State: Minnesota
Community Name: Duluth
Population Size: 85915
Percentage of Residents Above Age 60: 21
Community Structure: City
Other:
Community Type: Mixed
Elected Official Signing the Letter of Commitment
Name: Emily Larson
Title: Mayor
Office Mailing Address: City Hall, Room 422, 411 West First Street, Duluth, MN 55802
Community Contact Name: Jodi Slick
Email: [email protected]
Position: Founder and CEO, Ecolibrium3
Telephone: [redacted]
Role: Ecolibrium3 is a Duluth-based organization with a mission to lead and inspire change in our community toward an equitable and sustainable future. Our role will be as the convening partner for Age-Friendly community stakeholders to lead planning design and implementation, and build overall capacity for the initiative. Ecolibrium3 is uniquely qualified for this role as an organization that is deeply embedded in the community, has multi-sector experience, and is a trusted developer of community planning processes. Our experience includes leading the Green Jobs Action Planning Process, the Duluth COVID Winter Analysis, the Duluth Citizens Climate Action Plan, and Minnesota's application to HUD's National Disaster Resilience Competition. Ecolibrium3 administers an AmeriCorps VISTA program with members placed at 27 sites working on food access, transportation, aging support, housing, and the environment. Ecolibrium3 has received national honors from the DOE, EPA, and White House.

Older Adult Involvement: Including Duluth's older community members throughout the Age-Friendly Community process is critical. The phrase "nothing about me without me" will be our mantra through this process. We plan to distribute a short survey regarding the experience of older adults to
community centers, churches, older adult living communities, and other programs that serve older adults in the Duluth area. These surveys will focus on the eight domains identified by AARP’s Age-Friendly livability indexes and aim to capture respondents’ views about present or anticipated future needs that the current programs may not meet. After the survey responses have been gathered and the data has been analyzed and interpreted, we plan to employ focus groups to obtain additional insight into gaps in current resources for older adults and community needs. Currently, Duluth has many established committees, collaborations, and other groups working on issues or projects within the eight domains of livability. We plan to identify and map out the existing groups that might have age-friendly aligned goals. We hope to have older adults or other aging ambassadors join and participate in these current groups to bring the age-friendly voice to as many as possible. The Duluth Age-Friendly team will consciously amplify the voices of older adults through this project and plans to include older adults throughout the process and within every decision-making team. We plan to utilize the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing to center decision-making on our senior population.

Increasing Collaboration and Coordination: Through the process of outreach and marketing for our age-friendly work, we will take the opportunity to extend our network and gain connections to more organizations in the area that are already aimed at improving one or more of the eight domains identified by AARP. This is an exciting opportunity and can be marketed to older adults in the Duluth community and organizations and City government departments already interested in improving their age-friendly features. Access to AARP's network of resources and the designation and maintenance of the Age-Friendly Community status opens an opportunity to engage with and educate organizations that are not currently working with an age-accessible lens. Currently, several established groups and organizations are collaborating to improve supports, systems, and programs in many areas under the AARP eight domains of livability. These groups may have formed with goals around active transportation, sustainability, dementia-friendly, health equity, housing, food access, resource connections, and more. We view the AARP age-friendly process as bringing a formal focus of our older community members’ needs to the existing efforts and spurring new approaches. Examples of opportunities for collaboration already exist among relevant agencies. One opportunity in the transportation domain is to encourage collaboration between the Duluth Transit Authority's Better Bus Blueprint and the STRIDE Accessibility Committee. Through this formal age-friendly process, we will expand partnerships already working on aging projects like the Northland Diversity in Aging Series, led by The College of St. Scholastica, Northland Foundation, Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging, and Duluth Aging Support. We plan to leverage the network of home and community-based service providers who are funded through Older Americans Act Title III dollars, with the support of the Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging. We have begun to reach out to Duluth’s informal groups like book clubs, knitting circles, and gardening clubs, to start essential community conversations around the meaning of
age-friendly. We think the age-friendly designation will help grow these efforts to improve the community's attitude toward older adults and the aging process, increasing respect and encouraging social inclusion.

A powerful part of belonging to a network is the opportunity to learn from and assist others. Duluth is an urban environment that serves as a medical, academic, and business hub for the region. Our unique geographic location on the westernmost tip of Lake Superior makes Duluth a travel destination and port city. Duluth is the county seat for St. Louis County, the largest county by area in Minnesota. Duluth has just under 90,000 residents but serves a large number of people living in rural areas. As our team moves through the Age-Friendly process, we think Duluth's characteristics will necessitate unique and creative approaches that may appeal to other communities. We think that our process benefits from having Ecolibrium3 as the lead organization. Ecolibrium3 is not primarily focused on older adults but instead focused on innovation to strengthen the community. This model may be an example for other communities to use to determine potential lead organizations for their Age-Friendly Community work.

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