January 28, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

The City of Worcester is pleased to announce our commitment to the AARP and the World Health Organization network of Age Friendly communities. This effort is led by the Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging, Inc. along with over two dozen organizations in the City of Worcester. The mission of the Age-Friendly Worcester initiative is to leverage our community’s collective expertise and build on current efforts in order to secure an AARP Age-Friendly designation for the City of Worcester. This designation comes with opportunities for additional funding for community projects, positive public relations for partner organizations, and advanced capabilities to expand on current accessibility efforts.

Worcester is a vibrant, livable mid-size city with a culturally diverse population of more than 200,000 residents, including more than 35,000 students and 20,000 adults over the age of 65. The city also has approximately 20.9% of foreign born residents. This city welcomes immigrants; people of diverse cultures; backgrounds; religions; LGBTQIA+ people; veterans and people who are living with disabilities.

The city is home to a number of colleges and universities, and provides cultural opportunities through its Arts Council, The Worcester Art Museum, The Worcester Historical Society, The Antiquarian Society, Hanover Theater, and university theatre productions. For sports fans, we have Polar Park and the Worcester Red Sox, the Worcester Railers and the Massachusetts Pirates. There are housing opportunities for people with AIDS, LGBTQIA+ housing, and a tiny home village being constructed for homeless individuals. Programs have been developed for cleaning the water and environment through Clean Worcester’s Water and the Green Worcester Plan. There are over 60 community gardens that promote intergenerational sharing, interaction and learning about the environment. Seasonal Farmer Markets are available throughout the city to promote food security. Additionally, Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) also offers a Masters degree for those looking to learn how communities can adapt to the climate crisis.

Transportation in Worcester has a significant impact due to our city’s size and location. This is particularly evident by the extension of free fare for the Worcester Regional Transit Authority. Additional bike paths, improved sidewalks and walking trails are being developed to promote a cleaner, healthier, walkable city and our parks support accessibility in many ways. As the heart of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Worcester is actively working to build a robust community that connects across generations and supports a healthy future.

In terms of public health, Worcester is home to many health care institutions committed to improving health outcomes across the city. Worcester is home to UMass Chan Medical School and teaching hospitals. The city’s Department of Public Health was the first nationally accredited
Health Department in Massachusetts as well as the only multi-jurisdictional accredited Health Department in the country! Having a healthy population is a priority for Worcester and we are committed to developing hunger-free communities. The city has a Commission on Elder Affairs, Elder Services of Worcester Area, Center for Living and Working (advocating for individuals living with disabilities) and Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging, organizations that are dedicated to supporting older adults in the city. The city has a Wellness Program for Youth and an active Senior Center that offers exercise, instructional videos, resources and assistance for older adults. Recently, with gratitude to AARP, the Senior Center ceremoniously opened its Outdoor Fitness Park, one of 53 in the country. This park is located on the grounds of the Worcester Senior Center and is free and accessible for people of all abilities. Additionally, White Cane Awareness Day is held yearly to support people who are blind or have low vision. This intergenerational program promotes a health orientated interaction between individuals with vision loss and sighted guides of all ages. The city’s Accessibility Advisory Commission also holds annual wheelchair strolls, which highlights the repairs needed to the city’s sidewalks. Recently, we also became a recipient of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation award for our collective work on health equity.

Inspired by the Community Health Improvement Plan, the Age-Friendly Worcester working group will focus on the needs of our diverse populations including older adults by holding community listening sessions regarding housing and outdoor spaces; transportation; health information and social services; civic participation and social interaction and Age Friendly marketing and outreach subcommittees. Resources to obtain input from diverse populations include the Worcester Senior Center’s multicultural programs serving hundreds of African American, Albanian, Arabic, Chinese, Latino and Vietnamese seniors as well as the Southeast Asian Coalition, CENTRO, the India Society, Ascentria Care Alliance, and numerous faith based organizations. In response to the pandemic, an amazing network of organizations, “Worcester Together,” has emerged as strong, very accessible leaders. There will be transparent reporting of all outcomes and subsequent follow up to ensure plans are on track. The Age Friendly Worcester effort also connects community agencies, organizations, and community members to look through a new lens to establish universally beneficial improvements.

Through the Age Friendly Worcester initiative, the city of Worcester will continue to build on its current efforts to support its diverse communities. Whether someone is eight years old or eighty years old, making Worcester Age Friendly is a big step in furthering our city’s wellbeing.

Sincerely,

Joseph M. Petty
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