**Membership Application**

To join the **AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities**
and the **World Health Organization Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities**

- If you have questions while completing this form, please email **livable@aarp.org**
- If you need additional space for answering the questions you may add an additional sheet of paper

**Section 1: COMMUNITY DETAILS**

**APPLICATION SUBMISSION DATE:** 1/6/2022

**NAME OF THE COMMUNITY:** River Valley – Chattahoochee, Clay, Crisp, Dooley, Harris, Muscogee, Marion, Macon, Schley, Sumter, Stewart, Randolph, Quitman, Taylor, Webster and Talbot Counties

**STATE:** GA

**POPULATION SIZE:** 368,953

**PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS ABOVE THE AGE OF 60:** 21%

**NAME AND TITLE OF THE ELECTED OFFICIAL SIGNING THE OFFICIAL COMMITMENT:** Jerry ‘Pops’ Barnes, RVRC Chair, Columbus City Councilor

**OFFICE ADDRESS OF THE SIGNER:** 710 Front Avenue, Suite A; Columbus, GA 31902

**Section 2: COMMUNITY CONTACT for the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities**

- The community contact is the local staff member or volunteer who is primarily responsible for carrying out the community-level work — it is not the responsible AARP staff member.

**NAME:** Allison Slocum

**POSITION:** Senior Planner

**EMAIL ADDRESS:** [redacted]

**TELEPHONE NUMBER:** [redacted]

Please describe the named person’s role in the city or community’s age-friendly initiative:

As Senior Planner, Ms. Slocum is responsible for the annual update to the River Valley Regional Plan and assists in many of the local Comprehensive Plan updates. As part of her updates, she will be reviewing annually the goals/objectives in the Regional Plan which impact seniors and persons with disabilities.

The person named above agrees to be subscribed to the **AARP Livable Communities Weekly e-Newsletter**, which is one of the primary ways we share useful news and resources. To add additional subscribers, type their names and email addresses into below. Once this application is processed, a subscription confirmation message will be sent so the individual can confirm that they want to subscribe. To subscribe today, follow the link above or visit [AARP.org/Livable-Subscribe](http://AARP.org/Livable-Subscribe).
Ms. Slocum agrees to be subscribed to the weekly e-newsletter

Section 3: COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES, ENGAGEMENTS and COLLABORATIONS

1) Please provide a brief summary of the community policies, programs and services that are targeted toward older people and how the community plans to become more age-friendly.

The RVRC is a development organization focused on improving the quality of life for the approximately 375,000 people living in its region. RVRC does this through a number of programs and services. The mission of the RVRC is to “create, promote, and foster the orderly growth and economic prosperity for our region.” The vision of the RVRC is “a region where current and future generations succeed at home, at work, and in their communities.” This mission and vision are inclusive of all people in the region, including our senior citizens. Improving the quality of life for the people, economy, and infrastructure of the region means improving the livelihood of the region’s seniors. The RVRC outlines the process for regional development in its Regional Plan – a document designed to outline the future of the River Valley Region. The Regional Plan identifies the following as priorities for the Commission to address during the next five years. Below each priority are key strategies and actions the Commission has identified that will allow the RVRC to make quantifiable progress toward achieving these goals. RVRC is currently working toward all these goals.

- **Update Ordinances, Land Use Regulations, and Guidelines**
  RVRC’s plans to update ordinances, land use regulations, and guidelines by developing tools to assist local governments manage development. To do this, RVRC plans to provide zoning administration technical assistance and training to at least six (6) local governments. This goal will improve the region by allowing governments to develop land more effectively.

- **Protect Historic Neighborhoods and Buildings**
  RVRC plans to protect historic neighborhoods and buildings by providing technical assistance to local governments in their preservation activities. RVRC will do this by providing monthly technical assistance and staff review for Certificate of Appropriateness to the Columbus Board of Historic and Architectural Review. This goal will improve the region by preserving its history and culture, which builds sense of place and draws tourism and growth.

- **Preserve Prime Agricultural/Forestry Lands**
  RVRC plans to preserve agriculture and forestry lands in the region by educating local elected officials, industries, developers, youth, and the public on the importance of natural resource protection. RVRC plans to do this by helping local governments write comprehensive plans. There are many benefits to living in a region with preserved agriculture and forests. Some of these include more locally sourced, healthy food and ecotourism. Grow the Agricultural Resources in the Region
  RVRC plans to grow the agricultural resources in the region by promoting the production and sale of locally grown foods. The plan to achieve this is identifying local partners to conduct feasibility studies to determine the viability of joint-use kitchens. It is well-documented that locally produced food contributes to the well-being and health of a community.

- **Protect Groundwater Recharge Area/Aquifer**
  RVRC plans to protect the groundwater recharge area/aquifer by increasing education and outreach programs directed toward improving water quality. To achieve this, RVRC will coordinate training opportunities for the Georgia-Adopt-a-Stream program and educational seminars regarding water quality issues. Improving the water quality in the region and protecting the water sources has lasting environmental and health benefits for the area’s residents. Maintain Environmental Integrity in the Region
  RVRC plans to maintain regional environmental integrity by creating a balance between protection of natural resources and development. To do this, RVRC will implement watershed management plans. This goal’s outcome will be a more protected regional environment, which will help improve the vitality of the region’s ecosystems.

- **Provide Safe, Standard, Affordable Housing Options**
  RVRC outlines a plan to improve and provide affordable housing by supporting local housing efforts through planning and technical assistance. The RC will do this by helping local governments identify GICH team community partners. Safer, more affordable housing will create better standards of living for the region’s residents and improve accessibility to housing.

- **Improve Broadband/Internet Capacity**
  RVRC prioritizes improving internet in the region and plans to do so by identifying and addressing telecommunications deficiencies. More specifically, RVRC plans to write “Broadband Readiness” ordinances for local governments, which will help...
improve upon their internet infrastructure. Better internet at home and work improves independence and communications for the residents of the region. Improve Old or Inadequate Infrastructure Systems RVRC plans to improve old or inadequate infrastructure systems by assisting local governments in identifying and addressing deficiencies. To address deficiencies, RVRC will help write grants to bring improvements to communities with problems. Problematic roads, water, and sewer systems can have many negative impacts on a community, especially one that is rural and poor. These improvements will help keep residents safe and improve the livelihood of the communities they live in.

Provide a Diverse Offering of Recreation Options for All Ages RVRC plans to diversify recreation in the region by developing and expanding trail networks to connect the region’s green and blue infrastructure. Specifically, RVRC will coordinate meetings between recreational advocacy groups and state and federal funding resources to make projects happen. Improving upon recreational opportunities in the region will have lasting effects on the health and well-being of the region’s residents.

Road Maintenance and Expansion RVRC plans to improve and expand upon the region’s roads by helping local governments identify issues and gain access to training that will assist those governments with making improvements. Better roads decrease the likelihood of accidents and wear on vehicles. Increase Awareness of Rural Transit Options One of RVRC’s priorities is to improve the number of transit options available to the region. To do so, RVRC works with local governments to identify each communities’ strengths and weaknesses, and create transit plans to improve upon those weaknesses. Currently, the region is home to many individuals who lack adequate transportation. Improving transit options helps get people to work, to the grocery store, the doctor’s office, or wherever else they need to go. It improves the region’s independence.

Support Continuation of Regional TSPLOST The Regional TSPLOST is a transportation sales tax that has funded many infrastructure projects in the region. RVRC works with local communities to market the success of the levy called TIA (Transportation Investment Act) through printed materials, media articles, and presentations.

Diversify and Strengthen the Region’s Economy RVRC is working toward this goal by fostering community leadership and coordinating educational and training opportunities to teach downtown development practices. Stronger economies in the region’s communities create jobs, increase access to goods and services, and improve the living experience in that community. Provide Quality, Genuine Places and Experiences for Visitors RVRC provides quality, genuine places and experiences for visitors by marketing special events and the unique aspects of the region. Specifically, RVRC provides training opportunities for local “Camera Ready” contacts annually. When a region has more to do, people are able to experience a better sense of place and community.

Train and educate the Regional Workforce A major priority for the RVRC is ensuring that there are good jobs and education available for the workers and employers of the region. RVRC acts as the regional Workforce Development agency, providing several services to both train, teach, and enable workers, and help employers find the right jobs. There are countless benefits to securing a strong and educated regional workforce. RVRC provides basic literacy skills, financial literacy education, and follow-up services to 100 individuals 17-24 years of age.

Create a Statewide Focus on Reaching Underserved Persons RVRC seeks to focus on reaching underserved persons by developing and implementing training for community partners to aid in outreach and service provision to underserved populations. RVRC hosts one training annually. Expand Efforts to Support Individuals to Remain in Their Desired Residence as Long as Possible.

There are many homeowners in the River Valley Region who face the possibility of losing their residency due to home repair costs or need for modification. RVRC seeks to make repair and modification services available to these individuals through state programs like the DCA Community Development Block Grant Program.

Increase Professional Capacity of Georgia’s Aging Network to Better Meet the Needs of Family Caregivers and At-Risk Adults RVRC plans to help caregivers and at-risk adults by facilitating trainings for health and wellness coordinators and caregiver specialists. To do this, RVRC will give presentations at churches and/or civic organizations to identify individuals willing to become Master Trainers in the “Powerful Tools for Caregivers” program. These trainings will increase regional Georgians’ access to caregiver and at-risk adult care needs.

Create a Balanced Sustainable Region To create a balanced and sustainable region, RVRC will work with local governments, community organizations, and businesses to improve efficiency in delivery of services. RVRC hosts a regional meeting of city and county clerks and managers annually to work on improving access to a multitude programs and services.

2) How will the community engage and involve older people in the process of becoming a more age-friendly?
The RVRC frequently holds public meetings with community members, local leaders, business owners, organizations, and elected officials. During all public hearings for grants and plans, citizens will be asked to identify their community needs to become more age-friendly. RVRC will work with each community to identify the best ways of reaching their senior citizens through traditional and nontraditional methods. There are many opportunities during planning processes to include seniors. During the creation of the Regional Plan, the RVRC council members – a group consisting of a combination of elected officials, government staff, and local citizens with at least one representative from each county – volunteered to sit on the planning committee. The steering committee developed a list of stakeholders from whom to solicit input regarding the regional plan update. RVRC staff developed an online survey to solicit input from stakeholders and residents of the region in regard to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats the area faces. The survey was visually appealing, interactive and easily accessible to residents of the region. The survey was placed on the RVRC Facebook page and the RVRC website. E-mail invitations with a link to the survey were distributed to RVRC Council members, local elected officials, and the Family Connections Coordinators within the region with the request to forward the invitation to others. RVRC staff also held a drawing for two tickets to Columbus Whitewater events for survey respondents. In addition to the online survey, the Commission reviewed each community’s current comprehensive plan for information regarding regional needs and opportunities. RVRC staff also held five in-person listening sessions in conjunction with SWOT analyses at each session to gather information from the public. Each meeting was held in a different county to collect as much input as possible from as wide a variety of people as possible. RVRC staff held meetings in Buena Vista (Marion County), Columbus (Muscogee County), Cuthbert (Randolph County), Americus (Sumter County), and Vienna (Dooly County). Together with the steering committee, RVRC staff used the information gathered from the comprehensive plans, from the survey, from the listening sessions, and from the steering committee meetings to develop the regional vision statement and a list of regional needs and opportunities. The RVRC Council then utilized an audience response system to vote on the needs and opportunities that they felt should be the priorities of the Commission during the next five years. Once the Commission established their priorities, RVRC staff and steering committee members developed strategies and activities that would use regional strengths to maximize opportunities, minimize weaknesses, and take advantage of opportunities to overcome regional weaknesses and threats.

3) Briefly describe the mechanisms the community has or is planning to put in place to facilitate collaborative planning and implementation between different agencies and departments.

At its core, the RVRC is a development organization that must collaborate with many different local, state, and federal entities in order to help the region succeed. A basic tenet of community planning is working with both community members and the local government to solve problems and lay the groundwork for future growth and development. For years, RVRC has helped facilitate these meetings for each of its local governments. Additionally, RVRC acts as a conduit between state and federal opportunities and its governments, administering grants, writing applications, and facilitating technical and educational opportunities. Development of the Regional Plan showcases this collaborative process. The regional planning process, at its inception and culmination, is a vision for the future. The ultimate aim of the process is to develop a linked group of strong communities. In order to achieve that objective, a meaningful planning process must solicit and integrate the input of citizens, government officials, and commission staff. The result will be a well-balanced regional plan addressing the issues of today, the opportunities of tomorrow, and outlining the steps necessary to bring about positive change over the next five (5) years. The intent of the River Valley Regional Plan Update process is to encourage as much public participation, open dialogue, and communication as possible among the region’s residents. By using proven community participation strategies, RVRC staff will build consensus among River Valley residents as to key regional priorities and specific actions to be pursued that will result in better government decisions and greater community agreement with those choices. The major challenge in developing a successful plan for the River Valley Region is convincing its citizens that the Regional Plan belongs to each and every citizen of the River Valley Region, and that broad-based public participation is necessary to obtain citizen ownership of the plan. It is also necessary to educate plan participants that the plan should represent a balance of community interest, defined by a give-and-take process that seeks local opinion and knowledge on planning issues. The end result is a community consensus (a Vision) in regards to future development policies and practices. Successful communities first create a vision, and then agree upon a course of action to
achieve the vision, and finally take the steps necessary to implement the vision. An essential element in implementing a Regional Plan is to recognize other organizations and interested parties that could provide information and support. These groups, or stakeholders, have a vested interest in the successful growth and development of the River Valley Region, and are therefore an integral part of the community planning process. The community participation process included tools to identify and engage representatives who have a present or future stake in the community. The steering committee developed a list of stakeholders from whom to solicit input regarding the regional plan update. Key stakeholders included community residents representing a diverse range of backgrounds and interests, as well as business and industry leaders, civic leaders, the development community, real estate professionals, media representatives, city and county staff, and elected officials. Other important participants include agriculture and forestry interests, banks, religious institutions and leaders, civic clubs, students, tourism officials, service organizations, and military leaders and members of the military with interest in the community. Local groups, property owners, and local business owners were also identified as crucial. Stakeholders are vital to the planning process. They are not only affected by change, they also create change. Participation of these individuals helps foster community understanding and support for the Regional Plan document, as well as provides fuel for the implementation of the plan. In order to ensure that all interested parties have a voice in the process, local government officials were utilized to encourage participation and guide the planning process. The State of Georgia Standards and Procedures for Regional Planning in 2017 (O.C.G.A. 110-12-6) require that two (2) public hearings and three listening sessions be held in association with the development of the Regional Plan Update. The initial public hearing was held Wednesday, August 23, 2017 in Buena Vista (Marion County) to inform the RVRC Council and the public that the planning process was underway, to go over the plan’s timeline, and to discuss how the public could be of help during the planning process (See Appendix: Public Meeting Documentation for further information). In addition to the two required public hearings, five listening sessions were held in various locations around the region. These public meetings were held Thursday, September 21, 2017 in Columbus (Muscogee County), Thursday, October 12, 2017 in Cuthbert (Randolph County), Thursday, January 11, 2018 in Americus (Sumter County), Wednesday, January 24, 2018 in Buena Vista (Marion County), and Wednesday, February 21, 2018 in Vienna (Dooly County). During meetings where SWOT analysis was done, interactive participation was used by giving meeting attendees stickers to affix to the SWOT items of highest importance to them (See Appendix: Public Meeting Documentation for further information). One meeting that took place before the RVRC Council also utilized an audience response system to gauge the priorities of the council. An online survey was also developed to solicit input from residents of the region in regards to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats the area faces. The survey was visually appealing, interactive and easily accessible to residents of the region. The survey was placed on the RVRC Facebook page and the RVRC website. E-mail invitations with a link to the survey were distributed to RVRC Council members, local elected officials, and the Family Connections Coordinators within the region. RVRC staff also held a drawing for two tickets to Columbus Whitewater events for survey respondents.
Section 4: NETWORK MEMBERSHIP

• Your answers to the following questions will help us complete your membership in the global age-friendly network and better enable us to understand how to support the network.

4) How do you hope to contribute to the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities and the World Health Organization Global Network of Age-Friendly Communities?

It is a goal of the RVRC to make the communities of the region more livable for all people, especially older adults. As a development organization that works for its local governments, River Valley Regional Commission is constantly collaborating with communities’ local leaders, elected officials, and organizations on various projects and initiatives. Through these connections, RVRC will strive to advocate for age-friendly improvements like changes in public policy and private-sector investment or action. Ways RVRC can help seniors in the region:
1) Encourage communities to pursue the development and rehabilitation of senior centers through state and federal grants.
2) Encourage communities and local leaders to be contentious of seniors needs in comprehensive planning, and advocate for those needs during planning meetings. Encourage and incentivize seniors to participate in the public planning process and attend public meetings related to planning.

5) What motivated your community to join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities and the World Health Organization Global Network of Age-Friendly Communities?

The RVRC strives to make the River Valley region a better place to live, especially for its senior citizens. It is therefore in the best interests of the RVRC to pursue resources that allow our organization to achieve these goals. The age-friendly designations from AARP and the WHO grant RVRC access to a host of opportunities and resources that have the potential to improve the livelihood of the region’s senior residents. The designation also helps identify the region as an age-friendly place to live.

6) Provide a digital file or link of a logo or other image that represents your community and for which you have reprint rights. The image resolution should be at least 72 dpi. As an example of an image, here’s ours:

Click here to add a link to where we can find your logo. Or, send a JPEG, PDF or PNG of your logo by email attachment to livable@aarp.org.