October 2020

Ruby Haughton-Pitts  
State Director  
AARP Oregon  
9200 SE Sunnybrook Blvd, Suite 410  
Clackamas, OR 97015

Dear Ms. Haughton-Pitts,

On behalf of the people I serve in the Hood River, I am writing this letter of intent to express the City of Hood River’s interest in joining the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. Hood River is deeply connected with other communities in the Mid-Columbia Gorge, and interdependent. Together we are committed to promoting policies and programs to make the Gorge a friendly place to people of all ages and abilities.

According to the 2019 US Census estimates, Hood River County in Oregon has a population of 23,382. Of that, 16.3% is over the age of 65 and 5.1% have a disability.

The Mid-Columbia Gorge is a place of enormous disparities. Due to the rural nature of the counties we serve, access to transportation, healthcare, and social supports continue to be major issues our population faces. Our own 2019 Community Health Assessment reveals that some in our community live daily with concerns regarding chronic disease, access to nutrition, preventive care, and social isolation. These needs are even more prevalent among the older-adult demographic.

The Aging in the Gorge Alliance/Alianza de la Tercera Edad (AGA/ATE), a self-organizing grassroots education and advocacy group, first came together in 2015 to promote the interests and welfare of elders and caregivers in the Mid-Columbia Gorge region. In hosting open meetings for interested individuals and agencies from late 2015 through mid-2017, AGA/ATE identified key needs and interests. Sub-committees on housing, transportation, multigenerational activities, caregiving, and outreach/education were initially formed.

Among the AGA’s successes are the 2018 designation of Hood River and Wasco Counties as a Dementia-Friendly Community (the sole designee so far in Oregon). The current focus on supporting persons with dementia and their caregivers is of great importance, as Alzheimer’s disease is the 6th leading cause of death in Oregon. Nearly 60 percent of people with dementia live in their own communities and one in seven lives alone. Activities are now under way to involve businesses, public agencies, and others in creating welcoming and safe spaces and services for people living with dementia. Joining the Age Friendly Network is a natural progression and expansion of these efforts.

It is not always easy to find the resources to meet the needs we see. That is why our region values collaboration in order to truly make a difference in the lives of those we serve. I am hopeful that you’ll support the continued work of the AGA towards making sure the older adults in Mid-Columbia Gorge
are treated with dignity and have their needs met by accepting our request to join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities.

As a Network of Age-Friendly states and community members, we look forward to partnering and exchanging ideas with AARP to enhance our ability to:

- Practice sound planning.
- Establish an Age-Friendly Committee, that includes active engagement of older adults.
- Develop a plan of action that responds to the needs identified by older adults and other residents that complements other city plans.
- Measure activities, review action plan outcomes, and report on them publicly.

We appreciate your interest in working with the counties Hood River and Wasco Counties in Oregon, and look forward to our partnership on this important program.

Sincerely,

Kate McBride
Mayor, City of Hood River