marcus & Sachs, pg. 28-29

Our Knowledge and Experience



Brad Smith Associates, Inc. has provided landscape architectural services for a number of senior living communities throughout the state of Florida and extending as far as Hawaii. Typically, these facilities are comprised of buildings that capture outdoor space in courtyard areas that are either semi-enclosed, or are totally surrounded. These spaces provide the perfect opportunity for patients, visitors and staff to connect with nature, and enjoy spending time in pleasant outdoor areas.

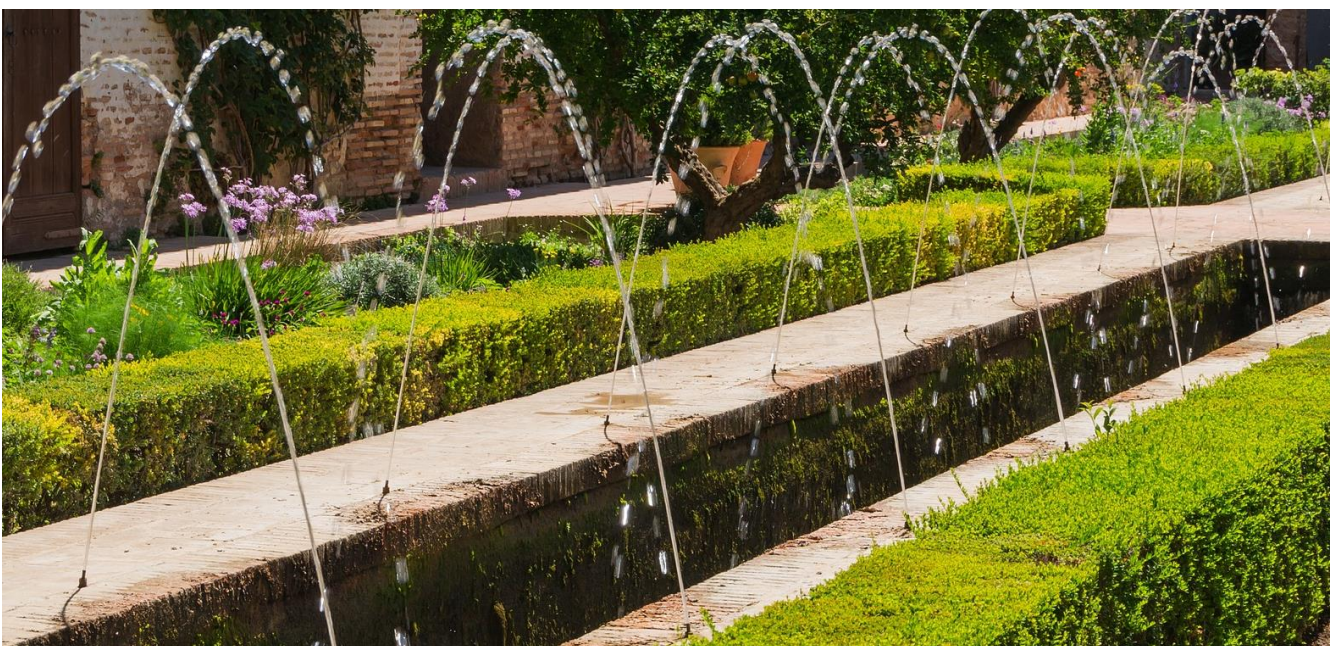
We understand the unique development and design responses associated with Senior Living environments – including Independent Living, Assisted Living, Skilled Nursing, and Dementia-Care. Attention must be taken to consider issues such as reflected heat, wind patterns, intense glare, protection from the elements, and providing choices. Way-finding and orientation are very important in these types of facilities. We recognize the importance of providing common spaces for semi-public elements, locating seating for individuals as well as small groups. We also appreciate the need for adequate contemplative garden space.

Proper signage, lighting, and seating should also be provided to meet the specific needs of patients, visitors, and staff. Well maintained fountains and pools of water can add to the enjoyment of outdoor spaces. Most of the outside areas should be able to be observed from the lobby or key interior areas. Walkways should provide non-slip surfaces when wet. Areas should be included where one may be able to have a small vegetable or flower garden. Raised planter areas can ensure that gardening is not too strenuous. Covered areas should be interspersed throughout the landscape to provide shade and protection from rains.

Applications

Much has been written about the therapeutic value of “healing gardens”. Here are a few examples beneficial and therapeutic environments we have developed on senior living campuses:

- Reading patios
- Lanais and entry gardens
- Remedial therapy (exercise stations, rehabilitation, mobility skills, etc.)
- Raised working beds for growing cut-flowers
- Aquatic gardens, rain gardens and water features
- Green roofs
- “Obstacle courses” – training in simple tasks such as negotiating curbs, steps, etc.
- Walking courses, sitting areas, and other opportunities for safe ambulatory experiences



Appropriate use of Plantings and Garden Features

Lessons we have learned over the years that apply to plantings in senior living communities include:

1. Avoid root systems that can create potential safety hazards.
2. Avoid plants that produce excessive litter, thorns, and spines.
3. Take care with low-branching trees; keep them away from paths.
4. Avoid poisonous plants, heavy pollen-producing plants, and those with strong odors (*even overpoweringly sweet fragrances*).
5. Provide defensible spaces.
6. Use lush, colorful planting that is varied and interesting to reinforce the image of a garden. Ensure appropriate horticultural requirements are met in selecting the right plants for the right places.
7. Provide multi-seasonal interest in the landscape through the use flowering plants to announce the seasons and provide a sense of cyclical rhythm throughout the year.
8. Use trees whose foliage moves easily and creates noise even in slight breeze. Place the trees in locations that will create patterns of color, shadow, light and movement.
9. Use plants and other features (*such as feeders and birdbaths*) to attract birds and butterflies.
10. Use a harmonious variety of plant textures, forms and colors. Plant them in a pleasing and mindful arrangement that attracts notice.
11. If possible include a water feature. Moving water creates a soothing sound and can create a psychological screen that helps the restoration process. Consider exposure to wind and competing noises when selecting locations for water features.

⁹These lessons have come through years of practical experience, but have also been influenced by Marcus and Barnes' work - [Healing Gardens: Therapeutic Benefits and Design Recommendations](#), Wiley Press, 1999.

Appropriate use of Plantings and Garden Features

12. Create a planting buffer between public garden spaces and private offices or patient rooms bordering the garden.
13. Provide meandering paths where possible to encourage strolling and reflection on elements in the garden. Where possible, provide a variety of vistas, levels of shade and textures of planting.
14. Select paving surfaces that accommodate wheel chairs or gurneys. Make at least the main paths wide enough for patients in wheelchairs to pass one another— at least six feet wide. Avoid highly reflective surfaces.
15. Nighttime lighting allows the garden to be used or viewed after dark. Use low path lighting and low voltage landscape lighting with fixture shields so that glare does not shine into adjacent rooms. Highlight the effect of the lighting, rather than the source.
16. Movable chairs or benches placed at right angles provide for more social interaction. Provide seating for varying levels of sociability. Place some seating at the entrance to the garden for those with limited time (*such as staff on a short break*). Seats should have backs and sturdy arms, and should be made of material that is durable yet pleasing to touch. Movable furnishings should be lightweight.
17. Provide a variety of shelter and exposure so that the garden may be used in different season. People will seek out sunny spots on a cool day and shady areas on a hot day. Covered areas, especially at the entrance to the garden, could allow the garden to be used during a rainstorm. Make rainfall become an exciting event!
18. Take advantage of natural views from the site. If there is no ready view, design a series of experiences and focal points as one moves through the space.
19. Provide one or two memorable features by which people can identify the garden. Sculpture, sound, water, a profusion of flowers, or an edible vegetable garden will provide strong memories of the garden and the renewal found there.
20. Give residents the opportunity to work in the garden. Consider movable pots, and perhaps an herb garden.

Appropriate use of Plantings and Garden Features

Once the garden is designed and built, it must be well maintained¹⁰ and, to be truly useful, must be known to residents and staff. Directional and way-finding signage to the garden is a key component to ensure use of the garden. Signage should be posted on the exterior areas of the campus as well as inside the facility. Finally, the garden should be kept open and available to all who wish to enter. We use our proprietary LandEconomics, developed by our sister company, LandEconomics™, to project the operating costs for the landscape. If you can't afford to provide proper maintenance, you should not be planting it in the first place! LandEconomics™ also allows for optimizing the financial performance of the landscape prior to installation.



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