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CASS Remains Committed to OTR Senior Center

Center is Closed Temporarily Due to the Pandemic

Cincinnati Area Senior Services remains committed to operating a senior center in Over-the-Rhine, even though its OTR Senior Center has been closed since the pandemic started.

In a statement issued today, Dan Driehaus, Chair of the CASS Board, and Tracey Collins, Chief Executive Officer of CASS, reaffirmed the organization's commitment to the senior center.

"We know the importance of the OTR Senior Center in keeping older adults happy and healthy," Collins said. "The OTR Senior Center is a top priority of CASS. But during the pandemic, an even higher priority is preventing the people we serve and our staff from getting COVID-19."

The Senior Center has been closed since March to prevent the spread of the virus following an order from Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine.

The Senior Center is located at 1722 Race Street, between W. Elder and Green streets, a block from Findlay Market. Seniors like to go there on weekdays for breakfast, lunch and activities, such as birthday parties, bingo, trivia quizzes, speakers and bus trips.

In late September, the State of Ohio authorized senior centers to reopen. But like many senior centers in Greater Cincinnati, CASS has not yet reopened the OTR Senior Center because of the significant challenges in meeting health safety requirements.

The state Health Department's conditions for reopening senior centers are extensive, requiring additional staff and supplies and a substantial reduction in participants.

The requirements include:

- Ensuring that participants and employees maintain at least six feet of social distance, including while eating and standing in line for meals. Table and chairs must be placed so participants are separated by six feet.

- Screening participants for health conditions by phone before each visit.
- Prioritizing participants best suited from a health standpoint to use the senior centers.
- Isolating participants who become sick and seeking medical care for them.

If it were to reopen the Senior Center, CASS would find it difficult to meet the guidelines because of its limited staff and space.

Additionally, CASS would need to address transportation challenges. CASS transports most of its senior center participants on its buses. For health safety, CASS has reduced capacity on those buses to five riders, so the buses would have to make more trips.

In reaffirming their commitment, Driehaus and Collins said CASS is exploring other places in OTR where, with limited funding, CASS could efficiently operate a senior center. In 2018, CASS announced it was closing the Senior Center, but emergency funding approved by Cincinnati City Council kept it open.

In the future, CASS hopes to avoid such emergencies.

“The long-term financial sustainability of the OTR Senior Center is crucial,” Driehaus said. “We think that by partnering with other organizations we could achieve the goal of operating a senior center in Over-the-Rhine for many years.”

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Cincinnati Area Senior Services, a nonprofit organization, provides services to older adults to help them live independently, stay active and enjoy life. We serve all of Hamilton County, including Cincinnati, as well as some surrounding areas. We make sure seniors, age 60 and older, have food, transportation, social interaction and assistance to deal with their complex financial challenges. Our Meals on Wheels program, which delivers hundreds of thousands of meals annually, is the largest program of its kind in Hamilton County. And our transportation team makes tens of thousands of trips each year in our blue-and-white buses, helping seniors stay mobile.

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