State: Kentucky
Community Name: Woodford County
Population Size: 26871
Percentage of Residents Above Age 60: 21
Community Structure: County
Other:
Community Type: Small Town, Rural
Elected Official Signing the Letter of Commitment
Name: James Kay
Title: Judge-Executive
Office Mailing Address: 103 S Main St., Versailles, KY 40383
Community Contact
Name: [Redacted]
Role: Laura Dake is chair of the Livable Woodford (Age-Friendly) Committee. She and a community volunteer started the process for Woodford County to become age-friendly over two years ago. In addition to her work on Versailles City Council, she is employed by ITNAmerica and is working on a Federal Transit Administration Demonstration Project to bring on-demand volunteer transportation to Woodford County (and eight other communities throughout the U.S.). She is also involved in a project to address loneliness and isolation in the county. A survey has been completed and next steps are being planned (described in Section 2).

Older Adult Involvement: Most of the Livable Woodford/Age-Friendly Committee* members are in their forties or older and most work in the senior services field, including professionals from two of the local assisted living facilities and the local hospital; from the Alzheimer’s Association; from Bluegrass Care Navigators (hospice and palliative care); from an elder law practice, and others. In addition to the current Committee members, older county residents of diverse backgrounds are being invited to join. Older residents will also play an important role as participants in focus groups to identify areas for improvement as well as to help work towards solutions. It is critical that our age-friendly efforts include building
environments that enable and encourage older people to participate in all aspects of civic life, and that includes this Committee. The richness of experience and knowledge accumulated over a lifetime should never be diminished or devalued due to age, mobility challenges, or other disabilities, and we will make every effort to assist with technology, transportation and other aids as needed to encourage participation. We believe that to be an age-friendly community, there must be connection and solidarity among generations. We are excited to facilitate opportunities for residents of different ages and backgrounds to meet and interact and work together. This is especially important for older people’s quality of life because it allows them to feel socially involved and included in solving their community’s challenges. *The Livable Woodford/Age-Friendly Committee sprang from the Aging and Senior Living Subcommittee of the Health and Wellness Roundtable, a group that was started about six years ago by those in the senior services community who wanted to network with like others in Woodford County. Over time, the group expanded its focus to include youth and mental health issues as well as senior services. After the group was paused during 2020, the Chamber of Commerce agreed in 2021 to take over hosting the meetings. The Aging Subcommittee was looking for a project and a Versailles City Council member on the Subcommittee recommended exploring Age-Friendly projects and initiatives. Previously, in August 2019, the City Councils and Fiscal Court in a joint meeting had passed a resolution to apply to join the AARP Age-Friendly Network, which came to them from two community volunteers who had begun laying the groundwork for Age-Friendly in 2018. After the vote, the work was put on hold (partly due to the pandemic), and the mayors and Judge-Executive signed the Letter of Commitment in July 2021 at the request of the Aging Subcommittee.

Increasing Collaboration and Coordination:

As mentioned, the city councils and county fiscal court voted on a joint resolution in August 2019 to explore joining the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. While many projects can be accomplished without government participation, those involving infrastructure improvements – housing and sidewalks/streets, for example – will require assistance from local elected officials. We believe that the current goodwill that exists between Versailles, Midway and the county’s executive leadership will translate into smooth coordination on projects as we move forward. Prior to the August 2019 resolution, two community volunteers created a spreadsheet of stakeholders – local and regional organizations (including places of worship) and their leadership – that served with older people in some capacity. By the time they were finished, the spreadsheet contained the names of more than 100 organizations! The Committee will tap into these entities, many of which are governmental or quasi-governmental or human services nonprofits, for additional Committee members, as expert resources for advice and guidance and to help with outreach to the community. As a small community, Woodford County is fortunate that many stakeholders know each other
already and work together regularly. The pandemic, unfortunate as it has been, has really brought the county together in ways probably no one dreamed possible. For example, the City of Versailles has allotted (so far) $125,000 in CARES and ARPA funds to assist residents behind on rent and utility payments. The City partners with Bluegrass Community Action to administer the program. The local health department, which has done an amazing job communicating to residents during the pandemic and has an 76% vaccination rate to show for it, is currently partnering with a downtown church to offer a weekly vaccine clinic. Woodford Countians step up to help each other. We believe it will be no different as we move forward on Age-Friendly efforts.

Most Instructive Area of Work:

We believe we can provide guidance to other communities on identifying potential local stakeholders and figuring out how to bring their best skills to Age-Friendly efforts. We are particularly excited to share the results of the two projects mentioned earlier in the application. 1) As a national ?Demonstration,? the transportation project in Woodford County and eight other communities is poised to be a model for transportation for small and rural communities across the United States. Reliable, on-demand, affordable transportation will be a gamechanger for older residents and people with disabilities as access to transportation disproportionately impacts persons in these demographics as they are less likely to drive. 2) Loneliness is an epidemic in the U.S., and the results of our Loneliness/Social Isolation survey and plans to combat it locally should be of interest to other communities. These plans include: matching volunteers and participants on regular Care Calls; providing a ?Virtual Welcome Center? for people of all ages to get together weekly on Zoom for a facilitated conversation on an interesting topic; and ? when it is safe ? to get together for in-person events.

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Additional Social Media: