Livable Communities of Oneida County

Action Plan

April 2021
Livable Communities of Oneida County Executive Summary, Anthony J. Picente, Jr.

On behalf of the County of Oneida, I am pleased with the work that has been done to ensure that our community is age-friendly. In 2016 our County applied for membership to the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities World Health Organization’s Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities. Oneida County recognizes the importance of encouraging and promoting age-friendly planning and policies to address changing demographics and enhance independent living. Further, Oneida County is committed to a process of continual improvement to support active and healthy aging and sustain economic and social vitality.

Our County has an ever-growing aging population coupled with a very diverse population, which offers many opportunities. It is through our age-friendly initiative, Livable Communities of Oneida County, that we have developed this Action Plan, which is a culmination of input of residents from all areas within our County from the rural areas to our urban centers, that address the eight (8) domains of livability: Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, Transportation, Housing, Social Participation, Respect and Social Inclusion, Work and Civic Engagement, Communication and Information; and Community and Health Services.

Because of efforts across many sectors of our community, the County of Oneida was one of the five (5) New York counties chosen in 2019 to be a Center of Excellence. This initiative seeks to ensure more age-friendly counties across the state. It includes livability domains and incorporates Health Across All Policies to better integrate community-based support and services within the health system and across the continuum of care to improve all of its residents’ overall health.

We are excited to move from the development of this Action Plan to the implementation stage, which will ensure our community is age-friendly for all ages.
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I. Oneida County Profile

Oneida County is in central New York State as part of the Mohawk Valley and contains 1,256 square miles. About 1,212 square miles is land area, with about 44 square miles of water area. Approximately 30% of the land area is agricultural, 29% in forest areas, and 35% in open land areas. Oneida County’s seat is Utica, but County Court and principal offices also are found in Rome. Public Works and the Oneida County Jail are adjacent to the former Oneida County Airport in Oriskany.

The County consists of an urban-rural mixture composed of 26 towns, 16 villages and three cities. In 2019, the two largest cities had a combined population of almost 96,000. This number represents about 42% of the County’s total population (228,761). Another 24,500 people live in villages and other areas immediately surrounding these cities. All told, more than 50% of the County’s population live either in urban settings or incorporated villages that surround these cities. The remaining population lives in more rural settings both north and south of the Mohawk Valley corridor.

The County population estimate in 2019 was 228,761. During the 1990s, the County lost 6% of its population, dropping from 250,836 in 1990 to 235,469 people in 2000. From 2000 to 2010, the population stabilized, dropping less than a quarter of a percent, to 234,878. The median age of the County’s population jumped from 33.8 in 1990 to 38.2 in 2000. This shift reflected the loss of many younger population segments following the Griffiss Air Force Base’s closure in the mid-nineties. As of 2018, the median age in Oneida County stood at 41.0 years of age. Approximately 5.6% of the current population is under five; 21.2% are younger than eighteen, 74.3% are age twenty-one or older, and 18.5% are age sixty-five or older. These are somewhat older than the 2010 age distributions.

According to the 2018 ACS data, about 98% of the county population identifies itself as being of a single racial background. Among the total population, 85.3% see themselves as white only, 6.8% as black or African American only, and 5.8% identify themselves as being of some other singular racial composition. In 2010, nearly 11,000 persons in the County identified themselves as being of Hispanic ethnicity. By 2018, this number had jumped to almost 14,000 people. Hispanics now represent 6% of the population and are the single largest growing ethnic group in the region. Asians represent 4% of the population.

Among the 105,447 housing units in Oneida County, about two-thirds are within urban settings. Of the almost 89,000 total occupied housing units, 66% are owner-occupied, with the remainder occupied by renters. 2018 ACS estimates identified about 16,000
units as vacant; nearly 3,500 of these were seasonal housing. The median self-identified housing value in 2018 in Oneida County was $135,100. The median self-reported rent was $758.

Of the 106,513 persons age 16 or older in the civilian labor force in 2018, 101,483 were employed. These numbers reflect an unemployment rate of 4.0% in 2018. Employment within various industries includes: education, health care and social assistance (30,170); retail trade (11,474); arts, entertainment, accommodation and food services (11,264); manufacturing (8,101); finance and insurance (5,266); construction (4,122); transportation and warehousing (4,061); and wholesale trade (1,554).

Higher education facilities in the County include Hamilton College, Clinton (about 1,800 students); Mohawk Valley Community College, Utica and Rome campuses (around 7,000 full and part-time students); Utica College, Utica (approximately 2,500 undergraduate and 500 graduate students); and SUNY Polytechnic Institute, Marcy (about 2,800 students).

Health care facilities include the Rome Health in the City of Rome and the Mohawk Valley Health System (MVHS) in the City of Utica, which merged Faxton-St. Luke’s and St. Elizabeth’s Hospitals. MVHS is currently building a new hospital in downtown Utica.

Oneida County is considered an excellent place to raise a family. Several features make people want to live and remain here. The area boasts clean air, ample outdoor space, and diverse people, housing, and land. Many residents pride themselves on traditional values. Small communities strive for local self-sufficiency, mutual care and support among neighbors and families.

Responding, in part, to economic challenges upstate New York has weathered in recent decades, young people tend to leave the area to seek educational and employment opportunities or warmer climates. Many return to Oneida County at middle age or retirement to care for older family members and wish to stay as long as possible in their homes of choice. A dearth of young families in relation to older residents creates an imbalance, however. Older residents lament that they can’t find the services they need after years of hard work and dedication.

With this as the background, and given the typical collaborative attitudes of Oneida County residents and organizations, this was an ideal county to implement an age-friendly/livable communities project.

Primary Source: HOCCPP 2020
II. Introduction to the Livable Communities of Oneida County Action Plan

The Livable Communities of Oneida County Action Plan is a culmination of over four years of work and planning to gather demographics and as much input from the Oneida County residents of all ages as possible. The goal has been to create or, in some cases, enhance age-friendly characteristics of Oneida County with the product an evolving and improving Livable Community for all ages.

We ensured inclusion in the planning and final project by inviting leaders from diverse communities, government bodies, and organizations serving residents across the county spectrum to join the Steering Committee and sub-committees. Typical of Oneida County, participants came together willingly and enthusiastically to develop collaborations across townships, cities, and villages of Oneida County.

An extensive survey process was developed for dissemination throughout Oneida County and focus groups organized representing urban and rural areas of Oneida County. The specifics of the process are described below. Copies of the Livable Communities of Oneida County Survey and focus group initiative can be found in the Appendix.

The Livable Communities of Oneida County Steering Committee and collaborative partners are pleased to provide this Action Plan along with a detailed description of the development of our process for completion.

The Livable Communities of Oneida County Steering Committee and participating organizations thank all of the Oneida County collaborating residents and organizations who have made this report and the next steps possible.
III. How the Livable Communities of Oneida County Action Plan was Developed

In 2016, the Parkway Center, Oneida County Office for Aging/Continuing Care, Oneida County Planning Department, and the Community Foundation of Herkimer & Oneida Counties came together to discuss the AARP Age-Friendly Community initiative and the possibility that Oneida County could become an Age-Friendly Community.

On July 26, 2016, Oneida County Executive Anthony J. Picente, Jr. submitted an application to AARP for membership in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities - Livable Communities. On November 18, 2016, County Executive Picente held a press conference to announce AARP’s approval of Oneida County to join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities. He introduced the Steering Committee members who were committed to guiding this project: representatives from the County Departments of Health, Planning, Mental Health, and Office for the Aging/Continuing Care as well as representatives from The Community Foundation of Herkimer & Oneida Counties and the Parkway Center.

As part of the Steering Committee’s formation process, members made specific commitments to ensure the initiative’s forward momentum.

Oneida County committed to this initiative by providing resources of staff, printing, data entry and support.

In 2017, the Community Foundation of Herkimer & Oneida Counties committed to supporting this initiative with funding for a two-year project coordinator position. In 2019, they renewed their commitment for an additional two years (2021). They also have dedicated staff time to this initiative.

The Parkway Center committed to this initiative dedicated staff time, resources and supervision of the Project Coordinator. As a member of the Steering Committee, the Parkway Center shares this supervisory role with the committee.

With commitments in place, Oneida County was now ready to enter the “Getting Started” Phase as part of the AARP Age-Friendly Communities five Phases:

1. Getting Started  
2. Needs Assessment  
3. Action and Evaluation Plan  
4. Implementation  
5. Connecting
VI. The Process and Program Cycle of AARP Livable Communities of Oneida County

1. Getting Started Phase

The Getting Started Phase began with establishing eight work groups to address the eight domains of liveability as listed in the AARP guidelines and as outlined by World Health Organization (WHO). These include: Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, Transportation, Housing, Social Participation, Respect and Social Inclusion, Work and Civic Engagement, Communication and Information, and, Community and Health Services.

Each work group was assigned co-chairs from the Steering Committee and a community leader with some background or connection to the work group’s topic. Participants from non-profit organizations, businesses and community members were invited to serve on the work groups. Each work group was given the AARP guidelines for their specific domain to begin the discussions.

The work groups were asked to outline positives and weaknesses of the County in their assigned domain, review the score given to Oneida County by AARP concerning each area of liveability and prepare for the next phase: Needs Assessment and Planning.

2. Needs Assessment Phase

The Needs Assessment was completed in a two-part process: A Community Survey and Focus Groups. The Steering Committee assumed the role of developing a community survey based on the AARP Needs Assessment Survey. The survey was disseminated throughout the entire County – both rural and urban areas. The Project Coordinator held many outreach events at senior centers, local libraries, local eating establishments, senior meetings, community partner events/health fairs and tabled at the mall. Utica College Occupational Therapy graduate students assisted in many events. Surveys were collected both on-line and via paper copies. Over 1,700 surveys were completed.

The Oneida County Planning Department provided staffing resources to analyze the data from the surveys and map the County to ensure surveys represented the entire County. The coordinator provided bi-monthly reports to the Steering Committee to show the progression of data collection.

The second part of the assessment process was to host focus groups throughout the County to gather additional information from residents to ensure that the assessment was complete. A strong partnership was developed with the Utica College Occupational Therapy Program, specifically for conducting, gathering, and analysing the county-wide
focus group data. With oversight from Professor Denise Nepveux and Kathleen Bishop, PhD, a consultant from the Office for Aging/Continuing Care, OT graduate students facilitated focus groups using qualitative research strategies.

The community assessment was completed in 2019. Data gathered through the survey and focus group processes were summarized with the full reports in the Appendix. Collaboration with higher educational institutions is evident from the amount of information and participation by Oneida County residents throughout the planning process.

3. Action and Evaluation Plan Phase
Community Assessment findings were presented to the Work Groups, who were asked to use this information to develop Work Plans for their respective liveability domains. These Work Plans were then compiled for this Action Plan. Each contain action items, goals, specific action items, who will be involved, a facilitator(s), date for completion and performance indicators for evaluation purposes.

4. Implementation Phase
The Steering Committee will support the Work Groups during the phase of Implementation over the next two years and will continue developing the County’s Action Plan as a road map for age-friendly initiatives. Through the implementation phase, progress will be measured and any needed additions or changes will be made to the plan. This process will lead to a cycle of continuous improvement; as priority items are accomplished in a given domain, new action items are identified and form the basis for additional planning and implementation.
Civic Engagement Action Plan

Vision Statement: Expand opportunities for persons of all ages to engage in meaningful paid employment and volunteer positions free from age discrimination. We will improve the level of participation for people of all ages and abilities.

Background: A wide variety of volunteer opportunities are available in Oneida County, as well as the 2-1-1 HELPLINE and AmeriCorp Seniors of Oneida County (f/k/a Oneida County Retired and Senior Volunteer Program). Greater public awareness of volunteering opportunities and benefits could help connect potential volunteers with opportunities that address community needs. Employment and educational opportunities, and the value of being mentally, physically and socially engaged, also remain underpublicized. Older adults are one of the few resources that are increasing in our community.

Civic Engagement: Action Plan #1

Goal: Create a Volunteer Resource Center

Specific Action Items:

1. Hire a volunteer outreach coordinator
2. Create a database of volunteer opportunities
3. Create volunteer registration forms
4. Expand volunteer outreach and recruitment
5. Expand partners in need of volunteers through Memorandums of Understanding

Who: Older Adults, Parkway Center, Oneida County Office for the Aging

Facilitator: Parkway Center

When: September 2021-2023

Performance Indicators:

• Volunteer Resource Center is created
• Number of new volunteer opportunities created
• Number of new volunteers signed up
• Number of new outreach events
• Number of new partners signing Memorandums of Understanding
**Civic Engagement: Action Plan #2**

**Goal:** Increase opportunities for older adults to secure paid employment

**Specific Action Items:**

1. Promote employment-ready job training programs for older adults.
2. Recruit and educate area employers on:
   a. Older adult workforce readiness,
   b. Needs of individuals with disabilities
   c. Awareness of age-discrimination policies and practices

**Who:** Older adults, Working Solutions, Social Service Employment; Empowered Pathways; Resource Center for Independent Living; A4TD

**Facilitator:** Resource Center for Independent Living/Workforce Development

**When:** 2023

**Performance Indicators:**

- Number of older adults participating in employment training
- Number of older adults gaining employment
- Number of businesses participating in workforce educational workshops

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**Civic Engagement: Action Plan #3**

**Goal:** Post-retirement options and pre-retirement planning options are available

**Specific Action Items:**

1. Provide pre-retirement seminars to educate on how to stay engaged.
2. Provide a series of outreach workshops on volunteer opportunities for older adults.
3. Schedule pre-retirement planning seminars on Medicare, Medicaid, and long-term care coverage options

**Who:** Older adults, Oneida County Office for the Aging, NY Connects and (HIICAP) Health Insurance Counseling and Assistance Program, Parkway Center, Working Solutions, Social Service Employment, Empowered Pathways, Resource Center for Independent Living

**Facilitator:** Resource Center for Independent Living

**When:** 2023
Performance Indicators:

- Number of older adults attending pre-retirement seminars about staying engaged after retirement
- Number of new older adult volunteers engaged
- Number of new volunteers under the age of 55 assisting in meeting the needs of older adults
- Number of adult/family caregivers attending long term care workshops

Civic Engagement: Action Plan #4

Goal: Self-employment options for older adults are promoted and supported

Specific Action Items:

1. Chamber of Commerce will provide education on self-start up businesses through workshops and seminars.
2. The Small Business Development Center/SCORE will provide mentoring opportunities for small business start-up.

Who: Older adults, Small Business Development Center/SCORE

Facilitator: SCORE

When: 2023

Performance Indicators:

- Number of workshops to educate on self-start up businesses
- Number of people who attended workshops
- Number of people referred to SCORE
- Number of people who started a business
Social Participation Action Plan

Vision Statement: To provide unique opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to connect and feel welcome. To encourage socialization and strengthen the greater community.

Background: Many resources exist to address social participation, but public awareness of these resources is lacking. Additional effort is needed to develop programming that is conducive and welcoming to new participants who arrive alone, bridge the gaps between cultures, address the age-friendliness of events, and create a central location for events to be shared.

Social Participation: Action Plan #1

Goal: Public is aware of the age friendliness of events in Oneida County.

Specific Action Items:
1. Using the Oneida County Tourism’s platform, implement codes for events and activities that address affordability, accessibility, senior friendly, and family friendly
2. Codes are used uniformly across the County for events and activities

Who: Older adults, Oneida County Tourism, Oneida County Office for Aging, Parkway Center, Oneida County Government, community organizations

Facilitator: Oneida County Tourism

When: May 2022

Performance Indicators:
- Codes are completed and implemented for community events and activities throughout the County.
- Number of Events and activities coded throughout Oneida County

Social Participation: Action Plan #2

Goal: Bridge cultural and linguistic gaps to increase social participation of non-English speaking individuals and English learners

Specific Action Items:
Engage and educate community partners to increase social participation of non-English speaking older adults in community events and activities
**Who:** Older adults, Oneida County Tourism, Oneida County Office for Aging, Midtown Community Center, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Mohawk Valley Latino Association

**Facilitator:** Oneida County Tourism

**When:** 2022

**Performance Indicators:**
- Number of events and activities that demonstrate increased diverse participation
- Number of events and activities that provide publicity and program information in multiple languages

**Social Participation Action Plan #3**

**Goal:** Increase knowledge about what events are happening community-wide

**Specific Action Items:**
1. Increase usage of Prime Time and small local tabloid papers to share events
2. Identify and network community-wide calendar of events and social media outlets including Livable Community Facebook and web site

**Who:** Older adults, Oneida County Tourism, Oneida County Office for Aging, Parkway Center, Mohawk Valley Chamber Alliance, County Senior Centers

**Facilitator:** Oneida County Tourism

**When:** 2022

**Performance Indicators:**
- Increase in publicity of community events in newspapers sources throughout Oneida County.
- Number of web site user sessions and social media engagements
- Partnership with cable network provider sharing community events
Outdoor Spaces and Public Buildings Action Plan

**Vision Statement:** To improve entry points, participation, and navigation to new options and opportunities within neighborhoods, open spaces and buildings for people of all ages and abilities.

**Background:** Our community has many safe, accessible and pleasant recreational opportunities, community centers, fitness facilities, activities and parks throughout the County. There is a need to improve accessibility and increase community use of outdoor spaces and public buildings.

**Outdoor Spaces and Public Buildings: Action Plan #1**

**Goal:** Implement zoning ordinances and design requirements that create accessible, mixed-use neighborhoods with a variety of housing types and services

**Specific Action Items:**

1. Provide examples of Municipal Zoning Ordinances and design requirements that will include age-friendly language that incorporates accessibility for a variety of housing/building types and services.
2. Setup County wide training workshops and disseminate information through Oneida County Zoning Board

**Who:** Older adults, Livable Communities Outdoor Spaces Work Group, Local Municipalities, Oneida County Planning Departments, North Country Snowmobile and Hiking Clubs, Oneida County Tourism, local Bicycle Groups

**Facilitator:** Oneida County Planning Department

**When:** 2022

**Performance Indicators:**

- Number of new projects that implemented the age friendly design requirements
- Number of municipal zoning ordinances that were changed to incorporate age-friendly language.
- Number of workshops held throughout the County and number of attendees

**Outdoor Spaces and Public Buildings: Action Plan #2**

**Goal:** Improve access to safe, accessible and welcoming walkways, streets, public buildings and outdoor spaces for all ages and abilities.
Specific Action Items:

1. The Outdoor Space Work Group, in coordination with Oneida County Planning Department, will conduct audits of parks and public buildings to collect data on accessibility and amenities (seating, parking, ramps, etc.).
2. Create a committee to receive and review data to make recommendations for improvements.
3. Use results of the audit will be used to access the accessibility and amenities in a directory.

Who: Older adults, Livable Communities Outdoor Spaces Work Group, Local Municipalities, Oneida County Planning Departments, North Country Snowmobile & Hiking Clubs, Oneida County Tourism, local Bicycle Groups, Utica College OT Students

Facilitator: Oneida County Tourism/Oneida County Planning Dept.

When: 2022

Performance Indicators:

- Number of audits conducted
- Number of parks and/or recreation facilities rehabilitated, improved or created based on audit recommendations
- Directory of accessible and safe amenities that exist in the county spaces and buildings.

Outdoor Spaces and Public Buildings: Action Plan #3

Goal: Build capacity for community activities throughout the County by using community centers, senior centers, schools and other public facilities.

Specific Action Items:

1. Build a database of community assets for hosting activities based on community needs
2. Develop activities to take advantage of off-hours and underutilized facilities in the community

Who: Older adults, Livable Communities Outdoor Spaces Work Group, Local Senior Centers, County Libraries, PTAs and other Community Groups

Facilitator: Oneida County Tourism

When: 2022
Performance Indicators:

- Database with community assets is created and disseminated
- Number of new events throughout the County using community centers, senior centers, schools and other public facilities
- Number of community groups sharing services and facilities

**Health and Community Services Action Plan**

**Vision Statement:** To promote, maintain and restore health by engaging all people and creating an environment to improve community health and quality of life.

**Background:** The local public health system continues to engage in an ongoing cycle of needs assessment and planning through the work of community agencies, organizations, local health department, and hospital/healthcare systems. Planning includes the development of the Community Health Improvement Plan for 2019-2021, identifying community focus areas, specifically, Chronic Disease Preventive Care and Management and Opioid Overdose Prevention. Most recently, the efforts of the public health system have focused on the COVID-19 pandemic response.

**Health and Community Services: Action Plan #1**

**Goal:** Educate consumers on health and community health services

**Specific Action Items:**

1. Create package of available health services in Oneida County
2. Update current list from NY Connects and Oneida County Office for Aging.
3. Distribute it through social media, Health Fairs, Housing and Senior Centers.

**Who:** Older adults, Oneida County Office for Aging, Oneida County Health Department

**Facilitator:** Oneida County Health Department

**When:** 2021

**Performance Indicators:**

- Number of website and social media hits
- Number of calls received by NY Connects
Health and Community Services: Action Plan #2

**Goal:** Promote staff training practices that address the needs of our ethnically-diverse aging population including language barriers.

**Specific Action Items:**

1. Create a communication tool highlighting the benefits of staff training and outcomes, including a list of training resources and available training partners

**Who:** Older adults, Oneida County Office for Aging, Oneida County Health Department, The Center, Parkway Center

**Facilitator:** Oneida County Health Department

**When:** 2022

**Performance Indicators:**

- Number of classes held and number of attendees

Health and Community Services: Action Plan #3

**Goal:** Health and wellness preventive classes and information forums including alternative medicine and practices

**Specific Action Items:**

1. Promote evidence-based classes and programs to increase health through education, lifestyle change and fitness practices.

**Who:** Older adults, Oneida County Office for Aging, Oneida County Health Department, Parkway Center

**Facilitator:** Parkway Center

**When:** 2022

**Performance Indicators:**

- Number of classes held and number of attendees
- Number of outreach promotional events/advertising
**Health and Community Services: Action Plan #4**

**Goal:** Promote emergency planning that takes into account the vulnerabilities and capacities of older people.

**Specific Action Items:**

1. Create presentation and training media to be used throughout Oneida County by planners, first responders and the community

**Who:** Older adults, Resource Center for Independent Living, Oneida County Office for Aging, Oneida County Health Department, The Center, Parkway Center

**Facilitator:** Oneida County Health Department

**When:** 2022

**Performance Indicators:**

- Number of presentations and training classes held
- Number of participants

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**Health and Community Services: Action Plan #5**

**Goal:** Increase addiction recovery and community reintegration services and awareness of existing services.

**Specific Action Items:**

1. Increase educational outreach and recovery workshops for substance use and abuse

**Who:** Older adults, Oneida County Office of Mental Health, Center for Family Life and Recovery, Opioid Task Force, Friends of Recovery

**Facilitator:** Opioid Task Force

**When:** 2022

**Performance Indicators:**

- Number of presentations and outreach workshops held and attendees
- Number of peer coaching sessions
- Number of pre and post-event surveys
Housing Action Plan

Vision Statement: To ensure access to safe, accessible and affordable housing.

Background: Many affordable housing options exist for average-income households; however, housing values in some neighborhoods are low enough to deter construction of new, higher-quality units. A variety of strategies -- including development, rehabilitation, modification, weatherization and neighborhood-beautification projects -- are necessary to transform neighborhoods and meet various needs.

Housing: Action Plan #1

Goal: Support aging in place in urban and rural communities throughout Oneida County and provide information on resources to age in place.

Specific Action Items:
1. Create a list of organizations and programs to update homes with ramps, chair lifts etc. to allow seniors to remain at home
2. Create a list of available services throughout the County, including sidewalk snow removal etc. to refer seniors for services
3. Outreach to seniors about the programs and services available to them
4. Update the database of information on NY Connects, 211 and Livable Communities web site

Who: Older adults, NY Connects, 211, Homeownership Center, OFA, MVCAA, Senior Centers, Resource Center for Independent Living, Mohawk Valley Community Action, VFW, American Legion, Upstate Cerebral Palsy, Cluster 13

Facilitator: Oneida County Office for Aging

When: 2022

Performance Indicators:
- Number of outreach events and attendees
- Number of web hits and calls received by NY Connects and 211 for information after education sessions are completed

Housing: Action Plan #2

Goal: Develop Home Repair Service for Seniors
Specific Action Items:

1. Create a database of services throughout the County
2. Create a network of local organizations (Veterans, BOCES, MVCC, Repair Businesses) to provide home repair services to Seniors.
3. Create a learning collaborative for government agencies, professionals, students and volunteers to work together to provide training, home repairs and updates for older adults.

Who: Older adults, City of Utica Urban and Economic Development Office, Camden Home Helpers, Office for the Aging, Resource Center for Independent Living, HomeOwnership Center, Municipalities, Mohawk Valley Community Action, VFW, American Legion, Upstate Cerebral Palsy, Cluster 13

Facilitator: HomeOwnership Center/Mohawk Valley Community Action

When: 2022

Performance Indicators:

- Database of home repair services
- Number of partners in the network for home repairs
- Number of learning collaboratives

Housing: Action Plan #3

Goal: Wheelchair Ramps - install and reuse program.

Specific Action Items:

1. Create a wheelchair ramp program to shorten the delay for new installations and create a program for reuse and relocation of temporary ramps provided through organizations providing senior services.

Who: Older adults, NY Connects, Home Ownership Center, Mohawk Valley Community Action, Plymouth Bethesda Church

Facilitator: Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency

When: 2022

Performance Indicators:

- Number of households served
Housing: Action Plan #4

Goal: Directory of safe affordable senior housing available throughout the County.

Specific Action Items:
1. Create a database/directory of senior housing of all income levels and post it on the Livable Communities of Oneida County website
2. Create a database of needs assessments of senior housing. Focus on the gaps in senior housing and needs for additional housing.

Who: Older adults, Mohawk Valley Housing and Homeless Coalition & City of Utica Urban and Economic Development Office

Facilitator: Housing Coalition

When: 2022

Performance Indicators:
- Database/Directory is developed and available on the Livable Communities of Oneida County website
- Number of web hits
- Number of new senior housing units in Oneida County

Transportation Action Plan

Vision Statement: To increase transportation options that connect people to social activities, economic opportunities, and medical care. To offer convenient, accessible, and low-cost alternatives to driving.

Background: Many transportation-related services exist in Oneida County. The Way2Go Transportation Program for Oneida and Herkimer Counties educates residents on transportation options and safety in their communities. Service gaps exist in the rural parts of the County. Oneida County has conducted a new Rural Transit Study to develop strategies to address the need. Additional coordination is needed among transportation providers to ensure communities have the necessary transportation resources.

Transportation: Action Plan #1

Goal: Educate members of the communities on transportation options and resources
Specific Action Items:

1. Reach out to community members (individuals, groups, leaders) to ensure they are aware of the resources available to them through public transportation.
2. Enhance web-based training resources for Way2Go/Mobility Management.

Who: Older adults, Parkway Center, Centro, Birnie Bus
Facilitator: Parkway Center
When: 2022
Performance Indicators:

• Number of in-person and virtual training events held, brochures distributed, and website hits

Transportation: Action Plan #2

Goal: Work with County government agencies and community organizations to implement Complete Streets throughout Oneida County. Complete Streets is a statewide initiative to make streets safer for shared use by all transportation types (motorized, biking, walking, etc.)

Specific Action Items:

1. Empower community members and stakeholders to engage in planning projects for Complete Streets within their own communities.
2. Identify short term, attainable, low-cost projects that make a marked improvement
3. Create “Pop Up” events to allow communities to preview changes proposed

Who: Older adults, Transportation Work Group members, County Planning Department, Municipalities, Parkway Center
Facilitator: Parkway Center
When: 2022
Performance Indicators:

• Number of projects identified and completed
• Number of groups created
**Transportation: Action Plan #3**

**Goal:** Hold a Transportation Fair for Oneida County residents to learn about services available and to connect consumers with providers

**Specific Action Items:**

1. Invite all local transportation providers (public, private, and volunteer) to come to an informational fair (in person or virtual) to educate the public on their services and answer any questions they have

**Who:** Older adults, Parkway Center, Centro, Uber, Lyft, Call a Bus

**Facilitator:** Parkway Center

**When:** 2022

**Performance Indicators:**

- Number of people in attendance at transportation fair

**Transportation: Action Plan #4**

**Goal:** Facilitate collaboration to improve transportation options for the residents of Western Oneida County

**Specific Action Items:**

1. Assist residents of Noyes Manor to identify a solution to their transportation needs and provide guidance through the process of setting up their solution
2. Assist community members and stakeholders to implement a volunteer driver program

**Who:** Older adults, Parkway Center, Noyes Manner Staff, Community Stakeholders

**Facilitator:** Parkway Center

**When:** 2022

**Performance Indicators:**

- Number of participants served
- Number of projects implemented
Communication and Information Action Plan

Vision Statement: To create communication strategies effective in engaging community residents of all ages, making sure seniors are aware of activities, services and programs available through the County.

Background: A wide variety of communication resources exist, including local newspapers and tabloids; a variety of local print and electronic newsletters; several television and radio stations that include shows about the local community; and many community-related websites and Facebook pages. Several libraries have a variety of communication and information resources including computers and computer training, and several senior centers have access to computers and training. Fee-based computer classes are also available. 2-1-1 Helpline has an extensive database of organizations serving our County that is accessible by phone and through a website. Other web-based information clearinghouses serving our County include the NY Connects database of long-term care services and supports, the Network of Care database of mental and behavioral health services, and the Chamber of Commerce community events calendar. In spite of many free and low-cost communication resources, a lack of public awareness about community resources has been identified through a variety of community assessments. Frustration at not having the right information at the right time is paired with concerns about “information overload,” indicating that providing more information more frequently, using more sources, and reaching more people is not necessarily an effective solution.

Communication and Information: Action Plan #1

Goal: Make information and contact information for services and community events easy to access by County residents of all ages

Specific Action Items:

1. Create a media campaign to bring awareness to NY Connects, 211 and Oneida County and Livable Communities Webpage and Facebook

Who: Older adults, Livable Communities Work Group Members

Facilitator: Livable Communities Work Group Members

When: 2022

Performance Indicators:

- Number of phone calls to NY Connects and 211
- Number of Social Media hits compared to previous numbers
**Communication and Information: Action Plan #2**

**Goal:** To identify and promote Age-friendly businesses

**Specific Action Items:**

1. Create a checklist of what makes a business age-friendly. Businesses agree to have assessments completed to receive “Age-friendly Business” status with a window decal.
2. Businesses are given “tips” to improve the age-friendliness of their business.

**Who:** Older adults, Chamber of Commerce, Parkway Center, Oneida County Office for the Aging/Continuing Care

**Facilitator:** Chambers of Commerce

**When:** 2022

**Performance Indicators:**

- Number of assessments completed by businesses
- Number of businesses that are age-friendly or working on increasing age-friendly services

**Communication and Information: Action Plan #3**

**Goal:** Continuous education of newest communication technologies, creating age-friendly communications and the use of positive aging language

**Specific Action Items:**

1. The Oneida County Office for Aging’s annual outreach will include questions about the best way to communicate with seniors. The results will be used to create education programs, training materials and workshops on the use of multimedia (social media, community bulletin boards, TV, Radio and print media) to address best practices for older adult friendly materials.
2. Hold workshops at libraries and community centers as well as online to educate seniors on use of technology, online resources and social media.

**Who:** Older adults, Oneida County Office for the Aging/Continuing Care, Utica College, Parkway Center, Utica Public Library, Jervis Public Library

**Facilitator:** Parkway Center

**When:** 2022
Performance Indicators:

- Number of Workshops held along with attendance counts.
- Number of web hits for online resources.

Communication and Information: Action Plan #4

Goal: To increase communications with older adults

Specific Action Items:

1. Office for the Aging’s annual outreach will include questions about the best communication avenues
2. The results will be part of a continuous education program

Who: Older adults, Office for the Aging

Facilitator: Office for the Aging

When: 2022

Performance Indicators:

- Number of outreach events
- Number of participants

Respect and Inclusion Action Plan

Vision Statement: To increase meaningful and positive engagement by older adults in community life. Needs and preferences of a diversity of older adults are heard, considered and acted upon in planning of programs and events. Intergenerational bonds are strengthened.

Background: Older adults are well-represented in the leadership of many community organizations. Despite this, some older adults reported in focus groups that they did not feel that their needs and preferences were adequately considered in decision-making. This was especially true of those in northern and western segments of the County, as well as those of under-represented groups such as refugee communities, African American and Latino communities, and the LGBTQ community. Additionally, older adults in several areas of the county reported a feeling of disconnection with young people, both within workplaces and generally in their communities.
Respect and Inclusion: Action Plan #1

Goal: To increase and diversify involvement of older adults in decision making processes to achieve fair and effective representation of older adults in County, town and city planning especially transportation and housing

Specific Action Items:

1. Leadership workshops for older adults in collaboration with other senior community group leaders

Who: Older adults, Long Term Care Council, County Planning, City planning, Metro transit, MVCC

Facilitator: Oneida County Tourism

When: 2022

Performance Indicators:

- Number of older participants in the Leadership Workshops
- Number of new organizations representing diverse communities in the Leadership Workshops

Respect and Inclusion: Action Plan #2

Goal: Create intergenerational opportunities to promote mutual understanding and support positive aging

Specific Action Items:

1. Provide educational opportunities on positive aging through participatory programs at high schools or colleges, involving the creation of elder life-stories with the help of students

Who: Older adults, Utica College, high schools

Facilitator: Utica College (Denise Nepveux/Michelle Nunno-Evans)

When: 2022

Performance Indicators:

- Number of students participating in positive aging programs.
- Number of high schools and/or colleges participating in positive aging programs
Respect and Inclusion: Action Plan #3

Goal: Increased positive visibility of older adults in local media

Specific Action Items:

1. Publish Life-Stories
2. Senior Centers and Clubs produce positive news stories to share with the community
3. Provide educational opportunities on positive aging

Who: Older adults, Office for the Aging, Senior Centers, media representatives

Facilitator: Oneida County Office for Aging

When: 2022

Performance Indicators:

- Number of positive news stories about older adults
- Diversity of older adults is represented in positive news stories (age, gender, profession, urban/rural, sexual identity, disability, race/ethnicity)
- Number of senior centers and clubs producing positive news stories
- Number of educational opportunities on positive aging

Respect and Inclusion: Action Plan #4

Goal: Older adults are engaged in public policy and practice.

Specific Action Items:

1. Identify barriers that prevent older adults from inclusive and engagement in public policy and practice
2. Create a plan to address the barriers with a focus group of seniors

Who: Older adults, Office for the Aging, Livable Communities Workgroup, Utica College

Facilitator: Oneida County Office for Aging – Advocacy Committee

When: 2022

Performance Indicators:

- Number of older adults participating in focus groups to address barriers for participation
- Number of senior centers and clubs producing positive news stories
- Number of older adults engaged in public policy and practice
Respect and Inclusion: Action Plan #5

Goal: Older adults are respected in the community

Specific Action Items:
1. Gather information from seniors across the County regarding what they consider to be “respect.”
2. Incorporate the results into the educational training programs

Who: Older adults, Office for the Aging, Livable Communities Workgroup, Utica College

Facilitator: Utica College Graduate Students

When: 2023

Performance Indicators:
- Number of older adults participating in planning groups for respect and inclusion
- Number of older adults engaged in multi-generational activities

VII. Center for Excellence

According to the New York Academy of Medicine, many different areas of practice implementation, including public health, education and research, have successfully employed Centers of Excellence (CFE) as a mechanism to support local and regional work. Rather than having the work in one agency, organization or department, the infrastructure of a CFE consists of cross-disciplinary, cross-agency, public-private partners. CFE Leadership can support existing and new activities to include Health Across All Policies and Smart Growth Principles. (See Appendix)

In 2019, Liveable Communities of Oneida County was chosen to participate and become one of five Centers for Excellence in New York State. Oneida County’s project was one of three to be funded by the Health Foundation of Western and Central New York. The goals of the CFE Project included adopting a County Resolution similar to Governor Cuomo’s Executive Order #190, which incorporates age-friendly concepts in government planning, contracting and procurement. Such a resolution would further the goals of incorporating healthy aging, accessibility and liveability features in policy development.

In addition, as a CFE, Oneida County serves as a mentor to other developing age-friendly communities. Oneida County is assisting in the development of Age-Friendly Herkimer County by collaborating with and mentoring the Herkimer County Office for the Aging.
1. **Summary of the Age-friendly/Liveable Communities Survey Process**

The Consumer Survey and Partner Surveys were distributed between November 2017 and July 2018. The two surveys attempted to obtain baseline data to gauge the level of “livability” in Oneida County. “Livability” is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) and AARP as “age-friendly” community amenities that help people of all ages live as they age. The amenities are sorted into eight different categories called “The Eight Domains of Livability” or “Domains.” These Domains include: Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, Transportation, Housing, Social Participation, Respect and Inclusion, Civic Participation and Employment, Communication and Information, and Community and Health Services.

**Consumer Survey**: The intention of the Consumer Survey was to get the perceptions of livability from Oneida County residents 18 and older. These people are identified as *Consumers or Residents*. The residents rated age-friendly amenities in their community. These amenities can be provided by either public or private entities. There were approximately 182,000 Oneida County residents that qualified to take the survey at the time it was distributed.

**Partner Survey**: There were two goals of the partner survey. One goal of this survey was to gather “expert” opinions on the importance and availability of amenities that add to the livability of communities as described by AARP and the WHO. The second goal was to use the results to identify any potential service gaps in Oneida County through comparisons with the Consumer Survey. Over 100 agencies received the survey with 28 responses received.

**Demographics**: There were 1,609 responses by residents to the survey. The primary focus of the Consumer Survey was older residents. “Older residents” are defined within this study as those 50 and over. Overall, the demographic data collected shows that respondents were: Older (75%), Female (70%), Urban (55%), Not married (58%), White (74%), Not disabled (67%), college-educated (68%), and prefer English (91%).

**Data Highlights per Domain:**
- **Perception of County-wide Livability**: Seven out of ten respondents rated their community as either “Good” or “Very Good.”
- **Outdoor Spaces**: Overall, residents have a favorable opinion of outdoor spaces in Oneida County (69%).
• **Transportation**: Transportation received the lowest rate of “Good” or “Very Good” responses (36%).
• **Housing**: The County is roughly split 50/50 on their perceptions of age-friendly housing in their community.
• **Social Participation and Inclusion**: Residents reported that they are very socially interactive, with 91% answering they socialize once per week.
• **Volunteerism**: Younger residents are more likely to volunteer (70%) than older residents (59%).
• **Employment**: County-wide, 58% of the respondents said they were employed full or part-time.
• **Access and Sources of Information**: Non-English speakers are less likely (63%) than English speakers to search for information about their community.
• **Health and Wellness**: Easy to find information on local health and supportive services had the largest gap between importance (89%) and availability (41%). This could indicate a priority area for the livable community initiative.

**Conclusion**
The data collected from the Consumer and Partner Surveys was intended to have a few uses. First this information can assist Work Groups with developing questions and action items as the plan develops. Second, it can be used to gauge the progress of each community after certain “age-friendly” projects/actions have been implemented. Based on the responses, these surveys were successful in providing the necessary data to take the next steps in the Age-Friendly/Livable Communities Initiative.

*Copy of Age-friendly/Livable Communities Survey attached.*
2. Summary of the Focus Group Process and Analyzes

These Domains include: Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, Transportation, Housing, Social Participation, Respect and Inclusion, Civic Participation and Employment, Communication and Information, and Community and Health Services.

Livable Communities of Oneida County Age-Friendly Focus Group Analysis Summary

The second part of the process of surveying residents of Oneida County was the Livable Communities Age-Friendly Focus groups. Sessions were planned to reflect the urban and rural communities throughout each of the regions of Oneida County. Locations for the focus groups were selected by working through leaders of each area to determine the most accessible sites in the region. Once the initial set of focus groups was completed, we recognized that certain aspects of diversity were underrepresented. Additional focus groups were held to hear views of African American, refugee, Latino and LGBT communities.

Denise Nepveux, Utica College Associate Professor of Occupational Therapy, was asked to collaborate with Kathleen Bishop, PhD, consultant on aging for the Oneida County Office for Aging/Continuing Care and also a Utica College Gerontology Adjunct Faculty Member as well as Livable Communities Age – Friendly Steering Committee member, to organize the format and facilitation of the focus groups along with the data collection and analysis. Utica College OT Master’s program students were trained in the facilitation and data collection.

Focus groups were conducted throughout 2018 and 2019 with one of the professors facilitating and at least two OT students collecting data as well as guiding discussions. Open-ended interview questions were organized along domain area topics with each group assigned one or two domain topics. The analysis of the discussions demonstrates no group was able to discuss one domain topic without overlapping into other domains.

The focus groups represented convenience selection. Participants responded to outreach efforts to essentially self-select or were encouraged to participate by a community leader.

The data was collected through note taking by students and transcription of the recorded sessions. The analysis was conducted through qualitative methodology of emerging themes under the domain topics. The organization of the summary combines domain topic areas as it was difficult to unravel some of the overlapping data into one topic area. The analysis and summaries will be shared with the Sub-committee groups for each of the domain areas.
Below is a brief summary of Emerging Themes from the Livable Communities of Oneida County Age-Friendly Focus Groups 2018 – 2019. The extensive and detailed analysis summaries for each Focus Group are in the Appendix.

3. **Summary of Emerging Themes**

**Defining Livable Age-Friendly Communities:**

This domain was the first topic asked in each of the focus groups. The discussion almost always led into other topic areas which were most often housing and transportation. Age-Friendly was defined by many to have opportunities for socialization as part of affordable housing and surrounding community.

Most participants grew up in Oneida County. Some participants lived in Oneida County all of their lives moving to various parts of Oneida County depending on situation many others moved away for school, marriage, and employment. Those who moved away and came back to Oneida County returned to be near family and friends. Access to their church and other community sources was also a reason to return to Oneida County.

Those participants who did not grow up in Oneida County were from other countries such as Sudan, other US states and territories, and/or came to Oneida County for SUNY Polytechnic, Utica College, or MVCC. They most often stayed in Oneida County for employment, marriage and family, and/or the rural/urban character of the region.

When asked for a numerical rating of Oneida County from 1 – 10, most answered in the upper numbers as a safe place to live and to be near families. While a few scored Oneida County closer to 1 there was not one participant who regretted living in Oneida County but did have suggestions for improvements which are included in other domain areas below.

**Housing:**

A majority of attendees lived in affordable senior housing or mixed aged affordable apartments/housing. Attendees in rural areas lived most often in single family independent housing. Those attendees who originated from outside of Oneida County mentioned the benefit of affordable and safe housing for their families while other attendees, especially in rural areas, discussed the lack of affordable housing.

“Aging in place” was mentioned as a goal for people living in suburban and rural areas but also discussed as a likely impossibility in the future. The challenges to remaining in their single-family homes included lack of help for household maintenance, lack of access to services such as grocery shopping, health care, and the Upstate NY winters.

Residents of senior housing liked having others around to visit and the social activities along with the option to go back to their apartment to be alone. Affordable and
convenient transportation was also mentioned as a reason to live in senior housing but also a problem for anyone who could not still drive or didn’t want to drive distances in the winter.

Unsafe walkways were the most frequent complaint from people living in senior housing outside of villages and in areas like Whitesboro where sidewalks were either non-existent to the stores or offices or were not walkable with walkers or using a wheelchair. One group in Clinton mentioned no sidewalks to their complex and examples of residents walking or driving their wheelchair down the middle of the street in the winter.

**Transportation:**

Typically, transportation was mentioned as unavailable, too expensive, or not available for the times necessary for health care appointments or community social activities/senior center meetings. Bus route schedules, when available, were confusing to some and changing frequently. Participants commonly mentioned missing appointments, being stranded, or just giving up going to something that was important but too difficult.

Some people still drove, especially in rural areas such as Boonville and Camden, but mentioned winters as becoming more difficult to drive due to limited daylight and icy conditions on the roads. For people in rural areas, medical offices and shopping for groceries was anywhere from 20 – 50 miles away with some not wanting to drive that far anymore. One driver with a car mentioned feeling guilty being reluctant to drive her friend’s because of worry about safety and liability.

Transportation was mentioned as a problem no matter where the focus group was in Oneida County. The one exception was a Sudanese men’s group that mentioned Oneida County was a great place to live as “getting a driver’s license was much easier here than other parts of the US.”

**Information sharing/resources:**

Participants in the focus groups mentioned using Smart Phones, Tablets, and computers for internet access to information. Some discussed their families including grandchildren encouraging them to use the devices to stay connected while others were the ones to encourage families to “Facebook” or use other types of social media.

In rural areas, especially Camden, internet access, cable network connections and even cell phones were generally not available in outlying areas of the township. When it was available in those areas it was usually too expensive for people living on a limited monthly income of $700 or less. One of the leaders in Camden discussed a train spill emergency causing many days of power outage in which there was not a census or
listing of who needed contact in those areas and how to contact other than door to door canvassing.

In some of the senior housing bulletin boards, newsletters from senior centers, and word of mouth were commonly mentioned as ways for information to resources. Senior centers provided resources and information if there was a way to travel to the senior centers.

In focus groups such as the only primarily African American center in the Cornhill District of Utica word of mouth and shared information was quite common. Internet, cable TV, and newspapers were also sources of information. Focus groups from mostly middle-class participants including this center were more likely to have access to income to afford the services.

**Outdoor/Public Spaces/Civic Engagement/Employment:**

Outdoor and public spaces were only mentioned in relation to getting to employment or participation in community activities which is why the two domains were combined. Ability to walk to grocery stores and even to bus stops to go to work was an essential and was often a barrier because of broken sidewalks, lack of sidewalks, or uncleared sidewalks in the winter.

Participants at a couple of the sites were either employees of the site or consumers of the services offered. They were all approximately the same age with no age difference between employees or consumers. One woman stated, “I live over the line in Herkimer County so maybe I shouldn’t be here. But I consider Oneida County to be my home because that is where I go to church, work, and grocery shopping.”

Few of the focus group participants mentioned employment as extremely important though for those who worked they appeared to take employment as something they liked to do and enjoyed the extra money. A few participants experienced ageism from younger co-workers. Some examples are “wanting them to move over and give them their titles” or “expect more pay than I get immediately.”

**Respect and Inclusion:**

Participants in some rural areas discussed many community activities in their local schools but not being available to them due to lack of transportation at night unless they had family to drive them. “I like to watch my grandchildren play sports but I can’t ask my daughter/son to take me when they have to drive an hour from work in Syracuse to get to the games on time.”

Focus groups located in Utica were primarily concerned about the lack of safety in their communities. “I don’t think young people have respect or care about older people.”
Robberies and personal assaults were of concern for participating in community activities.

One leader from the African-American senior center stated, “We like to be together because we have shared experiences, know each other from childhood, and are used to helping each other out. We don’t want to be invited to other centers for activities. We just want to receive the same kind of funding and support that other centers receive.”

4. Resources:

**Health Across All Policies**


**Smart Growth Principles**