Age-Friendly Sarasota

A Community for All Ages

Five Year Progress Report (2015-2020)
Foreward

I am pleased to present the Age Friendly Sarasota, Five Year Progress Report 2015 -2020. As I reviewed this report, I was both amazed and proud of all that our community has accomplished in just five short years of age friendly efforts.

How wonderful to pause for a moment to recognize and celebrate the many efforts and accomplishments that are shaping Sarasota County as a Community for all Ages. It is also a significant benchmark for our community and very exciting as we establish a sustainable on-going age friendly process and begin to focus on what is possible over the next five years.

I am thankful for the sponsorship of Sarasota County Government, the partnerships with The Patterson Foundation, USF Sarasota Manatee, AARP and the many contributors to this report, representing our wonderful community.

Clearly, Sarasota County is invested in efforts to improve quality of life for all Sarasota County residents and visitors.

Regards,

Charles H. Henry, MPA,
Health Officer, DOH Sarasota
Acknowledgements

The importance in being identified as an Age-Friendly Community is that this accolade is not just about Sarasota as a place, but about the community that helped create and advance the effort. Age-Friendly Sarasota has made incredible progress since 2015 because of the hard work and dedication across multiple sectors and stakeholders.

The Age-Friendly Sarasota Initiative (AFS) was made possible through the generous support of The Patterson Foundation (TPF). Special thanks to the entire TPF team for their tireless work from the start of this journey along with strategic Communication Partner; Magnify Good.

In addition, AFS is supported through partnerships with AARP Florida, the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, the Florida Policy Exchange Center on Aging at the University of South Florida, Sarasota County Government, and the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee.

Special thanks to the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee and Dr. Kathy Black, Professor of Aging Studies and Social Work at USF Sarasota-Manatee, who contributed countless hours to the assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation of the Age-Friendly Sarasota Initiative. Dr. Black continues to present at major conferences and lectures around the globe on age-friendly practices.

Age-Friendly Sarasota is currently being advanced by Sarasota County Government working in collaboration with The Patterson Foundation. Thank you to Jonathan Lewis, Sarasota County Administrator; Chuck Henry, MPA, Health Officer, Department of Health in Sarasota; and the Board of County Commissioners for recognizing the importance of this initiative and accepting oversight.

We acknowledge and appreciate the support and dedication of the Sarasota County Seniors Advisory Council. Adopted in 2000 by the Board of County Commissioners, this 11-member board was established to provide a conduit for citizen input to the Board, on issues and conditions affecting Sarasota County’s older adult community. They have addressed issues including Access to Information, Food Security and Hunger, Transportation, Safe and Affordable Housing and Access to Healthcare. In 2019 they accepted responsibility as the reviewing Council for the Age-Friendly Sarasota Action Plan, providing advice and input for strategies and review of outcomes.
Acknowledgements

With sincere appreciation to Sarasota County staff in many departments for help in updating key data for this report and the action plan: Administration, Communications, Health and Human Services, Human Resources, Libraries & Historical Resources, Neighborhood Services, Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources, Planning and Development Services, Public Works, Transportation and UF/IFAS Extension

We celebrate and are grateful for the most important contributors; the Sarasota County residents, aged 50 and older who participated in all phases of the work; and to the community partners who provided valuable input:

2-1-1 Suncoast
All Faiths Food Bank
Alzheimer’s Association, Florida Gulf Coast Chapter
American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)
American Red Cross of Southwest Florida
Area Agency on Aging for Southwest Florida
CareerSouce Suncoast
CenterPlace Health
City of North Port
City of Sarasota
City of Venice
Community Alliance of Sarasota County
Community Alliance of Sarasota County’s Aging Stakeholders Committee
Cornerstone LifeCare
Dale Smith, The People Photographer
Downtown Sarasota Condominium Association
Dr. Kathy Hyer, Professor and Director, Florida Policy Exchange Center on Aging, University of South Florida
FCCI Insurance Group
Florida Council on Aging
Florida Department of Children & Families in Sarasota County’s Adult Protective Services
Florida Department of Elder Affairs
Florida Department of Health in Sarasota County’s Community Health Action Teams (CHAT)
Acknowledgements

Florida Department of Health in Sarasota County’s Health Planning, Education and Promotion Department
Florida Studio Theater
Friends of Sarasota County Parks
Friends of the Legacy Trail
Goodwill Manasota
Habitat for Humanity Sarasota
Herald-Tribune Media Group
iTN Suncoast
Jewish Family and Children’s Service of the Suncoast
Laura Cantwell, Associate State Director of Advocacy and Outreach, AARP Florida
Living in Community Network
Lutheran Services
Nathan Benderson Park’s World Rowing Committee
National Council on Aging
Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Ringling College (OLLI)
Pines of Sarasota
Sarasota Bradenton International Airport
Sarasota County Aging Network
Sarasota County Government
Sarasota County Schools
Sarasota County Senior Advocacy Council
Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office
Sarasota Housing Authority
Sarasota Memorial Health Care System
Sarasota Ministerial Association
Sarasota Police Department
Sarasota YMCA
Sarasota-Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization
Sarasota-Manatee Originals
Senior Friendship Centers
Senior Housing Consortium
Seniors Blue Book
Acknowledgements

State College of Florida
SunCoast Alliance for Lifelong Learning
The Fuller Center for Housing
The Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee
The Patterson Foundation
The Ringling Museum
Tidewell Hospice
Town of Longboat Key
United Way Suncoast
Universal Design Coalition
University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee
Venice Area Chamber of Commerce
Visit Sarasota County
Women’s Resource Center
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Age-Friendly Welcome ........................................ 9
Age-Friendly Program Cycle ................................. 10
About Sarasota County ........................................ 11
Sarasota County Population ................................... 12
Age-Friendly Process .......................................... 13
Age-Friendly Highlights ..................................... 14
Domains of Livability .......................................... 15
Civic Participation & Employment ......................... 16-18
Communication & Information ............................ 19-21
Community Support & Health Services ................. 22-24
Housing ................................................................ 25-27
Outdoor Spaces & Buildings ............................... 28-30
Respect & Social Inclusion .................................. 31-33
Social Participation ............................................. 34-36
Transportation .................................................... 37-39
Looking Forward ................................................. 40
References .......................................................... 41
It’s hard to believe Age-Friendly Sarasota is concluding the 5-year Age-Friendly Process. It has been a cycle of assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation in collaboration with many community partners to help make Sarasota a community where older adults lead purposeful, active lives that promote inclusion and respect.

As you will read in the following Age-Friendly Sarasota Five Year Progress Report, there has been considerable growth, but there is always more to do. We must remind ourselves, the Age-Friendly Initiative is a journey, not a destination. It’s a collective effort that includes people, government, business, nonprofits, and media. Each of us has something to contribute; no effort is too small.

I am extremely proud to be representing Sarasota County in this important work and would like to thank Dr. Kathy Black, University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee; Sarasota County Seniors Advisory Committee and The Patterson Foundation for pioneering the Age-Friendly Sarasota Initiative and contributing to the development and creation of the Age-Friendly Sarasota Community Report (2016), Action Plan (2017), and Progress Report (2018).

As we close out our first five years, we come away with lessons learned, increased understanding and sincere gratitude to the community for your interest and input in helping navigate the age-friendly journey.

Sincerely,
Susan Firestone,
Aging System Policy Coordinator
Age-Friendly Program Cycle

In 2010, with significant support and research, The World Health Organization (WHO) established the Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities (GNAFCC). The GNAFCC has 15 affiliates worldwide including the United States affiliate AARP.

In 2015, Sarasota County became Florida’s first community to join the World Health Organization’s (WHO) GNAFCC and the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities.

Age-Friendly communities seek to create an environment that empowers all people to live purposeful, active lives that promote inclusion and respect. It includes the combination of community members, government, business, nonprofits, and media to work together in developing services, systems and policies that enhance livability for people of all ages and abilities.

The Age-Friendly process and program cycle is one of continuous improvement. The WHO and AARP model outline a five-year framework. This includes assessing community needs and aspirations, developing a plan of action, implementation and working towards goals, and measuring the impact and progress.
Sarasota County anchors the middle of Florida’s western coast, approximately 60 miles south of Tampa Bay. It includes the cities of Sarasota, Venice and North Port, and the Town of Longboat Key. The county is home to approximately 415,896 permanent residents and more than 476,000 during the winter months.

The community encompasses 725 square miles of land and is surrounded by 37 miles of open shoreline along the Gulf of Mexico. Endowed with inspiring natural beauty, and appealing climate and world-class arts and culture, this coastal paradise has superior schools, significant medical research and education facilities, high educational attainment, and a regional workforce of more than 350,000.
Sarasota County Population

Sarasota County is home to one of Florida’s largest proportions of older adults, with more than a third (34%) aged 65 and older (Florida Department of Elder Affairs, 2018). Among the older age groups, persons aged 80 and older currently represent 10% of all residents, but by 2045 are projected to represent over 17.8% of all residents. The population pyramid demonstrates the older adult population estimates for 2020 and 2045. The “inverted” pyramid is indicative of not only Sarasota County, but a national shift in declining births and increased life span.

The Age-Friendly process requires conducting a community-wide baseline assessment of Sarasota County residents’ (age 50 and older). Nearly 1,200 residents, representing every zip code location throughout Sarasota County, completed surveys, or participated in focus groups. This data along with contributions from more than 50 community organizations and businesses were combined to create a Community Report (2016), Action Plan (2017) and Progress Report (2018) detailing the objectives, strategies, progress and outcomes of the Age-Friendly Sarasota Initiative.
Age-Friendly Highlights

Age-Friendly Festival

On October 28, 2017, Sarasota hosted the nation’s first Age-Friendly Festival sponsored by The Patterson Foundation. With 125 participating partners, 140 volunteers and over 4,000 attendees, the festival showcased entertainment, resources, lectures, panel discussions, food, art, and fun for people of all ages.

Age-Friendly Sharing Symposium

Sarasota County has hosted two statewide Age-Friendly Sharing Symposia with support from AARP and The Patterson Foundation. The inaugural symposium began with just 15 attendees and has grown to over 100 attendees from all over the state of Florida.
Domains of Livability

The WHO has identified eight domains that influence health and quality of life:

**Civic Participation & Employment:** Options for paid work, entrepreneurship, post-retirement training, volunteering, and the chance for residents of all ages to engage in the creation of policies relevant to their lives.

**Communication & Information:** Access to information about community activities and services through multiple formats adapted for sensory impairments and access to computers, internet and automated information.

**Community Support & Health Services:** Access to homecare services, medical care and programs that promote wellness, voluntary support, emergency planning, aging specialist and coordinated care across the continuum.

**Housing:** Access to a range of affordable housing options, home modification programs, home maintenance services and alternative living options to age in place.

**Outdoor Spaces & Buildings:** Availability of safe and accessible facilities for recreation, shopping and services; walkways; parking areas; public restrooms; and public parks.

**Respect & Social Inclusion:** Access to an environment that encourages reverent treatment and interactions, intergenerational activities, and involvement by residents of all ages, abilities and incomes.

**Social Participation:** Affordable and accessible opportunities across a range of social activities with peers and younger people, countering isolation.

**Transportation:** Availability of safe and affordable transportation to needed services and desired activities; specialized services; pedestrian and cycling; roadway design and signage; and travel after transitioning from driving.
Civic participation includes involvement in aspects of community life that extend beyond our day-to-day activities, such as volunteering, becoming politically active, voting or working on committees. For some, these have been lifelong involvements and for others, retirement has created time to become more involved. Employment is also important, especially for those with low and fixed income. The ability to remain employed or find new employment provides both economic security and benefits employers who recognize the experience and commitment that older employees bring to the workplace.
Civic Participation & Employment

Highlights (2015-2020)

- AARP Livability Index indicates there are 7.3 organizations per 10,000 people across a range of civic, social, religious and business organizations, which is higher than the median US neighborhood at 7.0.

- Sarasota County Government redesigned its website portal to provide access to volunteer opportunities, and more than 300 positions through 34 different advisory/appointed boards.

- 1,033 Sarasota County volunteers contributed 283,606 hours of volunteer service to County programs with an in-kind value of $7,212,104 in 2019.

- Volunteer Florida, Neighborhood of Good, Volunteer Match, All for Good and Senior Friendship Centers provide volunteer opportunities across a wide range of interests and locations.

- AARP Create the Good, Sarasota Newcomers Club and Senior Friendship Centers connect people to share life experiences, and promotes connection and inclusion.

- University of South Florida (USF), Florida Department of Elder Affairs, Elder Helpers, and Scholarship Volunteer seek to enhance and promote intergenerational volunteer opportunities and support youth volunteers in completing service hours.

- 17,269 adults age 65+ were employed during 2018, up 12% since 2015.

- CareerSource SunCoast, Women’s Resource Center, State College of Florida Workforce Solutions and Goodwill Manasota offer training, education and resources for resume preparation, job interviewing skills, job searches/applications and registering with online jobsite portals.

- Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), CVS Health “Talent is Ageless” Program, CareerSource Suncoast and Retirement Jobs.com all cultivate partnerships with the goal of recruitment and placement of mature workers.

- MyStartupSuncoast is a community network dedicated to support startups and the Florida Small Business Development Center at USF provides no cost counseling and low-cost training for entrepreneurs of all ages.

- Participation in the annual State of Talent Conference (2017). The Age-Friendly Workplace Panel discussion highlighted the demographics of the current workforce and the value of hiring employees of all ages.
Civic Participation & Employment

“I think our community does a really good job. There are a lot of volunteer opportunities.”

“I try to share (opportunities) with people – new people that I meet in the community. I always, if I see someone at an event or something, I just go up and introduce myself ... just to get them to know about what is available and to get them involved in different things... I think the personal connection is best...”

“I still work 2 days a week. I enjoy the extra income and it is important to me. I also think it is good. It’s good for you emotionally to be around other people.”

“There is enough of (volunteering) and it is very accessible, but I mean you really have to reach out.... once again, we face transportation issues for a lot of people who can’t get to whatever...”

“There are certain places where there’s a lot of older people in the work force and I’m always pleased to see that.”

Age-Friendly Sarasota’s goal is to include persons through civic engagement and enhance meaningful opportunities to participate in community life. There has been significant progress on many of the objectives and strategies under this domain, and steady progress on other actions to meet outcomes. Through community partners, there is improved centralized sources for both paid employment and volunteer opportunities. There are connections to initiate volunteer involvement especially for new residents, singles and retirees, and increased awareness about intergenerational volunteering. There are improvements in accessing education, training, and assistance for learning new job skills. Continued effort needs to be made on expanding awareness about the value of both multigenerational and older adult workforce as well as expanded transportation options for both paid work and volunteering.
Communication & Information

**DOMAIN DESCRIPTION**

Communication & Information includes keeping individuals connected to community through diverse sources. Age-Friendly communities make sure information is readily accessible and in formats that are appropriate for persons of all ages. Both formal (TV, newspaper, radio, internet, social media) and informal (family, friends, clubs, faith-based) communication as well as distribution close to home remain important to older adults. The ability to keep connected supports decision making for full participation in all aspects of community life.
Communication & Information

Highlights (2015-2020)

• Sarasota County Government launched a mobile-friendly version of the website with improved accessibility and created a Multi-Modal Map for information and navigation to SCAT. Access Sarasota television provides live coverage of meetings and events.

• Sarasota County Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources publicizes a monthly calendar of special events and an Activities Guide available to view via the website or download. Sarasota County Libraries publicizes events by library location, event type and program.

• Sarasota County Emergency Services offers information on Hurricane Preparedness, Evacuation Maps, Shelters, Transportation Options, Special Needs, Fire Station location, and Public Safety Information.

• Sarasota County Health and Human Services, Mosquito Management and Veterans Services webpage provide information on available community resources.

• The Patterson Foundation manages the Age-Friendly newsletter, blog, social media presence, website, presentation request, and shares information about Age-Friendly practices and impact on a National and Global level.

• The Patterson Foundation sponsored the nation’s first Age-Friendly Festival (2017) with education and information from 125 participating partners, serving over 4,000 attendees.

• Senior Friendship Centers publishes Prime Times monthly through the Herald Tribune newspaper distributed countywide and available in digital format with enhanced accessibility options. Prime Times provides relevant articles about aging.

• Senior Friendship Centers, Sarasota Memorial Health Care System, Good Samaritan Pharmacy, Gulfcoast Legal Services, Legal Aid of Manasota, Sarasota County, National Council on Aging, The Patterson Foundation, Jewish Family & Children’s Services of the Suncoast, The Paradise Center, 2-1-1 Suncoast, Inc., Area Agency of Aging for Southwest Florida, Lighthouse of Manasota, Hearing Loss Association of America, and the Florida Department of Health all provide extensive information and referral resources specific to aging.

• Sarasota County Libraries, Senior Friendship Centers, Sarasota Adult and Community Education, and SunCoast Alliance for Lifelong Learning provide for opportunities to improve technology skills and access to computers and internet.
“I don’t want to go online. I have a computer and I use it minimally because it is not consuming my life. I don’t want to take the time to click and clack to find out so and so and then find out that you can’t go there, you’ve got to go somewhere else and then ‘oh, they want my Social Security number.”

“A positive thing I think is that we have a lot of great sources.”

“We need to be concerned about the people who are still aren’t on email...and some will never be, like my mother.”

“I think there’s a lot of information out there but it’s not comprehensive ... there are things that appear to be comprehensive but they leave out a lot....People are not aware of what is going on.”

“Our homeowner’s association uses website, twitter, Facebook page...we publish a hard copy newsletter...trying to take into consideration the vast range of age, socioeconomic issues, cultural issues, different languages...in Spanish as well.”

Age-Friendly Sarasota continues to make progress across many objectives and strategies under this domain. The goal is to enhance accessible, timely and pertinent information to support decision-making for full participation in civic, social and economic life. There has been significant improvement to accessibility features on government, business and nonprofit websites. Options for increased font size, contrast, read mode, text spacing and keyboard navigation have been added to make it easier to navigate. Information about local events, special programs, resources, newsletters, videos, and social media are readily available in print, on line or through mobile apps. Aging resources can easily be found through multiple government websites and publications. While access to internet service has made steady progress, it could improve in areas where low income older adults are living.
Community Support & Health Services

DOMAIN DESCRIPTION

Health and support services are vital to maintaining well-being and independence. Age-Friendly communities recognize that good mental and physical health contribute to quality of life. Community services that support physical or mental well-being and the availability of health promotion activities foster healthy aging throughout the lifespan. Community-based health and social services should aim to meet changing needs that come with aging including caregiver assistance so that people can be supported throughout their lives as fully as possible.
Community Support & Health Services

Highlights (2015-2020)

• Florida Department of Health in Sarasota County (DOH) operates adult health care programming for specialty care, lab, pharmacy, communicable disease screening, HIV assessment/management, health education and operates the Health in Motion mobile unit for no-cost, on-site screenings.

• CenterPlace Health operates primary care for adults, health education and evaluation of acute and chronic health problems, lab services and on-site mental health/substance abuse services.

• Sarasota Memorial Hospital (SMH) is an 839 bed acute care hospital with 18 facilities throughout the county. It is Sarasota County’s only Level II Trauma Center, and received designation as an Age-Friendly Health System in 2019. SMH operates one of only seventeen Memory Disorder Clinics in the State of Florida.

• Senior Friendship Centers (SFC) operates two clinics that provide primary care, dental and specialty services to low-income individuals age 50 years or older on a sliding fee scale. SFC offers the Center for Aging Studies an accredited continuing education program for geriatric-focused coursework. The Caregiving Place offers resources, support groups, adult day services, referrals and education for caregivers.

• The Florida Department of Health (DOH) added Alzheimer’s Disease and related dementia as a 9th priority to the State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP).

• The Florida Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA) along with the Area Agency on Aging for Southwest Florida (AAA) oversees government funded home and community based services for eligible adults age 60+ and administers a wide range of programs benefiting older adults and those with disabilities.

• SMH Memory Disorder Clinic, Roskamp Clinic, Alzheimer’s Association, Jewish Children and Family Service of the Suncoast and SFC offer memory screenings, support groups, education, research and resources on Alzheimer’s and related dementia.

• The Dementia Care and Cure Initiative (DCCI) was established to provide awareness, education and sensitivity surrounding those with dementia and their caregivers.

• Florida DOEA, AAA, DOH, Sarasota County, and Community partners all work together on emergency preparedness and recovery efforts.
“Is there kind of a networking system of people who maybe are not in the healthcare system but they are neighbors or friends or people who would be willing to do that and then maybe you would be willing to do that for them some other time. Is there anything like that around?”

“My church has a group that will call other people who are frail and check with them every morning, say ‘hello, how are you, goodbye.’ Every day.”

“What is needed is (information) on cost, availability, training, education for the consumer – what to ask for, what to expect, how to hire, how to fire... but people don’t know and we’re back to education.”

“I don’t know how I would have managed (spouse’s dementia) without the advice I learned from others (at support group).”

“There is nothing in town, finding a facility, finding doctors, psychiatrists who can do geriatrics. It isn’t here.”

Sarasota is a community with abundant resources including six Major Hospitals, 86 Assisted Living Facilities, 30 Skilled Nursing Facilities and 68 Home Health Agencies. There are organizations that operate adult health care programming, health education, provide referrals to resources, and assist with accessing state and federal funding. The community has networks that focus on caregiving, palliative/end of life care, falls prevention and Alzheimer’s and related dementias. Sarasota has offerings for supportive and innovative services to age in place through home care and robust disaster preparedness specific to older adults through state and county government. Community involvement through neighborhood associations, faith-based organizations and technology options such as personal health monitoring systems help to extend the reach. Continued effort needs to be made on expanding awareness about unintentional injuries (primarily falls) and finding affordable options for in-home care resources.
Housing is essential to safety and well-being. For many of us, aging in place is desirable, yet our current homes may be unable to meet our needs as we age. The availability of appropriate, affordable housing with a choice of styles and locations that incorporate adaptive or universal design features will be essential for many of us to continue living independently in our community. We also need to consider alternative living options such as shared and communal housing that are emerging throughout the country, but not yet widely available in our community.
Housing

Highlights (2015-2020)

- Sarasota County and University of Florida IFAS Extension provide information and training on the concepts of Universal Design (UD). A voluntary resolution for builders was adopted in 2015 which expedites permitting for builders incorporating UD into new construction.

- Sarasota has an active Universal Design Coalition (UDC) that educates the public through presentations and seminars. UDC is working to develop a public Universal Design home for education and showcasing accessibility features.

- Sarasota County Planning and Development Services provides an on-line search for state and locally registered contractors.

- Funding was received for redevelopment of four major housing projects; Orange Avenue, Arbor Village, Venetian Walk and Lofts on Lemon between 2016-2019.

- Sarasota Housing Authority has increased HUD subsidized units for older adults (age 62+) by 40% since 2016.

- Senior Friendship Centers began a Home Share Program that matches people looking for affordable living situations with older adults through a strict vetting process to ensure both parties safety and comfort.

- Various websites such as After55.com, Nesterly and Silvernest provide opportunities for roommate matching, home sharing, independent retirement, assisted living, or memory care as well as senior housing options and referrals.

- Administration for Community Living provides extensive information regarding long term care options, cost, providers, payment option and region specific costs.

- National Association of Home Builders provides information on Certified Aging-In-Place Specialist (CAPS) and resources for education, requirements and costs. Sarasota County has seven Certified Aging-In-Place Specialists.

- Sarasota County Planning and Development Office of Housing and Community Development administer the Barrier Removal Program that provides grants or forgivable loans to assist low income families with a disabled or elderly resident to remove barriers and/or implement UD features that allow a person to live independently.

- AARP Livability index indicates 43.6% of homes in Sarasota have a zero step entry. In Sarasota, 19.3% of income is devoted to monthly housing costs, and 27.3% of housing units are multi-family (not single-family, detached homes).
“There are so many people trying to cope with what they have without going through renovations. There are people who can’t afford it, resist it, whatever. Just the layout of the home, the environment that they’re living in does not promote independence at all... It’s a nice idea, if you can afford it.”

“We respect our zoning laws when we build developments here, but we are not respecting the needs of the elders when we build all single family homes far away from a center without any kind of commercial enterprises nearby?”

“There’s a very short supply of affordable housing.”

“If homes that are handicapped accessible are more common, it is a good thing because when you buy a house, it is available as your needs change.”

“I have a one flight walk up to my apartment. I’ve been there for years...and I’ve noticed how much harder it’s gotten since I first moved in. I like (my home) but I don’t know how much longer I can manage the steps.”

Age-Friendly Sarasota’s goal is to enhance accessible, affordable and supportive housing options to age in place. According to AARP, 76% of Americans age 50 and older say they would prefer to remain in their own home. Universal Design features are important in creating a home that is comfortable, efficient and safe for all people. In 2015, Sarasota County adopted a Voluntary Resolution for builders on Universal Design to help increase new UD housing stock. Sarasota’s subsidized housing has seen a 40% increase and four major housing projects have been completed since 2016. Shared and co-housing opportunities are limited, but available through community partners. Sarasota County residents across all ages report the largest gap in this domain is well-maintained and safe low-income housing. Continued effort needs to be made to promote the benefit of building using UD features and individuals need to manage options to make their own home age friendly.
DOMAIN DESCRIPTION

When we think about daily life, we visit or encounter outdoor spaces and public buildings on a regular basis. These elements are critical to an active community life. Age-friendly outdoor spaces consider safe and accessible features such as paved sidewalks, timed crosswalks, adequate parking, and safe walkways. Age-friendly buildings consider appropriately timed elevators and escalators, non-skid flooring, adequate signage and accessible restrooms. These types of features offer opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to benefit from community spaces.
Highlights (2015-2020)

- Sarasota County Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources deployed a 400 sq. ft. mobility mat (mobimat) for access to Siesta Key Beach in 2015. They provide beach wheelchairs at no cost year-round at five public beaches, installed EZ launch Kayak at two parks and offer a seasonal surrey ride along the Legacy Trail.

- Sarasota County Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources provides oversight of the Legacy Trail a non-motorized, paved multi-use trail connecting communities across Sarasota County. The trail offers rest stops, trailheads, free parking and rest stations approximately every mile.

- Sarasota County Board of County Commissioners approved the Legacy Trail extension project for an additional eight miles of non-motorized paved multi-use trail. 291,510 people used the Legacy Trail in 2019.

- Sarasota County Resolution 2019234 created approved use of Class I Electronic Bicycle for use on the Legacy Trail.

- Sarasota County Public Works implemented SeeClickFix mobile application to communicate with local government about non-emergency issues for the time period 2016 thru 2019; 10,815 requests were resolved.

- TripAdvisor named Siesta Key Beach #1 in the US in 2020.

- Sarasota Bradenton International Airport provides an escalator at a reduced speed.

- Visit Sarasota offers a listing of hotels, restaurants and activities that are wheelchair accessible with a direct link to the location’s website.

- Friends of Sarasota County Parks provided 187,455 volunteer hours in 2019.

- Sarasota County Department of Health offers ten Pathways to Health Walking and Wellness Loops.

- The City of Sarasota approved construction of freestanding public restrooms in St. Armand’s Circle, and waive metered parking for those using handicap parking permits.

- City of Sarasota created multiple courts (pickleball, basketball, shuffleboard), bicycle facilities, dog park, kayak launch, picnic area, covered pavilion, fishing pier, multipurpose paths for biking, jogging exercise, fitness and a technology hub (Wi-Fi throughout the park) at Bayfront Park.
Outdoor Spaces & Buildings

“Neighborhoods where people are safe. That is very important.”

“We have a picnic lunch and we can spend 2, 3, 4 hours outside and it is lovely. It’s just nice to be outside and to be enjoying the beautiful scenery.”

“The Legacy Trail (and other trails) are good for walking, for biking... a real plus for the community.”

“The restrooms have very heavy doors in all of the restaurants and in all of the stores-and most do not have a button to push.”

“I’ve seen a lot of discontinuity where you have a really nice sidewalk and then maybe it totally ends at 2 or 3 blocks or narrows down.”

Age-Friendly Sarasota’s goal is to enhance accessibility to public spaces, buildings and to promote senior friendly park design and open space features for people of all abilities. Sarasota County is rich in parks and natural resources (160 county parks, two state parks and 60 city parks) with numerous features including paved sidewalks, shaded playgrounds and covered picnic areas. All parks include entry signs, park rules, direction with pedestrian and wheelchair accessibility. Siesta Key Beach has been named the #1 beach in the US again in 2020 and has features such as the Mobility Mat and beach wheelchairs which create access for all people. The Legacy Trail is 12.5 miles of paved surface that offers rest stops, trailheads, rest stations as well as a seasonal surrey ride for residents and visitors who might otherwise be unable to experience The Legacy Trail. Sarasota County Public Works implemented SeeClickFix mobile application which enables individuals to communicate with local government about non-emergency issues in the community.
We know that community attitudes that demonstrate respect of older persons and recognize the important role that they play in society are critical factors for an age-friendly community. Age-friendly communities foster positive images of aging and intergeneration understanding to challenge negative attitudes and combat ageism. We live in a culture that has stigmatized aging, and we can do better to demonstrate respect and inclusion for all persons and their contributions. Intergenerational interactions and public education can go a long way in helping change this stigma.
Respect & Social Inclusion

Highlights (2015-2020)

- Sarasota County Government conducts an annual Citizen Opinion Survey to promote community input and feedback about programs and services.

- Sarasota County has a Seniors Advisory Council, an 11-member council that serves as the community conduit to the Board of County Commissioner whose membership is made up of one youth member, five professionals from businesses serving the older population and five at large members 50 years of age or older.

- Community partners in conjunction with Florida Studio Theater participated in the research and development of *Old Enough to Know Better* a performance piece about aging based on more than 100 interviews and close to 300 hours of material.

- Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at Ringling College, Senior Friendship Centers, and JFCS of the Suncoast created the Reinvention Convention, a six-year series of discussions about aging.

- Sarasota County Sheriff partners with other Law Enforcement professionals and older adults through Seniors and Law Enforcement Together (S.A.L.T.) to develop, expand and implement effective crime prevention and educational programs.

- The Florida Department of Elder Affairs provides a 24-hour hotline to report Elder Abuse and provide community education.

- Florida Department of Elder Affairs, Sarasota Memorial Hospital, and Age-Friendly Sarasota established the Dementia Care and Cure Initiative (DCCI) Task Force to provide awareness, education and sensitivity regarding the needs of those effected by dementia and their caregivers.

- AARP unveiled the *Disrupt Aging* campaign to shed light on stereotyping older adults.

- Multiple community partners offer discounts for older adults for legal services, prescriptions, restaurants, shopping and local attractions.

- Scholarship Volunteers locate opportunities for students and tracks hours for school credit and community service.

- The Florida Department of Elder Affairs sponsors an annual celebration of Intergenerational Engagement to raise awareness and celebrates the benefits of uniting the generations.
“We shouldn’t just be thinking about what the older generation is thinking; it ought to be a community of concern that goes in all directions, intergenerationally.”

“There are those receptionists that are dismissive of you...they need to understand what their patients are feeling, so that they can be empathic to the people who they are treating. That is really empathic with a capital “E” - that’s what we want from the people who are providing services to us.”

“I’m finding that the wait staff, the restaurants...they’re wonderful. They really seem to clue in very quickly when they realize there is a situation because my (spouse with dementia) looks very normal...the perception when you first meet him would be that he’s probably fine. He’s not, believe me.”

Age-Friendly Sarasota’s goal is to enhance awareness and respectful interactions to support full participation in community life. This is achieved through education about the positive aspects of aging and in recognizing contributions of older adults. Much of the progress in this domain surrounds messaging about aging. It is about breaking down stereotypes and combating ageism. National organizations, such as AARP have pushed out campaigns such as “Disrupt Aging”. Local partners (SFC, JFCS, OLLI, FST) have created performance pieces, educational series, and opportunities for lifelong learning. Programs through the Department of Elder Affairs such as Elder Abuse Awareness Training, reporting hotline, and the Dementia Care and Cure Initiative (DCCI) ensure those who are vulnerable have a voice. Sarasota County Government offers the opportunity for citizens to be heard through an annual satisfaction survey and through participation on advisory councils. Community partners make the vital link with children and youth to bridge the generations.
Participation in leisure, social, cultural and spiritual activities within the community or with family is critical to maintaining good physical and mental health. Age-friendly communities foster opportunities to socialize and integrate with other age groups and cultures and promote lifelong learning and education. Sharing in activities is enhanced through the provision of adequate transportation, affordable options and proximity. Religious activities remain an important form of participation for older adults and often facilitate a variety of services for those who may be at risk or isolated.
Highlights (2015-2020)

- Sarasota County Park, Recreation & Natural Resources offers a calendar of park events and publishes a biannual Recreation and Natural Resources Guide. There are multiple opportunities for a variety of individual abilities and interests including the mobility mat at Siesta Beach, outdoor exercise equipment, paved trails, yoga on the beach, The Legacy Trail, Beach University, senior softball, and walking programs to name a few.

- Sarasota County has 36 natural areas/nature centers, 160 county parks, two state parks and 60 city parks that include a wide range of features for people to gather.

- Sarasota County Libraries and Historical Resources publicizes a schedule of events by library location, event type and program across 10 sites in Sarasota County. In 2019 they offered 2,258 adult programs with 43,234 attendees.

- The Florida Department of Health in Sarasota offers a variety of outreach wellness programs including “Health in Motion” mobile unit and “Pathways to Health” walking trails.

- Senior Friendship Centers provides activities at two main locations and satellite sites throughout the county that promote health and wellness, socialization, inter-generational opportunities, dancing, lifelong learning and LGBTQ+ discussion groups.

- Multiple community partners participated in the development of Old Enough to Know Better with Florida Studio Theater. This performance piece was created from nearly 100 interviews and close to 300 hours of material.

- The State University System of Florida allow universities to waive fee courses for residents of the state age 60 or older on a space available basis.

- Suncoast Alliance for Lifelong Learning, Sarasota Adult & Community Enrichment at Suncoast Technical College and Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes at Ringling College offer thousands of courses in a variety of areas.

- The Arts & Cultural Alliance of Sarasota provides a guide to arts and cultural activities involving more than 176 organizations.

- Seniors Blue Book provide older adults, caregivers and professionals a comprehensive resource guide for services with over 70 categories of information.
Social Participation

“We have a lot of social activities, particular cultural ones. Whether they’re affordable is another issue because I don’t think a lot of people, when they have limited incomes, can afford some of the things that are here.”

“I feel like there is so much to do in Sarasota, that you could be busy every minute of every day. I find it actually overwhelming because there is so much to do”

“The other thing that this is really so appreciative here are the freebies. The library has movies, you can get books, you can get magazines, you can read your paper and it’s all for free. That helps a lot when you are on a limited income, you know.”

“Several years ago my spouse has serious problems and we had to cut down on everything...I usually don’t go out to any affairs...”

“It can be out of your comfort zone to go to new places and engage with new people.”

Age-Friendly Sarasota’s goal is to increase awareness and access to leisure, recreational, cultural, educational and intergenerational opportunities. Several of the main objectives surrounding wellness, caregiving and connecting generations have been very successful, but we need to continue to support conveniently located and affordable activities. We are fortunate that Sarasota County has ample performing arts companies, museums, concert venues, sports stadiums and movie theaters. Sarasota County Parks and Libraries offer a wide variety of programming and activities throughout the entire county. Lifelong learning programming through OLLI, SCALL and ACE offers hundreds of courses across myriad topics for all ages and skill levels. Activities focused on health promotion and wellbeing for older adults are available at places like Senior Friendship Centers and The Paradise Center, while the Florida Department of Health provides outreach activities and participation through Community Health Action Teams (CHAT).
The ability to move around the community is not only key in determining social and civic participation but access to resources and needed services. That is why the availability, affordability and safety of transportation options for older adults is critical to an age-friendly community. Safe sidewalks, crosswalks and adequate lighting and signage are also important features to consider. Alternate forms of transportation need to be available to those who are transitioning from driving. This includes both public and private options and those specifically for disabled and older adults.
Highlights (2015-2020)

- Sarasota County Transportation Planning created a multimobility app for quick access to transit lines, bus stops, bike lanes and sidewalks.

- Sarasota County Public Works maintains almost 2,000 miles of sidewalks and bike lanes that connect communities, provide alternative transportation options and provide a safe place to exercise and walk.

- Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) adopted Complete Streets Policy which designs streets for all users including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders. They also have outlined specific Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Strategies available on the website.

- City of Sarasota installed a High-Intensity Activated Crosswalk (HAWK). This system provides protected pedestrian crossing, stopping traffic on demand.

- FDOT has created the Safe Mobility for Life program which offers a Florida Guide for Aging Drivers. Twenty-nine partners support this guidebook.

- AARP, American Society on Aging and the American Occupational Therapy Association developed the CarFit educational safety program to help aging drivers improve the “fit” of their car for safety and comfort.

- Sarasota County launched Siesta Key Breeze Trolley which runs 7 days per week including major holidays at no cost. 230,000 passengers were served in the first year (2017).

- Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) has a fleet of buses that are all ADA-accessible with buses that kneel for easy boarding and have the capability to deploy a ramp for wheelchair use. All buses are designated a “Safe Place” for passengers in danger and have cameras for added safety.

- SCAT Plus provides more than 4,000 trips per month via paratransit buses for individuals not able to access regular bus service.

- iTN Suncoast offers an alternate transportation option for older adults in Sarasota for all travel needs. Ridership has increased annually from 4,058 (2015) to 23,1056 (2019).

- Uber, Lyft, Seniors on the Go and Find a Ride are web or app-based transportation options which match individuals with rides.
“Transportation is critical because people want to stay in their homes and if they are able to stay in their own homes, they have to be able to get to the store and to the doctor and so forth.”

“There are many people driving who are really no longer really capable of safe driving on the road... that is a factor that comes with aging that each of us have to face...”

“At some point, yeah. I know. The day I can’t drive is the day I don’t know what I will do.”

“I have noticed that some, a lot of the street crossings are awfully short for people to get across... in a lot of places-it is really dangerous.”

“I know it’s an awareness issue... your vision is changing as you age. Your cognitive abilities can be diminished...”

Age-Friendly Sarasota’s goal is to enhance safe, accessible, and affordable transportation and mobility options for persons at all life stages and abilities. Good progress has been achieved on several key actions including the Sarasota County Multimobility App for quick access to transit lines, bike lanes and sidewalks; FDOT’s Coalition for Safe Mobility for Life which promotes safe mobility through education and resources; and increasing transfer stations and covered bus shelters. Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) added the Siesta Breeze Trolley which provides free transportation on a continual loop 365 days a year. In addition, all fixed route buses are ADA compliant with wheelchair accessibility and seating. Innovative transportation options such as iTN, Seniors on the Go, Find a Ride, Lyft and Uber all offer services that match riders with local drivers. While progress has been made, additional options for lower income individuals need to be explored further as well as road user safety and understanding changing abilities and transitioning from driving.
Looking Forward

Where do we go from here?

As stated early in this report the Age-Friendly process and program cycle is one of continuous improvement. We begin back where we started at the Planning stage. Luckily, we are ahead of the game. The process through data and information gathering has already started with the help of the Florida Department of Health in Sarasota (DOH) and The Patterson Foundation.

The DOH facilitated focus groups throughout Sarasota County and conducted surveys including the CASPER Survey, a statistically significant methodology in which thirty census tracts were randomly selected for resident survey completion electronically, by mail or in person.

An Age-Friendly Survey was designed using AARP and NCOA (National Council on Aging) questions. The Patterson Foundation shared the survey electronically and at various community locations.

Key outputs and outcomes that were reported as minimal progress on the Age-Friendly Five Year Progress Report tables will also be incorporated into the new program cycle.

In addition, as a community we will need to address the recent impact of COVID-19 as well as the issue of health disparity. The partnership between Age-Friendly Sarasota and the DOH to align healthcare goals will be essential as we move forward.

In the coming months, the community will work together to review survey results, focus group comments and other data to identify objectives, strategies, actions, and outcomes to create the next 5-year action plan.

And so, the age-friendly journey continues...
AARP. 2013. Livable Communities Initiative.
AARP. 2019. Livable Communities Publications and Resources.
Florida Department of Elder Affairs. 2011 Florida County Profiles: Sarasota.
Florida Department of Elder Affairs. 2018 Florida County Profiles: Sarasota.
Florida Department of Health in Sarasota County (DOH). 2019. Community Health Assessment.
Sarasota County. 2017. About Sarasota County.
Sarasota County. 2020. About Sarasota County.
World Health Organization. 2018. The Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities Looking back over the last decade, looking forward to the next.