State: Maine
Community Name: Gray
Population: 8085
Percentage of Residents Age 60 or Over: 28%
Community Governance Structure: Town
Community Type: Mixed, Small Town, Rural

Town Official Signing Letter of Commitment
Name: Nate Rudy
Title: Gray Town Manager
Office Mailing Address: 24 Main Street, Gray, ME 04039

Community Contact
Name: Sharon Young
Position: Gray Lifelong Living Committee Chairperson

Describe the community contact person's role in the community's age friendly initiative.
Sharon Young, Town Councilor, served together with former Town Manager, Deb Cabana, on a Maine Council on Aging task force in 2019, bringing back to the town and its governing body information and a desire to recognize the importance of addressing the needs of the older residents of the town. Sharon went on to form a committee, Gray Lifelong Living Committee, to further study the older demographic, what are their needs and wants, and what can we do to support or mitigate the difficulties of aging in their homes. With the help of a grant from Maine Community Foundation, the Gray Lifelong living Committee created and disseminated a Lifelong Living Survey via postal mail, and later through an electronic survey, to residents over the age of 60. A 30% response enabled the committee to compile a fair representative data collection. The committee’s next goal is to research what needed programs and services may be available in the region and make that information readily available to Gray’s older population. Equally important will be to present proposals for programs and services to the municipality that the town could offer to address unmet needs. Councilor Young’s term as councilor expires in 2021 and she will continue advocacy efforts through the work of the Gray Lifelong Living Committee and through Municipal Data Across Sectors in Health (M-DASH), a collaborative effort with Maine Council on Aging.

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.
Gray’s Recreation Department has sponsored programs for older adults. Prior to the pandemic social and recreational programs such as senior lunches, a trip to the Boston Flower Show, and Silver Sneaker type activities. All gathering type activities are still on hold but will resume when safe to do so.
Gray’s Public Library host book club groups popular with the older residents and is anticipating a program to assist the older residents with technology instruction and help once it is safe to do so.

In 2020 the Town of Gray enacted a Senior Property Tax Assistance Ordinance. The ordinance will allow eligible older residents to apply for a rent and property tax rebate based upon their income and the cost burden of their rent or property tax. The assistance is anticipated to be available to eligible applicants for the fall 2021 tax billing cycle.

Gray completed a new Comprehensive Plan in the fall of 2020. Two priorities noted of particular importance to our older residents were: 1) Invest in the Village and community programs, and 2) Focus on moving people safely through Gray and getting around via walking, biking, car, or public transportation. An investment in revitalizing our Village Center will bring municipal, retail, and service business closer together and more easily accessible to the older residents and will include attractive and accessible greenspace. A focus on moving people safely for all modes of transit will encourage healthy modes of getting about, like walking. The goal is to enable and promote connectivity to those places and things that will encourage healthy lifestyles for all ages as well as building a community center that is safe and welcoming to encourage the older residents to get out and about thus reducing social isolation.

How will older adults be involved in the community efforts to become more age-friendly?

The Gray Lifelong Living Survey respondents told us that the Town’s Web Site and the electronic Community Newsletter were their primary source of news and information about what is happening in and about, as well as a resource for a multitude of other things. The committee will continue to use those modes of communication to share information, announce upcoming events, and solicit involvement in the Town’s programs and services.

Gray’s older population includes many volunteers who serve on town committees and volunteer their time to assist with planning and events. The Gray Lifelong Living Committee will continue to seek out more participation from older adults in our efforts to assess and recommend programs and services the town may offer to the older residents.

Momentum had begun prior to pandemic but was then limited to a fall yard clean-up and a couple holiday meal deliveries. The High School Service Club volunteers spend a fall day engaging with older residents (with safety protocols observed) and assisting them with their fall yard work. We also partnered with the local Sherriff department on a community service project where meals were cooked locally and delivered to older residents who may have been unable to join family or friends for the holidays. Both programs were hugely appreciated by those served. Word of mouth will help with awareness and participation in future outreach.

How will the efforts to become more age-friendly increase collaboration and coordination among relevant community agencies and departments?

For Gray to join the growing numbers of Age Friendly Communities in Maine at this time, and while we emerge from an isolating pandemic, will propel the collaboration and coordination among municipal and community leader forward.
At this time the town is also participating in a pilot program with Maine Council on Aging where town staff, church leaders, support agencies, and volunteers are meeting bi-monthly to collect and share data to assess the towns need and recommended programs and services that will provide the biggest bang to mitigate the unmet needs of the aging population.

Gray’s recreation department, public safety department, and planning department have all participated in collaborations and will likely be participating in ongoing efforts. Community service groups, houses of worship, fraternal organizations, etc. are becoming aware of the Town’s efforts and anticipating participating in some fashion.

**What motivated your community to join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities?**

The Town of Gray, Maine is an aging community, in an aging state. Gray is committed to supporting our aging citizens and supporting policies that support those residents that are aging and need services not presently available.

Our community recognizes the value of making our community a place that people of all ages want to call home. Formation of the Gray Lifelong Living Committee and the MCOA pilot program have already driven conservation and planning for healthy living to Gray. Inclusion as one of AARP’s Network of Age-Friendly Communities would provide additional planning and implementation tools. Most importantly, the Age-Friendly recognition would cement and guide the existing momentum.

**What aspect of your community’s current or intended age-friendly work could be useful to other communities in the network?**

Our Gray Lifelong Living Committee formation was spurred by Councilor Young’s participation in a Maine Council on Aging Taskforce. The insights and passion to start a community wide conversation about the needs of our aging population and how to make it easier for the oldest elderly to remain in the homes and community they love arose out of knowledge gained through that task force. What we would encourage other communities to consider is to find or create an ignitor. An event or trigger to start the conversation and then keep on talking until enough is repeatedly heard that momentum builds.

Second, we would suggest inviting targeted folks in the community to join. Our targets included a committee member with a medical history, a clergy person, a long-term resident who was also participating on the town’s Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee (CPSC), and a life-long resident who would be able to share historic knowledge and contacts. The timing of our healthy aging efforts was boosted by the CPSC outreach and visioning.

Lastly, we would encourage communities to take a wide look around town and the region for potential collaboration. We reached out to Saint Joseph’s College located a neighboring town to analyze and interpret the data we collected with our survey of residents over 60. Their marketing class benefited from the experience and we benefited from independent third-party conclusions. We also recognized that our Library, our Recreation Department, and our HS community Service Club were institutions that already had involved older resident following and could be instrumental in outreach and sponsorship of programs and services on the horizon.