

# Guiding Resident Engagement through Expansion Projects

Environments for Aging Conference

---

March 18, 2026

**DIMELLA  
SHAFFER**



# Session Speakers



**Zehra Abid-Wood**  
President, Lasell Village



**Elizabeth Gray, Assoc. AIA**  
Associate, DiMella Shaffer



**Greg Sweeney, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP BD+C**  
Associate, DiMella Shaffer



SENIOR LIVING  
RESIDENTIAL  
ACADEMIC  
SCIENCE + TECH  
WORKPLACE





LIFELONG LEARNING  
COMMUNITY  
WELLNESS  
EDUCATION  
INTERGENERATIONAL



# Agenda

- » Defining the Engagement Process
  - » Engagement as a Spectrum
  - » Examples – questionnaire
- » Key Elements to Engagement Success
  - » Benefits to Operators
  - » Advantages to Design Team
- » Project Case Studies



# Audience Poll

- » Your Role?
  - » Architect / Designer
  - » Owner / Operator
  - » Product and Material Vendor
  - » Construction Manager
  
- » What do YOU think is the goal of resident engagement?



1

# The Engagement Process



# Engagement as a Spectrum



## Advisory

- Curated Committee



## Collaboration

- Resident Surveys
- Project Status Presentations
- Focus Groups



## Co-design

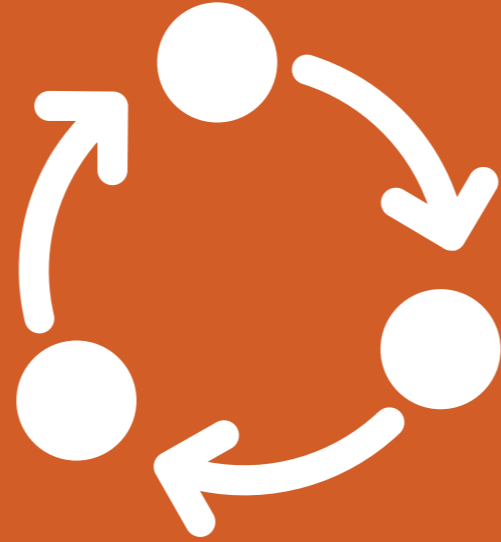
- Hands-on interactive workshops
- Residents included in decision making process

*Meaningful engagement requires clarity about which decisions are truly open.*

# Define the Engagement Process



Collect  
Information



Ideation



Refine &  
Establish  
Consensus



# Resident Engagement



- » Different engagement methods reveal different kinds of insight.
- » Passive – Questionnaires & Surveys to broader group:
  - » Must be carefully constructed, can be limiting
  - » Multi-channel delivery (digital link, hard copy, or both)
  - » Allows for anonymity and reaches quieter voices
  - » Gauges broad sentiment and allows prioritization
- » Active Conversations:
  - » Large community listening sessions
  - » Resident & staff focus groups
  - » Allow residents to have their voices heard
  - » Often provide greater qualitative insight
  - » Best for complex trade-offs, design choices and operational implications



# Focus Groups



- » Project and client dependent – may include;
  - » Exterior & Landscape
  - » Dining
  - » Sustainability
  - » Healthcare
  - » Services
- » Groups should include both residents and staff
- » Established groups participate later in design process

*\*Focus groups should address both physical design decisions as well as how spaces will actually operate.*



# Interactive Engagement



- » Present design project goals and concepts, followed by discussion
- » Charrette with physical tools for ideation – set clear expectations!
  - » Sticky notes
  - » Trace paper
  - » Building/Lego blocks
  - » Voting
  - » Architectural models
- » Interior Design presentations
- » Furniture Fair



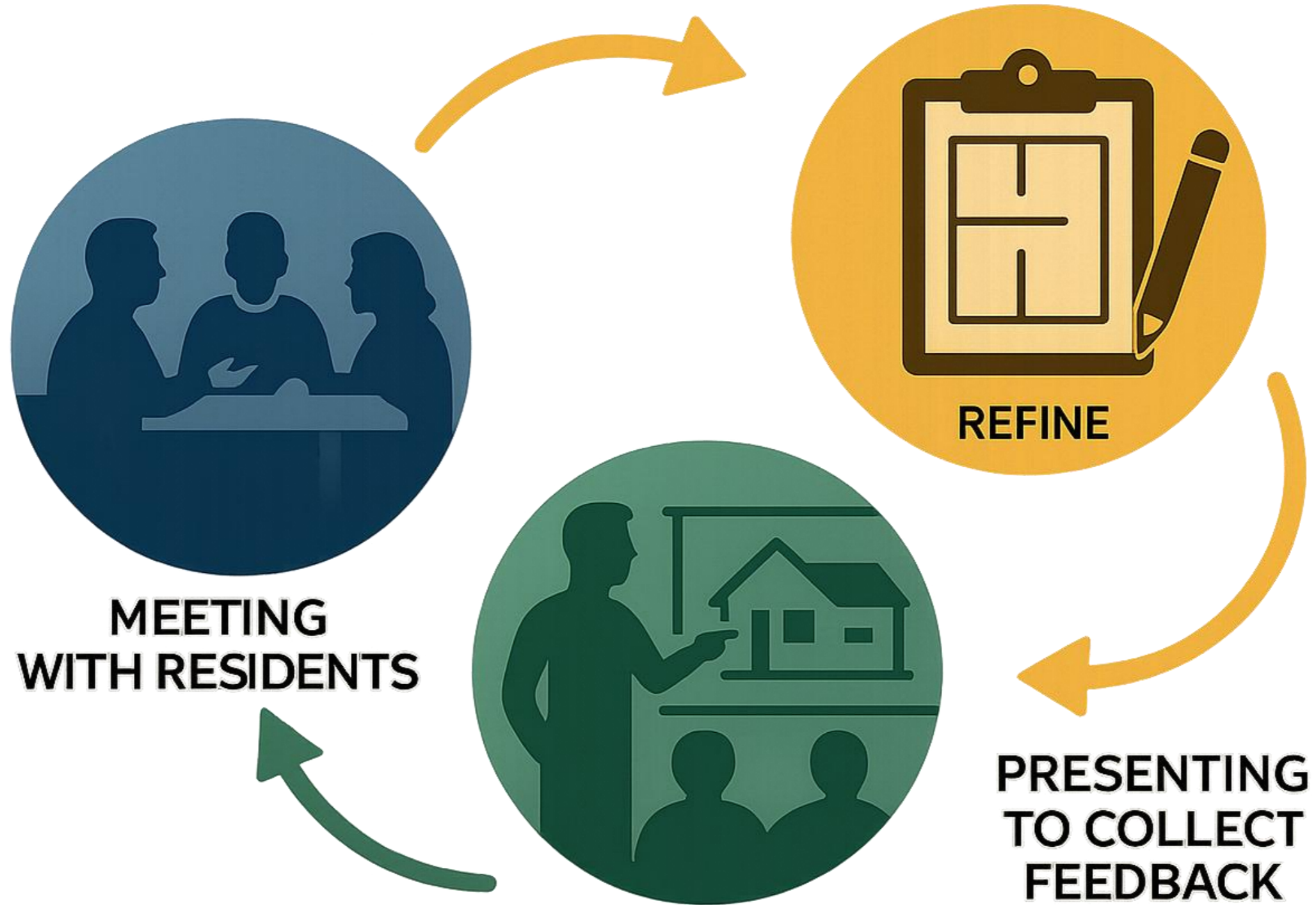
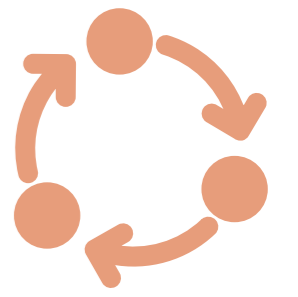
# Don't Forget Future Residents!

- » Current residents protect culture. *Future* residents reveal market demand.
- » Opportunity to gain future consumer data from those on waitlist and potential consumers looking to move to the community
- » Could offer financial incentives

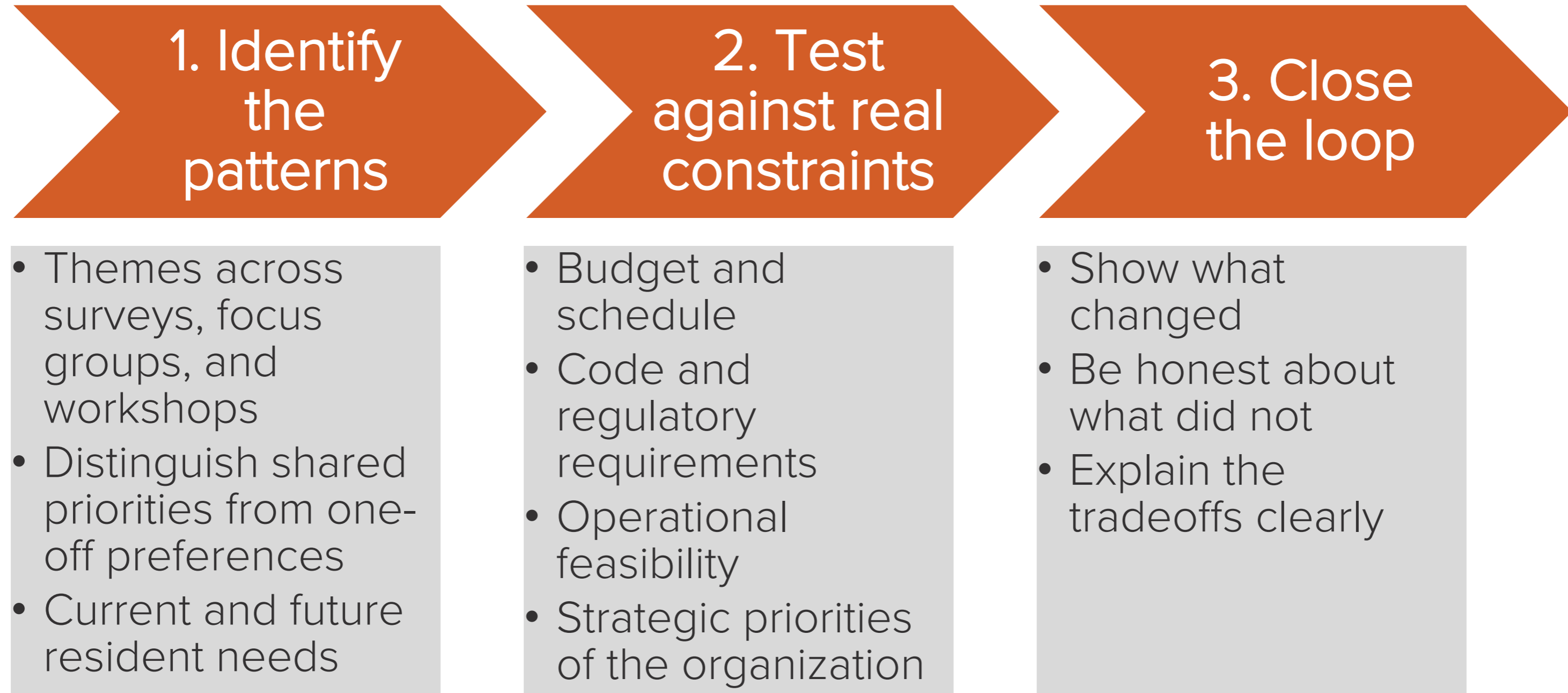


- » **Priority choice of residence**
- » Lock in the best **pre-construction pricing**
- » **Monthly fee waived for two months**
- » Financial Incentives, discounts
- » **Exclusive access** to special events

# Ideation



# Refine and Establish Consensus



*\*Consensus does not mean everyone gets their way. It means stakeholders understand how decisions were made.*

# 2 Elements to Engagement Success



# Elements to Success

- » Identify key players
  - » Management Team:
    - » Budget and operational considerations
    - » Ensure focus groups stay on topic
    - » Identify resident and staff participants
  - » Resident Groups:
    - » Capitalize on in-house experts, institutional knowledge and lived experiences
    - » Strong voices within the community
    - » Varied cognitive and physical abilities
  - » Staff Representatives
    - » Offer operational boots-on-the-ground perspective
    - » Champion change and drive adoption of new processes driven by design change
  - » Design Team:
    - » Guiding/Leading the process

# Elements to Success Cont.

- » Craft the structure of the process
  - » Determined by management & design team
  - » Engagement schedule: Bi-weekly, monthly, or end of each design phase
- » Clear communication & clarity on decision making
  - » Flow of information
  - » Communicate that experience sits with residents but authority sits with leadership
  - » Define what is not up for debate (budget, code, program constraints)
- » Maintain control of the process
  - » Responsibility of management & design team
  - » Keep on schedule to meet project milestones
  - » Close the loop to show residents what changed, what didn't and why

# Goals and Benefits

## » Operators

- » Chance to learn more about current (and future) residents
- » Strengthen trust and connection with residents during disruptive construction
- » Chance to understand operations at a different level
- » Align design with how the community actually functions

## » Design Team

- » Hear current residents' point of view and reveal patterns of behavior in shared spaces
- » Active listening – identify common points of interest across the organization
- » Reinforce initial architectural ideas that will be refined during the design process
  - » Reduces late-stage redesign
- » Improves adoption of new spaces after opening

# 3 Project Case Studies



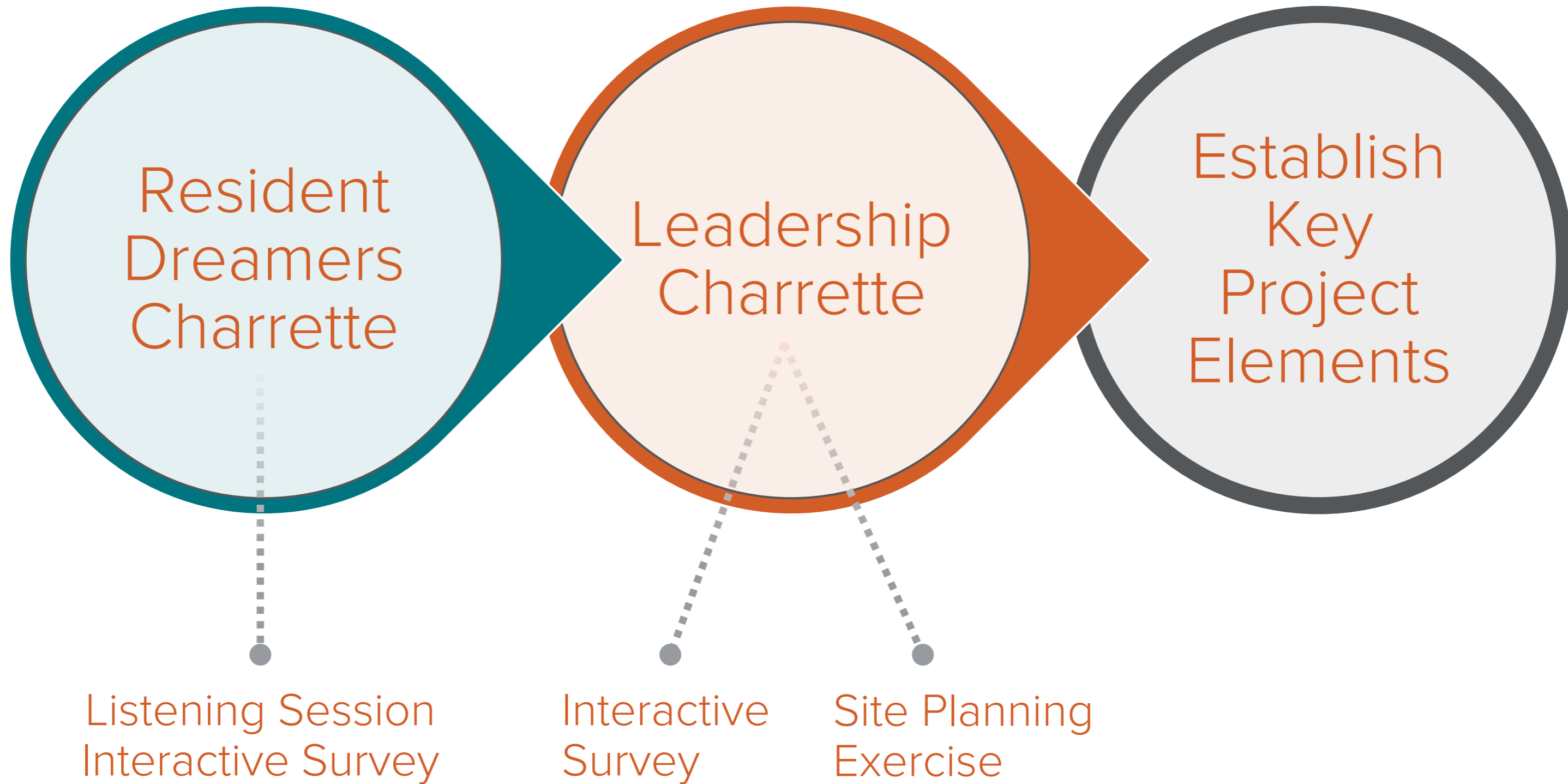
# NORTH HILL

Needham, MA

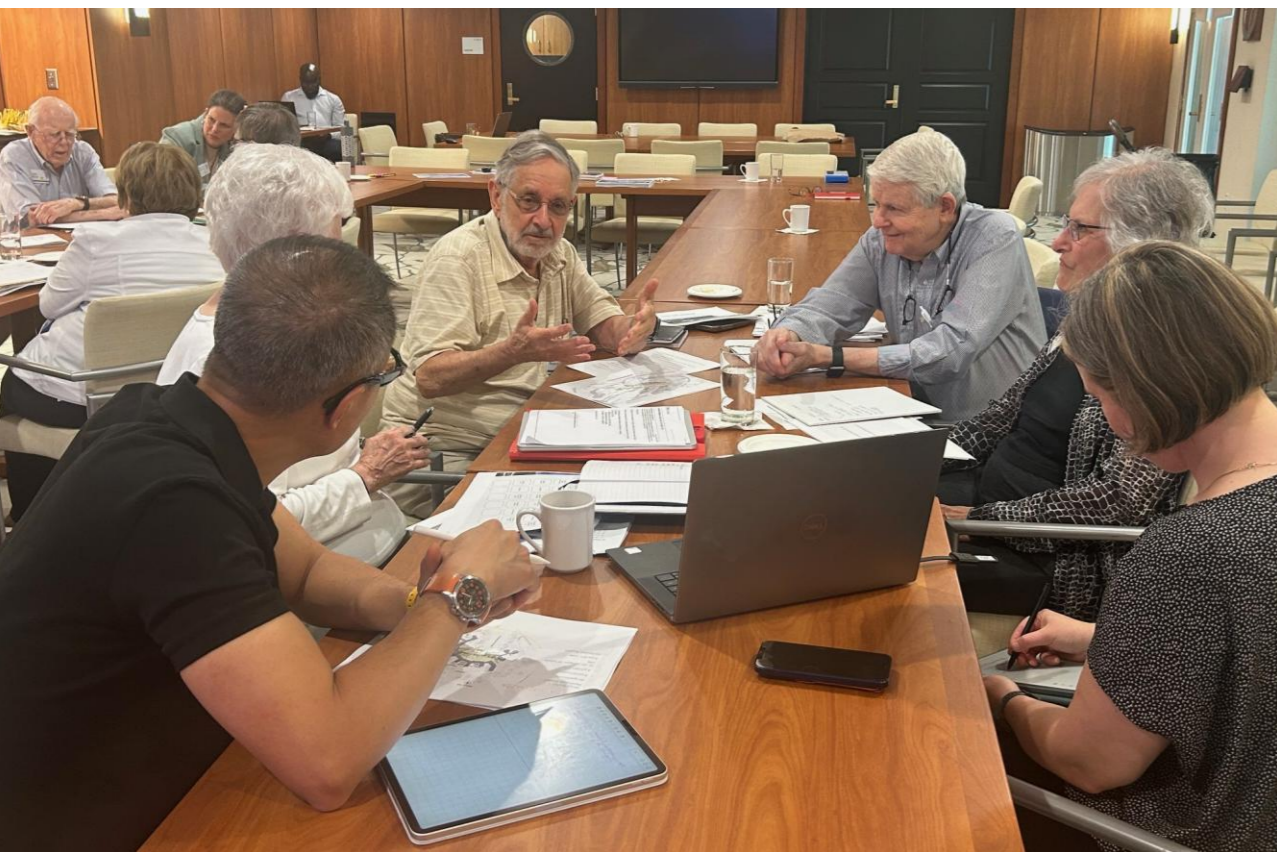


DIMELLA  
SHAFFER

# North Hill Charrette Sequence



# Success of Small Groups



## Design Discussion Prompts

- Part 1: ARRIVAL EXPERIENCE & GREEN SPACES
- > What are your reactions to the Piazza options?
  - > What would you like to see at the new Piazza as part of the arrival experience?
  - > How can we connect the residents better to nature?
- ESSENTIAL & AMENITIES
- > What amenities would you like to see in the new ground level space?
  - > Pros and cons of cottage units, alternate IL scheme?
  - > How do we connect the Fitness Club with the potential relocation of IL Rehab?
  - > What are the pros and cons of the alternate office locations?

DIMELLA SHAFER

# Discussion Prompts

- » What are areas of the existing campus that could be improved?
- » What are some amenities that you would like to see in the future?
  - » On the ground floor
  - » At a rooftop level
  - » Outdoors

# Amenity Priorities – Interactive Survey

Enhanced  
Outdoor  
Green  
Space

Indoor -  
Outdoor  
Connection

Alfresco  
Dining

Casual  
Dining

Rooftop  
Garden

Indoor track

Outdoor  
walking  
paths /  
nature trails

Rooftop  
Lounge

Pickle Ball

Dog Park /  
Dog wash

Food Truck  
area

Art Gallery

Music  
Venue

Indoor  
Games  
(bowling,  
table tennis  
etc.)

Fossil Fuel  
Free

Kids Zone

Astronomy  
Club / Star  
gazing

Indoor rock  
climbing

Solar Panels

Community  
Resiliency  
Hub

Close Easy  
Access for  
Everyone

# OBSERVATIONS – Dreamers Charrette



Group A (Philippe & Elizabeth)

1. Vibrant and active community
2. Like the existing connected campus
3. Active amenities
4. Expanded dining options
5. Meeting room spaces

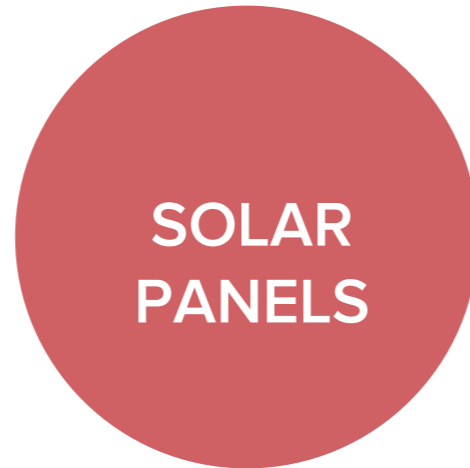


Group B (Taylor & Sapir)

1. Preserve existing community connections and culture
2. Emphasis on equity and accessibility
3. Outdoor amenities (activities)
4. Outdoor dining
5. Solar panels

# OBSERVATIONS – Dreamers Charrette

- Indoor track
- Pickleball
- Dog Park / Dog wash
- Food Truck Area
- Rooftop Garden
- Kids Zone
- Music Venue
- Art Gallery
- Community Resiliency Hub
- Fossil Fuel Free
- Astronomy Club/ Stargazing
- Indoor Rock Climbing



# OBSERVATIONS – Leadership Charrette

- Pickleball
- Solar Panels
- Rooftop Garden
- Kids Zone
- Art Gallery
- Community Resiliency Hub
- Fossil Fuel Free
- Indoor Rock Climbing
- Alfresco Dining (incl. casual choices)





**DIMELLA  
SHAFFER**

**North Hill**  
VIBRANT LIVING FOR PEOPLE AGE 65+

# Lasell Village

Newton, MA



Lasell  
Village

# Project Overview

- » Expansion of Independent Living
  - » New Building housing 42 IL units
  - » Large Multipurpose / Community room
  - » Informal Dining Option – Bistro Style
  - » Consolidated Fitness Center
- » Renovation of Supported Living & Skilled Nursing
  - » Renovate & expand Supported Living offering
  - » New outdoor space for Supported Living units
  - » Improve connection of Supported Living & Larger Lasell Community
  - » Renovate Skilled Nursing to provide homelike environment
  - » Decrease bed count, provide more single-bed rooms with full bathrooms
  - » Bringing food service to each floor in lieu of tray service

# The Engagement Process



Collect  
Information



Ideation



Refine &  
Establish  
Consensus



# Designing Engagement at Lasell Village

Engagement started before design drawings with conversations about:

- Community values
- Future of care
- Resident priorities

Residents shaped both design and services through Programming & Design Groups that addressed:

- Physical space
- Dining models
- Programming
- Service delivery

Clear governance structure ensured alignment on decision making

- Residents influence design
- Board and leadership hold final authority

# Resident Questionnaires



- » Why this Community
- » Perception of quality-of-life
- » Favorite activities offered
- » Additional engagement opportunities
- » Favorite space(s) and why
- » Concerns with proposed site
- » Ways to enhance the Supported Living
- » Ways to enhance the Skilled Nursing
- » Concerns with renovating SL & Skilled



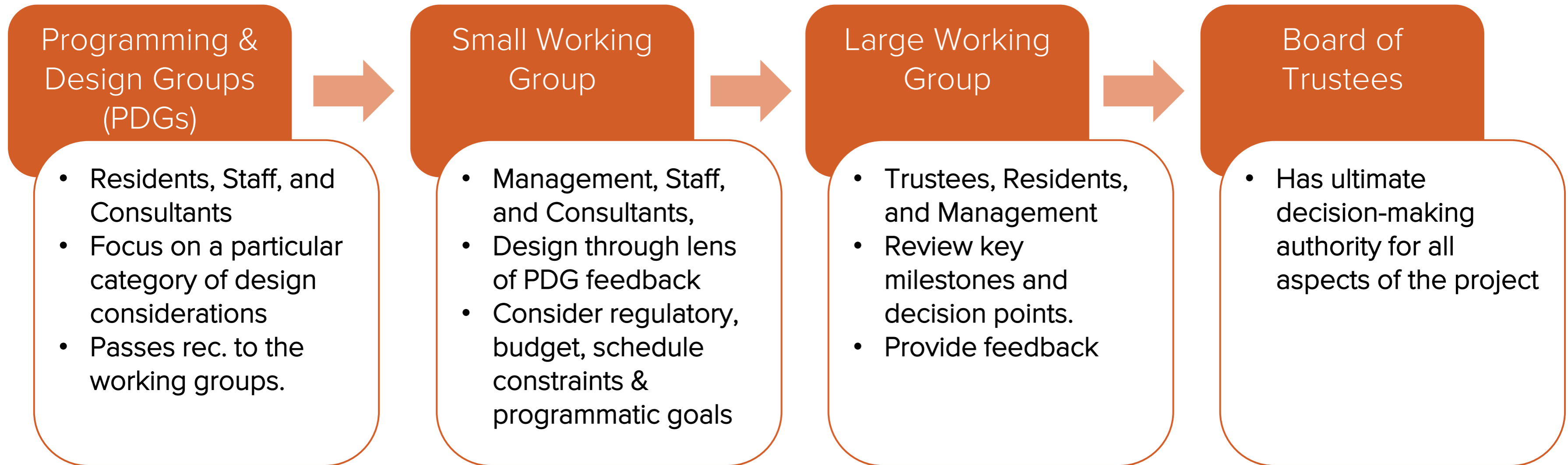
# Focus Groups – aka Programming & Design Groups



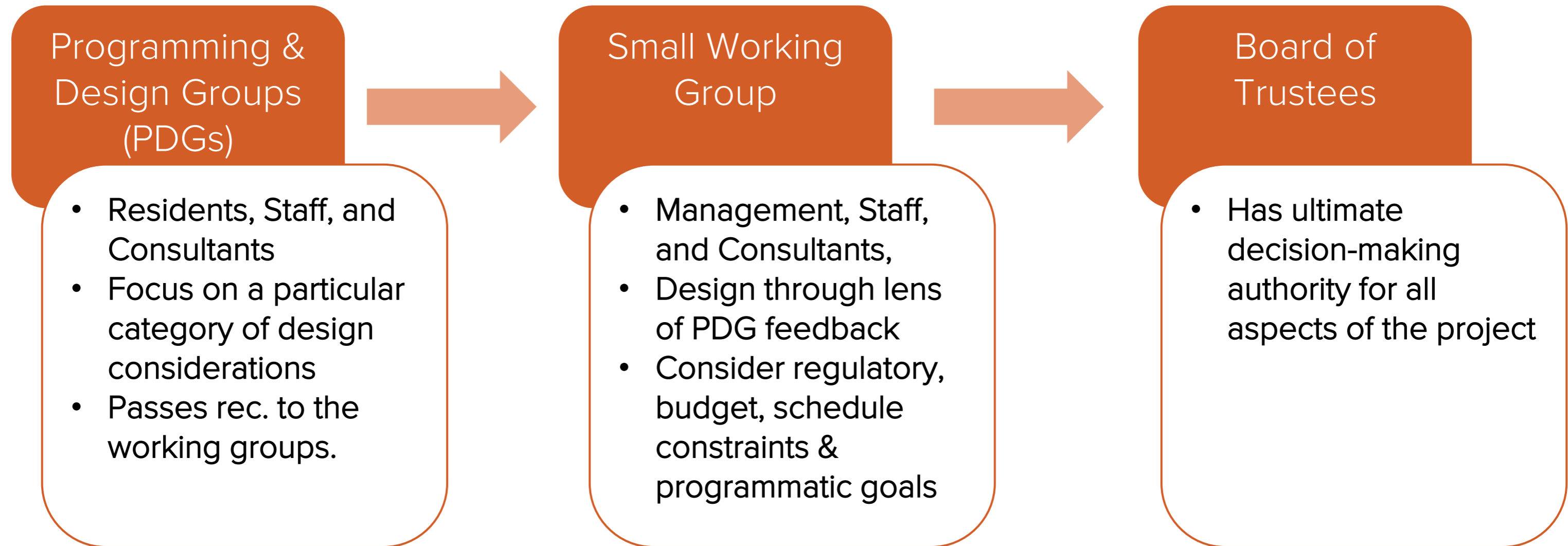
- » Determine existing groups to be involved
- » Establish new groups as required by the program or operational changes
- » Establish Leadership involvement and oversight



# Leadership Involvement



# Leadership Involvement



# Programming and Design Groups (PDGs)



- » Exterior
  - » Outdoor spaces
  - » Grounds & Landscape
- » Sustainability
  - » Fossil fuel free
  - » Solar
  - » Passive House
  - » Sustainable landscape
- » Dining
  - » Dining venues
  - » Kitchen



# Programming and Design Groups (PDGs)



- » Education & Amenities
  - » Programming space
  - » Classrooms
  - » Libraries
  - » Fitness
  - » Resident services
- » Continuum of Care
  - » Supported Living
  - » Skilled Nursing
  - » Wellness Center
- » Operational



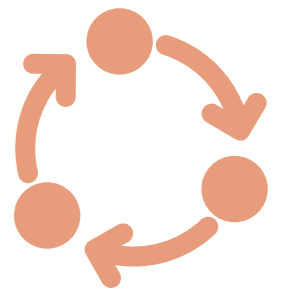
# What Residents Tell Us Matters Most



- » Community & Social Life
  - » Larger community room / performance space
  - » Activate main street
  - » Informal dining space
- » Operational Considerations
  - » Concern with parking
  - » Green roof
  - » Variety of choices, longer hours
- » Sustainability Priorities
  - » Desire to be Net Zero
  - » Track LEED
  - » Limit irrigation use/need
  - » Use healthy building materials
  - » Desire to study Geothermal
- » Wellness & Mobility
  - » Continuous walking path
  - » Dedicated fitness space

*These priorities informed both how the team looked at the physical design and also how management looked at the operational model.*

# PDG Meeting Schedule



	SD	DD	CD	Total
» Exterior	3 meetings	1 meeting	2 meetings	6 meetings
» Sustainability	2 meetings	1 meeting	2 meetings	5 meetings
» Dining	1 meeting	2 meetings	2 meetings	5 meetings
» Education & Amenities	1 meeting	2 meetings	2 meetings	5 meetings
» Continuum of Care	2 meetings	1 meeting	1 meeting	4 meetings

# Refine and Establish Consensus



## 1. Identify the patterns

- Large Community Rm. & Performance
- Informal Dining
- Green Roof
- Limited irrigation
- Cont. walking path
- Dedicated Gym & Fitness space

## 2. Test against real constraints

- SNF proforma, operational factors vs. experience
- Geothermal Study
  - Not Feasible
- No LEED tracking
  - Passive House
- Net Zero Ready

## 3. Close the loop

- Show what changed
- Be honest about what did not
- Explain the tradeoffs clearly

# Furniture Fair: Residents & Staff



# Continued Resident Engagement

- » Construction Learning Sessions
  - » Held Quarterly
  - » Educational Overview of upcoming Construction Activity
- » Café Construction Discussion
  - » Held weekly (30min.)
  - » Ongoing real time Const. updates and Q&A
- » Construction Insight
  - » Included in weekly Newsletter
  - » Advanced notice of specific Const. activities / impacts
- » PDGs Phase 2
  - » Operational & Service Models





Lasell  
Village











# THANK YOU



**Zehra Abid-Wood**  
President, Lasell Village  
[ZAbid-Wood@lasell.edu](mailto:ZAbid-Wood@lasell.edu)



**Elizabeth Gray, Assoc. AIA**  
Associate, DiMella Shaffer  
[egray@dimellashaffer.com](mailto:egray@dimellashaffer.com)



**Greg Sweeney, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP BD+C**  
Associate, DiMella Shaffer  
[gsweeney@dimellashaffer.com](mailto:gsweeney@dimellashaffer.com)