

Northfield Village planners seek input, promise food in exchange for thought

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NORTHFIELD — Organizers of a cooperative network providing services to the elderly, called “Neighbors at Home: The Northfield Village,” want to hear from you.

Their question to Northfield residents: What do you need for you to stay in your home indefinitely?

That’s why resident Bill McGee and the four other members of the exploratory committee trying to create such a cooperative network in Northfield — Tony Stavely, Jerry Wagener, Judy Wagner and Pam Eldridge — are offering three “food for thought” programs in March.

“We provide the food, you provide the thought,” McGee, 79, said. “We hope to get a lot of feedback from the town to see if we’re on the right track.”

The three Saturday “food for thought” programs will be held March 3 at Dickinson Memorial Library, March 17 at Pioneer Valley Regional School and March 24 at Northfield Mountain Recreation and Environmental Center. Each program will start at 10 a.m.

McGee and the exploratory committee have been working on developing a Northfield “village” since last fall, after McGee happened upon a brochure about the nationwide Village to Village (<http://www.vtvnetwork.org>) Network. Each “village” consists of volunteers that provide services such as transportation and minor home repairs to elderly residents, allowing them to live independently.

“The idea is to keep people in their homes and allow them to remain in their community for as long as possible, to keep them out of nursing homes,” McGee said previously.

McGee thought such a model would be useful in Northfield, particularly given that nearly one-third of the town’s population is over 60. He said a Northfield version would involve contractor services at discounted rates, having volunteers who would deliver garbage to

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the Transfer Station and one-on-one electronics training. At the same time, the Northfield Village would act as a concierge service, providing a link to existing services offered by organizations like LifePath.

Fundraising will be needed to cover startup costs, McGee said previously, though after the village's launch, membership fees will cover expenses. McGee proposed a cooperative of 75 to 100 households contributing approximately \$10 per month.

"There's a combination of giving and receiving," McGee said, estimating the Northfield Village's operation to cost between \$12,000 and \$15,000 yearly. He suspects scholarships will be offered.

The hope, he said, is that after compiling the feedback residents provide during the "food for thought" programs, the exploratory committee will come up with a final design for "Neighbors at Home: The Northfield Village."

"This is something people would really like to see happen," he said.

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