

AGE FRIENDLY BERKSHIRES ACTION PLAN

November 1, 2017



Making the Berkshires a great place to grow up and a great place to grow old!



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The Berkshires – A great place to grow up and a great place to grow old!

INTRODUCTION

AGE FRIENDLY BERKSHIRES MISSION

To create a more livable Berkshire County for people of all ages, with a focus on the needs of an aging population.

WHAT IS AGE FRIENDLY?

Age Friendly Communities are communities that are livable, provide opportunities for work and leisure and are inclusive of all residents. An Age Friendly community enables people of all ages to actively participate in community activities and treats everyone with respect, regardless of their age. It is a place that makes it easy for older people to stay connected to people that are important to them. It helps people stay healthy and active even at the oldest ages and provides appropriate support to those who can no longer look after themselves. As the U.S. population ages and people stay healthy and active longer, communities must adapt. Well-designed, livable communities promote health and sustain economic growth, and they make for happier, healthier residents of all ages.

Although most age-friendly services are local, the movement itself is global. Internationally, the World Health Organization (WHO) has provided key leadership with its Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities. In 2006, WHO brought together 33 cities in 22 countries to help determine the key elements that support active and healthy aging, which formed the basis of its *Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide*.¹

In the United States, the Age Friendly Communities program is administered by AARP. AARP works with local officials and partner organizations around the country to identify communities for membership in the Age-Friendly Network. AARP then facilitates the community's enrollment and guides its representatives through the network's implementation and assessment process. At last count, 193 communities, representing more than 61 million people, have joined the AARP Age Friendly Communities.²

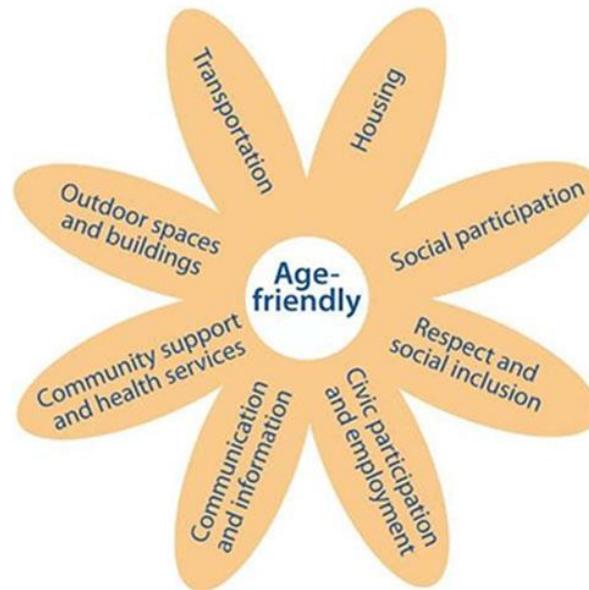


¹ Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide can be downloaded at http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/age_friendly_cities_guide/en/

² AARP, <http://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/info-2014/member-list.html>

EIGHT DOMAINS OF LIVABILITY

The WHO and AARP's vision includes eight Domains of Livability to consider in designing an age-friendly community. The eight domains include Civic Engagement and Employment, Communication and Information, Community Support and Health Services, Housing, Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, Respect and Social Inclusion, Social Participation and Transportation. These eight can be roughly divided into two areas: The Built Environment and the Social Environment. The Age Friendly Berkshires Action Plan is organized by these eight domains.



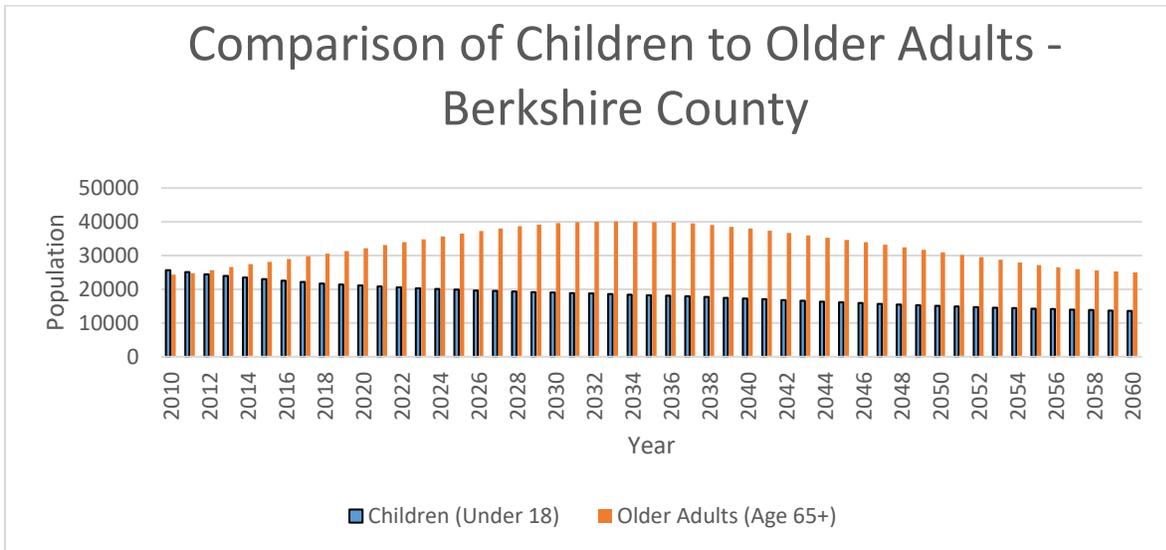
WHY AGE FRIENDLY BERKSHIRES?

The United States is currently undergoing an unprecedented aging of the population. Baby boomers began turning 65 in 2011, and every day for the next 20 years 10,000 Americans will celebrate their 65th birthday.³ Already one in three Americans is aged 50 or older; by 2030, one in five will be over the age of 65.⁴ In Berkshire County, this shift is happening sooner and faster than in other parts of the state and the country. By 2030 the United States population over age 65 is expected to overtake the number of those under 18. In Berkshire County, this shift occurred in 2012. This appears to be a permanent change in Berkshire County, with the number of adults over 65 continuing to increase and the percentage of children continuing to decline.

³ Pew Research Center

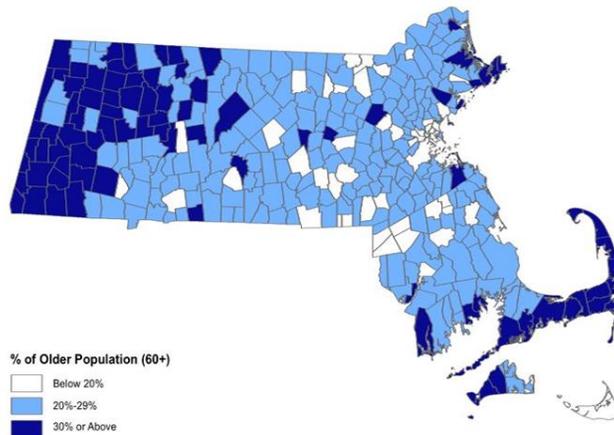
⁴ AARP

Comparison of Children to Older Adults - Berkshire County



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With a median age of 44, Berkshire County is older than Massachusetts (median age of 39) and the country (median age 36). In Massachusetts, only Cape Cod has a higher percentage of older adults, compared to the entire population, than Berkshire County.



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Projections show that both the absolute numbers and the proportion of older adults in Berkshire County will continue to increase, while the number of younger adults and children will continue to decrease. In 2010, ten of the 32 municipalities in Berkshire County had populations that were 20% or more adults over the age of 65. By 2020, three years from now, the Donahue Institute projects that all but two of the municipalities in the county will have populations that are more than 20% adults over the age of 65. Several municipalities will be close to or over 40% adults over the age of 65.

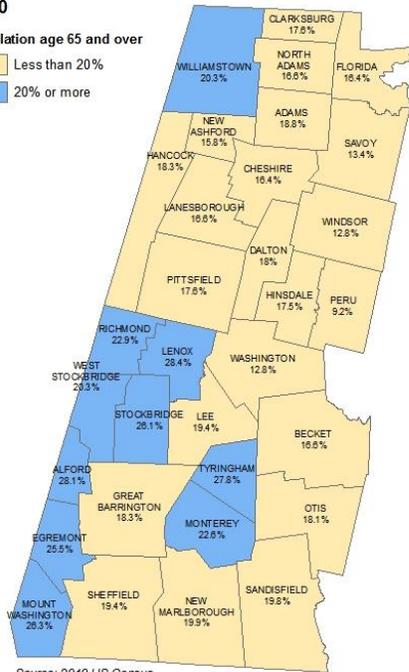
⁵ Graph from Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Berkshire County Population Projections, 2014

⁶ Center for Social & Demographic Research on Aging. Gerontology Institute. UMASS Boston. Based on data from the Donahue Institute, University of Massachusetts.

2010

Population age 65 and over

- Less than 20%
- 20% or more

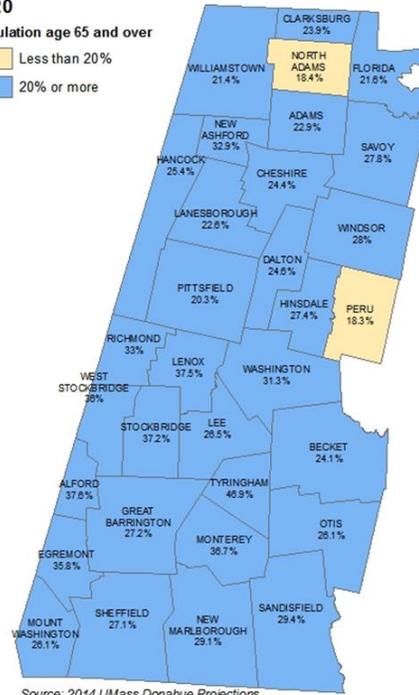


Source: 2010 US Census

2020

Population age 65 and over

- Less than 20%
- 20% or more



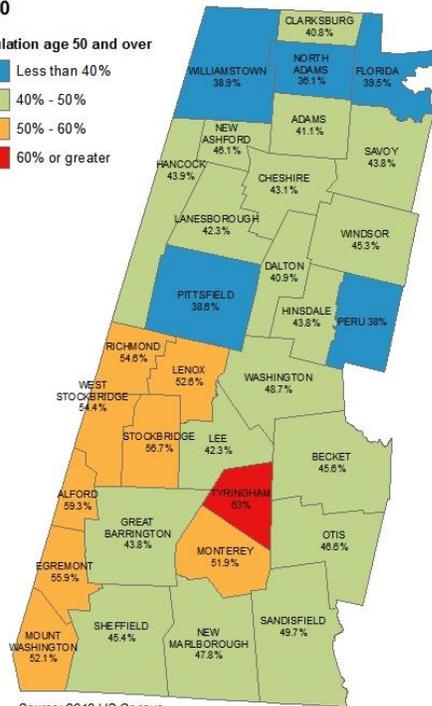
Source: 2014 UMass Donahue Projections

Similarly, the proportion and number of adults over the age of 50 will continue to rise. In 2010, the over 50 age group made up 40% or more of most Berkshire County municipalities. By 2030, less than fifteen years from now, the majority of Berkshire County municipalities will have populations that are 60% or more residents aged 50 or over, and all but North Adams and Williamstown, with substantial college student populations, will be over 40%.

2010

Population age 50 and over

- Less than 40%
- 40% - 50%
- 50% - 60%
- 60% or greater

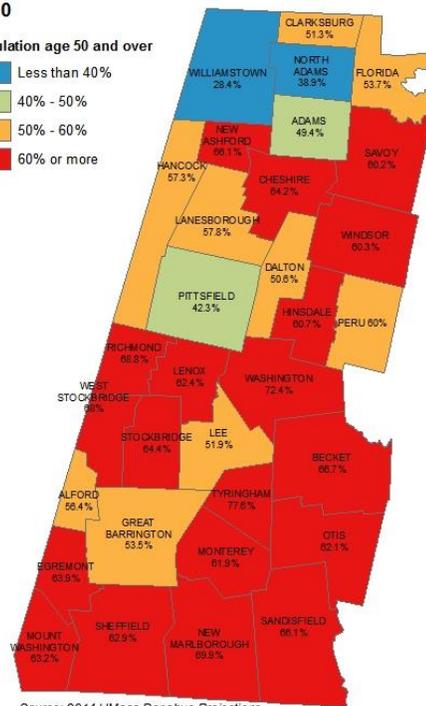


Source: 2010 US Census

2030

Population age 50 and over

- Less than 40%
- 40% - 50%
- 50% - 60%
- 60% or more



Source: 2014 UMass Donahue Projections

With these demographic changes, the needs of the community also change in dramatic ways, in areas such as health care, employment, housing, transportation, emergency preparedness and social inclusion and participation. Age Friendly Berkshires is working to create a community that embraces and supports older adults, while also taking advantage of all the benefits that older adults can bring to the community.

AGE FRIENDLY BERKSHIRES BACKGROUND

In mid-2014, a group of interested Berkshire County professionals, led by Bobbie Orsi, Director of Community Relations at Home Instead Senior Care, began to meet and explore how to make Berkshire County a more age-friendly place to live, work and play. The Age Friendly Berkshires Partner Organizations was more formally implemented in late 2014, with representation from numerous sectors of the community such as planning, health care, home care, housing, education, councils on aging, municipalities, boards of health, business, cultural organizations and others. Organizations that have participated in the Partner Organizations include Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Home Instead Senior Care, Berkshire County Boards of Health Association, Tri-Town Health Department/Be Well Berkshires, the City of Pittsfield Health Department, the Councils on Aging from Adams, Williamstown, Pittsfield, Great Barrington and North Adams, Elder Services of Berkshire County, Inc., Berkshire Health Systems, Osher Lifetime Living Institute (OLLI) of Berkshire Community College, Rainbow Seniors of Berkshire County, Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority, Northern Berkshire Community Coalition (NBCC), the Berkshire Alzheimer's Association, Kimball Farm, 1Berkshire, City of Pittsfield Mayor's Office, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), the Berkshire Music School, AARP MA, Berkshire Area Health Education Center (BAHEC), Health New England and several others.

In early spring 2015, the Age Friendly Berkshires survey was released, and almost 2,500 responses were received from adults age 50 and over living in Berkshire County.⁷ In June 2015, Age Friendly Berkshires was formally accepted into the AARP Network of Age Friendly Communities. Also in June 2015, Age Friendly Berkshires held a large public summit to launch the effort, with 125 attendees. That same month, Age Friendly Berkshires was awarded a generous two-year grant from the Tufts Health Plan Foundation to implement the planning process toward an age-friendly Berkshire County and leading to this Action Plan.

Since 2015, Age Friendly Berkshires has had a number of successes, including the formation of the Active Agers Advisory Council (AAAC), three public forums to elicit feedback on the obstacles to aging in place and potential solutions⁸, creation of a workbook and training video

⁷ The final report from the Age Friendly Berkshires Survey can be found at http://berkshireplanning.org/images/uploads/projects/Berkshire_County_Age_Friendly_Survey_Report_FINAL_Sept_2015.pdf

⁸ The final report from the Aging in Place Forums can be found at http://berkshireplanning.org/images/uploads/projects/FULL_REPORT_final.pdf

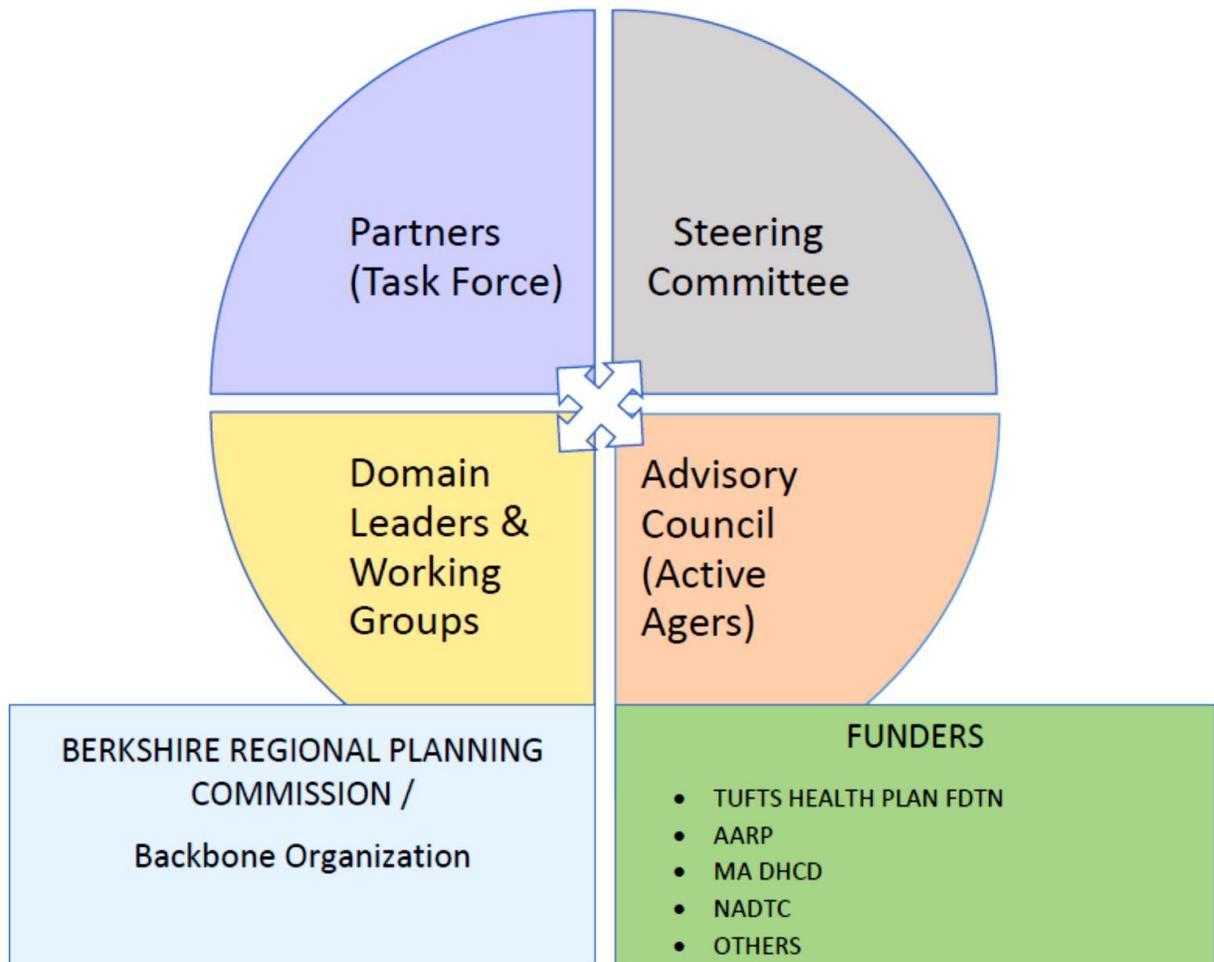
for residents who wish to age in place⁹, receiving the Peter R. Lee Award at the 2016 Ounce of Prevention Conference, sponsoring an Executive Office of Elder Affairs breakfast with Secretary Alice Bonner, becoming a stop on the Dr. Bill Thomas Age of Disruption Tour and multiple other events and trainings. In 2017, the work continued with the development of an Age Friendly Berkshires website (www.agefriendlyberkshires.com) supported by a grant from AARP - Massachusetts, and the piloting of a transportation-sharing program between Councils on Aging in different municipalities, supported by a grant from the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC).



Aging in Place Forum, Froio Senior Ctr, Pittsfield

⁹ The creation of the workbook was supported by a grant from the MA Department of Public Health and the Mass Association of Health Boards. The workbook can be found at http://berkshireplanning.org/images/uploads/projects/Aging_In_Place_Booklet_9.8.2016.pdf and the video can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDxNaEKNYBc>.

In June 2017, Age Friendly Berkshires was awarded a second, two-year grant from the Tufts Health Plan Foundation, to implement the Action Plan and continue the work of Age Friendly Berkshires. Over the summer months of 2017, a smaller Steering Committee was formed to supplement the work of the Partner Organizations, and, following the Collective Impact Model, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) was designated as the backbone agency for Age Friendly Berkshires. The current AFB structure is represented by the following diagram:



The initial steps after joining the AARP Age Friendly Communities Network include garnering political commitment, organizing stakeholders and establishing an advisory committee of older adults. The community then enters a planning phase, which begins with a community-wide assessment, and culminates in a three-year community-wide action plan. The Age Friendly Berkshires' Action Plan incorporates findings from the Age Friendly Berkshires Survey in 2015, as well as the three Aging in Place Forums held in 2016. Eight domain leaders, one for each domain of livability, were hired in late 2016 to conduct strategic interviews with key stakeholders and to produce the first draft of the plan framework in their area of expertise. The

plan was then assembled by Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, and provided to the Age Friendly Berkshires Partner Organizations and the Active Agers' Advisory Council for feedback.

The eight Domain Leaders were:

Civic Engagement and Employment: Megan Whilden, Executive Director, Osher Lifetime Learning Institute (OLLI) at Berkshire Community College (BCC).

Communication and Information: Roger Gutwillig, Active Agers Advisory Council/Berkshire Museum docent.¹⁰

Community Support and Health Services: Dominica D'Avella, I.D.E.A.L. Health & Wellness Solutions.

Housing: Van Ellet, Williamstown Housing Committee.

Outdoor Spaces and Public Buildings: Melissa Provencher, Energy and Environment Program Manager, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.

Respect and Social Inclusion: Vicky Smith.

Social Participation: Beryl Jolly, Executive Director, Mahaiwe Theater.

Transportation: Robert James, Transportation Issues Study Volunteer with Pittsfield Community Legal Services.

The Plan presented here is quite ambitious - with a broad range of detailed goals, strategies and action steps. Many of these strategies and actions are dependent on resources in time, money and organizational support which may or may not materialize. Arguably, fewer goals would be more achievable; however, AFB felt that given the uncertainties of resource availability, it was wiser to have more goals from which to choose, to enhance agility. The aim is to achieve some success in all goals, strategies and actions described here over the next three years. Resources, partners and collaborations will be sought with that goal in mind.

This plan is designed to be dynamic and will be evaluated regularly. At least once a year, a formal evaluation process by the entire Task Force will occur and the plan adjusted accordingly.

In addition to uncertainties related to resources, the "responsible parties" identified in the detailed plan sections are also intended to be fluid and dynamic and to change as circumstances require. In general, AFB Backbone Staff refers to Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) staff members. Partner Organizations may mean the entire Task Force, or more often, individual organizations that sit on the Task Force and whose mission or expertise suits them to a task. The Active Agers' Advisory Council, abbreviated as AAAC throughout the

¹⁰ Communication subcommittee consisted of Lesley Ann Beck, Berkshire Museum, Diane Pearlman- Berkshire Film and Media Collaborative, and Rhonda Serre, Elder Services of Berkshire County

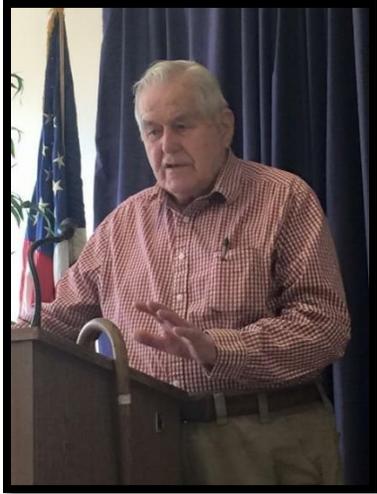
detailed sections, refers to the advisory group made up of active and interested community members. Although the AAAC role is advisory, several members will play an active role in designing, operating or publicizing one or more Age Friendly Berkshires Actions. Domain Leaders are members of the AAAC or other community members, hired as subject matter experts to help guide one or more actions or strategies through to completion.

AGE FRIENDLY BERKSHIRES DOMAINS OF LIVABILITY - OVERARCHING GOALS

- Identify baseline data for each Area of Livability. Identify and integrate best practices from other Age Friendly communities across the U.S. and internationally.
- Determine a set of evaluation measurements for each domain. Evaluate progress continuously; make course corrections as necessary.
- Ensure the sustainability of Age Friendly Berkshires initiatives by concentrating on policy, programs, systems and environmental changes whenever possible.
- Increase representation on the Active Agers Advisory Council to enhance geographic representation and diversity.
- Gain commitment from Age Friendly Berkshires partner organizations to incorporate Age-friendly initiatives and policies into their on-going work.
- Encourage the passage of municipal Age Friendly Resolutions in all 32 municipalities
- Design policies, systems or environmental changes with the goal of greater equity, accessibility, respect and inclusiveness for all Berkshire residents
- Incorporate Dementia Friendly precepts into AFB program, as appropriate
- Ensure consistency with other Plans already in existence

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & EMPLOYMENT: WHAT WE HEARD

Older people are an asset to any community and many continue contributing their time and



talents even after retirement. An age-friendly community provides multiple and diverse ways older people can, if they choose, continue to work for pay, volunteer their skills and be actively engaged in community life and the political process.

Seniors' diverse skill sets, life experiences and achievements are applicable to a wide range of "second career" employment. There is a need for ways of connecting older people to existing opportunities, particularly on municipal and nonprofit boards and commissions, and for identifying where the community might benefit from new programs or from matching experienced older people with employers, business incubators, and school training programs.

Technology training for older adults helps them remain relevant and connected. Entrepreneurial seniors should be connected to existing workforce development resources to foster greater self-sufficiency.

Age discrimination in the workplace continues to be a barrier for older workers. Educating employers on the benefits of retaining and recruiting older workers can help increase employment opportunities. The workplace can be made more welcoming for older adults to put their experience and expertise to use in new ways.



Most adults who are drawn to participate in the political process do so because of issues that affect them directly. But that's not all – many have a desire to "give back" to society. Lifetime experience can help inform local programs, policy and legislation. Concern about the world we are passing on to future generations also plays a role in civic participation. An Age Friendly Community enables and encourages active engagement of all residents in political and civic life.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & EMPLOYMENT DOMAIN

GOALS AT A GLANCE

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT GOALS

- Increase opportunities for active participation in civic affairs for all residents.
- Increase the number of older adults who participate as volunteers on local municipal, government, community boards and commissions.
- Strengthen outreach efforts to potential volunteers, including organizing information about volunteer opportunities in one location.
- Facilitate the use of volunteers by county organizations by offering training and support to both potential organizations/managers and potential volunteers.

EMPLOYMENT GOALS

- Increase employer awareness of the benefits of employing older adults.
- Recognize and encourage employers who offer part time, work from home, flexible hours and other benefits for older workers.
- Increase training opportunities for older adults to develop skills necessary to meet the needs of a dynamic workforce.
- Facilitate opportunity for entrepreneurship and mentoring programs.
- Increase opportunities for financial planning to enable older workers to plan for retirement.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & EMPLOYMENT DOMAIN

Civic Engagement Goal 1: Increase numbers of older adults running for election, volunteering for, serving on municipal boards and commissions.

Strategy	Action Steps	Potential Leads	Year	
1. Publicize opportunities to serve on municipal boards and commissions.	1a. Utilize local town newsletters and email lists to publicize opportunities in local government.	Municipalities	1	
	1b. Post openings on job/volunteer websites.	Relevant organizations; AFB Website	1	
2. Ensure information on the requirements for running for municipal positions are accessible and widely shared.	2a. Organize educational forums on running for office, featuring current and former municipal officials.	Municipalities; professional organizations; AFB Backbone Staff;	2	
	2b. Gather and adapt educational print materials on the requirements and opportunities for public office	Partner Organizations members	2	
3. Provide initial training for new municipal board/commission members	3a. Identify organizations able to conduct orientation classes adapted to the relevant boards/commissions. See Board of Health training by BCBOHA; the Planning Board Training by BRPC; CPTC, EANE, etc.	AFB Backbone Staff	2	
	3b. Design Orientation Classes, if necessary	Identified organizations	2-3	
	3c. Run orientation classes annually post-election, or on-demand by municipalities		3	
4. Encourage local boards to convene regularly for continuing education, networking and refresher training	4a. Identify which boards/commissions are already holding events (BCBOHA twice yearly for BOH, Selectmen’s Organization, BRPC 5 th Thursday series).	AFB Backbone Staff	1	
	4b. Identify any boards / commissions with a need.	AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations	1	
	4c. Identify organizations to facilitate / organize events.		2	
	4d. Hold events at least annually.	Identified organizations	2-3	
5. Develop mentoring system for municipal boards/commissions	5a. Identify organization willing to provide organizational infrastructure.	AFB Backbone Staff & Partner Organizations; municipal boards	2	
	5b. Identify experienced individuals willing to mentor new board / commission members.			
	5c. Publicize mentoring service to new or prospective board/commission members.	Identified organization; municipalities; board members	3	
	5d. Continuously evaluate program and modify, as needed		Identified organizations; AFB Backbone Staff	

Civic Engagement Goal 2: Increase engagement in government and civic affairs, such as attending public meetings, advocating and informing elected officials and speaking up on issues of importance.			
1. Create more opportunities to become educated on civic issues.	<p>1a Establish moderated local issue discussion groups at local senior centers, libraries, clubs and other organizations.</p> <p>1b. Increase the number of current events-related courses available through local educational institutions.</p>	COAs; libraries; other municipal or political organizations; Partner Organizations OLLI, MCLA, etc.	1 2-3
2. Create more opportunities to engage with elected officials	<p>2a. Increase publicity and outreach for visits and talks by elected officials to senior centers, clubs, etc.</p> <p>2b. Encourage councils on aging and/or others to provide or organize group transportation to events with public official.</p> <p>2c. Establish an annual Age Friendly Berkshires legislative breakfast.</p>	Partner Organizations members; AAAC; COAs; municipalities; political organizations; AFB Website; transit organizations AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations	1
3. Increase publicity and outreach for public meetings and calls for comment on important local issues	<p>3a. Increase use of “free” media to publicize events, e.g., town newsletters, email lists, press releases, partner websites, etc.</p> <p>3b. Encourage COAs to provide transportation for evening meetings, including annual Town Meeting and Special Town Meetings.</p>	Municipalities; AFB Website; Partner Organizations member contact lists; AAAC COAs	1
Civic Engagement Goal 3: Older adults can find volunteer opportunities that suit their schedule, interests and skills.			
1. Develop and support a web-based portal that identifies all volunteer opportunities in Berkshire County	<p>1a. Develop committee to review existing volunteer match websites or to determine if a custom website is better.</p> <p>1b. Identify host organization to take responsibility for the website.</p>	AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations, Domain Leader/Working Group; AAAC	1
	<p>1c. Meet with media outlets to arrange partnership opportunities to provide pro-bono or discounted marketing for the website.</p>	Identified organization	2
	<p>1d. Determine methods to publicize site</p> <p>1e. Gather volunteer opportunities from nonprofits, businesses, municipalities and agencies via press releases, town newsletters, public TV, advertisements, emails, and direct outreach on an ongoing basis.</p>	Identified organization; COAs; libraries	

Civic Engagement Goal 4: Prepare organizations to effectively use volunteers, and older adults to become effective volunteers			
1. Identify skills needed for successful volunteering by type/interest area and develop materials/training to assist organizations	1a. Survey organizations using volunteers to determine skills needed; identify greatest need(s)	Domain Leader/Working Group; AFB Backbone Staff	2
	1b. Identify organizations to adapt or develop written materials on using volunteers successfully, or to develop curriculum and provide training	Partner Organizations; AAAC	
	1c. Provide materials/information to relevant organizations	Identified organization; AAAC; Partner Organizations	3
	1d. Conduct classes in several locations in region in partnership with organizations that use volunteers	Identified organization(s)	
2. Develop a model training/orientation for organizations that use volunteers	2a. Survey organizations on their needs for volunteers; survey those interested in volunteering about what they seek	AFB Backbone Staff	2
	2b. Develop a template for training/orientation; curriculum and course material	Identified organization; Partner Organizations; Domain Leader/Working Group	3
	2c. Market to organizations that use volunteers		
3. Develop volunteer leadership programs individuals who are interested in serving on non-profit or other boards.	3a. Identify open leadership positions/types of organizations that need members of boards, etc.	Domain Leader/Working Group; Partner Organizations; AAAC; AFB Backbone Staff	1
	3b. Survey organizations on skills needed		
	3c. Develop leadership course based on OLLI's Leadership Academy	Identified organization (OLLI)	2
	3d. Schedule trainings 2-3 times per year in different parts of the county		
Employment Goal 1: Increase Employer awareness of the benefits of employing older workers			
1. Share information with employers about the benefits of employing older adults.	1a. Develop or adapt educational information/outreach programs for employer groups, chambers, trade organizations, etc.	AFB Backbone Staff; AARP; Chambers of Commerce; business organizations	2
	1b. Encourage coverage on the subject by local media	Chambers of Commerce; AARP; Partner Organizations; AFB Backbone staff	2
	1c. Give presentations at professional events, to highlight the issue.		3
	1d. Highlight organizations that employ older adults and older adults who are leaders in their field on the Age Friendly Berkshires website.	AFB Website	1
2. Tout the benefits of offering flexible, part-time, job-share or work-at-home jobs, etc., to enable older adults to continue working.	2a. Seek out employers currently employing older workers successfully and identify best practices	AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations; AFB Website	1
	2b. Share best practices with other employers		2

<p>3. Facilitate opportunities for entrepreneurship and work at home opportunities</p>	<p>3a. Research current opportunities by plugging into existing HR departments and job search sites in government, business, industry, nonprofit, venture capital, schools and local incubators for encouraging entrepreneurship/telecommuting for older workers. 3b. Identify an existing host for local older job seekers looking for opportunities; promote local use of site 3d. Consider mentorship program with those who have been successful entrepreneurs guiding those who are newer to the idea.</p>	<p>Domain Leader/Working Group; AAAC; AFB Backbone staff</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>Employment Goal 2: Increase training opportunities for older adults to develop skills needed to stay in or re-enter the workforce.</p>			
<p>1. Partner with organizations to provide training on newer technology and other skills needed to stay in or re-enter the workforce.</p>	<p>1a. Identify training needs and wants of older adults. 1b. Identify organizations such as councils on aging, BCC, workforce development organizations, social service agencies, libraries, OLLI and other continuing education programs to offer training. 1c. Develop training, find instructors, and publicize offerings. 1d. Encourage organizations to offer scholarships or a sliding scale fee structure to allow older adults of all incomes to participate. 1e. Assist older adults in looking for paid or volunteer work that uses their new skills.</p>	<p>Partner Organizations; AAAC; AFB Backbone Staff</p> <p>Identified organizations</p> <p>Identified organizations; AFB Partner Organizations</p> <p>Berkshire Works; BCC jobs website; Volunteer Match, others</p>	<p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p>
<p>2. Develop intergenerational skills building opportunities, such as high school students teaching older adults how to use their smart phone to text and receive and send email.</p>	<p>2a. Encourage replication and expansion of existing programs 2b. Encourage intergenerational mentorship programs.</p>	<p>Working group; AAAC; COAs; schools; teen clubs; scouts; faith communities</p>	<p>1</p>

Employment Goal 3: Increase knowledge around planning for retirement and managing credit and debt

1. Develop a list of financial and estate planning resources and related services, offered throughout the county	1a. Make list available on AFB Website	Domain Leader/Working Group; AAAC; AFB Website; AFB Backbone Staff	1
	1b. Utilize community colleges or life-long learning venues to set up financial planning and financial literacy programs; connect with any existing programs.		2
	1c. Take advantage of Financial and estate planning Speakers Bureaus for regularly scheduled local programming		3
	1d. Implement special programming on credit counseling and debt resolution services.		

COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION: WHAT WE HEARD



Staying connected with events, news and practical information is a key part of active aging. Technology can be tapped to spread information quickly, but also might inadvertently play a role in social exclusion.

Age-friendly communities recognize that not everyone has a smartphone or Internet access. Mass media is

instrumental in communicating information to the wider community. Many older people still receive information through traditional print and broadcast media and through direct personal contact, such as word-of-mouth, and by telephone. Access to community information should be centralized and improved, to ensure that all residents are able to locate needed information. Governments and organizations must ensure that information on policies and issues affecting the elderly can reach them in a timely, effective and accessible manner, through a variety of centralized and all-ability-friendly communication channels.

Affordable access to computers and other adaptive communication devices for people with differing abilities, both at home and in community facilities, can play an important role in strengthening communication and technological literacy in an age friendly community. Computer and “smart” tech training, adapted to seniors’ needs and pace of learning should be promoted.



COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION DOMAIN

GOALS AT A GLANCE

COMMUNICATION GOALS

- Maximize the dissemination of necessary and useful information to all Berkshire residents regardless of their location, age, economic status, technical expertise or physical limitation.
- Develop an all-encompassing, ongoing program of information, resources and technical assistance to implement Age Friendly Berkshires Action Plan and to make residents aware of Age Friendly Berkshires.
- Develop a county wide “senior voice” of, for and by the growing population of older adults and encourage them to be actively involved in their communities/region.
- Develop or improve municipal-level communication models for municipalities of different sizes to communicate with all residents.
- Hold annual Age Friendly Berkshires events, e.g. Legislative breakfast, AFB Progress awards celebration and others, to highlight/celebrate progress implementing the Action Plan
- Conduct ongoing evaluation and course correction; communicate progress toward goals



COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION DOMAIN

Goal 1: To maximize the dissemination of necessary and useful information to Berkshire residents regardless of their location, age, economic status, technological expertise or physical limitations.

Strategy	Action Steps	Potential Leads	Year
1. Develop an overall communications model for the entire county, utilizing print, broadcast, direct mail, telephone, social media and other appropriate or necessary methods	<p>1a. Identify what is being done now, by whom and how information is being shared</p> <p>1b. Identify gaps</p> <p>1c. Compare our region with others, to see who is doing it more effectively and “borrow” as appropriate</p> <p>1d. Elicit cooperation/input from media to fill gaps inexpensively but effectively</p> <p>1e. Try to obtain time and space on an ongoing basis for AFB communications</p>	AFB Backbone Staff; Domain Leader/Working Group; Partner Organizations; AAAC	1 1-2
2. Develop pilot communication projects in one or more municipalities of varying sizes and with varying resources.	<p>2a. Identify up to three municipalities (large, medium, small populations)</p> <p>2b. Research specific communication history and ongoing data to identify successes and failures</p> <p>2c. Build on successes/make suggestions for improvement</p> <p>2d. Document as examples for similar municipalities</p>	Domain Leader/Working Group; AFB Backbone Staff; AAAC, municipalities	1
3. Develop communication models for each municipality or group of municipalities and the entire region to effectively communicate with residents.	<p>3a. Identify current communication assets in each municipality</p> <p>3b. Consult with town boards, councils on aging and other interested parties to create an efficient and affordable model for that municipality.</p> <p>3c. Search for a champion or champions in each municipality</p> <p>3d. Garner municipal government support where possible</p>	AFB Backbone Staff; Domain Leader/Working Group; AAAC; municipalities	2

Goal 2: Develop an all-inclusive, Communication Plan about Age Friendly Berkshires aimed at all county residents and organizations.			
1. Develop a set of goals and objectives related to Age Friendly Berkshires to be disseminated countywide, through all media, on a continuing basis.	<p>1a. Develop a set of goals and objectives to get the AFB message out</p> <p>1b. Create of 3-4 minute informative video, professionally produced, to be shown on local TV, in resource centers and on the AFB website, etc.</p> <p>1c. Create print articles about Age Friendly activities for distribution to local newspapers and magazines</p> <p>1d. Schedule promotional appearances on local radio and TV media</p> <p>1e. Schedule promotional appearances at local town meetings, discussion groups, organizations, etc.</p>	Steering Committee; Partner Organizations; AFB Backbone staff; Vendor to be identified	1 1-2
2. Develop an ongoing electronic presence in the County	<p>2a. Develop an interactive Age Friendly Berkshires website that is informative, provocative and educational</p> <p>2b. Develop an ongoing social media presence</p> <p>2c. Continue to promote AFB Facebook page</p> <p>2d. Use other social media such as Instagram/YouTube</p>	AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations	1
3. Develop a public recognition program to recognize businesses, organizations, individuals and municipalities that take steps toward becoming more age-friendly	<p>3a. Develop criteria for recognition</p> <p>3b. Develop method for choosing those to be recognized</p> <p>3c. Publicly recognize, e.g., on AFB Website</p> <p>3d. Consider public event to honor those recognized each year</p>	Partner Organizations; AAAC; AFB Backbone staff AFB website; other media Domain Leader/Working Group; AAAC; Partner Organizations; AFB Backbone Staff	1-2
Goal 3: Develop a county-wide senior voice for, of and by the growing senior population to encourage them to be actively involved in their community.			
1. Work with Elder Services of the Berkshires, Inc. to help expand the circulation of the Berkshire Senior Newspaper to the largest audience possible, particularly by mail to remote locations	<p>1a. Broaden editorials to include monthly articles about Age Friendly activities and upcoming events</p> <p>1b. Continue to provide Senior News with pertinent articles from Age Friendly Berkshires</p> <p>1c. Grow circulation pf Senior News by marketing to different population segments</p> <p>1d. Solicit grants and/or contributions to provide free subscriptions to those who cannot afford one Encourage seniors to subscribe to the electronic version of Senior News</p>	Elder Services Elder Services; AAAC; AFB Backbone Staff Elder Services; AAAC; AFB Task	1

COMMUNITY & HEALTH SERVICES: WHAT WE HEARD

Accessible and affordable community and health services are crucial in keeping community members healthy, independent and active. This includes, but is not limited to, adequate provision of senior-care services located close to where older people live and trained health professionals and social or therapeutic counselors to provide these services.



Adults have different health care needs and preferences as they age. A range of services along the full continuum of care - including preventive care, nutrition and wellness programs, providers trained in geriatrics, hospitals, adult day centers, respite care, rehabilitation, nursing home care, home care and palliative care, is needed to meet these diverse needs. Ideally, these services should be in places convenient for all residents to reach and with appointments available in a reasonable timeframe. Providers should treat all clients with respect and attention. Residential care services, such as adult day health or nursing homes, should be located within residential areas, to allow the residents being cared for to remain connected to their familiar surroundings and make it easier for family and friends to visit. Social services should also be easily accessible to those who need them. Efforts to reduce stigma and other barriers to accepting services are necessary.



Education and centralized information on available health and wellness services and how to pay for them, would raise awareness of community care options. Health services should be affordable, to provide residents with peace of mind that they will receive care, regardless of the ability to pay.

COMMUNITY & HEALTH SERVICES DOMAIN

GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Improve the health-related quality of life by enabling greater access and utilization of existing programs and establishment of new services through:
 - Targeted communications
 - Development of a catalog or other compilation of community resources
 - Raising awareness among social service and health providers about existing services
 - Identifying and addressing gaps in the social service and health provider network.
- Identify and address health inequities and reduce health disparities.
- Improve health literacy.
- Address the social determinants of health.
- Work toward a more holistic quality of life for all - not simply the absence of illness or disability.
- Encourage the adoption of the Village model to provide a better support system for aging in place and in community.



COMMUNITY & HEALTH SERVICES DOMAIN

Goal 1: To enable and encourage older adults to take full advantage of services that will allow them to stay healthy, independent, active and engaged throughout their lifetimes.

Strategy	Action Steps	Potential Leads	Year
Grow the reach, impact, and priorities of targeted health/social service information to different age groups, especially those who are difficult to reach	<p>1a. Conduct a comprehensive analysis to identify major existing channels of communication related to health and social services.</p> <p>1b. Determine consumers reached and evaluate constituencies being missed.</p> <p>1c. Identify best practices, particularly among communication channels with high reach/low cost and high perceived credibility.</p> <p>1d. Formulate plan in conjunction with Communications Domain to develop a single, centralized Age Friendly information access/delivery point related to health & social services.</p> <p>1e. In conjunction with providers, develop messages to reach underserved communities/demographics</p>	AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations; AAAC; Domain Leader/Working Group	1
	2		
Educate community members on the continuum of care and expand their understanding of how best to address their health and wellbeing	<p>2a. Develop education campaign to give ‘roadmap’ of services (wellness, prevention, primary care, mental health care, specialist care, urgent care, emergency care, in-patient care, rehabilitation, home care, respite care, nursing care, palliative care, etc.) and when each is likely to be helpful.</p> <p>2b. Identify service providers willing to help with community education.</p> <p>2c. Implement messaging campaign</p>	Domain Leader/Working Group; AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations; AAAC; providers	2
Encourage wellness opportunities based on principles of prevention and the importance of individual behavioral choices.	<p>3a. Promote successful existing programs, such as Matter of Balance for falls prevention and Get Cuffed for hypertension.</p> <p>3b. Work with key community organizations identified in strategy 2 to increase public awareness and utilization of programs.</p> <p>3c. Help create/enhance clear links from wellness to prevention and primary care.</p> <p>3d. Review existing options and evaluate where they are and are not addressing concerns specific to older adults</p>	Domain Leader/Working Group; community partners; AFB Backbone staff	1
		Community providers; AAAC; Partner organizations	1
		Domain Leader/Working Group; AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations; AAAC	3

	and successful aging, particularly as they relate to nutrition, movement and psychological well-being. 3e. Engage stakeholders to help create high-quality solutions /partnerships to fill gaps when identified.	Domain Leader/Working Group; community partners	
Goal 2: Assess current service availability, identify gaps and formulate strategies to increase and enhance the availability of needed health and community services.			
Catalog existing community services agencies, programs, and initiatives throughout the County to reduce confusion among both consumers and organizations.	1a. Obtain information about service usage. 1b. Research capacity vs. utilization rates. 1c. Identify redundancies and service gaps, to the extent possible. 1d. Convene meeting of stakeholders to seek input and proposed solutions to connect silos, reduce redundancies, and re-deploy resources to address gaps.	Domain Leader/Working Group; AAAC; Partner Organizations;	2 3
Develop education campaign based on strategies 1 results to relay information to both service providers and consumers of available services	3a. Compile basic information on what programs/services exist, how to access, and who can help answer questions based on major categories of services catalogued. 3b. Create new resource or expand existing resource for community service and health providers 3c. Create separate community services and health services resources for the public. 3d. Disseminate new resources	AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations; Domain Leader/Working Group Domain Leader/Working Group; AFB Backbone Staff; AAAC Partner Organizations; providers; AAAC; COAs; providers	2 3
Increase utilization of needed services	3a. Identify common barriers for seeking assistance, including entrenched attitudes/fears, stigma or provider insensitivity. 3b. Develop strategies to counter barriers identified above and to encourage utilization. 3c. Facilitate ongoing collaboration among community service providers to establish 'safety nets' in areas where older adults currently may be at risk due to discontinuity between services.	Domain Leader/Working Group; community providers; AAAC; AFB Backbone Staff	1 2
Develop community support services to allow older adults to continue to keep pets as they age.	4a. Develop volunteer network to help with pet care, so that older adults do not need to give up their pets. 4b. Encourage veterinarians, groomers, and shelters to offer group rates or "senior" pricing	Domain Leader/Working Group; AAAC; Partner Organizations	2

Goal 3: To give community leaders the tools needed to promote wellness at all levels			
Establish county-level focus to promote health in all policies and consistency in priorities and messaging among all 32 municipalities	<p>1a. Create concise talking points to encourage health in all policies on a municipal level and across municipal boundaries.</p> <p>1b. Provide to city/town leaders across the county.</p>	<p>Domain Leader/Working Group; AFB Backbone Staff</p> <p>Domain Leader/Working Group; COAs; Municipal champions; AAAC</p>	1
Goal 4: Identify and provide training or education to improve the quality of interactions between older adults and medical and social service providers			
Increase opportunities for satisfactory health care interactions by giving healthcare professionals and community members tools to increase mutually satisfactory interactions.	<p>1a. Work with community organizations to offer health care providers and first responders continuing education on concerns specific to older adults, including those with dementia, and availability of community services that may benefit their patients and improve outcomes.</p> <p>1b. Work to expand health literacy among all populations, to encourage compliance and satisfaction with medical advice</p> <p>1c. Engage health system and community stakeholders to identify potential solutions for more effective coordination of health/medical and community services.</p> <p>1d. Encourage the use of technology, such as telemedicine, where appropriate.</p>	<p>AFB Backbone Staff; Domain Leader/Working Group; Community and Health Organizations; AAAC</p> <p>Healthcare providers; Partner Organizations; community providers</p> <p>Healthcare providers; AAAC; Domain Leader/Working Group</p>	2
	Increase the number of geriatricians and geriatric services in Berkshire county	2b. Engage state and congressional representatives for assistance in funding major structural issues	Partner Organizations; Health Organizations; AFB Backbone staff; AAAC
			2

HOUSING DOMAIN: WHAT WE HEARD

Age Friendly communities provide a range of housing options for all residents - suited to different life stages, incomes and abilities.



Older adults generally want to stay in their own homes and communities for as long as possible, close to family and friends. But living on a fixed income, or changing health or physical abilities, might make continuing to live independently in one's own home challenging. Doing so may be possible if living quarters are designed, built or modified to include age and dementia-friendly enhancements or standards and if a variety of housing options and alternatives are available in

the community. The ability to modify one's home through affordable and accessible home modification programs, or to move to a residence with less upkeep, would help ensure that more seniors are able to live independently.

The cost of housing, including upkeep, real estate taxes and utilities influences where older people live. High housing costs and a lack of alternatives may discourage older people from moving to more appropriate, age-friendly housing. Exploration into alternate housing strategies, like home sharing, congregate housing, intentional communities, Villages, NORC's – naturally occurring retirement communities -- and others, should be fully explored and adapted for Berkshire County.



HOUSING DOMAIN

GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Develop capacity to address Age-Friendly housing needs throughout the County, including a network of those working on housing issues, in both the public and private sectors.
- Inventory and map existing housing resources and collect municipal and state regulations related to housing, to identify resources and gaps.
- Make information and assistance available to consumers about how older adults can age-in-place, including home assessments, workshops and guidance on website.
- Assist municipalities in addressing local housing issues.
- Help expand the range of housing options that are available and affordable for seniors at varying income levels, including multi-generational neighborhoods, shared living arrangements, and other alternatives, as desired.
- Encourage solutions to ease the transition to alternative housing arrangements, including the use of a centralized application for affordable housing.
- Expand senior tax deferral and work-off programs, and/or consider creating a tax relief fund to help the neediest low-income or disabled seniors to reduce burden of real estate taxes on a primary residence.



HOUSING DOMAIN

Goal 1: To improve the ability of residents to age-in-place in their current home or community, by creating a wider range of safe, affordable and appropriate housing options.

Strategy	Action Steps	Potential Leads	Year
Determine municipal needs and develop technical assistance on common housing needs	<p>1a. Identify/survey relevant parties about housing issues, including zoning and other impediments to development.</p> <p>1b. Extend invitations to developers, housing/aging non-profits, realtors, and selected parties to join housing network.</p> <p>1c. Hold regional conference to address identified issues</p> <p>1d. Provide direct technical support to municipalities upon request.</p>	AFB Backbone Staff; Domain Leader/Working Group; selected public and private sector housing professionals.	1
			2
Develop the housing domain component of the AFB website to disseminate educational materials related to aging in place to the public and network members.	<p>2a. Develop framework for housing component of AFB website.</p> <p>2b. Develop and adapt materials</p> <p>2c. Publicize the availability of the housing domain section of AFB website and its content.</p>	AFB Backbone Staff; Domain Leader/Working Group; Partner organizations/Network members	1
Goal 2: Expand the availability and affordability of senior housing options			
Research innovative housing models and financing options that may improve housing in Berkshire County over time	<p>3a. Identify how the integration of cross-domain issues (e.g., healthcare, transportation) can positively impact aging-in-place and the availability of new housing options</p> <p>3b. Explore how non-profit organizations can be used to help finance the development of needed housing for seniors.</p> <p>3c. Examine how the use of technology and sharing arrangements might help people stay in their home as they age.</p> <p>3d. Identify gaps in housing options and best practices for alternatives from other places.</p> <p>3e. Encourage development of alternative housing options.</p>	AFB Backbone Staff; Domain Leader/Working Group; AAAC; Partner Organizations, BRPC AFB Backbone Staff; Domain Leader/Working Group	1
			2
Develop standard shared application form for all Berkshire County subsidized housing	<p>4a. Obtain buy-in from providers</p> <p>4b. Obtain copies of existing applications and synthesize</p>	AFB Backbone Staff; Domain Leader/Working Group; AAAC;	2

Goal 3: Make information and assistance available to consumers about how they can age-in-place

<p>Form a Consumer Housing Education (CHE) workgroup that develops and/or disseminates consumer educational materials on selected</p>	<p>1a. Identify already existing programs, such as the AFB Aging in Place Workbook and video for sharing 1b. Identify and invite individuals/organizations with appropriate issue expertise to be involved in developing new consumer education programs to fill gaps. 1c. Disseminate written, web-based and other materials to public and to agencies serving the public.</p>	<p>AFB Backbone Staff; Domain Leader/Working Group, Partner Organizations, AAAC</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>Increase the availability of persons certified to do home assessments specific to aging in place.</p>	<p>2a. Identify people qualified to conduct training sessions. 2b. Publicize training sessions on AFB website, local media, and normal distribution network, etc. 2c. Identify and make arrangements with qualified individuals to conduct trainings. 2e. If insufficient numbers exist, facilitate training of additional people qualified to conduct home assessments.</p>	<p>AFB Backbone Staff; Domain Leader/Working Group; Partner Organizations</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>Encourage/support the development of Villages in Berkshire County, as well as NORCS (Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities)</p>	<p>3a. Coordinate with existing efforts, such as Berkshire Villages or the Norther Berkshires Villages Study. 3b. Disseminate information, make connections with existing groups for needed service provision and/or technical assistance 3c. Facilitate introductions and relationships with existing services and organizations</p>	<p>AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations; Berkshire Villages and others</p>	<p>1</p>

OUTDOOR SPACES & BUILDINGS: WHAT WE HEARD



Rural Berkshire County offers nature lovers year-round beauty and easy access to the outdoors – and has a major impact on the quality of life of young and old residents alike. The built environment also has an impact on how we live our lives, as does the use of our public buildings and spaces. Aging public buildings and infrastructure have evolved as our community has grown and needs have changed. Today, the wish to protect our natural environment, while making

it accessible to all ages, coupled with the ever-changing needs of an aging population, are prompting us to re-create our communities again.

Clean, safe, well-planned and maintained roads, recreational areas, pedestrian walkways, bikeways, and accessible, well-lit buildings and sidewalks together provide an ideal living environment for aging-in-place.

Creating an age-friendly region will likely require the adaptation or rehabilitation of many public spaces and structures over time, with the goal of a more cohesive and integrated community, designed for maximal access to nature, increased mobility and independence for all.



OUTDOOR SPACES & BUILDINGS DOMAIN

GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Create and/or maintain accessible spaces to ensure that residents of all ages and abilities can use and enjoy public spaces, whether they are indoors or outdoors.
- Market and promote opportunities to encourage residents of all ages and abilities to use public spaces.
- Work to create/maintain safe places, including parks, open spaces and public buildings.
- Work to create/maintain spaces that are multigenerational and inclusive for all users.
- Encourage the use of joint use agreements allowing community groups to use municipal buildings.
- Promote Complete Streets solutions (i.e., those designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities) whenever possible.



Goal 3: Work to create safe places for residents of all ages and abilities to enjoy throughout the year.			
1. Encourage use of parks, open spaces and public buildings by ensuring a safe and welcoming environment.	1a. Provide conveniently located, safe, commodious well-lit parking.	Municipalities; businesses	3
	1b. Maintain sidewalks, parking lot and other pavement around public buildings and parks. 1c. Ensure adequate street lighting at intersections and sidewalks. 1d. Reduce potential trip hazards including glare, uneven surfaces, sudden transitions, etc. 1e. Work with Commissions on Disability to develop a system to identify needed improvements, develop prioritization plans and track actions. Seek resources to support communities in their efforts to make improvements.		2
Goal 4: Work to create/maintain public spaces indoors and out, that encourage multigenerational use.			
1. Ensure that parks, open spaces and public buildings offer opportunities for people of all ages	1a. Encourage location of park benches where they are not isolated from other park activities.	Park owners	1
	1b. Encourage trails/play areas that are family friendly and tick free (e.g. where vegetation on trails is pushed back and maintained).		2
	1c. Create a wild playground for kids and families as an alternative to traditional playgrounds.	Municipalities; other outdoor recreation oriented organizations	3
	1d. Build partnerships to establish regular activities in parks for people of all ages both age specific and multigenerational.	Identified organization; Municipalities; outdoor recreation organizations; AFB Backbone Staff	1

RESPECT & SOCIAL INCLUSION: WHAT WE HEARD



An inclusive society treats all residents – regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, age, language proficiency, income – or other status - with respect, and encourages full participation in the life of the community.

“Age friendliness” is a natural outgrowth of that shift toward greater respect and inclusiveness for all. While respect for seniors is mostly healthy in many communities, negative preconceptions of aging still exist. There is a need to facilitate a range of intergenerational and multi-cultural activities, to foster understanding and to enhance the sense of belonging. Education about aging should also begin early, to raise awareness on aging and associated issues, so that people learn to appreciate and acknowledge that we are all aging all the time.

Social engagement can contribute to self-esteem and prevent isolation and loneliness. Age-friendly initiatives aim to increase inclusion in community and regional activities. Older people should always be consulted on decisions concerning them.

Everyone wants and needs to feel valued. Direct outreach to rural or disengaged residents may increase inclusion in community life.

RESPECT & SOCIAL INCLUSION DOMAIN

GOALS AT A GLANCE



- Create an inclusive community where all people can participate fully in social, civic, and economic life.
- Develop social programs to increase respect and inclusion between persons of different backgrounds, generations or abilities.
- Encourage and facilitate an inter-generational mentoring programs in Berkshire County.
- Ensure that programs developed for older adults are intergenerational when appropriate and that segregation is not practiced inadvertently.
- Explore innovative transportation models to allow older adults to continue to engage socially on weekends and evenings, in all weather.



RESPECT & SOCIAL INCLUSION DOMAIN

Goal 1: Creating an inclusive community where all people regardless of race, creed, color, gender identity, income, age or other status can be treated with respect and feel included in social, civic and economic life

Strategy	Action Steps	Potential Leads	Year
2. Develop inclusive social opportunities to demonstrate/enhance mutual respect	<p>2a. Bring different groups together to create intergenerational learning projects, such as community gardens; planning multi-cultural festivals or other events to encourage dialogue</p> <p>2b. Develop a model for a Grandparents Day in schools – mini-lessons on aging from visiting grandparents.</p> <p>2c. Encourage active and healthy aging educational programs, such as book study groups based on This Chair Rocks.</p> <p>2d. Create opportunities for older adults to learn from teens such as lessons as how to use their smartphone or other technology</p>	Partner Organizations; AAAC; AFB Backbone Staff	1
3. Celebrate and promote intergenerational activities	<p>3a. Hold annual conferences/workshop for Councils on Aging and other organizations working with older adults to share and celebrate intergenerational successes</p> <p>3b. Encourage cities and towns in Berkshire County to pass resolutions to be Age Friendly as part of an inclusive community pact</p> <p>3c. Set up training for senior care workers/professionals on the needs of older adults and best practices for interactions.</p>	<p>Partner Organizations; AAAC; COAs</p> <p>AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations; AAAC. See Overall section.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>1</p> <p>2</p>

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION: WHAT WE HEARD

Participating in leisure, social, cultural and spiritual activities in the community helps older adults to stay healthy, engaged and informed.

Older people have a broad range of interests. An age friendly community makes available a variety of social activities to cater to those diverse interests, including activities that are accessible for people with different abilities.

Scheduling activities at various times and at convenient and accessible locations served by public transportation options encourages greater participation.

Activities must be affordable for older people to allow their participation. Special attention should be paid to communicating and marketing age friendly events using a variety of media.

Participation in social activities helps to prevent social isolation. Most older adults want to socialize and integrate with other age groups and cultures in their communities.

Intergenerational activities are mutually enriching and fulfilling for all ages, with older people passing on knowledge, traditions and experience while the young may help seniors with new technology and practices.

Regardless of a person's age, loneliness is often as debilitating a health condition as having a chronic illness or disease. Sadness and isolation can be combatted by ensuring that older adults stay engaged with family and friends through the availability of accessible, affordable and fun social activities.



SOCIAL PARTICIPATION DOMAIN

GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Develop self-sustaining networks of residents based on common interests or within a geographic area.
- Encourage those in need to become engaged in community by helping others.
- Create opportunities for socialization and strive to eliminate barriers to participation (transportation, cost, etc.).
- Organize regional and long-distance activities for group engagement, as well as bringing programs to Councils on Aging, community centers, faith-based organizations, civic organizations and others where older adults might already congregate.
- Promote local arts, music and other cultural and academic programs and build bridges to facilitate engagement of seniors as both volunteers and consumers.
- Reach out personally to engage residents of all needs and abilities.
- Build intergenerational networks.



SOCIAL PARTICIPATION DOMAIN

Goal 1: Develop self-sustaining networks of Berkshire residents to promote social interactions and opportunities for those with varying interests and abilities

Strategy	Action Steps	Potential Leads	Year
1. Enlist those who are isolated to become engaged by helping others.	1a. Identify individuals or groups of individuals who refrain from participation in current activities and have volunteers from Faith organizations, COAs, TRIAD, etc., to reach out to them to see why they are currently not participating and try to encourage them to connect.	COAs; AAAC; Partner Organizations	1
	1b. Create/adopt programs to engage older adults in volunteer community projects that benefit all. 1c. Engage friends to invite other friends or share information about programs with family members and neighbors.	Community organizations; Partner Organizations; AAAC	2
2. Develop Neighborhood Networks using available communication channels	2a. Provide materials at local grocery stores and through non-senior networks, asking residents to pass information on to 'those they know.' 2b. Develop grassroots outreach for gatherings at coffee shops, schools, local outings. 2c. Encourage daily/weekly check-in routine for neighbors and family members. Consider developing program for those without close neighbors of family members	AFB Backbone Staff; AAAC; Partner Organizations AAAC; community champions AAC; Partner Organizations; AFB Backbone staff	1
3. Reinforce value of socialization and outreach to residents.	3a. Ask bookstores and libraries to promote outreach within current book clubs. 3b. Engage frontline healthcare workers in conversations around social opportunities and benefits. 3c. Develop resources and materials with FAQ for family members to access on the AFB website.	AAAC; Partner Organizations AFB Backbone Staff; AAAC; Partner Organizations; provider champions	1
4. Identify naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs) and garner support for same	4a. Arrange press features or other public materials on these kinds of opportunities. 4b. Create speaker opportunities on a small or large regional scale to describe examples. 4c. Engage local legislators and regional leaders to consider how to support this living model.	AFB Backbone staff; Partner Organizations; AAAC	2

5. Promote NORCS by using public places, regional businesses and local media print, radio, public tv (per region of the county) to promote PSAs around programs and benefits.	<p>5a. Develop network of media and leadership to share information.</p> <p>5b. Offer monthly or weekly updates per region.</p> <p>5c. Create upbeat marketing that can be used on Public Access TV and radio.</p>	AFB Backbone staff; AAAC; Partner Organizations – coordinate with Communication domain	2
6. Support dementia and caregiver support services, such as Memory Cafes, caregiver support groups and respite services	<p>6a. Catalog existing services and document gaps</p> <p>6b. Promote existing services and their importance</p> <p>6c. Facilitate development of programs to fill gaps</p>	AFB Backbone Staff; AFB Taskforce/Partner Organizations	1
Goal 2: Organize regional and long-distance activities for group engagement			
1. Work with local arts and recreation organizations to develop hands-on and audience based programs that are compelling to older adults.	<p>1a. Communicate with arts and recreation organizations</p> <p>1b. Encourage development of additional/new programs</p> <p>1c. Organize outreach to residents to participate/attend</p> <p>1d. Encourage sliding scales, reduced fees or grant applications to ensure affordability</p> <p>1d. Develop group transportation plans.</p>	AFB Backbone staff; Arts organizations	1
		Transportation providers	2
2. Organize trips to regional and long-distance venues for tours, cultural and other events and meals.	<p>2a. Identify existing tours and research new ideas</p> <p>2b. Secure group leader, arrange group sales and/or ticket subsidies, develop group transportation plans, develop meal plan</p>	AFB Backbone staff; Partner Organizations; AAAC; Arts Organizations, transportation providers	2
3. Bring engagement programs to councils on aging and other gathering centers.	<p>3a. Partner with arts/humanities leaders to develop new programs that might appeal to new and additional audiences</p> <p>3b. Create schedule for programs</p> <p>3c. Develop strong outreach platform to ensure ongoing engagement.</p>	COAs; arts organizations COAs; arts organizations; Partner Organizations; AAAC	2
Goal 3: Reach out to personally engage residents and assess their range of needs, wishes and abilities			
1. Support councils on aging and service agencies, or alternative groups that serve different senior constituencies.	<p>1a. Develop simple shared survey to assess needs across county</p> <p>1b. Share resources and best practices for outreach using phone, visits, mail, technology and regional promos (radio/tv/billboards)</p> <p>1d. Educate practitioners for multi-cultural engagement as region evolves</p> <p>1d. Explore opportunities to bring more social service and health service providers into these settings on</p>	AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations; providers	1
			2
			3
			1

	regular basis for ongoing services, or develop warm referral methods		
2. Inform and engage younger residents about volunteer opportunities with and for seniors	<p>2a. Promote senior centers, councils, residential homes to local school districts as places that would benefit from visits and cross-invitational opportunities.</p> <p>2b. Encourage community service through religious organizations and sports/arts after-school programs.</p>	<p>AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations; AAAC</p> <p>AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations; AAAC</p>	1
3. Engage younger residents in informing family and friends about opportunities	3a. Share information about current services with non-elders in a variety of ways and encourage them to share with friends and family who might be interested.	AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations	1
GOAL 4: Build Intergenerational networks for mutual benefit			
1. Connect school and elder communities	<p>1a. Partner with schools, where possible</p> <p>1b. Highlight opportunities for volunteerism in both directions.</p> <p>1c. Encourage development of joint use agreements, so that schools and other public buildings may be used for intergenerational activities in the evenings.</p>	<p>Municipalities; schools; AAAC, COA Schools; AAAC; Partner Organizations/Partner Organizations; COAs</p> <p>AFB Backbone Staff</p>	2
2. Develop public meeting places for conversation (coffee houses, libraries, arts venues).	<p>2a. Research existing venues</p> <p>2b. Identify locations in towns without public spaces</p> <p>2c. Encourage programming</p>	Partner Organizations, AAAC, COA's	1
3. Create mentor programs for older adults to support youth and vice versa (Little Brother/Little Sister)	1a. Research mentorship programs around the country and compile best practices	AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations; AAAC	1
	1b. Identify agency or agencies to sponsor/administer program	Identified organization	2
	1c. Identify organizations through which to recruit both older adults (COAs, OLLI, etc.) and youth (RSYP, schools, NBCC, United Way, etc.)		3
1d. Design and implement program, including evaluation measures			
4. Build upon and scale community email lists and on-line forums based upon Front Porch Forum or Alford Assist	<p>4a. Research programs, gauge interest. Link to AFB Communications network</p> <p>4b. Provide technical assistance to start-up lists</p>	AFB Backbone Staff; AAAC, Municipalities, COAs,	1

Goal 5: Develop cross-sector opportunities to promote active lifestyles with group engagement

<p>1. Partner with usual and unusual suspects such as 1Berkshire and local chambers, Meals on Wheels, and Partner Organizations to develop and publicize opportunities for active engagement with others.</p>	<p>1a. Develop wish list of ideal partners for connecting with residents. 1b. Invite leaders to reach out to other leaders with targeted message. 1c. Develop streamlined message about resources and needs 1d. Update weekly or monthly for wide distribution. 1e. Invite cross-sector partnerships as sponsors and supporters per town/region. 1f. Evaluate barriers to participation, e.g., time of day, location, transportation, costs, etc.</p>	<p>AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations; AAAC AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations AFB Website/AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations</p>	<p>2</p>
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TRANSPORTATION: WHAT WE HEARD

Driving is the primary mode of transportation for most Berkshire County residents, particularly in the most rural areas. Ideally, driving shouldn't be the only way to get around the region. Non-drivers, and those without private cars, have few alternatives to remain engaged in community life.

Accessible and affordable public transit options should be expanded to include multiple taxi companies, ride-sharing and other on-demand services. The creation of more bike lanes and sidewalks to encourage and increase healthy alternatives to motorized travel is desirable. The development of rail service should be supported.

People should be able to navigate the region's transit system with ease and feel comfortable using it. Transportation services should cater to people with a range of mobility needs. Helpful drivers and station staff trained and attuned to the unique needs of older riders or those living with disabilities, is essential. Information on safe, accessible and affordable transport services must be made more available to people, to encourage broader use.

Heavy traffic, poor road conditions, inadequate street lighting and poorly positioned signage are barriers to safe driving. Maintaining confidence as drivers age is important to ensuring a safe driving experience for all. Parking located close to buildings and drop-off and pick-up services are welcomed by young and old alike.



TRANSPORTATION DOMAIN

GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Maximize access to user-friendly transportation services to meet daily living, employment, health and socialization needs, through ways that are safe, effective, affordable, and respectful to each person served.
- Ensure residents are fully aware of existing transportation options. Identify barriers to use and facilitate solutions.
- Expand transportation options in innovative ways to address gaps in the existing system
- Identify on-line shopping and support local delivery services to reduce need for unnecessary driving.
- Keep older adults using their personal vehicles safely for as long as possible, through programs that support the retention of driver skills.
- Improve and develop infrastructure to encourage walking and biking and to increase safety for wheelchairs and other assistive devices.
- Encourage the use of Complete Streets solutions wherever appropriate.



	2d. Encourage adequate, easy to understand parking at common locations.	Municipalities; cultural organizations; businesses; AAAC	2
3. Reduce the need for unnecessary travel	3a. Work with groceries and pharmacies to explore home delivery service and promote available services	AAAC; Domain Leader/Working Group COAs; Partner Organizations	2
	3b. Encourage the development of a comprehensive errand/delivery service in the Berkshires		
	3c. Encourage technology training for older adults, including how to shop on-line		1
Goal 2: To ensure riders have access to appropriate modes of transportation, and are aware of the services available to them.			
1. Expand the role of the Berkshire Regional Coordination Council (RCC) to help improve all transportation	1a. Participate with the RCC 1b. Propose expansion to the RCC	Domain Leader	1
2. Encourage municipalities to develop coordinated essential transportation services with on-demand capability, as feasible.	2a. Encourage those municipalities that participate in the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center grant to continue the centralized scheduling & partnerships with other municipalities; other improvements to facilitate customer access/scheduling.	AFB Backbone Staff; AAAC; COAs; Partner Organizations	1
	2c. Encourage additional municipalities to explore joining the BRTA Community Transit Grant for their own or regional COA vans	RCC; AFB Backbone Staff	
	2d. Explore additional partnerships between municipalities for transportation services	RCC; Domain Leader/Working Group	
3. Update the 2015 Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan	3a. Update plan with focus on expanding ride sharing, alternate auto-based services	BRPC Transportation Staff, AFB Backbone Staff; Domain Leader/Working Group	2
4. Encourage a county-wide pool of volunteer drivers by creating a centralized entry point, working with organizations that aim to meet local rider needs, and	4a. Conduct analysis to determine needs and learn from existing programs nation-wide	Domain Leader/Working Group; AFB Backbone Staff	1
	4b. Identify an organization to house / administer the program		2
	4c. Design program, including guidelines for rides and incentives for drivers	Identified organization; Partner Organizations; AAAC; BRTA	3

<p>arranging low-cost insurance for drivers.</p> <p>5. Support the introduction of on-demand rider services</p> <p>6. Continue to strengthen mass transit and paratransit services throughout the county.</p> <p>7. Encourage infrastructure and other improvements to enable biking/walking to reach a destination</p>	<p>4d. Recruit drivers 4e. Implement Program</p> <p>5a. Publicize and promote opportunities to use the services. 5b. Make accessible information available that teaches older adults how to utilize the services.</p> <p>6a. Publicize and promote current transit possibilities and training opportunities 6b. Determine lobbying needs to bring Berkshire County needs to legislators and policy makers in Boston and Washington</p> <p>6a. Make membership in the Berkshire Regional Transit Authority (BRTA) more attractive and publicize advantages to municipalities 6b. Continue to advocate at a state level for more resources</p> <p>7a. Assist in finding ways for municipalities to repair sidewalks, add traffic lights with pedestrian controls, etc., in downtown or business areas. 7b. Catalog needed improvements throughout the county and encourage implementation</p>	<p>AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations; AAAC; RCC; BRTA</p> <p>RCC; BRTA; municipalities;</p> <p>Municipalities; AAAC; Domain Leader/Working Group; Partner Organizations AAAC; Domain Leader/Working Group</p>	<p>1 2</p> <p>1 2</p>
<p>Goal 3: To facilitate alternative methods of transportation such as walking or biking.</p>			
<p>1. Stay informed about, and influence from an age friendly perspective, proposed countywide initiatives such as Greenway bikeway projects and street design, including potential grants or other funding.</p> <p>2. Facilitate a countywide “Walk and Cycle for Health Summit” to highlight the importance of outdoor exercise and identify safe and pleasant locations for easy to moderate walking and cycling.</p>	<p>1a. Attend meetings or otherwise gather information about proposed projects as relevant 1b. Promote age friendly perspectives</p> <p>2a. Identify an organization to sponsor/administer event 2b. Design, publicize and implement event\ 2c. Evaluate success</p>	<p>AFB Backbone Staff; Domain Leader/Working Group; Partner Organizations; AAAC</p> <p>AFB Backbone Staff; Domain Leader/Working Group; Partner Organizations; Identified organization</p>	<p>1-3</p> <p>2</p>

<p>3. Disseminate information widely on health benefits of and opportunities for biking and walking. May also consider a Walkability Index for rural areas that includes recreational walking and cycling areas in the municipality's rating.</p>	<p>3a. Design / adapt materials 3b. Distribute widely</p>	<p>AFB Backbone Staff; Partner Organizations; AAAC</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>4. Extend the Egremont/Great Barrington TRIAD sponsored high visibility vests program throughout Berkshire County.</p>	<p>4a. Gather information on program 4b. Identify organizations/municipalities willing to administer in their locality. 4c. Secure funding for vests and distribute</p>	<p>AFB Backbone Staff; Domain Leader/Working Group; AAAC AFB Backbone Staff; AAAC; Partner Organizations; Domain Leader/Working Group; Identified organizations</p> <p>Domain Leader/Working Group; AFB Backbone Staff, RCC</p>	<p>1</p>

THANK YOU!

We gratefully acknowledge the participation of many organizations and individuals who generously gave their time, expertise and support to create this Age Friendly Berkshires Action Plan.

We look forward to working together with all of you to make



The Berkshires a great place to grow up and a great place to grow old!

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