AGE FRIENDLY BERKSHIRE: AGING IN PLACE FORUM RESULTS

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Age Friendly Survey

- Survey conducted by Berkshire Regional Planning Commission & Age Friendly Berkshires Task Force
- Based on AARP Livability Survey
- Berkshire County adults age 50+
- Ran March 1 – April 15, 2015
- Distributed through Councils on Aging, municipal buildings, Elder Services meal sites/meals on wheels, social services agencies, email lists (BRPC, BOH, OLLI, town lists), etc.
- Responses collected directly on line by Survey and on paper copies
Survey Results

• Almost 2,500 responses!
• Good representation by age, income, education, municipality, area of the county
  • Overrepresentation by women, higher income & higher education

• Report of the full results can be found at www.berkshireplanning.org
Aging in Place

One result in particular stood out:

- 82% of respondents said it was “extremely important” to age independently in their own home
- 16% said it was “somewhat important”
- 98% of overall respondents
- True across all groups, though slightly higher among younger & higher income
- Higher #’s than those who said it was important to stay in their community

![Pie chart showing 82% extremely important, 16% somewhat important, 2% not important for aging in place.](chart.png)
People clearly wanted to age in their own homes, but many indicated that they weren’t sure they would be able to.
Aging in Place Forums

- Designed to elicit, through public participation:
  - Barriers to aging in place
  - Which of these barriers were most important
  - Potential solutions to these barriers
8 Areas of Age Friendly Livability

- Transportation
- Housing
- Social Participation
- Communication & Information
- Community Support & Health Services
- Civic Participation & Employment
- Respect & Social Inclusion
- Outdoor Space & Buildings
Transportation Barriers to Aging in Place

- Access to public transportation
- Lack of knowledge about transportation options
- Driving at night
- Loss of license
- Transport to medical appointments, including those in outside the county
- Transportation for shopping
- Transportation to attend cultural & social events, especially at night & on the weekends
Goal: Ensure older adults are fully aware of existing transportation options

Strategies:
- Promote existing transportation options, such as para-transit, COA vans & existing volunteer programs
- Promote BRTA travel training program
- Promote Mass Ride Match & other ride sharing options
Goal: Expand Transportation Options for Older Residents to Address Gaps in the Existing System

Strategies:

• Develop more on-demand transportation options, such as volunteer driver programs, or Uber or Lyft
• Promote AARP & AAA older driver programs
• Encourage more municipalities to offer COA vans
• Advocate for increased funding for regional public transportation
Goal: Reduce the Need for Unnecessary Travel

Strategies:
• Work with local groceries and pharmacies to explore home delivery options
• Develop a comprehensive home delivery/errand service
• Technology training for older adults, including shopping on-line
Housing Barriers to Aging in Place

- Lack of accessible, in-town housing
- Need for one-level living
- Home & yard maintenance
- Household chores / minor maintenance
- Regulatory/zoning banning accessory apartments
- Lack of information about home modifications such as grab bars, ramps, stair lifts
- Finding honest, trustworthy contractors
Housing Solutions

Goal: Ensure Older Residents are Aware of Home Renovation & Financing Options

Strategies:

• Educate older residents about home renovation options to support aging in place
• Educate about funding mechanisms available for renovations or for staying in a home
• Develop & promote options to reduce property taxes, such as senior work off programs
• Promote existing contractor certifications, such as NAHB’s CAPS program
• Develop local contractor referral service
Housing Solutions

Goal: Develop Networks of Volunteers to Provide Low Cost or Free Home Maintenance Services

Strategies:
• Develop volunteer networks for minor home maintenance such as community day of service or National Honor Society
• Work to build robust volunteer networks for older adults to assist each other
Housing Solutions

Goal: Encourage a Variety of Housing Options to Meet the Needs of All Older Adults

Strategies:
- Explore co-housing options with younger residents and with family members
- Identify and promote change to zoning bylaws to support development of in-law apartments/accessory dwellings
- Encourage development of condos, townhomes and apartments, with reduced yard maintenance, especially in areas close to town centers
- Develop a standard shared application for all County subsidized housing
Housing Solutions

Goal: Take Advantage of Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) for Services

Strategies:

• Identify NORCs in Berkshire County and encourage community cohesion
• Develop lower cost options for home services through group pricing/purchasing
Social Participation Barriers to Aging in Place

- Rural living, tied to transportation
- Weakened social lives, difficulty attending cultural and social events
- Feeling unengaged with community
- Lack of interaction with younger people
- Having neighbors, family and friends that can be depended on
- Access to broadband internet
- Learning to effectively use the internet to access services & connect with family & friends
- Social isolation, leading to depression or other mental health issues
Social Participation Solutions

Goal: Develop Self-Sustaining Networks of Berkshire Residents

Strategies:

• Develop facilitated on-going conversations or support groups to promote information exchange and development of solutions
• Facilitate development of local “villages” to join the national “village to village” network
• Identify NORCs in the Berkshires
• Encourage communities to develop & utilize email list serves and online forums, e.g., Front Porch Forum, Alford Assist
• Encourage regular accessible community events and gathering including encouraging those in rural communities to open their homes (Mt. Washington)
Social Participation Solutions

Goal: Older Residents are Welcome and Able to Fully Participate in the Region’s Rich Cultural and Social Offerings and Engage with the Larger Community

Strategies:
• Work with local transportation providers to ensure transport to cultural and social events
• Develop mentorship / visiting programs between older adults and local schools and colleges
• Encourage technology training on Internet or Smartphone usage
• Provide information about social and cultural events in multiple ways to ensure awareness
Communication & Information Barriers to Aging in Place

- Need for a central repository of information to obtain information about services, social events, news, advice on Medicare and accessibility options, housing options, etc., etc.
- Education programs needed about issues such as long term health insurance, end of life options, other legal issues, as well as in using the Internet and other forms of technology
- Need for local newspapers, including town newsletters and local TV
Communication & Information Solutions

Goal: A Coordinated Resource Providing a Central Hub for Information and Services in the Region

Strategies:
• Develop a “one stop shop” resource for information to support aging in place in the region building on and adapting existing models such as the NBCC Resource Guide or Mass 211. Ensure resource is available on line and printed.
• Identify a local organization able to serve as a county-wide telephone point of contact, referral service and resource on aging
Communication & Information Solutions

Goal: Local Communities and the Region at Large Disseminate Information to Older Adults More Effectively

Strategies:
• Encourage the development of local community newsletters / newspapers
• Develop regular PSAs on community television focused on needs of older residents
• Develop community bulletin boards through Facebook or Google where older adults can request and provide information
Community Support & Health Services Barriers to Aging in Place

- Mental & physical conditions making it difficult to care for oneself, including dementia, vision loss and hearing loss.
- Medication management / education about interactions
- Need for transportation to medical appointments, including those in Springfield or Boston
- Accessibility to primary care doctors & specialists
- Access for EMS to their homes / training for EMS in dealing with older adults
- Availability and cost of good home care providers
- Costs associated with medical devices, such as hearing aids
- Negotiating Medicare and Medicaid
- End of life issues
- Care of pets
Goal: Eliminate Unnecessary Medical Travel in the Region

Strategies:
- Promote existing medical transportation options
- Promote and develop telehealth options
- Promote and develop options for home medical care and doctor’s visits
Community Support and Health Services Solutions

Goal: Services to Allow Older Adults to Stay in Their Home are Known and Accessible

Strategies:
• Work with veterinary services, animal shelters and the humane society to develop and promote options that allow older adults to keep their pets
• Providing training and support services for caregivers
• Promote wellness and fitness activities, such as Matter of Balance to reduce falls
• Ensure awareness of all services/programs and financial assistance available
• End of life decision making assistance
Civic Participation & Employment Barriers to Aging in Place

- Ageism in applying for and staying in current jobs
- State legislators and agencies do not understand the unique concerns of the Berkshires, and geographic distance makes it difficult for them to visit their legislators
Civic Participation & Employment Solutions

Goal: Officials, Businesses & Local Organizations are Aware of and Engaged in the Challenges of Aging in the Region

Strategies:

• Encourage volunteerism among older residents, including serving on municipal and non-profit boards
• Encourage legislators to hold accessible events outside major population centers
• Educate older adults on other ways to contact legislators / state agencies
• Educate local businesses and organizations about the issue of aging in the region, and the benefits to older workers.
Respect and Social Inclusion Barriers to Aging in Place

- Opinions of children and other family – children feeling they know best for the aging parent, “too old” to live on their own
- Stigma in accepting services
- Lack of engagement in larger community, especially with younger people
- Emergency medical personnel and other health care providers lack training in needs of older adults
Respect and Social Inclusion Solutions

Goal: Residents and Organizations are Aware of and Sensitive to the Needs of Older Adults

Strategies:
• Develop or promote options for aging awareness or “senior sensitivity” training
• Develop training specifically for emergency medical personnel
Outdoor Spaces and Buildings Barriers to Aging in Place

- Physical barriers to events and public buildings, such as a lack of ramps, adequate railings, and high steps
- Need for accessible paths in recreation areas for walking
- Desire to be able to walk to town, to go shopping or to a medical appointment
Goal: Public Spaces, Buildings and Select Recreation Areas are Universally Accessible

Strategies:
- Work with local land trusts and municipalities to identify, create, and promote age friendly & universally accessible parks and hiking/walking trails
- Encourage municipalities to adopt “complete streets” policies and address pedestrian and bicycle accommodations on local roadways
- Encourage municipalities to address the accessibility of public buildings and facilities
Next Steps

- Draft report will be available at www.berkshireplanning.org
- Findings will be incorporated into the Age Friendly Berkshires Strategic Plan
- Implementation / Action Steps will be developed
Questions?