September 21, 2020

Dear Community Members,

The City of Roanoke’s Community Vision: Roanoke is a safe, caring and economically vibrant community in which to live, learn, work, play and prosper. Our City is a vibrant urban center with strong neighborhoods set among the spectacular beauty of Virginia’s Blue Ridge. One of my priorities as City Manager is to help our older neighbors feel safe to remain in their homes and have the choice to age in place. Our older neighbors are an asset to our community and make up a vital part of the fabric of our neighborhoods.

In our Strategic and Comprehensive Plan and civic processes, we must include people of all ages and abilities and ensure that we are meeting the needs of our most vulnerable city residents - young and old. We need to continue to evaluate that the places where we live, work and play are accessible to all ages and abilities. We need to ensure that everyone has the opportunities for necessary for optimal aging to include social and civic engagement through our Community Engagement Office, access to health care and Health Services through our Healthy Roanoke Valley initiatives, financial counselors through our Financial Empowerment Center and our myriad of services offered through our Pathways Hub offered by United Way of the Roanoke Valley and other community partners.

The Age Friendly Roanoke Action Plan for 2021-2023 will help us achieve that vision. It addresses each of the domains of livability identified by the World Health Organization and adopted by the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities, of which Roanoke is a member. The plan involves many improvements to the way City government recognizes and meets the needs of older adults and individuals with different abilities. There are opportunities for businesses, non-profits, civic and neighborhood organizations, community groups, and individuals to get involved as well.

I hope you will have the opportunity to review the Executive Summary of the Age Friendly Roanoke Action Plan and think about how you may be involved in making Roanoke, a seven time All American City, a great place to not only to age in place but thrive in place.

Sincerely,

Bob Cowell
City Manager
Acknowledgements

Led by the Local Office on Aging and the unwavering support of the Roanoke City Council and the City Manager’s Office, members of the Age-Friendly Roanoke leadership team developed Action Plan 2021-2023. Leadership team members represented the City of Roanoke, AARP Virginia, Virginia Tech-Carilion School of Medicine, and the Center for Gerontology at Virginia Tech. A special thanks to the Age-Friendly Roanoke stakeholders and regional partners for supporting this time intensive endeavor. Without their contributions, none of this would have been possible.
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What is an Age-Friendly Community?

An age-friendly community is a livable community with

- Policies, services, and public infrastructure that promote the health, well-being, and quality of life of older residents
- Respect for the needs, opinions, and perspectives of older residents regardless of age, race, income, or health needs.
- Safe, affordable, and accessible access to housing, transportation, and public spaces
- Opportunities to build social relationships, volunteer, and engage in civic activities.

An age-friendly community is a good place to live and grow old!
What is Age-Friendly Roanoke?

In December 2017, the City of Roanoke (City) became the fifth city in Virginia and the 202nd city in the nation to receive AARP’s designation as an Age-Friendly Community. The city earned the recognition due to its ongoing support of local agencies and organizations that work hard to make Roanoke age-friendly. The award is especially meaningful because it represents the city’s commitment to the future health of the city and a quality of life for residents across the lifespan.

The AARP’s Age-Friendly Community designation was sought through the Age-Friendly Roanoke initiative, which was formed out of increased regional interest in helping residents “age in place”; that is, remain in their homes and communities for as long as possible while receiving needed supports and services.

To date, more than 25 partner agencies and organizations have donated time, resources, and expertise in launching Age-Friendly Roanoke. Members’ shared interests in making Roanoke a good place to live and grow old has made the initiative’s work possible. A list of Age-Friendly Roanoke partners is provided in Appendix A.

The Local Office on Aging leads the Age-Friendly Roanoke mission with the encouragement of Roanoke’s Mayor, City Council, and City Manager and support from AARP Livable Communities program.

**Mission Statement:** The mission of Age-Friendly Roanoke is to facilitate collaborations between residents, organizations, and government agencies that result in the promotion of health, well-being, opportunity, and quality of life for older residents.

**Vision Statement:** Build a community that is a great place to live and grow old regardless of age, race, income, or health needs.

For more information about age-friendly communities visit the World Health Organization website [https://www.who.int/ageing](https://www.who.int/ageing) or AARP Livable Communities website [https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities](https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities)
Roanoke’s Older Population

The City of Roanoke is home to 29.7% of the Roanoke Valley’s population yet occupies less than 2% of the land in the region. The city is an economic and educational hub in Virginia and serves as the gateway city into rural southwest Virginia.

Nearly 15% of Roanoke’s population of 99,348 residents are age 65 and older, which is similar to the demographics of the US population and slightly higher than Virginia’s general population.

In the past 50 years, Roanoke’s population has become more diverse in race and culture. In 1970, the population was slightly less (92,115) and predominately White (80.7%). Today, more than 55 unique languages are spoken in Roanoke. Despite the racial shift as shown below in today’s estimates, older residents still tend to be less diverse in terms of race and ethnicity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Hispanic (any race)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All ages</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85+</td>
<td>82.8%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Roanoke residents typically do not migrate to other areas of the state or country as they age. Yet, in the surrounding counties the in-migration of seniors is booming. Increasing numbers of retirees are moving into the region to take advantage of the low cost of living as well as the goods, services, and opportunities available in nearby Roanoke.

The City of Roanoke is divided into 49 neighborhoods and older residents can be found living in each one. The neighborhoods with the largest percentage of residents age 65+ include Greater Deyerle (38%), Southern Hills/ South Roanoke (25%) and Franklin-Colonial (24%). The neighborhoods with the fewest older residents are Hurt Park/ Mountain View/West End (5%) and Downtown (3%).

Regardless of where older residents live or for how long, they face many of the same issues faced by younger residents:

- Poverty
- Affordable housing
- Access to public transportation
- Having their voices heard

Poverty frequently accompanies old age. Approximately 22% of Roanoke’s population age 60+ live in poverty. Among non-White residents of the same age, 20% live in poverty. That information suggests that in late life, poverty is not necessarily a product of race. Even though
people may live longer and healthier lives, their retirement income may not always keep pace with inflation. As a result, household funds become scarce and residents slowly and steadily sink into poverty despite previously having led financially successful lives.

As a result of being financially strapped due to inflation or rising healthcare costs, older homeowners can find themselves in a bind with not being able to maintain their homes but not being able to move to a more affordable place either. Roanoke city planners have recognized the problem and the need for increased affordable and transitional housing for older residents and are incorporating it into their next 20 year plan.

Similarly, access to public transportation throughout the City and the region has been the focus of many discussions at the city and regional level. For older residents who no longer drive and live on a tight budget, public transportation is essential, yet frequently unavailable due to lack of or non-connecting transit routes.

Another concern of many older residents is that they have no voice in decisions made for them or about them. Older adults come from diverse backgrounds and hold a range of beliefs, values, and opinions about the city and the neighborhoods in which they live. Their age should never be used as a tool to prevent them from speaking up on issues that matter to them.

To address these and other issues related to poverty, health, and quality of life, several Roanoke area agencies have started to think and talk about livable communities for all ages - not just for youth. Organizations currently taking a lifespan approach in their work include

- United Way of the Roanoke Valley’s Healthy Roanoke Valley Plan
- Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission Livable Community Plan
- City of Roanoke City Plan 2040
- City of Roanoke Senior Quality of Life Initiative
- Local Office on Aging Strategic Plan

Age-Friendly Roanoke includes stakeholders representing each of the above initiatives and looks forward to developing strong partnerships with them either individually or under the umbrella of a regional commission on aging. Either way, the community is poised to address the needs of older Roanokers!

For more information about Roanoke’s population demographics. Visit the following websites:


https://demographics.coopercenter.org

https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/roanokecityvirginiacounty
Action Plan Development

The Age-Friendly Roanoke’s Action Plan 2021-2023 was developed using four key resources:

- AARP 8 Domains of Livability
- Age-Friendly Roanoke 2019 Neighborhood Survey findings
- City of Roanoke City Plan 2040
- The expertise and experiences of Age-Friendly Roanoke stakeholder and partner organizations

By pulling in multiple resources with different but convergent perspectives on what age-friendly and livable community means in Roanoke, a more robust and targeted plan could be developed to help the city remain age-friendly.

A summary overview of the first three resources follows.
AARP 8 Domains of Livability

AARP’s Livable Communities framework recognizes eight linked aspects of community life that frequently need to be addressed together. Age-friendly communities are encouraged to conduct assessments on whether a domain feature exists and if it is available, accessible, and affordable to everyone. Findings can then help communities identify and prioritize their efforts to become more age-friendly. The eight interconnected domains of livability informing the work of Age-Friendly Roanoke are represented in this graphic.

For more information about AARP’s Livable Community initiative, visit https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities

Graphic https://nationalseniorsstrategy.ca/
Age-Friendly Roanoke 2019 Neighborhood Survey

In the winter of 2018-2019, Age-Friendly Roanoke conducted a citywide survey of residents age 45+ to assess if the city was a good place to live and grow old and to identify specific issues the city and local organizations needed to work on to ensure Roanoke remained age-friendly. Survey questions addressed the availability, accessibility, and affordability of features within the 8 domains associated with livable communities. More information about the survey and its results can be found in Appendix B.

Key Survey Findings

Roanoke is a good place to live and grow old.
- 83.3% rated the City as an excellent, very good, or good place to live and grow old.
- 81.5% also rated their neighborhood was a good place to live and grow old.

Household income predicted responses rather than age, race, or neighborhood.
- Residents with low incomes responded less favorably towards the City and neighborhood than residents with high incomes, regardless of age, race, or neighborhood.
- Even though the greatest number of low-income residents lived in the northwest section of Roanoke, their responses were similar to the responses of low-income residents from other areas of the City.

Participant comments about the condition of the city are similar to the survey findings. As shown in the word cloud below, concerns over the condition and quality of sidewalks and the accessibility and affordability of housing and public transportation were raised the most.
Survey Recommendations for
Moving the Age-Friendly Roanoke Initiative Forward

Expand Understanding and Raise Awareness of Need
Older adults are a diverse population with a wide range of ideas, needs, wants, and expectations. It is not enough to listen to a handful of older residents and infer that they speak for all older residents. Therefore, it is essential to regularly invite and involve older residents when discussing issues that could potentially affect them.

Build Community Capacity to Respond
To effectively initiate change and sustain those changes, the right people representing the right organizations and government agencies need to be present. The development of roles for community partners that align with their own missions and initiatives is essential to ensure overarching Age-Friendly Roanoke success. Joining forces with other aging-focused groups can enhance access to resources and identify persons with needed expertise. At the helm, should be a designated person with strong working relationships with the city government to facilitate conversation, planning, and implementation of Age-Friendly Roanoke activities. As each Age-Friendly Roanoke initiative is identified or launched, the configuration of workgroups may shift to accommodate the focus of work. Still, a strong leadership team that works well with the city needs to remain in place.

Initiate Sustainable Interventions
Developing brand new programs or initiatives can be time-consuming and expensive. A first step towards affecting change could begin by building on current activities and programs already existing within neighborhoods and the city. Such initiatives may not currently have an aging component, but may be well-suited to reach older residents. For example, efforts to increase physical activity outdoors typically focus on children, young adults, and families, but can be “re-tooled” to include older adults. Working with current initiatives is also a good way to build partnerships that would otherwise be unknown.

Measure Outcomes
Measuring whether or not the city is becoming more age-friendly is essential but will be a challenge as no set standards for measures exist. Performance indicators do not have to include multi-level measures or percentages of use. Indicators can measure whether or not a product or service exists (e.g., a resource guide is published). The goal is to select indicators that are meaningful and can demonstrate that efforts are indeed moving the needle forward.
City Plan 2040

In developing Roanoke’s next 20-year plan, City Plan 2040, city planners utilized six themes from the American Planning Association’s Best Practices for Comprehensive Plans. The themes help guide the creation of a sustainable environmental, social, and economic future that support a quality of life for residents of all ages. The six themes and the objectives associated with each theme align with AARP 8 Domains of Livability and the mission of Age-Friendly Roanoke.

**Livable Built Environment:** “Ensure that all elements of the built environment, including land use, transportation, housing, energy, and infrastructure, work together to provide sustainable, green places for living, working, and recreation, with a high quality of life.”

**Harmony with Nature:** “Ensure that the contributions of natural resources to human well-being are explicitly recognized and valued and that maintaining their health is a primary objective.”

**Resilient Economy:** “Ensure that the community is prepared to deal with both positive and negative changes in its economic health and to initiate sustainable urban development and redevelopment strategies that foster green business growth and build reliance on local assets.”

**Interwoven Equity:** “Ensure fairness and equity in providing for the housing, services, health, safety, and livelihood needs of all citizens and groups.”

**Healthy Community:** “Ensure that public health needs are recognized and addressed through provisions for healthy foods, physical activity, access to recreation, health care, environmental justice, and safe neighborhoods.”

**Responsible Regionalism:** “Ensure that all local proposals account for, connect with, and support the plans of adjacent jurisdictions and the surrounding region.”

To review City Plan 2040 in more detail, visit [www.planroanoke.org](http://www.planroanoke.org)
The goals and activities chosen for 2021-2023 are essential steps towards building and strengthening collaborative and cooperative relationships between the City of Roanoke and Age-Friendly Roanoke partner organizations, and giving voice to Roanoke’s diverse older population.

The Age-Friendly Roanoke leadership team worked hard to create a plan that was not only mindful of the missions and goals of partner organizations, but also aligned with the strategic plans of the City of Roanoke so not to duplicate efforts. As a result, through the work of Action Plan 2021-2023, the Age-Friendly Roanoke initiative is in a better position to become sustainable in supporting age-friendly activities and to help partner organizations keep Roanoke a good place to live and grow old.

The three goals mirror three recommendations from the 2019 Neighborhood Survey report:

**Goal 1: Expand Understanding and Raise Awareness of Need**

**Goal 2: Build Community Capacity to Respond**

**Goal 3: Build Sustainable Relationships and Interventions**

The fourth survey recommendation, “Measure Outcomes”, is embedded in each of the activities listed under each goal.

Information about the livability domains addressed under each goal, the key partners leading activities, and a timeframe for engaging in activities (i.e., year 1, year 2, year 3) is provided under each goal.
Goal 1: Expand Understanding and Raise Awareness of Need

Key Partners: Local AARP Chapter (lead) and Local Office on Aging

Objective: Assemble and disseminate resources to advocate for the needs of future and current older residents at the local and state levels of government, industry, education, and healthcare.

Activity Year 1: Identify existing local and regional reports and strategic plans and compile relevant information to support an age-friendly Roanoke.

Outcome Measure: Track the name and number of resources collected and create a method for receiving updates.

Activity Years 1-2: Develop a multimedia resource packet using information collected for AFC stakeholders to use in their own advocacy efforts to educate the community about the needs and wants of older residents and to help keep those same issues in the forefront when decisions are being made.

Outcome Measure: Conduct a brief content evaluation of the resource packet with AFC stakeholders and adjust the packet as needed before distribution.

Activity Years 2-3: Host a stakeholder information workshop to review the information packet and how materials can be used.

Outcome Measure: Track the number of times AFC stakeholders utilize the packet of information created in Activity 1.2. with the dates and types of groups engaged in the presentation.

Livability Domains Addressed
## Goal 2: Build Community Capacity to Respond

**Key Partner:** Local Office on Aging (lead)

### Objective 1: Support the Local Office on Aging in creating a regional commission on aging.

**Activity Years 1-3:** Recruit members to represent the AFC on the commission planning team.

**Outcome Measure:** Track the number of hours and type of work members contributed.

**Outcome Measure:** Provide a quarterly status update on progress to the AFC leadership team

### Objective 2: Support the needs of typically overlooked older adults (e.g., LGBTQ, persons of color, immigrants, and grandparents raising grandchildren) across all domains of an age-friendly community.

**Activity Years 1-3:** Meet with local agencies/organizations/providers to identify the needs of typically overlooked older adults.

**Outcome Measure:** Track the name and number of agencies and individuals contacted and record needs.

**Activity Year 3:** Generate and distribute a report based on information collected to help members of the regional commission on aging and AFC stakeholders keep identified concerns in the forefront when decisions are being made.

**Outcome Measure:** Track the number of reports distributed and the number of times referenced in public documents.

### Livability Domains Addressed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AARP 8 Domains of Livability</th>
<th>City Plan 2040</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Goal 3: Build Sustainable Relationships and Interventions

Key Partners: Neighborhood Services (lead Obj. 1), Local Office on Aging (lead Obj. 2), Regional Commission (lead Obj. 3), and Roanoke Financial Empowerment Center (leadObj. 4).

Objective 1: Partner with Roanoke Neighborhood Services to identify resident needs and facilitate change by connecting stakeholder resources and people at the neighborhood level.

Activity Years 1-3: Recruit AFC stakeholders to work specifically with Neighborhood Services to identify needs at the neighborhood level.

Outcome Measure: Provide a monthly update on unmet needs to the AFC leadership team for potential future AFC activities.

Objective 2: Work with Planning and Building Development to identify resident needs and facilitate change through intervention plans and strategies of regional organizations.

Activity Years 1-2: Create a stakeholder workgroup to work specifically on improving accessibility of accessory dwelling units within the City.

Outcome Measure: Provide a quarterly status update on progress to the AFC leadership team.

Objective 3: Work with the Regional Commission to identify older resident transportation needs and facilitate change through intervention plans and strategies of transportation services.

Activity Years 1-3: Create a stakeholder workgroup to work specifically on improving accessibility to public transportation.

Outcome Measure: Provide a quarterly status update on progress to the AFC leadership team.
Objective 4: Work with Roanoke Financial Empowerment Center to identify low-income residents age 50+ seeking free financial counseling.

Activity Years 1-3: Create a stakeholder workgroup to work specifically on identifying resources to support counseling efforts.

Outcome Measure: Provide a quarterly status update on progress to the AFC leadership team.

Livability Domains Addressed

AARP 8 Domains of Livability

City Plan 2040
If you or your organization is interested in becoming part of the Age-Friendly Roanoke initiative, please contact

Ron D. Boyd  
President & CEO  
Local Office on Aging, Inc.  
4932 Frontage Road NW  
P O Box 14205  
Roanoke, VA  24038-4205  
540-345-0451

"Celebrating 47 years of helping older persons remain independent for as long as possible."
Appendix A: Age-Friendly Roanoke Partner Organizations

Action Plan Lead Partners

Local Office on Aging

The Local Office on Aging (LOA) is a non-profit, 501(c)3 organization “dedicated to helping older persons remain independent for as long as possible.” The LOA strives to enhance the quality of life in the home, help individuals stay in their homes and avoid early institutionalization, provide support to caregivers of the elderly, and advocate for quality services, medical care, and housing for the elderly. To effectively carry out its mission, the LOA administers over 25 community services that provide nutrition, education, advocacy and socialization. It is funded by federal, state, and local governments, corporate and private foundations, United Way, Foundation for Roanoke Valley, donations and fund raising. The LOA serves the Fifth Planning District in the Commonwealth of Virginia, including Alleghany, Botetourt, Craig and Roanoke Counties and the cities of Covington, Roanoke and Salem.

Roanoke Office of Neighborhood Services

The Office of Neighborhood Services helps foster a sense of community by partnering with citizens to ensure high-quality services are provided, neighborhood groups are supported, and neighborhood issues are addressed and responded to in a timely manner. Neighborhood Services also serves as a liaison for connecting citizens to the information they need for improving their neighborhood and quality of life, and uses feedback received to keep city staff informed of their needs and those of their neighborhood. Building community begins at the neighborhood level for when residents get to know their neighbors, they become more informed, involved, and committed to their neighborhood and ultimately their city. By participating in Roanoke’s neighborhood life and becoming actively engaged with your neighbors, you will also become an active partner with the City of Roanoke in the decisions being made about your neighborhood that ultimately may affect your quality of life and character of our community.

Roanoke Financial Empowerment Center

The Roanoke Financial Empowerment Center (FEC), offers professionally trained FEC counselors at no cost to help individuals and families manage their finances, pay down debt, increase savings, establish and build credit, and access safe and affordable mainstream banking products. At the core of the FEC model is the integration of counseling into other social services, such as housing and foreclosure prevention, workforce development, prisoner reentry, benefits access, domestic violence services, and more. Launched in July 2020, it will continue to expand its capacity to reach the low-income 50+ (LI50+) community by adding an Age-Friendly Financial Services Outreach Coordinator who will act as the entry point for seniors to the FEC.
Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission - Transportation

The Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission (RVARC) is involved in a number of transportation related planning programs. The RVARC provides staffing for the Roanoke Valley Transportation Planning Organization, which develops four key documents that are the backbone of transportation planning and programming in the region — the Long-Range Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program, the Congestion Management Plan, and the Unified Planning Work Program. RVARC also manages Rural Transportation planning services for the region. While addressing issues associated with transit, pedestrian, bicycle, freight, rail, air and truck transportation, staff are tasked with providing planning services that also consider human, environmental, fiscal, and economic impacts in an equitable manner.

AARP Local Chapters

Roanoke features two independent AARP Service Chapters, which meet on a monthly basis promoting the ideals of the organization “to serve and not be served”. Membership is open to all AARP cardholders and both chapters feature educational programs, ongoing community engagement opportunities, and social fellowship throughout the course of the year. Advocating for persons age 50+ in the community is another key goal shared by those involved. AARP Eureka Chapter #514 holds mid-day meetings at the Eureka Library while AARP Southwest Roanoke Valley #4652 gathers for breakfast meetings at the Roanoker restaurant. For additional information visit https://www.aarp.org/giving-back/aarp-chapter-locator/

Partner Organizations

AARP Virginia
Alzheimer’s Association
Blue Ridge Independent Living Center
Carilion Clinic
City of Roanoke Neighborhood Services
City of Roanoke Parks and Recreation
City of Roanoke Police Department
City of Roanoke City Manager’s Office
Commonwealth Council on Aging
Congressman Goodlatte’s Office
Council of Community Services
County of Botetourt, VA
Family Service of Roanoke Valley
Habitat for Humanity - Roanoke Valley
Home Instead Senior Care

InnovAge Virginia PACE - Roanoke Valley
Jefferson College of Health Sciences
Local Office on Aging
RADAR
Roanoke Public Libraries
Roanoke Valley Allegheny Regional Commission
Roanoke Valley Southern Christian Leadership Conference
The Lifelong Learning Center
United Way Roanoke Valley
Valley Metro
Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine
Roanoke City Council
Virginia Tech Center for Gerontology
Appendix B: 2019 Neighborhood Survey Executive Summary

Executive Summary

In December 2017, the City of Roanoke (City) earned AARP’s designation as an Age-Friendly City (AFC), joining over 200 other communities nationwide achieving that honor. The 3-year designation was awarded due to the City’s ongoing support of and partnership with local organizations working to improve life for older residents. With the support of City Council, the Local Office on Aging (LOA) leads the local AFC leadership team, which includes representation from the City, Roanoke Valley - Alleghany Regional Commission, Blue Ridge Independent Living, AARP Virginia, Virginia Tech-Carilion School of Medicine, and the Center for Gerontology at Virginia Tech.

Survey Design

In the winter of 2018-2019, the AFC team conducted a City-wide survey of residents age 45+ to better understand how they perceived the City of Roanoke as a good place to live and grow old. AFC team members designed the survey to help identify specific issues that the City and AFC member organizations could work on to ensure Roanoke remains age-friendly. The effort coincided with the City’s interest in boosting its ratings on the Milken Institute’s Best Cities for Successful Aging List and AARP’s Livability Index.

Development of the survey was guided by a conceptual model (see Figure A) that includes factors that are known to influence how residents perceive the City and their neighborhoods as good places to live. AARP funded the survey and 53 survey questions on the physical environment (originating from the AARP national livability survey) were included. Those questions addressed the accessibility, availability, and condition of housing, transportation, and public places around the City. An additional 23 questions were included to gain insight into participants’ neighborhoods, how they interacted with their neighbors, and how they received information about happenings in their neighborhood and the City. The remaining questions asked about participants’ characteristics. Opportunities for writing comments were also provided.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited using multiple convenience sampling strategies (e.g., neighborhood activities, church gatherings, Next Door app users) to gain a representative sample of City residents by age, race, and household income. Participants were offered a $5 Wal-Mart gift card as an incentive to complete the lengthy survey and participants’ names were entered into two cash prize drawings of $250 each if they desired to be included. Using those strategies, 376 surveys were collected online, and 247 surveys were collected during 12 planned site visits and personal outreach efforts by AFC team members.

Participants

The 623 participants were statistically representative of City residents and represented diversity in the City by age (age 45-96; average 64.1 years), race (72% White, 24% Black), and household income (58%
reported household incomes over $30,000). More than half (63.7%) of participants have called Roanoke home for more than 5 years and among them more than half (61%) have lived in the City for over 15 years. Most participants (56.3%) owned their own homes and 73.5% drove their own car as their primary means of transportation. Only 27.9% had rode public transit in the last year. Most participants reported being in good health (84.6%) and rated the quality of their life as excellent, very good, or good (87.8%).

**Survey Findings**

**Roanoke is home and a good place to live and grow old.** Given their long-term residency, it is not surprising that 83.3% of participants rated the City as an excellent, very good, or good place to live as they grow old. Similarly, 81.5% felt as strong about their own neighborhoods.

**Income.** Household income was the consistent predictor of responses rather than age, race, or neighborhood. Specifically, participants with low incomes tended to respond less favorably towards the City and neighborhood than participants with high incomes, regardless of age, race, neighborhood, or quadrant. Even though the greatest number of participants with low incomes lived in the northwest quadrant of Roanoke, their responses aligned with the responses of low-income residents in other areas of the City.

**Predictive Models.** The survey model was used as a guide to conduct multi-level statistical analysis to predict which survey items significantly explained what makes the City a good place to live and grow old. Nine items (listed below) were identified and fall under the focus areas of Outdoor Features, Housing, and Neighbor Relationships. The items included

- **Outdoor Features**
  - Well-maintained and safe parks
  - Public spaces with enough benches
  - Sidewalks that are in good condition, free from obstruction and are safe for pedestrian use and accessible for wheelchairs or assistive mobility devices

- **Housing**
  - Affordable housing options for adults of varying income levels such as older adult communities with shared facilities and outdoor space
  - Homes that are equipped with features such as a no-step entry, wider doorways, first floor bedroom and bath, grab bars in the bathroom
  - Well-maintained and safe low-income housing

- **Neighbor Relationships**
  - I feel respected by my neighbors.
  - If my neighbors knew I needed help, they would be willing to help me.
  - My neighbors know I am available to help them, if I know they need help.

Participants’ positive perceptions of City features and their interactions with their neighbors were directly related to their positive perception that the City is a good place to live and grow old.

Also included in the resulting predictive model (see Figure B) is the notion that the neighborhood is a good place to live and grow old. Analysis revealed a strong positive connection between participants’ beliefs that if their neighborhoods were good places to live and grow old, then the City was also a good place to live and grow old. Working with this underlying relationship is essential to affecting change as
neighborhoods play a significant role in promoting health, well-being, and quality of life across the lifespan and as such, are cornerstones for change within the larger City.

Because the neighborhood/City connection was so strong, we also analyzed the survey data to predict which survey items predicted factors that made the neighborhood a good place to live and grow old. As might be expected, the results were astonishingly similar with one important distinction; transportation features replaced housing features. Transportation is likely more significant at the neighborhood level because people need access to the City from their homes.

**Neighborhood.** Despite the significant role and importance of neighborhood across the findings, many participants struggled to identify their neighborhood from a list of 49 City-designated neighborhoods. Frequently, they only referenced a City quadrant such as southeast. The shift in perception of neighborhood from a defined local area to a region is assumed to be related to their heavy reliance on automobiles to access employment, stores, services, and opportunities.

**Quality of Life.** Just like the neighborhood plays a significant role in predicting if Roanoke is a good place to live and grow old, personal health has a strong relationship with perceptions of quality of life and cannot be ignored. In controlling for health, we found that City features, neighborhoods, and neighbor relationships were significant in predicting a good quality of life.

Features
- Audio/visual pedestrian crossings
- Public spaces with enough benches

Neighborhood and Neighbor Relationships
- The City of Roanoke is a place for people to live as they grow old.
- I feel respected by my neighbors.
- I feel safe living in my neighborhood.

Issues of safety, accessibility, and social connectedness are important to maintaining a quality of life, just as they are important to making the City of Roanoke a good place to live as one grows old.
Summary of Findings
Participants reported being quite positive about Roanoke as a good place to live and grow old and the neighborhood played a strong supportive role in their perception of the City.

Efforts to enhance the City (and neighborhoods) as a good place to live for older residents should target the specific City features and neighbor relationships identified by the predictive models.

The findings also suggest that the biggest difference between participant responses was income and not age, race, or neighborhood. Participants with low incomes were significantly more likely to rate the City lower as a good place to live and grow old than participants with high incomes. Most older adults who are no longer working live on fixed incomes, which tend to be modest. The participants in this survey included many retirees and persons living on low-incomes representing neighborhoods throughout the City and in all City quadrants.

Efforts to support an age-friendly City need to be mindful that low-income residents live in every neighborhood, even though they may be concentrated in some areas of the City.

Lastly, the predictive findings align well with participant comments, which revealed concerns over the condition and quality of sidewalks and the accessibility and affordability of housing and public transportation. Thus, survey findings confirm what many residents already perceive to be the City’s biggest challenges to remaining an age-friendly community.

Areas of Focus for the City to Consider
The following recommended actions steps are for the City to consider in maintaining Roanoke as an age-friendly city. Each activity is a direct response to the items identified in the predictive models:

- Enhance current efforts to upgrade or install sidewalks and curbs that are lifespan friendly and can accommodate strollers, wheelchairs, and other assistive devices.
- Install public benches throughout neighborhoods and parks.
- Identify strategies (e.g., financial incentives, or need based programs) for retrofitting current housing stock to make homes more accessible and amenable for aging in place.
- Revisit zoning regulations to ensure opportunities for integration of alternative living arrangements in a neighborhood.
- Implement projects identified in the Transit Development Plan.
- Include older public transportation users in the Public Transportation Advisory Committee and other public engagement opportunities.
- Re-examine neighborhood boundaries and how City neighborhoods are defined. If the focus of age-friendly communities is to be at the neighborhood level, then a better grasp on where neighborhood boundaries lie is imperative before any interventions are planned.
- Partner with naturally-occurring neighborhood groups or gatherings to build neighbor connections (e.g., resident councils, breakfast at Hardees group). Residents who attend clubs tend to be socially connected and active. Use them to connect neighbors (including more socially isolated residents) to neighborhood events.
- Initiate neighborhood service activities. The activity can be purposeful such as litter clean-up or a simple meet and greet. Some neighborhood organizations already hold block parties, which are reportedly helpful in connecting neighbors.
Moving the Age-Friendly Roanoke Initiative Forward

Affecting change to ensure that the City remains a lifespan-friendly or age-friendly city requires a collaborative community effort that includes organizing the narrative about age-friendly communities, the resources to support an age-friendly environment, and the people (i.e., residents, service agencies, organizations, and government leaders) to affect change at every stage. The message of what it means to be an age-friendly city needs to be articulated and included in every discussion about City and neighborhood planning. To ensure that the message remains vibrant, the following steps should be considered.

Step 1: Expand Understanding and Raise Awareness of Need

Older adults are a diverse population with a wide range of ideas, needs, wants, and expectations. It is not enough to listen to a handful of older residents and infer that they speak for all older residents. Therefore, it is essential to regularly invite and involve older residents when discussing issues that could potentially affect them.

Step 2: Build Community Capacity to Respond

To effectively initiate change and sustain those changes, the right people representing the right organizations and government agencies need to be present. The development of roles for community partners that align with their own missions and initiatives is essential to ensure overarching AFC success. Joining forces with other aging-focused groups, such as the Western and Central Virginia Chapter of the National Aging in Place Council, can enhance access to resources and identify persons with needed expertise. At the helm, should be a designated person with strong working relationships with the City government to facilitate conversation, planning, and implementation of AFC activities. As each AFC initiative is identified or launched, the configuration of workgroups may shift to accommodate the focus of work. Still, a strong leadership team that works well with the City needs to remain in place.

Step 3: Initiate Sustainable Interventions

Developing brand new programs or initiatives can be time-consuming and expensive. A first step towards affecting change could begin by building on current activities and programs already existing within neighborhoods and the City. Such initiatives may not currently have an aging component, but may be well-suited to reach older residents. For example, efforts to increase physical activity outdoors typically focus on children, young adults, and families, but can be “re-tooled” to include older adults. Working with current initiatives is also a good way to build partnerships that would otherwise be unknown.

Step 4: Measure Outcomes

Measuring whether or not the City is becoming more age-friendly is essential but will be a challenge as no set standards for measures exist. Performance indicators do not have to include multi-level measures or percentages of use. Indicators can measure whether or not a product or service exists (e.g., a resource guide is published). The goal is to select indicators that are meaningful and can demonstrate that efforts are indeed moving the needle forward.

Summary

Ultimately, developing a City-wide strategy to help Roanoke maintain its status as an age-friendly community will require ongoing examination of City policies, systems, and environment to ensure an equitable living experience for older residents. The recommendations provided in this report are offered to the City and the AFC leadership team to help them maintain Roanoke’s age-friendly status.