TRANSFORMING PINE RIVER PUBLIC LIBRARY: BECOMING THE BEST SMALL LIBRARY IN THE U.S.

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In March 2010, Judy Dublin, the President of the Board of Trustees of Pine River Public Library, had scheduled a meeting with the current board members. While Dublin acknowledged the progress that had been made in the past year, she wondered what else could be done to transform the Pine River Public Library from a traditional, rural library to a library that served the expanding community, and help it move into the 21st century.

The Pine River Library Community

The library was located in a small, but growing, rural community of Bayfield, Colorado, with about 2,110 residents. The surrounding area of the library (i.e., 510 square miles) had an approximate population of 7,140. The town was located approximately 172 miles from the nearest interstate highway. Median household income ranged from $44,000 - $50,000 annually, with an annual average household income of $58,000. Approximately 28% of the district's residents had earned a high school diploma, with 37.8% having an Associate, Bachelor

or higher educational degree. (See Exhibits 5-7 for demographic information.) Pine River Public Library was located in a bedroom community that served the larger metropolitan area of Durango, Colorado, with an estimated population of 17,557. Because this community lacked many of the entertainment and educational services found in a larger city and/or town, Pine River Public Library played a pivotal role in offering such services to the community. As with many libraries in rural communities, Pine River Public Library appeared to face the challenges highlighted by the Rural Policy Research Institute, namely limited financial resources and expertise and resistance to change and innovation (Rural Policy Research Institute Rural Welfare Policy Panel, 1999).

From 2008 to 2010, Pine River Public Library's community underwent considerable population growth, averaging 2% annually. This growth was projected to continue over the next several years. At the start of 2010, this population growth increased the library's circulation to 94,228, with physical visits (139,000) with the number of patrons participating in programs (1,845) on the rise (see Exhibit 2). At that time, the library's chief function was to loan print volumes and videos to the local community. The library's collection did not contain any e-books. In addition, the library had increased from eight personal computers in 2008 to thirty in 2010 to meet community demand for technology and free Wi-Fi. Since the library was within walking distance of the city's middle and high schools, there existed a constant flow of teens and a strong interest in the summer reading program.

The library was set up as a special tax district, which was a common funding mechanism used in Colorado. The library was an independent district that had identical boundaries to those of the local school district. From the total annual budget of $509,346, or $77.23 per capita, $42,824 went to materials and the rest kept the library open seven days (or 62 hours) a week, paying for a full-time staff of 7.5 employees.

The Board of Trustees

Oversight of the library was the responsibility of a six-member Board of Trustees appointed by the County Commissioners. Board of Trustee members were selected to provide various skill sets to the library. The Board of Trustees was a governing (vs. advisory) body and was responsible for all aspects of the library's operations. Having a governing board meant that the Board of Trustees was responsible for a wide set of activities, including: policy making, funding and budgeting; community relations; interlibrary collaboration; director selection/evaluation; planning library services; and advocacy. The library also employed a Library Director, who was responsible for managing six full- and part-time staff and the library's day-to-day operations. The library is funded by tax revenues received from the County, along with donated and endowment monies available to run its operations (see Exhibit 3 for 2012 semi-annual budget).

In 2010, with its newly developed mission to continue as a high quality, small town library by supporting lifelong learning, the Board of Trustees began to feel a sense of urgency to transform and reinvent the Pine River Public Library. This urgency stemmed from the increase in active participation brought on by the community population growth, recognition of the transforming community needs, the challenges and opportunities brought about by technology and the internet, the desire to position the library for long-term growth and sustainability, as well as a $2 million endowment that could be used.

The Facilities Task Force

In order to address the uncertainty facing the library's future direction, the Board of Trustees commissioned a Task Force to update its long-range plan as well as to inform community stakeholders. One of the goals in the long-range plan was Facility Planning. The Board of Trustees asked the Task Force to focus on the following long-range goal:

- Consider and evaluate the possibility of the development of various types of expansion.

- Plan for future expansion based on projected population growth and patron feedback.

- Ensure adequate parking for current and projected use.

Specifically, the Task Force was tasked with:

1. Develop surveys for adults (including high school students) and youth (grades 3-8) that ask about how people use the library, current satisfaction, and future needs.

2. Select an on-line survey company to manage the data—Constant Contact.

3. Develop a marketing plan for the survey and meetings with community organizations.

4. Distribute the survey to community groups, at community events, in the library, and on-line.

5. Attend meetings of community organizations to share the library's long range planning process and solicit suggestions.

6. Compile results of the survey and meetings with community organizations.

7. Recommend revisions to the Long-Range Plan.

8. Report recommendations to the Library Board for approval.

9. Present a revised Long-Range Plan to the community.

The Task Force developed, pretested, and collected an adult and youth survey. The survey data were compiled using the online company Constant Contact. A pencil and paper survey was also available.   Adult surveys were distributed at community events (i.e., Pine Stream second grade holiday program, Pine Stream middle school holiday music program, Old Fashioned Christmas in downtown Pine Stream, and the Pine Valley Church Craft Fair). In addition, announcements of the survey were made using the local newspaper, Pine Stream Schools' newsletter, Pine Stream middle school holiday program, and the library kiosk and staff. Adults were also able to complete the survey at the library. Youth surveys were completed by Pine Stream students (grades 3 – 8) during an in-class "real world" exercise. 785 adults and 614 youths (grades 3-8) completed the survey.

The Task Force held approximately 10 external stakeholder meetings for community members to meet the Library Director and the Task Force and discuss the library's future. The meetings were marketed towards specific organizations (e.g., 4H clubs, Pine River Community Learning Center, Skills for Living and Learning, Pine Stream Study Club, and religious leaders). In addition to the external stakeholder meetings, two focus group sessions were conducted by the Pine River Public Library staff.

The results of the survey served a dual purpose: evaluating current services and recommending changes for the future. The most important strength that patrons reported was with the quality of service from library staff, especially their friendliness and helpfulness. In terms of programs, the library received positive comments on its programs for children, teens and the availability of technology. One improvement suggested was more shelf space, with two thirds of the respondents indicating a need for more space for books, movies, and audio material. Sixty percent of the adult respondents said the library needed more space for the children's area. Fifty-two percent indicated they wanted computer classes in the future on various devices and software programs. Because of this survey, the Board of Trustees dedicated a significant part of the budget to the design and construction of an expansion of the existing library building to increase its floor space by 50%. As part of the transformation, the library's collection would be reorganized from a traditional Dewey system to a topical system.

Additionally, service would be improved (e.g., self-checkout station that allowed for a more customer-centric approach with employees getting out from behind the circulation desk), sustainable construction materials would be used (i.e., conducting sustainable projects would provide an educational forum as well as allowing the library to model ideal practices), and an outdoor space would be added to coincide with a "living library" concept. The construction budget was set at $1.7 million.

Leading and Managing Change

The Board of Trustees asked Board Member Cheryl Ray to lead the Facilities Planning Committee to manage the library's expansion. This committee would be responsible for working with the architect, designers, builders and managing the bid process. The role of the Library Director would be to manage the budget and implement actions from the committee.

Soon after the first phase of the project started, the Library Director retired. Although an interim director was hired soon after, there was a leadership and communication vacuum and left Cheryl Ray with the key role in leading and managing the expansion. Cheryl reflected that there was a sense of urgency to get the expansion going, which introduced a large amount of change (e.g., services and programs) into the organization that in turn affected communication, personnel, and decision-making in the organization.

Efforts were also needed in facilitating design changes with the architect. For example, in the initial building design, there was a decorative wall included outside the meeting rooms. Although this wall was included in the initial planning of the building, an idea emerged that since the town's drive-in movie theatre was closing, there was a new opportunity for an outside video wall to show movies. Discussions about the movie wall idea with the community confirmed it was a good idea. The decorative wall just did not fit anymore and was eliminated from the design.

As a result of the issues brought up by the facility expansion and results of the community survey, it became clear early on that the whole idea of what the library did, and how it did it, would change. This transformation rested in four key areas: (1) organizational management, defined as a flexible structure and an effective management system; (2) facilities, to improve patron services and increase library efficiency; (3) increased services and service levels; and (4)

community involvement, to be more responsive to what people want and bring them into the library.

Organizational Management

Prior to the expansion, the library faced a number of organizational challenges ranging from human resource to fiscal management. For example, the current budgets were done by hand, several job descriptions were out-of-date, and so were some library policies. As with many rural libraries, the Pine River Public Library served a relatively conservative community and had a lack of academically trained staff (Vavrek, 1995), with none of the current staff having an advanced Library degree.   However, the library functioned with a strong, mission-driven organizational culture and shared values. All members of the staff prided themselves on their commitment to reach out to patrons and offer valuable services.

When the expansion phase of the library's transformation was first announced, there was much excitement and optimism from the library staff. The general staff sentiment was that the expansion of the library would be an incremental change to the normal operational procedures and not the large amount of change the Board of Trustees had envisioned.

With the Library Director's announcement to retire, communication became critical to manage staff expectations, ensure key staff was on the expansion committee, and that the staff's tacit knowledge could be leveraged in order to achieve the transformational goals of the library.

The interim director, a highly educated, trained, and experienced librarian, was put in place to allow time for a replacement director to be hired. However, the interim director was periodically pulled into the facility expansion and was unable to fill all the communication voids. As an example, when a staff member's desk was moved from the children's area to another

area of the library as part of the larger plan, staff members admitted that they did not know who was in charge.

Facilities

Several opportunities uncovered through the community survey centered on the necessity to transform the library to a more focused, patron-service model in order to improve the library's effectiveness and efficiency. This transformation would require the library to address the layout shortfalls (i.e., partitioning the library based on specific use requirements), reorganizing library material through a new cataloguing system, and employing energy- efficient and sustainable features. The entire layout of the library was changed (see Exhibit 1). The expansion designed busy, noisier areas near the front with back spaces designed for quieter activities (such as computer use). The children's area was now enclosed in a separate room for privacy and safety. Prior to the expansion, many children's summer programs were held outside since there was little dedicated space for these programs indoors, and during the winter, snow-filled months, this limited the ability to deliver children's programs. Special zones for children, teens and adults were designed with teens/children on one side of the building and adults on the other.

Prior to the expansion, there was one meeting room that was shared by the community and the library. There was tremendous demand for the library's one meeting room and it was fully utilized by the community. Typically, the demand by community members for meeting rooms was underserved with multiple requests being denied by the library on a daily basis. The new facility had two large meeting rooms (i.e., community rooms) that doubled the capacity (i.e., to 140 people) for meeting room availability. In addition, the library had a corresponding community room kitchen as well two designated study rooms.

The community also expressed frustration with the Dewey decimal classification system employed at the library to organize its holdings. The community thought that the Dewey system was difficult to use. With leading libraries moving to a bookstore model, the entire collection was reorganized into topical themes. This change, however, necessitated using a new system to categorize and manage the collection.

Lastly, the Board of Trustees recognized the need to be a role model in the community with respect to sustainability (e.g., construction methods and energy efficiency).   The expansion prompted the use of sustainable wall insulation as well as solar power and drum lighting to reduce long-term utility costs. These lighting changes not only provided more light but also were more cost-efficient.

Services and Service Levels

With added space, new programs could be offered based on community input. The library could now offer cooking classes, movies, exercise and hands-on gardening classes.   Another popular service was digital devices. The library purchased 43 devices to loan out (such as Nooks, Kindle Fire, Sony eReaders, MP3 players, Tom-Tom, Garmin, and laptops).

Service levels also increased. Along with the capacity doubling for the meeting rooms, waiting times to check out material had decreased because there were now two ways to check out (i.e., via library staff at the central desk or at a new self-checkout area). The automated checkout area freed up staff to answer questions and be available to offer assistance to patrons similar to a concierge function at a hotel. However, as one staff member noted, some patrons missed the central checkout desk and the personal interaction they could have with the staff during check out.

Community

The community survey was one of the first organized efforts of the Board of Trustees to understand current and future community needs. Due to the close proximity of the library to the middle- and high-schools, the library had always maintained close ties with the schools to design its school-aged programs. Library staff members attended public city board meetings and members of the community were invited to attend library Board of Trustees' meetings to express their interest in additional programs. The Friends of the Library, a key fundraising arm for the library, was another way to keep in touch with the community. As part of the Friends organization, $130,000 was donated to help with the library expansion and another $30,000 for technical equipment and a garden shed using the local High School construction class.

Library programs were driven by community requests. An outdoor garden expansion was one such community request. As Judy O'Henry (Library Development Director) stated:

> *We are not just about books anymore. We are about people who want to get involved and work together. The importance of the outdoor space is that it draws people into the library. For example, we asked for some volunteers to build garden beds out of lumber. More than 25 people showed up over two weekends to build these beds and were people who did not usually come to the library.*

Pine River Public Library in 2013

In March 2013, the Board of Trustees reviewed the results of the expansion.   Three times more visitors walked around a space that was 50% bigger to view a collection that had almost doubled since 2010. The library was more spacious and drew in more physical and electronic visitors. The book loan rate had increased from essentially zero to 308 with a modest increase in staff (1 full time employee), and checkout times were reduced to less than a minute.

Three years prior, the Board of Trustees and the library staff had worked on changing the public's image of the library from a book repository to a place where people learn, explore, and discover. This move was part of what many libraries around the U.S. were attempting to manage: that is, staying relevant in a rapidly changing, technology-rich global environment. As one unique example, Bexar County public library in San Antonio, Texas was the first all-digital, bookless public library to offer electronic readers and housed no actual books (Weber, 2014). Librarian of Congress James H. Billington said, "If we didn't already have libraries, they would now have to be invented. There are the keys to American success in fully exploiting the information superhighways of the future" (Goodreads, 2013).

Board of Trustees ex-officio President Judy Dublin reflected upon what was next for the library:

> *I am most proud of our library for weaving in the fabric of the community. People are now excited about the library. We need to embrace what libraries are becoming while recognizing that budgets are becoming more limited. In addition, we have not yet fully implemented or seen the results from our outdoor garden projects (the movie area was still awaiting licensure) which will bring even more people into our library. Currently, we exceed the full-time equivalent employee / patron ratio recommended for our library size and our staff costs are more than 60% of our operating budget. I am also worried about incurring a deficit in the upcoming fiscal year. We need to continue to be fiscally responsible. Moreover, the Board of Trustees has recently begun work on a new vision and a new long-term plan for the library.*

With the 2010 vision being fulfilled, discussions around vision and mission for the library were sure to involve staff and the community. Some saw the mission of the library to promote learning and social interaction as well as advanced technology, while others saw the mission as connecting communities. While the strategic process was being developed, the library was planning an open house for its garden area it called the "living library." It had also hired a new library director to manage future changes for the library in May of 2013.

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Exhibit 1: Previous and Current Layouts of Pine River Public Library

Previous Layout
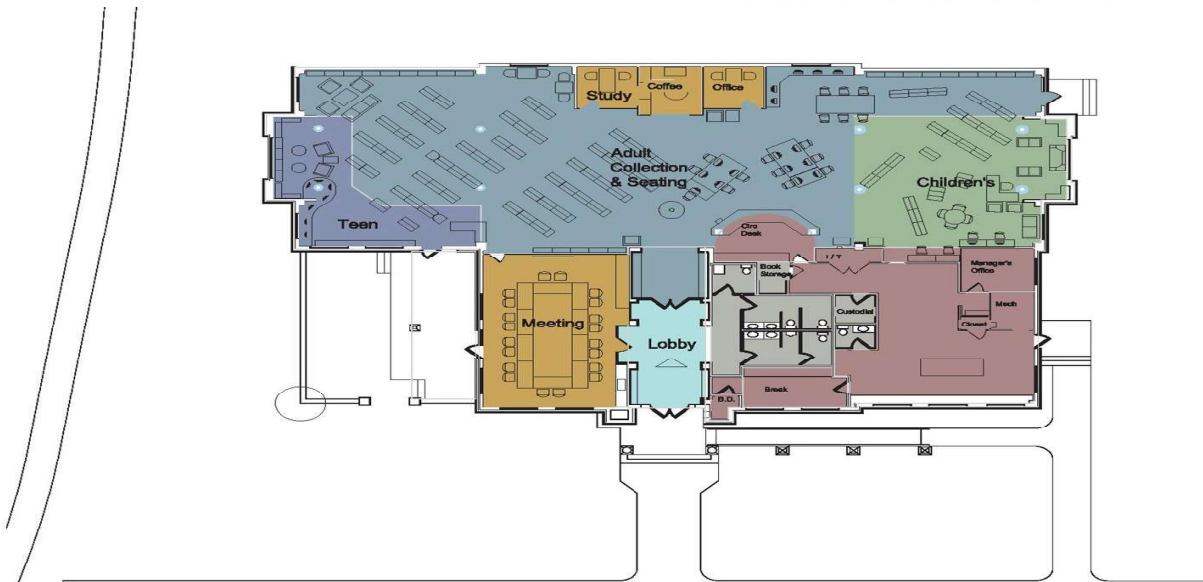
Current Layout
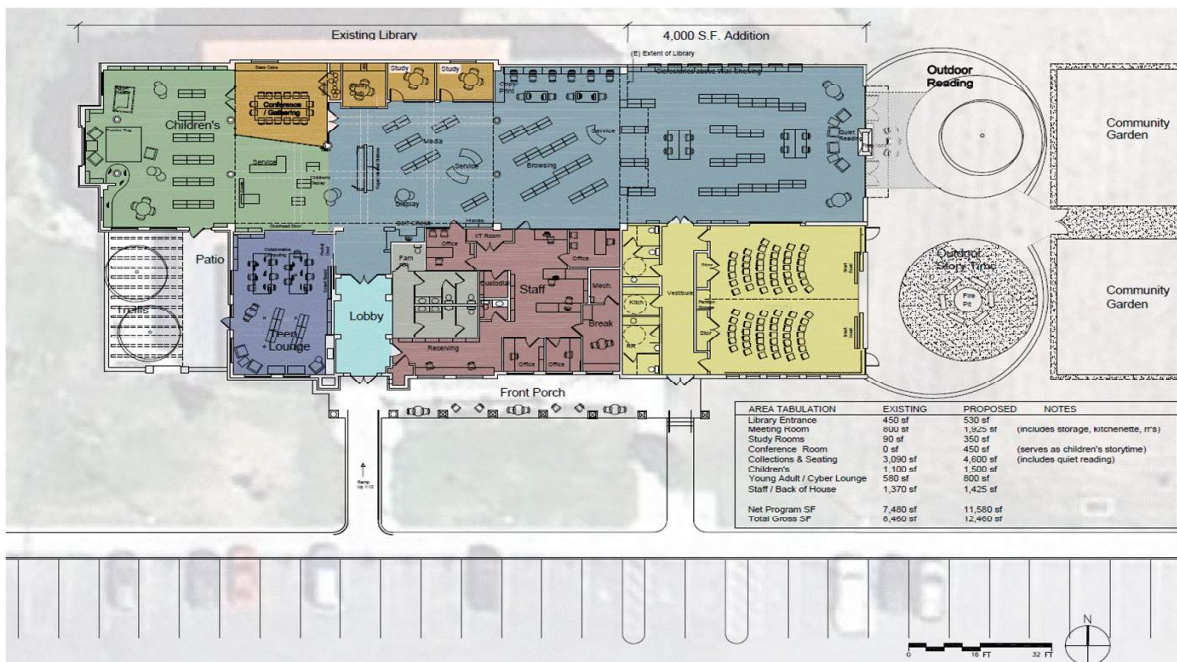
Exhibit 2: Statistics for Pine River Public Library 2009 and 2012

Annual Services	2012	2009
Visits	319,679	139,000
Patrons	8,552	7,051
Circulation	111,638	94,228
Books Loaned to other libraries	308	0
Collection:		
Print Volumes	30,805	23,185
E-Books	7,578	0
Total audio	4,738	1,852
Music	407	0
Electronic music	287	0
Total Video	3,874	3,031
Total Collection	47,689	28,068
Unique Visitors to Website	271,896	Not collected
Public access Internet computers	37	21
Misc. Operation Expenditures	$171,448	$129,257
Total Operation Expenditures	$582,127	$509,346
Capital Expenditures	$1,002,813	$180,730
Prof. Develop Expenditures	$41,098	$14,000
Number of Friends Group Members	20	10
Staff Expenditures per Capita	$42.48	$47.83
Materials expenditures per capita	$5.54	$6.07
Other expenditures per capita	$20.05	$18.33
Total expenditures per capita	$68.07	$72.24
Total revenue per capita	$91.25	$133.24
Staff expenditures per total operation expenditures	62%	66%
Materials expenditures per total operation expenditures	8%	8%
Total collection expenditures	$47408	$42824
Staff salaries and benefits	$363271	$337265
Square footage	12200	8200
Square foot per number of patrons	1.43	1.16
Total operating revenue	$850,372	$947,975
Staff per 1,000 served	0.99	0.92
Staff per 10,000 circulation	0.76	0.69
Staff per 1,000 reference transactions	111.84	216.67
Library visits per capita	37.38	19.71
Circulation per capita	13.05	13.36
Program attendance per 1000 served	738.19	848.67
Summer reading registrants	435	200

Exhibit 3: 2013 Semi-Annual Library Budget

REVENUES	*In dollars*
Donations	1,000
Interest on CD	5,000
Property tax revenue	652,317
Services, charges, fees	30,000
Total Revenue	661,317
EXPENSES	
Audios	4,000
Cataloguing	700
E-Resources	12,200
Books and materials	50,000
Landscaping	1,150
Maintenance	16,275
Misc.	2,720
Postage and delivery	1,200
Building and equipment repairs	1,400
Security	275
Supplies	10,300
Furniture and equipment	16,000
Professional fees	16,000
Programming and marketing	41,680
Technology	45,500
Utilities	25,000
Personnel costs	489,300
County treasurer fee	22,582
Total Expenses	733,700
Net Revenue/Expense	(72,383)

Exhibit 4: Population Race Comparison (2012)

	United States	La Plata County, CO	Bayfield town, CO
Total population	309,138,711	51,443	2,110

	Total	Percent	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent
White	236,362,158	76.5%	45,922	89.3%	1,995	94.5%
Black or African American	41,945,466	13.6%	441	0.9%	74	3.5%
American Indian and Alaska Native	5,049,092	1.6%	3,713	7.2%	55	2.6%
Asian	17,285,143	5.6%	571	1.1%	12	0.6%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	1,107,434	0.4%	54	0.1%	10	0.5%
Some other race	16,417,278	5.3%	1,845	3.6%	27	1.3%

	Total	Percent	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	50,545,275	16.4%	6,119	11.9%	216	10.2%
Not Hispanic or Latino	258,593,436	83.6%	45,324	88.1%	1,894	89.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey

Exhibit 5: Population Educational Attainment Comparison (2012)

	La Plata County, CO	Bayfield town, CO	United States
Population 18 to 24 years	6,127	125	30,822,835
Less than high school graduate	9.1%	13.6%	16.2%
High school graduate (incl. equivalency)	19.9%	28.0%	29.6%
Some college or associate's degree	58.2%	51.2%	44.9%
Bachelor's degree or higher	12.9%	7.2%	9.3%

Population 25 years and over	34,900	1,336	204,336,017
Less than 9th grade	1.8%	0.7%	6.0%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	4.1%	4.0%	8.2%
High school graduate (incl. equivalency)	19.9%	27.1%	28.2%
Some college, no degree	25.5%	30.8%	21.3%
Associate's degree	7.2%	5.8%	7.7%
Bachelor's degree	26.1%	21.7%	17.9%
Graduate or professional degree	15.5%	10.0%	10.6%

Percent high school graduate or higher	94.1%	95.4%	85.7%
Percent bachelor's degree or higher	41.6%	31.7%	28.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey

Exhibit 6: Population Poverty Comparison (2012)

	United States			La Plata County, CO			Bayfield Town, CO		
	Total	Below poverty level	Percent below poverty level	Total	Below poverty level	Percent below poverty level	Total	Below poverty level	Percent below poverty level
Population for whom poverty status is determined	301,333,410	44,852,527	14.9%	49,422	5,510	11.1%	2,064	274	13.3%
AGE									
Under 18 years	72,869,122	15,188,844	20.8%	10,313	1,123	10.9%	605	115	19.0%
Related children under 18 years	72,535,954	14,882,336	20.5%	10,233	1,047	10.2%	605	115	19.0%
18 to 64 years	189,105,463	25,961,446	13.7%	33,195	4,114	12.4%	1,308	149	11.4%
65 years and over	39,358,825	3,702,237	9.4%	5,914	273	4.6%	151	10	6.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey

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