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Post Occupancy Evaluation and Space Planning Suggestions

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Post Occupancy Evaluation and Space Planning Suggestions

Abstract

This project consisted of space planning research and an environmental design that translated into a tangible project in interior design. I worked with a local assisted-living community to develop a space plan for several areas within the community: a multi-purpose activity center (HAC) and the adjoining coffee lounge. Community management felt these areas were underutilized and I conducted a post-occupancy analysis and provided recommendations for space planning. The areas in question were also undergoing major reconfigurations due to additions to the building. I analyzed the space for current and future needs, incorporated changes in footprint and traffic, and created a revised space plan that would address community needs and provide a welcoming and stimulating atmosphere for its residents and visitors. The resulting space has distinctive areas for multiple activities that are both functional and comfortable. The overall space provides clear directions and seamlessly connects the new building addition to the existing areas.

RUNNING HEAD: Space Planning Suggestions



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Post Occupancy Evaluation and Space Planning Suggestions

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Overview

Lakeview Village is a growing and dynamic retirement community with over 800 residents. It is a non-profit community that “fosters optimism, growth, respect, self-responsibility, and community” (Lakeview Village). The residents at Lakeview Village are actively engaged in a variety of activities on a daily basis. The growing popularity of this community resulted in the need to expand. A new wing has been added to the existing building along with a new entrance. This created a different set of requirements for certain areas of the existing building. In order to match these requirements and accommodate all the possible future needs envisaged for the space, a post occupancy evaluation of several areas in the community has been conducted. A post occupancy evaluation includes observations of the space in order to fine-tune the building according to occupants’ needs. Based on these observations, following is an overview of space planning suggestions that would allow the community to meet its space requirements.

The main end users of this community are the residents, staff members, and visitors (visiting family, potential new residents, and non-affiliated persons facilitating the community in certain ways, volunteers, etc.). The majority of residents in the community are fully mobile and independent, however, there are also residents using wheelchairs or walkers. This population has certain special requirements in terms of space planning and interior design. The main consideration for planning spaces for the aging population is ensuring accessibility, utility, safety and providing an environment that is engaging and soothing at the same time.

Space planning can have a facilitating or restrictive quality with regards to activities and/or behaviors and feelings. The main role of space planning is then to provide a welcoming

space and ensure the possibility of performing certain activities envisaged for the space. In other words, unless the space has been planned and accommodates certain activities, the latter will never happen. The *behavior setting* power of interiors is seen in the fact that a space arranged in a certain way allows its occupants to see what activities are welcome/possible in that space. A welcoming and comfortable TV area encourages a certain activity and behavior. Providing a comfortable seating arrangement around a fireplace suggests and encourages its use as well. Another important factor is *ergonomics* – or comfort level – of the furnishings and surroundings. Spaces that use furniture pieces with a comfortable seat, arm and back height provide additional support and are easy to get in and out of without assistance, encouraging use of the space and fostering independence. *Lighting* is another critical consideration in making the space welcoming. It enhances safety, well-being and the overall positive feeling of the space, and can also contribute to or prevent people from performing certain activities.

Some of the factors that drive interior design and space planning in this application are issues of vision impairment and adequate sensory stimulation. This comes into play not only when planning use of space but also in specifying interior products of certain colors and patterns, especially in surfaces, such as countertops, floors and stairs. It is also important to incorporate good directions and guidelines to enhance a sense of direction and promote a sense of independence for both the residents and visitors of the community. Many resources on designing environments for the aging population stress the importance of “effortless attention” and the restorative value it has on humans of all ages and abilities. It is therefore important to incorporate views and cityscape scenery to provide the residents with visual interest and keep them mentally engaged.

I examined several areas of Lakeview Village against their current and future needs. As the name suggests, the main meeting area called Heritage Activity Center (HAC), is a multi-purpose space with multiple various activities held on a daily basis. This space has undergone some major changes in terms of footprint and traffic. A new entrance connected to the parking outside was added and a new building added to the community connects directly to HAC. Part of HAC now acts as a passageway for new residents accessing the rest of facilities at Lakeview Village that have not been replicated in the new building.

Based on my observations and analysis of the space and activities performed by the end users, I have developed the following general goals and suggestions for the space:

- 1) improve legibility and recognition of the space and provide a better sense of direction, with carpeting, lighting and furniture arrangement
- 2) define specific zones and areas within the space that would address certain needs and ensure that each individual area facilitates activities envisaged for that area
- 3) create a clear traffic pattern to transition between major centers of the community and facilitate circulation within individual areas
- 4) create multiple conversational/lounging/waiting zones in areas of anticipated higher traffic
- 5) improve lighting (to enhance the general feel of the space, increase the likeliness of certain desired activities, provide a more welcoming entrance and update the look of the space)
- 6) eliminate some of the furniture that is either not used, excessive in number or detracts from the purpose of the space

- 7) incorporate options for flexible use of the space
- 8) eliminate “dead zones” and wasted space
- 9) encourage additional activities to extend the time residents spend there
(place a magazine rack in the coffee lounge in a more accessible place, incorporate adequate counter space for the beverage center that could offer additional types of refreshments - a lemonade/ice tea next to coffee for warmer times and de-cafeinated coffee to address the people watching their caffeine intake and promote use of space later in the day)
- 10) suggest feasible no- or low-cost updates that would enhance the space, such as the following:
 - remove the valance from draperies to allow more daylight and offer a more updated look
 - infuse the space with live plants to enhance indoor air quality;
 - incorporate storage throughout the space – in the games area (for games), at the “guest relations” station (for new residents’ kits and forms/applications), at the TV lounge (for DVDs, refreshments), and the coffee lounge (for phone books, instructions on how to use the Internet/e-mail/Skype)
 - lower and reposition the TV in the coffee lounge and have it turned on for ease of use
 - reposition the TV in the HAC TV watching area to ensure comfortable watching and increase the number of people viewing TV comfortably
 - keeping the doors between the two adjoining areas open to improve

the flow and enhance circulation between the two spaces;

In terms of sensory stimulation, here are some additional suggestions that residents at Lakeview Village may welcome:

- 1) for sight stimulation and as an opportunity for passive energy restoration, placing bird feeders on the outside perimeter of HAC windows would create an engaging and soothing environment
- 2) playing soft music in the coffee lounge and/or HAC would provide sound stimulation
- 3) for pleasing touch sensation, furniture and furnishings with good 'hand' may be incorporated; introducing more upholstered pieces would have the same effect.

I believe the above-mentioned suggestions along with a revised space and furniture plan would improve the use of these spaces and contribute to the general well-being and enjoyment of the space by its end users.

Following are some of the highlights of the project (refer to diagram on p. 8):

Main Activity Center

This space is a multi-purpose room that incorporates a number of distinctive areas: 1) an assembly meeting area with theater seating; 2) a newly created hallway between the new building addition and the main building; 3) an inviting foyer with a fireplace; 4) a multi-functional area off another new entrance that can act as a mini-lobby/informal meeting/waiting area as well as additional seating during big events at the main assembly area; 5) a guest/resident relations station, 6) game area, and 7) TV lounge.

Guest Relations/Games/TV lounge

This portion of the space contains a clearly defined area for games that doubles as extra seating during events and additional seating close by when the coffee lounge is full. The area incorporates adequate storage of games and supplies.

A guest-relations station is created for meetings with visitors, potential customers, (new) residents needing information, and/or job applicants. The reconfigured TV lounge incorporates ergonomic seating, functional furniture groupings and incorporates multiple viewing areas. Storage of DVDs and supplies is provided as well.

Coffee Lounge

The coffee lounge now accommodates two computer users with an adequate work surface, has comfortable seating, a TV moved to a more comfortable location, and an improved beverage center. The furniture grouping is adjusted to ensure easy circulation within the space. The overall changes accommodate new activities and make existing activities more feasible and thus contribute to extended use of the space.

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