

Section 3: COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES, ENGAGEMENTS and COLLABORATIONS

1) Please provide a brief summary of the community policies, programs and services that are targeted toward older people and how the community plans to become more age-friendly.

Somerville is a rapidly changing and emerging city in our region. With a deep demographic diversity of age, ethnicity, background, nationality, language and ability, we pride ourselves on supporting all members of our community through our programs and policies. Our aim is to ensure our residents (older adults and future older adults) can safely and effectively age in place in our city, supported by programs targeted at health, transportation, housing, community inclusion and social participation.

In 2016, Somerville established an Aging Taskforce made up of older adults and COA staff to evaluate the needs of the community and the city's responses to those needs. This taskforce opened the discussion of Somerville as an Age Friendly community, and allowed us to do that initial community assessment ascertaining how we functioned as supporting seniors in our communities.

Each of the eight Domains of Livability have been included in our work, with transportation, housing and community inclusion being the priorities of those evaluations to date. The aim of living independently in one's own home and remaining in the community as they age was a distinct priority, and that has factored into the aims of our work as well.

Transportation:

Somerville has a high focus on mobility efforts. We are a very walkable city, and one which welcomes and encourages bicycles as a means of transportation. Public transportation is widely utilized and is accessible. We continue to examine all aspects of mobility from sidewalks to streets to make sure the city is welcoming for all, including older adults. One aspect of including our work has been on educating our older adults on new road signs and new road rules as things change. This helps older adults navigate the streets better for those who still drive but also for those that walk.

Safety-Comfort-Mobility (door to door transportation) provides low cost transportation for older adults, which the city helps to fund. The Edith Chaille Senior Transportation Fund has been set up to help older adults who are unable to get transportation for their daily needs, whether it is for medical appointments or just to get to the grocery store.

Housing:

The aim of many of our long-time residents is to age in place in their own houses. Somerville created a Department of Housing Stability to assist residents, and especially our senior population, to serve as a support for individuals seeking advice on maintaining their homes on fixed incomes.

Somerville has increased the number of affordable housing units considering the increasing costs of living in the city. The Council on Aging provides housing counseling through our social services team, assists older adults with housing application and with finding low income housing.

Respect and Social Inclusion:

A priority for the City of Somerville is to value and embrace the diversity of our community. With that as a priority, we have aimed to invite and support the diversity of our older adult population as well with our programs and policies. Supporting immigrants and recent immigrants, the LGBTQ+ communities, English-language learners, the wide generational differences in our older adult population (which spans nearly five decades), has been part of our ongoing work. Somerville has added programs such as SomerViva: Office of Immigrant Affairs and Outreach to help with any language barriers, and The Welcome Project, which builds the collective power of immigrants to participate in and shape community decisions.

It is with such programs as SomerViva and The Welcome Project that will allow us to include older adult immigrants and people of all backgrounds to be included and we move forward with being an age friendly city.

In programs throughout the Council on Aging, we offer ways of supporting and celebrating the diversity of all of our residents, including our older adults.

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings:

- The City of Somerville has over 80 parks and open spaces throughout the city
- The Parks and Open Space Department plans and Manages the renovation of existing parks and the development of new parks and open spaces. The department works with residents and consultants to create a vibrant network of outdoor spaces for all ages.
- The spaces have benches with many close to bus stops and public transportation

Civic Participation and Employment:

- Many older adults in the community volunteer- there is a high emphasis on community participation in Somerville throughout all ages
- We also work with Operation ABLE which helps with job placement for people over 55 years of age

Communication and Information:

- The COA and the city has many avenues to communicate and for information sharing. The COA has a widely read monthly newsletter, a monthly senior television show, a new google group for information sharing for older adults, and regularly use social media and local papers to spread information.

Community and Health Services:

- The COA has a monthly Community Supplemental Food Program or 'Brown Bag' program, as we call it. This is a partnership with the Boston Food Bank to provide food and improve the health of lower-income older adults by supplementing their diets with nutritious USDA food once a month
- The COA offers multiple health and wellness classes in house and throughout the city at various assisted living residences. During the winter months when travel to the physical places in the city becomes more challenging due to weather, we produce a TV show on our local cable access channel, the Fit4Life TV show, which goes through the exercises done in class, but which can now be joined in by those who are homebound
- We offer a Mobile Farmer's Market during the spring, summer and fall months which moves from our main Senior Center to various strategic places around the city, ensuring that fresh food is available to those who may have transportation difficulties
- Our partnership with Tufts University has produced ongoing relationships, programs and research, enabling Somerville to have access to, and often participation in, the latest research and experts in the areas of health, nutrition, sarcopenia, fall prevention, and aging well.

Social Participation:

- Somerville has three Senior Centers throughout the city, one with an emphasis on multiculturalism. That enables multiple meeting and gathering spots for senior, as well as the ability to hold multiple classes and programs at the same time, offering a variety of experiences and trips.

2) How will the community engage and involve older people in the process of becoming a more age-friendly?

Our plan going forward is to complete an enhanced community assessment over the next year, so we can get an in depth look at the city's needs pertaining to the eight domains of livability. Our original assessment was preliminary in 2016, and the need is now present for a wider survey.

Following the completion of the assessment, we plan to institute community listening sessions in the city with various age groups. Not only do we want to know what our current clients hope for, but we also want to know what Somerville's older-generation-to-be anticipates their needs to be.

Our Age-Friendly Taskforce continues from the preliminary assessment, and advise and recommend next steps for our city, program and policies.

3) Briefly describe the mechanisms the community has or is planning to put in place to facilitate collaborative planning and implementation between different agencies and departments.

There are presently broad avenues of communication between departments, as many of the needs of older adults in Somerville are served, and referred out to, various agencies. Our plan is to formalize this process with quarterly meetings between the departments, thereby enabling semi-annual reassessment of priorities, policy cohesiveness and keeping one another up to date.

Section 4: NETWORK MEMBERSHIP

Your answers to the following questions will help us complete your membership in the global age-friendly network and better enable us to understand how to support the network.

4) How do you hope to contribute to the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities and the World Health Organization Global Network of Age-Friendly Communities?

Somerville's great strength is our deeply diverse community. The Somerville of fifty years ago does not look like the Somerville of today. Our work with constituents from different cultures, community expectations, languages, ethnicities, nationalities, LGBTQ+, ages (we also have a deep university and younger adult demographic here) all enable our department and city to grapple with challenges that few cities have already responded to, but many will in the coming decades.

Our hope is to be an active team player, not just within Somerville, but within partner communities. Sharing ideas, offering insight, and gleaned wisdom as to how to keep this diversity not only thriving and healthy, but how to cultivate a generations-wide, life-long, active residential presence.

5) What motivated your community to join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities and the World Health Organization Global Network of Age-Friendly Communities?

The City of Somerville has a high focus on inclusion for every person as we make our city a great place to live, work, play, raise a family, and grow old. It is this premise that keeps us motivated and trying to raise the bar with each program we create, and policy we enact.

The AARP and WHO Global Network offer an array of resources, support and networks for assisting communities in enhancing the lives of older adults. Our hope is to support our residents with all that we can in creating spaces and systems where they can thrive, and we are deeply grateful that the AARP and WHO are willing to assist with benchmarks, connections and deep knowledge. We wish to be partners with programs which have the greatest impact.

6) Please provide a digital (JPG, PNG or PDF) file or link of a logo or other image that represents your community.

The image resolution should be at least 72 dpi. As an example of an image, here's ours >

