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Mayor talks senior issues at Holly Creek



Mayor Cathy Noon addresses about 70 residents of the Holly Creek retirement community as District 2 City Councilmember Sue Bosier looks on. Photo by Peter Jones

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Before Mayor Cathy Noon entered the meeting room at the Holly Creek retirement community on March 26, a few residents were grumbling that they had not yet received their U.S. Census forms.

A Holly Creek staff member suggested to one man that perhaps the questionnaires had been sent to the main office for the management to complete for the entire community — but she wasn't sure.

"Like hell, they will," the man complained loudly. "Because if they fill out mine, I want to fill out theirs!"

Luckily, Noon arrived just in time to clear up the confusion about the federal census, which is designed to count and categorize every person — of all ages and demographics — living in the United States as of April 1.

"Well, after a quick flurry of yesterday's and today's e-mails, we've already had a [census] official here this morning," Noon told the 70 or so seniors in the room. "You will be having forms and be contacted. We're not exactly sure what happened. ... You were in a black hole and now you're not."

The 2010 census will be the first federal count of residents since the City of Centennial was founded in 2001. Because an official population can affect the level of state and federal services, the newest city in Arapahoe County has actively encouraged participation of every resident — young and old.

"We're expected to surpass Denver and Jefferson County and be the largest county of seniors in about two to three years, and that's quite a turnaround," Noon said of expected changes in Arapahoe County's demographics.

Noon, the founding president of the Centennial Council of Neighborhoods, or CenCON, hinted that retirement communities, such as Holly Creek, might want to consider joining CenCON, which acts as an umbrella organization of homeowners associations and neighborhood groups in the city.

Noon, who was sworn-in this year as Centennial's second mayor, was visiting Holly Creek as part of a broader effort to reach out to residents, businesses and other communities within the city.

The official has long had an interest in senior issues. She serves on the Aging Advisory Council of the Denver Regional Council of Governments and on the Arapahoe County Council on Aging.

During last year's run for mayor, Noon campaigned on the idea of founding a senior commission as a counterpart to the longstanding Centennial Youth Commission, which advises the city council on teen issues and organizes civic projects.

An appointed body of older Centennial residents would perform a similar function in city government, according to the mayor.

"A senior commission is going to be able to advocate on behalf of what is needed in the city," she told the audience. "Is there need for a senior center? Do we have some transportation issues?"

Centennial has formed a task force to look into the idea of forming a senior commission. The group is expected to make a report to the city council by the end of the year. A commission could be founded in 2011.

Many Holly Creek residents said they were impressed by Noon's down-to-earth style and interest in the senior community. Some were not sure that they would want to serve on a senior commission, however.

"I don't think so at the moment," said Jimi Halstead, 80. "I'm more involved here [at Holly Creek]. I'd have to give it a thought, but I would definitely want someone to represent us."

Resident Bill Vobach, 80, a former Indiana state senator, thinks the Holly Creek community should play a role on the commission.

"Been there, done that," he said of serving himself. "But there are a lot of other people who are very gifted."

According to Vobach, residents of a self-contained retirement community like Holly Creek often lose sight of being city residents. He thinks the idea of the community joining CenCON might change that.

"If we had a structure that sent us into bigger groups, maybe the interest would pick up here," he said. "We're well taken care of in terms of plowing the streets."

District 2 City Councilmembers Sue Bosier and Keith Gardner also made presentations to the group.