Section 1: Community Details

Application Submission Date: 9/2/2021

State: MA

Community Name: Framingham

Total Population: 72,362

Percentage of Residents Age 60 or Older: 15.7%

Community Governance Structure: City

Community Type: Mixed

Elected Official Signing the Community’s Letter of Commitment:

Dr. Yvonne Spicer
Mayor
150 Concord St. Framingham, MA 01702

Community Contact:

Kimberly Rivas is a Community Health Program Coordinator at the Framingham Public Health Department. Kimberly has spent a decade working in public health, at both the state and local level. She has experience working with vulnerable populations including older adults, providing education on infectious disease and other chronic health conditions. Kimberly has revitalized Framingham’s Age and Dementia Friendly Coalition providing renewed leadership after an extended hiatus due to capacity shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic. Kimberly is the Chair of the multi-sector coalition and is responsible for facilitating meetings, leading data collection and analysis efforts, and engaging partners in strategic planning, implementation and evaluation. The Age & Dementia Friendly Coalition is now working to acquire age-friendly designation to move forward intentionally and sustainably with the City’s action plan and strategic implementation. Kimberly is the primary contact for Framingham and will continue to lead the coalition and its community partners through this next phase of work.
Section 2: Community Activities, Engagement and Collaborations

Briefly describe your existing community policies, programs and services that are targeted toward older people. Please identify how your community plans to become more age-friendly. (250-300 words required)

Framingham recognizes that in order to become a more age-friendly community for its older residents, we need to make policy and system changes. Through the Age and Dementia Friendly Coalition, Framingham has created the necessary infrastructure with strong partnerships to implement collective impact approaches to improve the health and well-being of Framingham’s older adult population. In the coming months, this coalition will develop an action plan and implement both organizational and community-wide initiatives that will advance age-friendly policies, programs and services in the City of Framingham.

The City of Framingham boasts a number of successful programs and services that are specifically designed to benefit older adults. The Callahan Center, Framingham's senior center run by the Council on Aging is highly utilized by the City’s older adult residents. Attendance at the senior center’s programs and activities surged 246% over the past 48 years, reflecting the increasing demand from Framingham’s expanding 55+ population. The Callahan Center offers an impressive range of services for seniors including: daily exercise programs, monthly adult education offerings, and various cultural events and socialization opportunities throughout the year both in-person and via Zoom. Additionally, the Callahan Center offers individualized services including application assistance for SNAP, the RIDE, low-income heat and energy programs, mental health services, free medical equipment loan programs, tax liability reduction programs and many others.

The MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA) oversees regional public transportation, with Framingham as its hub. They provide transportation services available to older adults and/or people with disabilities. Among their most utilized services is the MBTA Ride which is a paratransit service that provides door to door transportation for people that cannot use public transportation due to a temporary or permanent disability. The MWRTA also funds the Callahan Senior Center bus, providing older adults free transportation to and from the City’s Senior Center.

The Latino Health Insurance Program (LHIP) is a nonprofit health organization offering community-based prevention services and connection to healthcare for minority residents. LHIP provides culturally responsive services offered in multiple languages that assist older adults in applying for Medicare, as well as health and disability benefits. Jewish Family Service (JFS) of Metrowest offers the Patient Navigator Program, providing volunteers to drive older adults to medical appointments and assist them with understanding medical information.

The Framingham Housing Authority has over 700 units of senior housing available with resident services coordinators that connect residents to services in the community. Shillman House offers 150 units of mixed-income senior housing in a service-rich environment. Additional affordable services are provided by the Area Agency on Aging, BayPath.
How will older adults be involved in the community's efforts to become more age-friendly? (250-300 words required)

From its inception, Framingham’s Age and Dementia Friendly Coalition has been grounded and driven by the input from its older adult residents. Framingham is a richly diverse community and our engagement efforts to date have included extensive outreach to older adults spanning racial, ethnic and socioeconomic spectrums. In 2018 and 2019 the Age and Dementia Friendly Coalition conducted a community needs assessment using the 8 Domains of Livability Framework which included a survey and focus groups interviews with older adults in Framingham to learn about issues impacting the livability of the community. This needs assessment was administered in 4 languages – English, Spanish, Portuguese and Mandarin. The survey was completed by over 550 residents, and 8 focus groups were facilitated with over 100 participants. Issues related to transportation, housing and general health and wellness emerged as the top concerns. Findings from this assessment have pinpointed key needs impacting the ability for seniors to age in place, charting a clear path for solutions-driven next steps.

As we move forward to the strategic planning and implementation process, the coalition has already begun developing an engagement plan to meaningfully incorporate older adults into the next phase of work; ensuring the centering of their voices with emphasis on equitable representation of marginalized groups. Older adults will be empowered to inform, advocate and speak to their needs within the community, advising on proposed initiatives and providing feedback on strategy implementation and effectiveness. It is our intention to lift up the voices of the aging population in Framingham, our largest and fastest growing population. This will allow for sustainable, inclusive changes throughout the City that will benefit people from all ages and demographics.

How will the efforts to become more age-friendly increase collaboration and coordination among relevant community agencies and departments? (250-300 words required)

The Age and Dementia Friendly Coalition in Framingham currently includes a broad network of partners that are invested in working collaboratively to make Framingham more age-friendly. In order to improve the physical and social infrastructure limiting our city’s livability for older residents, we must work across sectors and disciplines. No one organization is responsible for this work, but rather it requires deliberate collective action. Thus far, the coalition has been successful with establishing cooperation between the local public health department and healthy aging providers; as well as within the municipal departments with authority to influence aging services programs and services, and the city’s planning and development activities.

While the coalition’s current membership reflects some of the community’s most vital partners, we recently conducted a partnership inventory which identified representation, knowledge and leadership gaps. An outreach strategy is underway to engage with these partners as the coalition moves into its strategic planning process this fall. For other prospective community collaborators, the coalition will focus on developing readiness. The objective of which will be to
build understanding and shared responsibility for realizing our vision for an age-friendly Framingham. Our public health department has the convening power to engage with these potential partners and bring them into work to address concerns, alleviate barriers and improve communication and coordination amongst entities. Additionally, it is imperative that the coalition not only include community partners, but also that we center older adults in this work, especially those representing marginalized communities within Framingham who have historically experienced the most disparities. Our coalition will deploy tools during strategic planning and implementation that will prioritize strategies that address inequities.

Section 3: Network Membership

1-a. What motivated your community to join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities (100 words minimum)

The City of Framingham believes that age-friendly designation is an important declaration and affirmation of our investment towards making our community a place where older adults can age with comfort and dignity. In recent years, Framingham has seen a rapidly growing older adult population including a 40% increase in 60-84-year olds since the year 2000, outpacing trends in growth at the regional, state and country level. The City of Framingham recognized the challenge of equitably providing services and care to its expanding aging population; and to respond to this emerging need, in 2018 the Framingham Public Health Department applied for grant funding to support the upstart of a health aging collaborative. Joined by critical community partners who had been vocalizing concerns about the increasing number of older adult residents with unmanaged chronic conditions, difficulties with housing and signs of dementia, Framingham’s Age & Dementia Friendly Coalition was established.

The first action of the coalition was developing and disseminating a community wide assessment to hear directly from older adult residents to understand the issues related to growing older in Framingham. The survey along with subsequent focus groups established baseline data. The coalition is now ready to use this data to form subcommittees to work on creating sustainable and inclusive action plans to address the identified needs and gaps within the community.

The City of Framingham feels that partnering with the AARP Age Friendly Communities and our established community partners will enhance our efforts to address the many needs of the aging population in Framingham. We recognize the valuable support and resources offered through the network and look forward to working with other communities on advancing age-friendly initiatives.
1-b. If you have consulted with an AARP State office or the national AARP Livable Communities team to discuss enrollment, please provide that person's name, title and e-mail address or phone number.

We have consulted with Antron Watson, The Age-Friendly Director for AARP
Email: awatson@aarp.org
Ph: 617-305-0564

2. What aspect of your community’s current or intended age-friendly work could be useful to other communities in the network? (100 words minimum)

One aspect of Framingham's age-friendly work that could be useful to other communities in the network is the collaborative nature of our group. Using a collective impact framework, our coalition members represent a wide range of knowledgeable and effective stakeholders, with leadership provided by both municipal and non-profit partners. Framingham’s Age & Dementia Friendly Coalition members include municipal representation led by the Public Health Department and the Callahan Center (Framingham’s nationally accredited senior center). Additional public sector partners are Framingham’s Housing Authority and Regional Transportation Authority. Local, regional and state-wide non-profit organizations are critical partners in the coalition and include health providers and advocates to low-income and minority communities, local affordable housing providers, social services agencies that support elderly populations, the blind, people with dementia, and who provide local wellness and recreation activities; a local foundation focused on community health; and private sector partners that work with or house older adults. Together, this coalition has been able to reach populations whose voices are often overlooked. We are committed to furthering our outreach into underrepresented and historically marginalized communities, to enhance our understanding of local needs of older adults of all socioeconomic backgrounds, and to advocate for change and offer programs and access to resources in the future to address those needs. We hope to be able to share with other communities the lessons learned in our efforts, and we look forward to the opportunity to collaborate with and benefit from the wide network of existing age-friendly partners across the country and the globe.

Section 4: Required Materials

1-a. Letter of Commitment: Please see the attached letter of commitment

2. Logo or Image: Please see the attached logo for the City of Framingham

Website URL: https://www.framinghamma.gov/

Section 5: Social Media

Not Applicable
Section 6: Agreement

I have read and understand the requirements for my community to become a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, including the need to conduct a community assessment; develop and acquire approval of an action plan; implement the plan; submit an annual best practice and provide periodic updates, including a five-year progress report.

☑ Yes, I understand the requirements.