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by J. David Hoglund FAIA | Perkins Eastman





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A deep longing for community leads to a growing interest in senior housing

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Janet Novack's recent article in Forbes, "Eight Ways Coronavirus Will Drastically Alter Boomer Retirements," focuses on the potential vulnerabilities of older adults, and suggests more people will choose aging in place rather than residing in senior living housing after surviving this pandemic.

"Until two weeks ago, every article was about the perils of social isolation (for the elderly). Now we're changing it to (promoting) self-isolation," Novack quoted Joseph Coughlin, director of Massachusetts Institute of Technology AgeLab. "This is an inflection point in our medical model of how to age well," Coughlin said.

Given the multitude of different housing options already available in the senior living sector, however, Perkins Eastman Architects believes many Boomers will choose among these options, or other evolving options, over aging in place. Boomers will demand creative living alternatives, especially after feeling socially starved with interrupted care during this outbreak of COVID-19.

A Surge in Inquiries from Prospects

John Knox Village, a life plan continuing care retirement community in Pompano Beach, FL, for example, has seen a surge in inquiries from prospects, as well as a five-year-high in sales during this turbulent time.

"We believe the security of financial protection and unlimited world-class healthcare are, no doubt, factors in this uptick of interest and buying commitment. Even with six-foot social distancing, communities such as ours help people avoid the feelings of isolation and loneliness that are often prevalent when residing in a single family house. Providing greater purpose for a

more engaged resident through a multi-generational culture gives opportunities that are at the center of resident well-being,” says Monica McAfee, Chief Marketing & Innovation Officer of John Knox Village of Florida, Inc.

What Kinds of Living Arrangements Will Boomers Seek in the Future?

In addition to identifying the growing trend toward aging at home, Novack discusses the importance of family, and concerns of virus spread in group living situations. While there is clearly reason for concern, significant shifts to address these concerns are already happening within the senior living sector. “Small house” nursing and memory support models where 10-12 people live in a house with few central services are growing in popularity. Unlike the 40-60 bed nursing units of the past where centralization becomes a breeding ground, these new living arrangements place far fewer people together at once.

Currently the move to private room accommodations in nursing and assisted living is focused on Boomer privacy and market expectations. In addition to private room models that address these demands, the small house model provides innate infection control. When virus-driven “shelter in place” needs arrive, private rooms with a private bathroom, complete with shower, offer a first line of defense against the spread of infection.

The Green House Project exemplifies this. “The model (Green House®) is inherently designed physically, philosophically, and organizationally to create opportunities that optimize health and well-being,” says Susan Ryan, senior director of The Green House Project. “Small homes with all private rooms and baths,



Canvas Valley Forge | King of Prussia, Pennsylvania



Friendship Village of South Hills | Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



Jewish Senior Life Green House | Rochester, New York

decentralized dining, housekeeping, and laundry, along with consistent staffing all combine to maximize relationships and collaborative care partnerships that place preeminent focus on the person, thereby mitigating the spread of infections and achieving better outcomes.”

What Will Older Adults Choose?

“Though aging in place is the model most often associated with independence in our country today, in reality quite the opposite is true: it leads to social isolation and the onset of health issues,” says Amy Schectman, President & CEO, 2Life Communities, which is based in Boston, MA.

The significant groundswell of interest in the fabric of community and the informal network of family and friends that support *aging in community* already offers options for aging adults. Technology will provide an ever-increasing network

of portable medical equipment previously only found in licensed-care settings. The Internet provides ready information and communication capabilities to access services and community-based programs. The coronavirus lock-down is also accelerating virtual access to education, online museum tours, great libraries, theaters, and other interests that keep people engaged. Autonomous vehicles will provide access to all kinds of services. Drone-delivered medicines and food, as well as robotic care aides are already here. While we can take care of people remotely in their home, they will be spending much of their time alone.

‘Deep Longing for Community’

Interdependent together settings, whether accessory dwellings, such as mother-in-law units, co-housing, or age-friendly communities, are options that give people the chance to age in a community they know and love, and where they have established

relationships. Housing with services, whether we call it a Life Plan Community, Retirement Community, or Senior Rental, all address the delicate balance of providing housing and care/services with an underlying fabric of community. These types of communities may well see increased viability as post-virus realities set in.

Older adults in 2020 may begin to question a “hunkered down” lifestyle at home with the potential for interrupted supply chain of food/meals, health care aides who can’t come (for reasons of exposure or family care obligations), and adult guest care/senior centers that are shuttered. Social isolation and loneliness are not the only challenges we have to provide for future Boomer consumers.

“One thing that will not change is the deep longing for community and purpose this generation of older adults has. Many of them have family that is not local, and a

good number are solo agers. They want a chosen family of friends. They want to stay relevant. And they recognize the opportunity to live in community as a lifeline to emotional and intellectual wellness,” says Sharon Brooks, president, Richmond Office, GlynnDevins, a senior living marketing firm.

Many contemporary communities have already been building in smaller dining venues and take-out services giving residents options. Gone are the big dining halls in many cases. Robust technology connects individuals in apartments and creates a fabric of on-site care giving support. Distance learning and in-house intra-nets keep people connected, educated, and safe. Much more work will need to be done around infection control and the impact of social distancing, but the infrastructure is there to support it.

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About Perkins Eastman

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