

**Age-Friendly Athens (Ohio) Application**

**Submission Date:** resubmitted 10/1/2020

**State:** Ohio

**Community Name:** Athens County

**Total population of the community:** 65,327

**Percentage of population over the age of 60:** 12,616

**Community Governance:** County

**Community Type (select all that apply)**

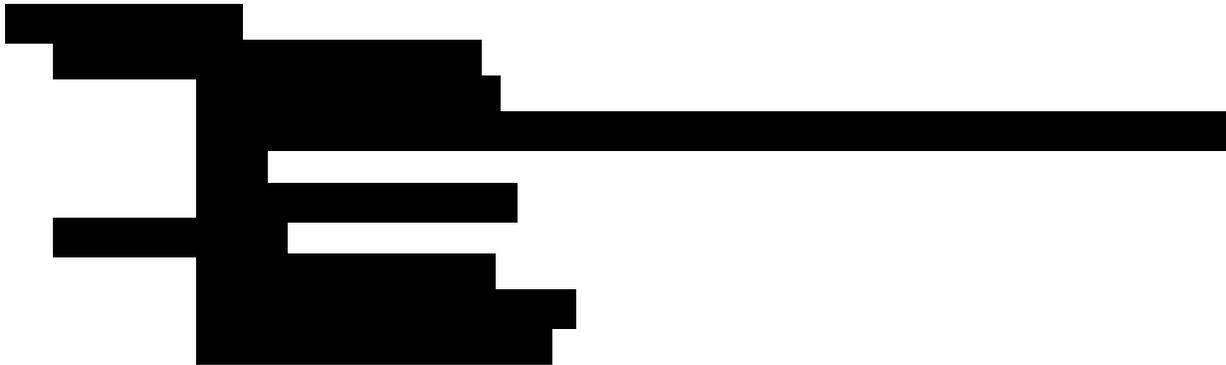
- Urban
- Mixed-
- Suburban (offices, apartments, & shops)
- Suburban (mostly residential)
- Small town
- Rural
- Other –college town, the city of Athens has a very different set of norms and challenges than the rural areas of Athens County
- Other –County wide effort

**Elected Official Who Signed the Letter**

Name: Chris Chmiel

Title: County Commissioner

Office address: 15 S Court St Ste 234, Athens, OH 45701



Please describe the named person's role in the community

Both named individuals work at Ohio University. Rebecca is also a resident of Athens County. Ohio University is facilitating the process but will not likely be the permanent home for the initiative.

***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?***

Athens County is located in the Appalachian region of Ohio and is designated as economically distressed by the Appalachian Regional Commission. Athens County has the highest level of poverty in Ohio, at 30.2%, while the city of Athens has a non-student poverty rate of 23.1%.<sup>1</sup> The current population estimate of adults over 65 living in Athens County is 13.2%<sup>2</sup>, and, like all of Ohio, is projected to increase substantially over the next several years.

*Policies and Involvement*

The intent of this project is to create Age Friendly County which will include the county seat of Athens City as well as other municipalities in Athens County. Leaders in Athens County, City of Athens, and other Athens County municipalities have recognized the importance of planning for the increasing aging population, which has resulted in conversations around including older adults in the decision-making processes. For example, recent involvement in the Entrepreneurial Communities project through Rural Action had 30% representations of seniors in the advisory group. In addition, the Athens County Community Improvement Challenge had seniors involved in the planning, staging and evaluation of those efforts.

Additional municipalities in Athens County are intentional with including older adults in leadership and decision-making roles as well as in organizations, clubs, and other community events. Amesville, in as an example, has been very purposeful in incorporating older adults in their efforts. For example, The Masonic Lodge, Grange, Village Productions, Amesville Elementary and the village all reach out to seniors in their programming, planning and community efforts.

*Services and Programs*

Athens County has several programs that provide services for lower income older adults. A list of these services is attached to this application. Athens County also has a senior levy that provides funds for senior centers, matching funds for non-profit organizations that focus on older adults, funds programs, and the ability to access funds for urgent matters that involve older adults.

Although Athens is in a region of Ohio that often struggles to have adequate resources, the providers in Athens are creative and dedicated, often strengthening their existing resources through collaboration and advocacy. Examples include:

- Area Agency on Aging (AAA) housed in Buckeye Hills Regional Council houses population health division that works with managed care organizations, hospitals, and other healthcare organizations. Buckeye Hills is also, District 18 Liaison for the Ohio Public Works Commission, Economic Development District, Local Development District, Regional Transportation Planning Organization, and home of the Southeast Ohio Aging & Disability Resource Network.
- United Seniors provides transportation in and out of county, adult day services, educational programming, fitness programs, evidence based programming of exercise including Tai Chi for

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.athensnews.com/news/local/athens-ranked-as-8th-poorest-community-in-u-s-but-ranking-likely-needs-an-asterisk/article\\_5c7c9fc4-74b9-11e8-b673-4bbcb5c2308f.html](https://www.athensnews.com/news/local/athens-ranked-as-8th-poorest-community-in-u-s-but-ranking-likely-needs-an-asterisk/article_5c7c9fc4-74b9-11e8-b673-4bbcb5c2308f.html)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/athenscountyohio/PST045219>

## Age-Friendly Athens Application

Arthritis/Falls Prevention and Tai Chi for Balance, Arthritis Foundation Exercise Classes, Gentle Yoga, SAIL and exercise program for Falls Prevention, and Walk with Ease; evidence based self-management and disease management programs including Chronic Disease Self-Management, Chronic Pain Self-Management, Matter of Balance, National Diabetes Prevention Program; Medicare and insurance counseling, information and referral; telephoning and friendly visiting socialization programs; and BRI Care Consultation. Their evidence- based programming will be offering a video-platform option within the next two months. They also provide limited homemaker/home health aide, socialization, meals both home delivered and congregate, insurance counseling, adult day services, home maintenance and social transportation, volunteer opportunities, senior employment opportunities.

- Transportation providers in Athens County that service seniors, include Athens on Demand Transit, United Senior of Athens County, RSVP program, and private providers with discounts available to seniors.
- Affordable Housing efforts are addressed through the Athens City Comprehensive Plan and the goals of the Athens City Affordable Housing Commission and the Athens City Environment and Sustainability Commission, which all include recommendations to increase affordable housing

### ***How will the community engage and involve older people in the process of becoming more age-friendly?***

Athens County and the City of Athens, as well as other communities like Amesville, have a history of involving older adults in planning and implementation. Examples of this historical involvement of older adults include:

- Coordinated Transportation Plan included a survey specific to seniors and round tables specific to seniors were held and the data recorded, which resulted in 10 goals and strategies to address the current transportation needs of the community,
- City of Athens elected officials and staff meeting with representatives from the Athens Village, United Seniors, and other organizations
- Community members outside of Village Council have been invited and encouraged to participate in committee work, planning in the park and other areas of interest as the village starts, implements or evaluates projects, and
- Transportation initiatives have and will continue to utilize the Athens-Hocking County Mobility Management program to engage older people in the process of becoming more age friendly.

The Athens Age Friendly process will seek input from older adults and those who will become older adults. Recognizing that multiple methods of engaging people will be needed to get the diversity of ages, backgrounds, ethnicity, etc needed to give a full picture of Athens, the following is a list of suggested ways to engage the community:

- Attend local events, local restaurants, day centers for people with various abilities, "senior" centers, church groups, participating in community events (Athens County Fair, Bingo Nights, Game Nights, and Trivia Nights at various local establishments, Senior Day at the fairgrounds,

## Age-Friendly Athens Application

ACBDD March Festival, Nelsonville Music Festival, Paw-Paw Festival, Brew Week, Boogie on the Bricks, Open Mike Nights at various local establishments,

- Hold forums within communities,
- Have older adults co-chairing committees around the 9 Age Friendly domains (the 8 identified by AARP and the addition of sustainability),
- Involve providers who are out in the field with the older adults such as meals on wheels drivers,
- Increase access to the internet through establishment of broadband, increase access to devices, and circulate mobile hotspots,
- Survey a set of randomized respondents based on voting registration or other common methods for generating those lists,
- Use focus groups to make sure people in different circumstances are represented and more open ended discussions can occur, publicly announced open forums out in communities in places where older adults have gathered, and then recruitment and use of older adult "champions" to reach out to their networks to get them connected to outreach and feedback mechanisms,
- Use voter registration to help identify registered voters who are typically folks that are responsive to surveys,
- Use direct mailing for targeted recruitment,
- Use online surveys
- Utilize the domain chairs to facilitate conversations specifically in their topical areas
- Use "meetings in a box" templates to allow groups to host their own self-facilitated discussions

### ***Briefly describe the mechanisms the community has or is planning to put in place to facilitate collaboration planning and implementation between agencies and departments?***

There are several organizations that focus on ensuring collaboration. The most relevant for this project is the former Aging in Our Community Initiative that is now known as the Age Friendly Athens Advisory Committee. There are multiple elected officials, public servants, non-profit organizations, older citizens, university employees, and others who have come together with the intent of uniting around this common goal. Other collaborative groups regularly meet, including the coordinated transportation team, the Athens County Coordinated Plan Planning Committee.

Athens County and Athens City will build on the collaborative forums already in existence. Additional collaborative efforts will evolve through the application process. We anticipate the Age Friendly planning group to continue throughout the process and bring in new members as needed and appropriate. The level of commitment demonstrated by the Age Friendly planning group can and will serve as model for collaborative efforts that will evolve as we move forward. We will also determine which methods described as a response to question two would be the best way to gather information and establish partnerships. It is important to note the importance of the informal collaborative efforts and networking that naturally occur in the process of our daily work.

***How do you hope to contribute to the AARP network of age friendly states and communities and the world health organization global network of age friendly communities?***

The Athens Age Friendly project can provide the knowledge gained from this project to other rural areas, particularly those with a University setting. We think it is essential to have rural expertise, experience, and voices represented in the Age Friendly network. Our intention is to be available to other rural communities to provide help and support for their work to become Age Friendly.

***What motivated your community to join the AARP network of age friendly states and communities and the world health organization global network of age friendly communities?***

Our Athens County Community sees it as critical to offer a more cohesive and inclusive age-friendly community. Both the city and county have a strong commitment to making Athens an inclusive community, and joining this network makes sense to strengthen our community resources for our citizens in a logical and structured format.

We also recognize the needs of caregivers, those who want to stay in Athens as they age, and those looking for a retirement destination. As the Appalachian region ages, we need to provide the best possible environment and services to make the aging experience as positive as possible. We celebrate the vibrancy of our citizens and our communities. We also want to have a tangible offering to demonstrate our commitment to all our community members, and by becoming Age Friendly, we are showing our citizens that we care, we support, and we welcome all.

