WHERE WE LIVE
COMMUNITIES FOR ALL AGES

From the introduction of Where We Live: Communities for All Ages—100+ Inspiring Ideas from America’s Community Leaders, the second book in the AARP Where We Live series

“Whatever our age, we all want the same things: safe, affordable housing and transportation options; good health for ourselves, our loved ones and our environment; opportunities to learn, support our families and enjoy our lives; a connection with our neighbors and a government that is responsive to our needs.”

Praise for Where We Live: Communities for All Ages—100+ Inspiring Ideas from America’s Mayors, the first book in the AARP Where We Live series

“Where We Live provides an organized set of ideas to spark change in communities across the country. This book shows how mayors in cities big, small, rural and urban have found countless ways to improve their communities for their aging population and all residents.”

—Mick Cornett, Mayor of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

“I commend Nancy LeaMond and AARP for writing Where We Live. This book should inspire mayors and other leaders to launch new projects to improve their communities for all of their residents.”

—Michael Nutter, former Mayor of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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WHERE WE LIVE
COMMUNITIES FOR ALL AGES
100+ Inspiring Ideas
From America’s Community Leaders
By Nancy LeaMond

Editor: Melissa Stanton
Director-AARP Books: Jodi Lipson
Manager-AARP Livable Communities: Mike Watson
Writer-Reporters: Sally Abrahms, Harriet Barovick, Mary Ellen Flannery, Bill Hogan, Steve Mencher, Ellen Ryan, Michelle Stephenson, Jay Walljasper
Contributors: Ana Hervada, Peter Morelli, Sasha Nyary, Kelly Stoddard-Poor, Beth Velasquez

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Where We Live celebrates work being done by communities throughout the United States, although they may not all be supported by AARP.

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WHERE WE LIVE

COMMUNITIES FOR ALL AGES

100+ Inspiring Ideas From America’s Community Leaders
2017 EDITION—FEATURING EXAMPLES FROM ALL 50 STATES!

By Nancy LeaMond
AARP EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT COMMUNITY, STATE AND NATIONAL AFFAIRS
CHIEF ADVOCACY AND ENGAGEMENT OFFICER

Edited by Melissa Stanton
Public places and outdoor spaces—like this scenic spot in New York City’s Central Park—help make communities livable for people of all ages. (To learn more, see the chapter starting on page 58.)
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INTRODUCTION

In his address at Harvard University’s 2017 commencement ceremony, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said, “Change starts local. Even global changes start small—with people like us.” While he spoke these words long after the idea for this book was conceived (and most of the copy was written), this concept neatly encapsulates our goal in publishing a second edition of Where We Live: Communities for All Ages.

The communities where we live are on the front lines addressing the needs of an aging population. Approximately 46 million people in the United States are now age 65 or older. That number will grow over the next 15 years to 73 million—or one out of every five people nationwide.

Rising to the challenge of this “demography is destiny” future requires change. The good news is that the things that make it easier for older Americans to stay in their homes and communities (which is where they want to be) also support the population writ large. As it turns out, whatever our age, we all want the same things: safe, affordable housing and transportation options; good health for ourselves, our loved ones and our environment; opportunities to learn, support our families and enjoy our lives; a connection with our neighbors; and a government that is responsive to our needs.

For nearly a decade, AARP has promoted local change to build communities where people
of all ages can thrive. We work in partnership with residents, community leaders and public officials of all stripes in close to 300 towns and cities nationwide. Much of this work is done through the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities, which, at press time, consists of more than 175 communities representing more than 65 million people.

As I travel throughout the country and speak with AARP staff and volunteers, I am heartened by the progress we are making and the can-do spirit that is alive and well at the local level. We hear so much these days about political division and distrust in many of our nation’s institutions. But people have a significantly higher level of confidence in local government. In fact, according to a 2016 Gallup poll, 71 percent of Americans trust their local government to handle problems.

And no wonder. Where we live is where the rubber really hits the road. You can look out your window or walk around your neighborhood and see results every day. That’s why the first edition of Where We Live: Communities for All Ages focused on policies and projects promoted by mayors. More than any other type of elected official I can think of, mayors get things done.

But mayors aren’t the only ones working hard to improve communities. City and town council members, county commissioners, leaders of nonprofit and social service organizations, business executives and just regular folks are all doing their part to make where they live great places to live.

This new edition of Where We Live takes a broader look at what’s happening on the ground, recognizing that good ideas and the energy to push them forward can come from any number of sources.

By shining a spotlight on a range of solutions—and digging deeper into how ideas are being turned into action—our aim is to make it a little easier to trigger change at the local level.

The first step toward making a difference in a community is often the most difficult: You see a problem, but how do you solve it? Chances are another community is tackling the same issue. Maybe what they’re doing will work where you live. Or maybe their idea leads to one of your own, something grounded in your experience and the culture and resources of your community.

One of my favorite sayings among the nation’s mayors is that they “love being the first to be second.” They talk to one another, learn from one another and copy what works. So, in a sense, Where We Live 2.0 is a means for launching a virtual conversation among our nation’s community leaders and interested citizens. Where We Live is a reference point for learning what others are doing so what works can be copied or adapted for other communities. (Perhaps even yours!)
The Themes of Successful Change

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to many of the issues facing our communities, but there’s a mind-set and some common themes:

• It really does take a village. Successful efforts bring the right people to the table to effect change and keep them engaged throughout the process. Several of the initiatives we highlight from Maine—such as the handy household tools display in Bowdoinham and work to prevent falls on icy streets in Bucksport—were done as part of age-friendly programs that are supported by AARP Maine with funding from the John T. Gorman Foundation. In Hawaii, the Kaiser Permanente Community Benefit is a key funder of the Age-Friendly Honolulu initiative.

• There are benefits to starting small and acting fast. While community change often requires a deliberative and time-intensive process, small changes and quick wins are good first steps for generating support and building momentum. Where We Live highlights pop-up demonstrations to create temporary parklets, bicycle lanes and other spaces in locations including Anaconda, Montana, and Covington, Kentucky.

• There’s no generation gap when it comes to great communities. Intergenerational efforts are becoming the norm as community leaders recognize that grandparents, grandchildren and everyone in between want similar things from their communities. Case in point: Vision Zero and Complete Streets initiatives make roadways safe for pedestrians and cyclists of all ages. Communities are also leaning in to education, with an emphasis on lifelong learning and bringing generations together.

• The “experienced class” is a valued community asset. More and more communities are recognizing and leveraging what older residents have to offer. For example, Maricopa, Arizona, is recruiting citizen ambassadors to talk about the community to their social networks as a way of boosting the city’s economic growth. In Medford, Massachusetts, residents age 60-plus are lending a hand at City Hall in exchange for a reduction in their property tax bills.

Putting Good Ideas to Work

AARP is committed to supporting local communities and those leading the way for change. We understand that while change starts with the spark of an idea, people need practical tools and resources to get ideas moving and make them real.

To help create action at the local level, our descriptions of community programs and projects detail how efforts got off the ground, who the key players were or are and what challenges had to be faced. Where We Live also offers tips, how-tos and links to additional resources.

As you read Where We Live, I hope you’ll find the inspiration and information you can use to make your community a great place for people of all ages.

Nancy LeaMond
AARP Executive Vice President
Community, State and National Affairs
Chief Advocacy and Engagement Officer
Pedestrian-only byways are so rare that in many communities the only safe place to go for a walk is inside a shopping mall. This outdoor mall on Church Street in Burlington, Vermont, is a “totally hopping place, even in cold weather,” says a resident.
A free summer concert in Cleveland’s restored Public Square provides a community gathering place as well as a venue for the Cleveland Orchestra—and fireworks. (Learn more on page 63.)
When complete, the Atlanta BeltLine will be a 22-mile walk-bike trail circling the city. The effort is part of an initiative to connect neighborhoods and make walking and bicycling a safe and practical option for getting around. (Learn more on page 43.)
Many will look at this photograph of Vanderbilt Avenue in Brooklyn, New York, and see a street. Local leaders and residents who are tuned in to livability work will see traffic lanes, bicycle lanes and parking lanes, as well as a landscaped median, crosswalks and traffic lights. In other words, a Complete Street. (See page 16 to learn what that means.)
Not every community can be walkable, and that’s okay. Livability works differently in different places. Little Free Library giveaway boxes have been designed and installed by property owners in all 50 states and dozens of countries. A traveler driving to or from Polebridge, Montana, can take a break and take a book—or, ideally, an audiobook.
Livable Lingo

You'll find the following terms, programs and policies mentioned throughout this book. Here’s what they mean.

**AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities** Founded in 2012, the AARP network helps participating communities become great places for people of all ages by adopting such features as safe, walkable streets; improved housing and transportation options; and opportunities for residents to participate in community activities. Because membership requires a commitment by the municipality’s local government, the application to join the network is made by the community’s highest elected official (such as its mayor) or, if there is no chief executive, its governing body. Once AARP accepts a town, city or county into the network, local leaders and residents work to assess the needs of the community, craft an action plan for improvements and then implement and evaluate the efforts. Learn more at AARP.org/agefriendly and see the growing member list. The AARP network is an affiliate of the World Health Organization Age-Friendly Cities and Communities initiative (an international effort launched in 2006 to help cities prepare for rapid population aging and urbanization), so communities joining the AARP program can choose to be enrolled in the global network as well.

**Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)** An accessory dwelling unit is a small, independent housing unit located within a single-family home or on its lot. The accessory apartment or small home can be rented out but not bought or sold as a separate property from the principal dwelling. Whether ADUs are allowed is generally a matter of local zoning. See page 34 to learn more.

**Complete Streets (or Safe Streets)** Developed by the National Complete Streets Coalition in 2004, the Complete Streets framework seeks to make roadways safe for all users—whether the user is a driver, pedestrian, bicyclist, public transit rider, older adult, child or a person with disabilities. By considering the range of possible users for a particular roadway rather than creating or renovating all streets for only cars and trucks, Complete Streets policies help expand mobility options while balancing the needs of different transportation modes and supporting local land uses, economies, cultures and natural environments. See page 56 to learn more.
Livable Communities As defined by AARP, a livable community is safe and secure and has affordable and appropriate housing, diverse transportation options, and supportive community features and services. Once in place, these resources enhance personal independence and health and engage residents in an area’s civic, economic and social life. Proper land-use planning and design are critical to developing livable communities, and policymakers at the federal, state and local levels have important roles to play in designing and maintaining—and, at times, retrofitting—cities, towns and neighborhoods so they are active places where residents of all ages can live, work and play. The World Health Organization has identified domains of livability that influence the quality of life of older adults and benefit people of all ages. Eight domains are traditionally listed as follows, but communities can adapt the focus and number as needed: Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, Transportation, Housing, Social Participation, Respect and Social Inclusion, Work and Civic Engagement, Communication and Information, and Community and Health Services. More about the eight domains framework can be found at AARP.org/livability-examples.

Placemaking Both an overarching concept and a hands-on tool for improving a neighborhood, city or region, placemaking combines the planning, design and management of public spaces to attract people, build community and create a local identity.

Smart Growth An approach to land use planning and zoning, smart growth seeks to dissuade overdevelopment and sprawl by supporting and revitalizing existing communities. Learn more at smartgrowthamerica.org.

Universal Design The practice of designing places and products so homes, offices and public places can accommodate a wide range of users is typically referred to as universal design or UD. For instance, a no-step entrance into a home or building is a universal design feature, as are doorways and hallways that are wide enough for access by someone who uses a wheelchair. An important tenet of universal design is that the accommodations incorporated into the design are so appealing or unnoticeable that they can be marketed to a wide audience. The related term “Visitability” means that a person with a physical or mobility disability can easily get into the home or building for a visit and be able to move about the gathering and also access a bathroom.

Vision Zero The Vision Zero approach to road safety sets as its goal zero deaths or serious injuries due to vehicular causes. Transportation systems have typically placed the responsibility for safety on road users, but Vision Zero, launched in Sweden in 1997, puts the responsibility on the design of the roadway. Vision Zero is being used in cities including Seattle, San Francisco, Boston, Washington, D.C., and, since 2014, New York, where being struck by a car has been the leading cause of death for children under 14 and the second leading cause of death for older adults. Vision Zero-inspired laws often call for redesigning streets and they bolster enforcement against speeding, dangerous driving and the failure to yield to pedestrians. See page 47 to learn more.
An accessory dwelling unit (ADU) such as this one in Portland, Oregon, can allow older residents to remain in their community, either by downsizing to a smaller living space or by augmenting their income by renting out a small home on their property. (Learn more on page 34.)
The vast majority of older adults want to stay in their homes and communities for as long as possible. Communities with housing options that enable people to live safely, comfortably and independently are smart for all ages and life stages.
The San Francisco Bay Area’s continuing affordable housing crisis is driving many lower-income people from their homes, especially older residents with special needs, who often wind up on the streets.

In response, Satellite Affordable Housing Associates—a nonprofit with 50 years of experience providing affordable housing in northern California—partnered with the Oakland Housing Authority to build Lakeside Senior Apartments.

Rising five stories on the site of a former parking lot, Lakeside is near a grocery store, a pharmacy and recreational facilities on the Lake Merritt waterfront, with convenient transit connections to downtown San Francisco and Oakland. The facility features 91 independent-living units with on-site health, educational and social services. One-third of the units are reserved for people with disabilities who are homeless.
The building—which won an American Institute of Architects-U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary’s Award in 2016—includes a courtyard, rooftop with garden plots, wellness studio and community room. The Lakeside apartments have been designated LEED Platinum for Homes and feature solar water heating and new building methods that improve indoor air quality.

“This project brings dignity and beauty to people in their twilight years, most of whom have had very difficult and stressful lives,” said the jury of experts for the Secretary’s Award. “There is great beauty here that is thoughtfully executed in a light and airy way that is echoed throughout the building.”

Funding for the project came from the Oakland Housing Authority, Bay Area LISC, Wells Fargo Bank, the California Community Reinvestment Corporation, the California Department of Housing and Community Development and the Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco.
In a way, it’s a chicken-and-egg question—except the question is about homelessness and the “what comes first?” question essentially asks: Should sobriety, employment or managed mental illness be a condition for receiving assistance with permanent housing, or should housing assistance be provided first?

In most cases, the former has been the qualifier. Get clean, be clean, have a job—and housing help might appear. With the Housing First model—an approach that is being used with success in communities nationwide—shelter comes first. The reasoning is that most efforts at kicking an addiction, managing a mental illness or finding and working at a job will fail if a person doesn’t have a safe and stable place to live.

As City of Boise spokesperson Mike Journee explained to the Boise Weekly in 2016, “It doesn’t do you any good to have a building for housing if you don’t have services. Conversely, it doesn’t do you any good to have the services if you don’t have a building.”

Such a building— to be called New Path Community Housing—will house and provide on-site supportive services for up to 40 individuals or families experiencing chronic homelessness. The project is being paid for by the City of Boise and the Idaho Housing and Finance Association, as well as through low-income housing tax credits, private financing and contributions from local nonprofits and social service providers.

On the day of the 2016 point-in-time count of homeless people in Idaho, 147 chronically homeless individuals were identified as residing in the Boise metro area. Research by Boise State University showed that for every 100 chronically homeless residents, Boise spends at least $5.3 million a year in services, criminal justice costs and medical expenses. The annual cost of providing permanent supportive housing options, like Housing First, is approximately $1.6 million.

A working group on housing and homelessness chaired by Boise Mayor David Bieter first identified the Housing First model as one worth pursuing.

“We are very excited about this community effort to provide permanent supportive housing to our most vulnerable residents,” says Bieter. “This entire effort has been a true and meaningful collaboration between government, corporate and nonprofit partners committed to finding meaningful and effective next steps for addressing this very difficult societal problem. Our community should be very proud.”

An artist’s rendering of the New Path Community Housing supportive housing complex.
AFFORDABILITY FIRST
WEST SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA
Mayor Christopher Cabaldon and the City of West Sacramento

For nearly two decades, Christopher Cabaldon has been directly involved in West Sacramento’s evolution from, as a local news outlet described, “a backwater, a community where residents complained it was hard to find a decent place to buy groceries” to a U.S. Conference of Mayors 2014 City Livability Award winner.

Cabaldon was first elected to the city council in 1996. Two years later, at age 33, the council chose him to be the city’s mayor. In 2004, he became the first mayor directly elected by West Sacramento voters. Since then, Cabaldon has been reelected every two years.

When the time came to develop the city’s riverfront area, one of the first structures to rise was The Rivermark, a 70-unit apartment building developed by BRIDGE Housing, a nonprofit with a mission to strengthen communities by “developing, owning and managing high-quality, affordable homes for working families and seniors.” When the building opened in 2015, rents ranged from $400 to $900 per month.

Constructing the building at the start of the development process rather than the end was, according to the mayor, a very conscious choice. “In most places, affordable housing is an afterthought. We build the places that we want to live in, and then, oh, because there’s some regulation, the city builds an affordable housing project,” Cabaldon told AARP. “That’s not our philosophy here, particularly in the new areas that we’ve been creating along the waterfront, which has the potential to turn into a very exclusive, wealthy enclave since it’s so beautiful and has so many amenities around it.

“We need to, from the very beginning, declare that the area is going to be a mixed-income community, with all kinds of people living in it,” Cabaldon continues. “So let’s start with the affordable housing. Starting that way also forced the property owners in the area to say, ‘We care about this affordable housing project looking good, and performing well, and being a great place to live, because that’s going to be the very first thing people see.’”

Another norm West Sacramento proudly debunks is that older people want to live among themselves in quiet, isolated places. “As we’re aging, what we want are more opportunities for engagement,” says Cabaldon. “We want to spend less time in our cars. We don’t want to be isolated. It doesn’t mean I want to live on top of a dance club, or that as a senior I want to experience everything urban life has to offer. There are nuances to it.”

Those nuances and differences are helping shape the city of 50,000. “We’ve tried to create a city, even though we’re small, where there’s a place that matches what a person’s needs are, and where their hopes and inspirations are at each stage in their life,” says Cabaldon. “Now it’s not about staying in the same place from the time you’re 18 until you’re 80. It is about being able to stay in the same community. One of our big hopes out of this process is to make real that promise.”

West Sacramento is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities
A WELCOMING PLACE TO CALL HOME
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

John C. Anderson Apartments

With the aging boomer population—and more than 2.7 million people age 50 and older identifying as LGBT or LGBTQ (the Q stands for “Queer”)—the demand for low- and moderate-income LGBT-Welcoming Housing, as the concept is called, could not be greater. A 2014 Equal Rights Center study found that 48 percent of LGBT older adults have faced at least one form of rental-housing discrimination.

Recognizing this need, LGBT advocates, municipalities, government, non-profits, developers and others are creating affordable LGBT-supportive housing.

Mark Segal, president of the dmhFund, an LGBT-focused nonprofit, envisioned and helped develop the John C. Anderson Apartments, a sleek 56-unit building that opened in 2014 for people age 62 and older. Nine out of 10 residents identify as LGBT.

The building is particularly special because members of the community were active participants throughout the design and construction phases. The project, which is managed by Pennrose, a local developer of affordable housing, received $2 million in grants from the city, $6 million from the state and $11.5 million in low-income housing tax credits. There was no private funding.

The American Institute of Architects recognized the apartments as among the “10 Most Impressive Houses” of 2015. Said the Institute: “The John C. Anderson Apartments is the first ‘LGBT friendly’ affordable senior housing project to be developed in the eastern United States with such direct community involvement. Its realization has been the source of great community pride.”

It truly has. As a resident told AARP: “My hope is that this building serves as a beacon to communities to address the needs of LGBT older Americans. Here I get to be me openly and unapologetically.”

Philadelphia is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities

Community leaders including Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter (center) wielded a rainbow array of shovels at the 2012 groundbreaking ceremony for the John C. Anderson Apartments.
FUNDS FOR AGE- AND ABILITY-FRIENDLIER HOUSING
COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Virginia General Assembly and the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development

As part of a program voted on and approved by the Virginia General Assembly, the Commonwealth of Virginia has set aside up to $1 million to distribute as tax credits to homeowners and licensed contractors who help to improve the accessibility and visitability of a Virginia-based residence.

The goal to increase the accessibility of Virginia’s housing stock has many benefits, including enabling older adults and people with disabilities to live independently in their own homes.

“Often, this is the home where they raised their families or spent most of their lives,” Violet Peyton, of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, told Stateline. “If there is any way they can retrofit it, they want to do that and remain in that environment.”

The Livable Homes Tax Credit is equal to 50 percent of the cost of retrofitting, up to a maximum of $5,000 per applicant (of any age). Or, $5,000 for the purchase or construction of a new home.

In 2008 the program served 47 Virginia homeowners. In 2011, the Livable Homes Tax Credit was expanded and the maximum credit increased from $2,000 to $5,000. The credits help about 300 taxpayers and contractors each year.

To qualify, a new home must include at least three features of universal visitability. A retrofitted home must accomplish at least one universal visitability or accessibility feature. These include, but are not limited to:

- A step-free entrance into the home
- An accessible bathroom on the same floor as the step-free entrance
- Doors with at least 32 inches of clear width
- Accessible light switches, electrical outlets and controls for heat and air-conditioning
- A stair lift or elevator

Although similar bills have failed in at least half a dozen state legislatures, a bipartisan effort in the U.S. Congress has taken a small step forward in 2017 with the introduction of the bipartisan Senior Accessible Housing Act. The legislation would provide up to $30,000 in federal tax credits to people over age 60 who invest in aging-in-place upgrades.

Increased accessibility, such as through a step-free entrance, is age- and ability-friendly, whether a person is older and has trouble with steps or is younger and needs to get a baby stroller or heavy luggage into the house.
With Santa Barbara’s mild temperatures, high real estate costs and a miniscule 1 percent vacancy rate for rentals, homelessness is a persistent fact of life in the city. Even people with jobs struggle to find housing they can afford. Quite a few residents wind up living in their cars, sometimes sharing them with pets or children. No one knows how many people bed down behind the steering wheel, but at least 115 have a safe space to spend the night thanks to Safe Parking, a program funded in part by the city and managed by the New Beginnings Counseling Center.

Overnight space in nearly two dozen church, government, nonprofit agency and business parking lots is provided and includes access to bathrooms. The cars are expected to clear out by 7 a.m. New Beginnings distributes food, offers job tutoring and resume preparation, and connects people with shelters and other social services. Between July 2015 and June 2016, the organization found homes for 61 program participants.

“It’s a hidden population and a growing population, and it is quite different from street homelessness,” says Cassie Roach, Safe Parking’s coordinator.

Monterey County, also in California, runs a similar program, and Los Angeles, where homelessness rose by 6 percent in 2016, has considered following suit.
Recognizing that the Rogue Valley region of southern Oregon doesn’t have anywhere near enough accessible and age-friendly housing, the Rogue Valley Council of Governments—a regional government body representing 22 municipalities—established the **Lifelong Housing Certification Project**.

This voluntary evaluation program lets homeowners, tenants, builders, buyers and sellers assess the age-friendliness and accessibility of both newly constructed and existing homes. Developed in collaboration with AARP Oregon, the program includes a comprehensive checklist of recommended features and defines three levels of certification (see the box on the opposite page) based on various universal design standards.

The certification, which is granted based on a home inspection, can be added to the local Multiple Listing Service that real estate agents and their clients use. The lifelong housing certification also provides architects, builders, remodelers and appraisers with vetted, standardized guidelines to use when working with customers who are buying, building or modifying a home for lifelong livability.

Visit AARP.org/RogueValleyHouse to take a tour inside this “Level 2” certification home.
IN CASE OF EMERGENCY
SCOTTSDALE and FOUNTAIN HILLS, ARIZONA
Scottsdale Area Association of Realtors

The Lockboxes for Seniors program provides a lockbox for securing a spare key outside the home of an older adult or a person with special needs. The box is free if their annual income is less than $25,000. For all other residents, the box costs $25.

Users provide the lockbox code only to the local police and fire departments. If the resident is inside the home but unable to get to the door, the emergency responders can gain entry without breaking in.

The program, one of the first in the nation, was launched by the Scottsdale Area Association of Realtors in 2004 as a response to concerns of older adults and their adult children. More than 2,000 lockboxes have been distributed thus far.

“I’m always surprised at how few Scottsdale seniors are aware of the program,” Realtor Nancy Laswick wrote in a blog post to help spread the word. “I’ve been involved with this program for several years now, and it always gives me a good feeling to know that what we do is making a difference in the lives of our senior citizens, especially those who live alone, by giving them a little peace of mind.”

Level 1: The home contains the mandatory features that are needed for visitability by all guests. For example, a person using a wheelchair must be able to easily navigate the main living area, a bathroom and the access leading to and from that bathroom.

Level 2: The home is fully accessible and includes a variety of mandatory and optional features that make the home’s central living area suitable for lifelong living; it also ensures that a person using a mobility device can perform all personal and housekeeping functions.

Level 3: These homes have enhanced accessibility, which means that in addition to the requirements noted in the previous levels, the property has been further customized for personalized accessibility. The specific enhancements are listed on the certificate and could include smart technologies or features that meet the needs of visually or hearing-impaired residents.

A pantry with a wide doorway and reachable shelves makes the space accessible for all users.

First responders can use the provided lockbox code to access the door key and enter the home to provide assistance.
“What must we do now to make the next generation more equitable, more adaptable and more prosperous? How can we make their New Orleans a dynamic urban landscape—aligned with its natural environment? What leadership is needed—from individuals, communities, the public and private sectors—to realize the city we envision?”

Those are among the questions asked by the Resilient New Orleans initiative, a partnership with the 100 Resilient Cities program pioneered by The Rockefeller Foundation, which defines a resilient city as “more resilient to the physical, social, and economic challenges that are a growing part of the twenty-first century.”

Within that framework, Housing for a Resilient New Orleans is a deliberate approach of policies and tools for addressing, as its five-year strategy states, “both new and long-standing challenges so everyone can participate in the city’s growing prosperity.”

Through the Housing for a Resilient New Orleans plan, released in June 2016, the city intends to build or preserve 7,500 affordable housing units by 2021. The work encompasses supporting the development of new affordable rental and homeownership opportunities; preserving affordability and improving the quality of existing rental and homeownership opportunities; expanding access to opportunities and promoting mobility by leveraging the Assessment of Fair Housing (AFH) process and other fair housing principles; and increasing accessibility for vulnerable populations.

The effort builds on work done already by HousingNOLA, a cross-sector initiative that documented the state of housing within New Orleans. On the plus side, HousingNOLA found that job growth in the city has been making New Orleans an increasingly popular place to live. On the other hand, housing costs have risen nearly 50 percent since 2000, there is an increasing demand for rental housing and residents are deferring homeownership partly because of the high cost of housing. As such, Housing for a Resilient New Orleans includes objectives to:

- Increase and ensure the availability of income-affordable properties in high-opportunity areas
- Include affordable-housing units in market-rate housing development
- Preserve the long-term affordability of rental units that benefit from a public subsidy
- Lower the costs associated with homeownership
- Improve the quality of privately owned rental properties
- Adopt policy language that regulates the use of short-term rentals
- Identify target neighborhoods for mobility- and place-based strategies
- Increase the number of housing units able to serve populations with special needs
- Make homelessness rare, brief and nonrecurring

“We must ensure that working people do not get priced out of New Orleans—they are the backbone of our city. The only way our entire community improves is if we all move forward together,” Mayor Mitch Landrieu says of the city’s resilience efforts and housing objectives. “New Orleans is for everyone. It needs to be, or else it stops being New Orleans.”

Located in New Orleans’ historic Tremé neighborhood, Faubourg Lafitte (opposite) provides mixed-income housing near transit and other opportunities for residents. Emelda Paul (above) resides in a one-bedroom apartment in the revitalized community of more than 800 homes.
After winning Dover’s top job in the summer of 2014, Robin Christiansen became the first Delaware mayor to join the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness. An initiative of the state of Delaware and various public and private organizations, the effort was widely championed by then First Lady Michelle Obama and Second Lady Jill Biden.

That fall, Christiansen established a working group made up of local partners and tapped William C. (Bill) Farley, a retired Marine and chairman of the Delaware Commission of Veteran Affairs, to lead the group.

The goals of the program, Farley told the Dover Post in January 2015, included identifying homeless veterans and their needs, moving homeless veterans and families from temporary shelters to alternative housing arrangements, and promoting stable housing solutions.

“The nation has established programs to assist these veterans,” he said. “However, they are often unaware of the resources available to them, unable to access those resources or too proud to ask for help.”

When the Dover group began its work, nearly 100 veterans were believed to be living on the city’s streets or in shelters or inconsistent housing. By the end of 2016, all had permanent housing.

“We were successful because we got people together who were interested in accomplishing the goal of housing every veteran in the city,” Christiansen told the local paper. Many of these veterans had returned from service in Iraq and Afghanistan to encounter a bad economy and no jobs. They “ended up on the streets,” he explained. “That never should have happened. We are doing all we can to make sure it doesn’t in the future.”

In addition to Christiansen’s work in Dover, the leaders of all three Delaware counties and mayors in eight other towns and cities committed to the initiative to end veteran homelessness. Between January 2015 and Veterans Day 2016, Delaware had housed more than 400 formerly homeless veterans, effectively ending veteran homelessness in the state.

“We now have systems in place to ensure that veteran homelessness is a rare occurrence, and is prevented whenever possible,” said Jack Markell, then Delaware’s governor. “We will remain committed to this effort, and to getting our veterans the help and resources they need and deserve.”

With a permanent address, veterans can sign up for services including health care and addiction counseling. Having greater stability in their lives helps them rebuild their social support networks.

Using the veterans’ program template, Christiansen hopes to succeed in housing the city’s wider homeless population. That challenge, he knows, will be more difficult.

“Military service offers a kind of cohesion,” Christiansen observes. “Getting veterans into housing with other people can connect them with one another. Many civilians don’t have that military cohesion.” One key to success, says the mayor, lies in the follow-up: “There should always be someone they can reach back to.”

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From left: Retired Marine William C. (Bill) Farley, a local veteran, and Dover Mayor Robin Christiansen at a 2015 event for the city’s initiative to end veteran homelessness.
HOME SWEET HOME SHARING
SAN MATEO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA
HIP Housing (Human Investment Project)

When Daniel Shepherd’s rent grew too high, he found that housing in San Mateo, an affluent county between Silicon Valley and San Francisco, was beyond his reach. The average rental for a one-bedroom apartment cost about $2,100 a month.

“I didn’t know where I would live or what I would do. I was falling apart,” recalls Shepherd, who is in his fifties. Then he heard about HIP Housing’s Home Sharing program, a free service that matches people who want to rent rooms in their homes with renters-to-be who live, work or attend school in San Mateo County. Such rents typically run about $850 a month but can be as low as $200. Some tenants receive a reduced rate for helping around the house.

For the past several years, Shepherd has lived in a room in Chiyo Yakushi’s four-bedroom home. “It’s clean, quiet and safe,” he says. For Yakushi, who is in her eighties and divorced, “it was hard to let go of my privacy, but I had to in order to keep my house. Now I’m used to it. It’s working out well.”

HIP Housing screens applicants through a written application and by conducting a personalized interview and background check. A “Living Together Agreement” is drafted with housemates (owners determine the rules and rent) and follow-up support is provided.

Fifty percent of the HIP Housing home providers and 24 percent of the home seekers are age 62 or older. Because there are at least five times as many potential renters as those with homes, a county marketing campaign launched to increase awareness about the initiative, which has been profiled in a U.S. Housing and Urban Development tool kit for its innovative affordable-housing model.

“This is a creative way for both sides to be able to stay in the community,” says Linda Fanucchi, HIP Housing’s associate executive director. “You’re using existing stock, so it’s always available.”

Funding for HIP Housing comes from individual donations and foundation and corporate grants, but also from community-development block grants, municipalities, fund-raising and rental income from low-income properties the nonprofit owns and manages.

The HIP Housing website includes a question about how much a person would need to earn to afford a $2,100 one-bedroom in the county. The answer? The rent is “out of reach for most teachers, home health aides, bank tellers, and so many other hardworking people in this county. Minimum wage earners would have to work over 200 hours per week to afford this rent!”
Accessory dwelling units, such as this backyard bungalow in Portland, Oregon, can provide housing options for empty nesters, young adults or older adults wanting to downsize.

MAKING ROOM FOR SMALL DWELLINGS
PORTLAND, OREGON • ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA • STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
Portland City Council, Asheville City Council and the New Hampshire State Legislature

An Accessory Dwelling Unit—commonly referred to as an ADU—is a small, independent housing unit located within a single-family home or on its lot. Think of a studio apartment built above a garage, an in-law suite added as a wing on a house, or a one-bedroom cottage constructed in a backyard.

Although ADUs are small, the complexities involved in building them can be a very big deal. ADUs are still prohibited in most communities, but when zoning allows such a secondary home, some municipalities charge fees that can make the project untenable. That’s too bad, because ADUs can solve many of our nation’s affordable-housing problems, especially for young people just starting out and older adults who no longer need a large house but want to remain in their community.
ADUs have been allowed in Asheville, North Carolina, for at least seven decades, according to its city council, which in 2015 revised the rules to address the needs of property owners and quell the concerns of neighbors.

Portland, Oregon, has allowed ADUs since 1998, although the concept didn’t really take off for another dozen years. In 2010, the city changed its zoning code to increase the allowable size of an ADU to be the smaller of 75 percent of the main property or no larger than 800 square feet. In addition, the city reduced or waived the costly permitting and impact fees it had been charging property owners seeking to build such structures.

According to the Portland Tribune, the number of construction permits for ADUs in 2016 was fast approaching those issued for regular houses. The paper explained, “The housing affordability crisis and growing traffic congestion are driving up the popularity of ADUs in Portland, especially in close-in neighborhoods. ADUs provide separate spaces for in-laws, adult children returning from college, or for private rentals that supplement homeowners’ incomes. Some are turning their ADUs into Airbnb rentals, which, in desirable locations, often yield higher incomes than regular rentals.”

Some ADU benefits specific to older people: Homeowners can build an ADU to retire into while renting out their main house for income. An ADU can also be put to work as the rental, thus providing extra income so a retiree couple can afford to remain in their home. An ADU can serve as a residence for a homeowner’s elderly parents, or for an elderly homeowner’s paid caregiver.

Because an ADU is located within or on the same plot of land as the principal dwelling, it can be rented out but not separately bought or sold. Whether ADUs are even allowed is generally a matter of local zoning—except in New Hampshire, where, as a result of a law that went into effect on June 1, 2017, every municipality in the state allows, subject to certain local land use controls, the construction of attached or self-contained ADUs in all areas that permit single-family dwellings. (See the box at right to read the legislature’s reasons for doing so.)

Portland is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities

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**From New Hampshire SB 146, codified at New Hampshire RSA 674:72**

I. There is a growing need for more diverse affordable housing opportunities for the citizens of New Hampshire.

II. Demographic trends are producing more households where adult children wish to give care and support to parents in a semi-independent living arrangement.

III. Elderly and disabled citizens are in need of independent living space for caregivers.

IV. There are many important societal benefits associated with the creation of accessory dwelling units, including:

   a. Increasing the supply of affordable housing without the need for more infrastructure or further land development.

   b. Benefits for aging homeowners, single parents, recent college graduates who are saddled with significant student loan debt, caregivers, and disabled persons.

   c. Integrating affordable housing into the community with minimal negative impact.

   d. Providing elderly citizens with the opportunity to live in a supportive family environment with both independence and dignity.

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ADUs can often be rented, but they can never be sold separately from the property’s primary home.
Early in 2015, an older gentleman in Bowdoinham, Maine, asked Patricia Oh, the town’s coordinator of older adult services, where he could buy a jar opener similar to the one he remembered his mother using. Arthritis was making it difficult for him to open jars and cans. He had searched department stores, hardware stores, drugstores and cooking shops without success.

Trying to help, Oh did an online search for “jar openers” and ordered three for the man to try out. Inspired by the inquiry, members of the Bowdoinham Advisory Committee on Aging began looking for simple devices (pill organizers, no-tie shoelaces, strobe-light doorbells and smoke detectors) that could be helpful to the town’s older residents. They also asked the residents to identify problems in need of solutions and to recommend products they had found useful.

The collective efforts and experiences led the committee to create a portable Handy Tools Display of more than 30 age-friendly gadgets, utensils and hardware. The display resides in the Bowdoinham Public Library, which allows the tools to be borrowed and tried at home for up to three weeks. The committee also created a printed catalog called Tools for Everyday Living, which Bowdoinham Hardware keeps in its shop. If the store doesn’t stock a particular item, it will place an order for customers who don’t use the Internet or credit cards.

Although it wasn’t an initial goal of the project, the tools display attracted people of all ages, including young mothers looking for a way to do things with one hand, shoppers buying gifts for relatives, middle-aged people wanting to simplify their lives and older adults in need of devices to help them adapt to age-related changes.

As Patricia Oh observes: “Everyone, of every age, is happier when they have the tools to make life easier.”

Bowdoinham is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities.
TAKEAWAYS

- **Affordable housing shouldn't be an afterthought.** If an area is going to be a mixed-income community, with all kinds of people living in it, start with the most affordable housing in the plan and make it good. When the affordable housing is appealing, it shows that the community and its leaders care about the area being a great place to live.

- **Vulnerable populations need supportive housing.** People who have special needs may be living with difficult health conditions or have endured hardships and require housing that also provides access to assistive services.

- **Housing can and must serve people of all ages and life stages.** Homes can be attractively designed from the get-go to be suitable for all users. Existing homes can be modified to better enable people to age in place. Programs that assist with the costs of repairs and renovations can help.

**CHECK OUT THIS RESOURCE:** [AARP.org/HomeFit](http://AARP.org/HomeFit)
The [AARP HomeFit Guide](http://AARP.org/HomeFit) (which is available in English and Spanish) features smart solutions and customizable worksheets for making a home comfortable, safe and a great fit.
The RideKC Streetcar was designed to serve all travelers, including bicyclists, parents pushing strollers and people with disabilities. (Learn more on page 40.)
In many places, it can be impossible to get around if you don’t have a car. In too many neighborhoods, sidewalks are few and far between. For too many years, transportation policies have served people using fast-moving vehicles rather than public transit, bicycles or their own two feet. Livable communities have transportation options for people of all ages.
A STREETCAR NAMED ACCESSIBLE
Kansas City, Missouri
Mayor Sylvester (Sly) James and the Kansas City Streetcar Authority

In May 2016, for the first time in 59 years, streetcars were again gliding through the streets of Kansas City. One major difference: The twenty-first-century versions are designed to be usable by bicyclists, people pushing baby strollers, and individuals with disabilities.

“This is one of the most significant milestones in this city in generations,” proclaimed Mayor Sly James, who described the RideKC Streetcar as a sign that Kansas City is a big-league city that takes seriously the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and national Project Civic Access initiative to eliminate physical and communication barriers that prevent people with disabilities from participating fully in community life.

The RideKC Streetcar follows a 2.2-mile downtown route running primarily along Main Street connecting the River Market to Crown Center and Union Station culture and entertainment complex. Other stops include the library, the Power & Light entertainment district, the Crossroads Arts District, the convention center and the National World War I Museum.

Among the streetcar’s flashiest features: ground-level, zero-step boarding, and station kiosks with ADA-recommended features and a button to connect passengers with live customer service assistance.
HENDERSON, NEVADA  
City of Henderson

Henderson’s approach to bicycle infrastructure once consisted of striping 5-foot-wide bike lanes on four-lane roadways and providing shared 14-foot-wide outside lanes on six-lane roadways. Yikes!

Today, more than 20 miles of separated bike lanes either have been installed or will be installed. The city has developed a standard separated bike lane design and the lanes have been recommended for other roadway rehabilitation projects.

The city also reevaluated a project designed as a six-lane road to connect commercial properties with residential areas, schools and sports fields. Based on an engineering evaluation, the project was redesigned and constructed as a four-lane roadway with a raised mile-long, 10-foot-wide separated bike lane.

In 2015, the League of American Bicyclists recognized Henderson as a silver award-level Bicycle Friendly Community—the first community in Nevada to receive the recognition. The following year, Henderson (population: 302,000) became the “small city” winner in the Design Right category of the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Mayors’ Challenge for Safer People, Safer Streets.

“In an effort to make our community safer and more accessible to bicyclists and pedestrians of all ages and abilities,” said Mayor Andy Hafen in 2016, “we have made important changes to the way we approach the engineering design of bicycle lanes, including identifying opportunities to include Complete Streets elements whenever practical. The changes we have implemented result in tangible benefits for our community, including improvements that enhance the comfort and safety of bicyclists and pedestrians.”

Henderson is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities.
The Atlanta BeltLine gets locals and visitors out of cars and onto their feet.
Traffic and traffic jams are a fact of life in and around downtown Atlanta. However, the region wants to get moving, and to do so it’s investing big money for big solutions with an ambitious plan called **Walk. Bike. Thrive!** Federal, state and local funding is being directed toward making foot and bicycle travel safer, more convenient and fun as part as an $85 billion metropolitan transportation strategy to be implemented over the next 25 years.

The city of Atlanta already has a two-step start. In 2013, Mayor Kasim Reed pledged that Atlanta would soon be among the best places in the nation for bicycling. The Atlanta BeltLine—a 22-mile walk-bike trail circling the city—is under construction and several segments are already in use. In fact, neighborhoods along the BeltLine are already experiencing a boom in housing, workplace and retail development. A report from the George Washington University School of Business found that a substantial share of recent real estate development in the region is occurring in walkable neighborhoods.

The Atlanta Regional Commission, a planning and intergovernmental coordination agency for the 10-county area, calls for existing walk and bike routes to form the nucleus of a 225-mile network of trails linking all parts of the region, with a particular emphasis on serving everyday destinations like schools, parks, transit stops, shopping districts and places of employment.

More traffic-calming projects to make walking safer, new and improved sidewalks, new bikeways, and bike- and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods are all part of the plans.

“Metro Atlanta residents, from millennials to baby boomers, want more opportunities to travel without hopping in a car,” said Mike Alexander, director of ARC’s Center for Livable Communities. “This plan provides a roadmap to help our region meet this demand and create healthier, more livable communities.”

*Atlanta is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities*
Getting around can be tough during a long Maine winter. And it’s especially tough for older adults, of which Maine—with a median age of 44—has many.

In the small town of Bucksport (population: 5,500), 20 percent of the residents are age 62 or older. Of this group, roughly 11 percent live alone and many don’t drive. They have no desire to move away because they’ve lived in the town for all or most of their lives. Many worked for the paper mill that fueled the local economy until it closed in 2014 after nearly a century in operation.

Much of the advocacy work and accompanying services available to older adults in the Bucksport region are part of Thriving in Place, an effort by the grassroots, largely volunteer Bucksport Bay Healthy Communities Coalition, which serves the towns of Bucksport, Orland, Verona Island and Prospect (total population: 8,900) and works with 15 partner organizations as well as local governments, various nonprofits and volunteers.

Winter mobility is a pressing concern. After an especially fierce storm, Pearl Swenson, a member of the coalition’s senior resources committee, addressed the town council: “The day or two after the snowstorm, I couldn’t get to the pharmacy. I couldn’t get to the post office. I mean, that didn’t seem like an extreme thing to ask,” she testified. “Those [snow] banks come up, and my legs don’t work like they used to.”

In many communities, sidewalk care and snow shoveling is the responsibility of the home or business adjacent to the sidewalk. In downtown Bucksport, where many storefronts are empty, the sidewalks are a town duty. The council and town manager responded to Swenson’s concerns with both short- and longer-term solutions. A part-time worker was hired and assigned to shovel downtown sidewalks. The city also shaved down the concrete edges of several sidewalks, notes the local paper, The Ellsworth American, “making it easier for pedestrians to shuffle onto them when a slick layer of ice renders normal footsteps difficult.”

Several Bucksport businesses do shovel the sidewalks outside their doors, partly because it’s good for business and partly because they could win the coalition’s annual Ella B. Rayner Golden Shovel Award. The full-size, golden-colored snow shovel is presented to a business that does a particularly good job of keeping its sidewalks clear. The winner’s name is written on the shovel in a black permanent marker. Much like Miss America’s tiara, the golden shovel is handed down to the following year’s champion.

Other mobility services—motivated by the needs of older residents but available to people of all ages—include work with the Downeast Transportation agency to provide a weekly shuttle bus service for getting to a local health center, the senior center and key businesses, including the supermarket and pharmacy. The fare to ride for the whole day is $1. A monthly shuttle to Bangor is also provided. In addition, a volunteer-driver program provides door-to-door rides for medical appointments.

As James Bradney, the former health planning director for the Bucksport coalition, wrote in a 2015 article: “We listened to what seniors were saying—to the things that were important to them in order to stay healthy, safe, and happy as they age in their homes.”

Bucksport is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities.
Driving Around in Circles is a Good Thing
Hamburg, New York
Village of Hamburg and the New York State Department of Transportation

Every day more than 20 people are killed at traffic intersections in the United States, and many more are seriously injured.

Roundabouts—circular intersections that move traffic counterclockwise around a central island—can help reduce such deaths and injuries. Because traffic roundabouts are calmer and safer than conventional intersections, they are a “proven safety counter-measure,” says the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Highway Administration.

By the 1990s, business had declined along the Route 62 commercial district of Hamburg, New York. Too many storefronts in the town’s independent downtown were empty, as shoppers had grown to prefer malls and big box stores. The road was generally congested and hazardous for cyclists and pedestrians. A state plan emphasized wider roads and signalized intersections.

A group of residents banded together to support a new vision for the roadway and the village based on improving walkability and calming traffic. The committee’s result, referred to as the Route 62 Project, recommended removing several conventional, signalized intersections at and along Main and Buffalo Streets and replacing them with four traffic roundabouts.

Tom Moses was not the mayor during that time. He was a private citizen opposed to traffic roundabouts, and he wasn’t alone. There was a great and vocal opposition to what seemed too drastic a change.

Construction for the roundabouts began in 2006, with project management handled by the New York State Department of Transportation. That same year, Tom Moses was elected mayor. Downtown businesses and others began to see the value of the roundabouts. Moses, too, turned into a roundabout enthusiast. The roundabouts were ready for use in 2008. Soon after, the work was selected as among the Top 10 transportation projects in the nation.

“The Village of Hamburg is experiencing a revitalization as businesses and homeowners continue to invest in the community,” Moses told a transportation newsletter a few years after the roundabouts were in place. “The village has become a walkable place with a ‘can do’ attitude.” Paul Gaughan, a village trustee, added, “Our community, both business and neighborhoods, feels a new sense of purpose.”

Hamburg’s before-and-after results: Traffic safety increased, vehicular crashes decreased (as did the severity of those that did occur), congestion eased and emissions from idling cars were reduced.

Finding the Right Ride
Fargo, North Dakota
and Moorhead, Minnesota
Fargo-Moorhead Metro Area Transit

Although Fargo (slogan: “Far More”) and Moorhead sit in different states, they are commonly referred to as “FM.” Compared to many cities and rural regions, the FM metropolitan area (which also includes North Dakota’s West Fargo and Minnesota’s Dilworth) offers far more specialized transportation options for people who have disabilities or are older than 60.

The FM Ride Source Directory provides a detailed listing of both private and government-supported transportation services. The directory spells out which services accept North Dakota or Minnesota Medicaid, which require advance reservations and which have wheelchair ramps.

One service, Metro Senior Ride, charges people over age 60 just $3 for a door-to-door ride anywhere within Fargo, West Fargo, Moorhead and Dilworth. The Metro Area Transit’s fixed-route buses cost seniors only 75 cents per ride, which is half the regular fare. Grocery shopping trips from senior housing locations are also available.

The downloadable edition of the directory explains its purpose: “The FM metropolitan area is a regional medical center and a hub of human and social services. The population needing access to these services is growing and transportation is an important part of living independently.”
YIELD

Los choques de vehículos no son accidentes. Sus decisiones importan.

nyc.gov/VisionZero
More than 5,300 Americans are killed crossing the street every year. More than 35,000 people are killed in the United States every year in traffic crashes.

Campaigns under way in more than 20 U.S. cities—from Anchorage to Fort Lauderdale—strive to end this tragedy. The approach, called Vision Zero Network, originated in Sweden and is responsible for that country’s success in halving pedestrian, bicyclist and motorist deaths over the past two decades.

The ultimate Vision Zero goal is the end of all traffic deaths and serious injuries. The strategy includes demonstrating that such deaths are predictable and preventable, and then implementing proven policies and practical measures that will make America’s roadways safe for all users.

“One way Vision Zero differs from the traditional approach to traffic safety is that it focuses on the policies and street designs that have the greatest impact on safety,” says Leah Shahum, the founder and executive director of the Vision Zero Network. “We know that a vehicle’s speed is the most critical factor in the severity of a traffic injury. That means we need to design roads for safety, set lower speed limits and effectively enforce speed limits.”

San Antonio sees an average of more than one pedestrian death per week. In response, the city has embraced Vision Zero as an official policy. (AARP Texas is helping.) “The loss of even one life or serious injuries on our roads is unacceptable,” declares a city statement. “The responsibility for roadway safety in our community is shared between those who design the road and those who use the road.”

New York City and San Francisco are currently the leaders in enacting Vision Zero policies such as designing safer intersections, reducing speed limits, promoting public education campaigns and stepping up enforcement of traffic laws. San Antonio and other Vision Zero cities can look to both coasts as all pursue a perfect score of zero.

San Antonio is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities.
A decade ago, Grand Rapids had the second-most dangerous roadways in Michigan for bicyclists. Today, says Suzanne Schulz, the city’s planning director, “Our safety numbers show a major change in behavior.”

In a matter of just one year, from 2015 to 2016, the number of serious car-vs.-bicycle crashes in Grand Rapids fell 81 percent. Total crashes dropped 40 percent. Meanwhile, 92 percent of residents said they were at least somewhat familiar with the rules of the road for bicyclists.

Driving such numbers is a community education program, Driving Change, that is fueled by a $632,000 grant from the Michigan Department of Transportation and steered by an advisory committee of more than 60 stakeholders, including schools and neighborhood associations.

“Driving Change is the vehicle for everybody to know what to do,” explains Schulz. “Whether you’re the driver of a car or a bicycle, you know what you’re supposed to do, and where you’re supposed to be, to keep everybody safe.”

Ensuring that everyone is on the same page is a good practice in general, and specifically because Grand Rapids has added 80 miles of bike lanes since 2010 (when it had none).

To keep the information memorable, Driving Change focuses on just four rules (see the box below), which safety advocates selected after combing through crash reports. “We knew most crashes occurred when motorists were turning right and not looking for bicyclists,” Schulz says. The city also knew the most dangerous sites, so it targeted those roads with billboards.

To help spread the message, Driving Change produced two humorous 30-second videos and aired them on broadcast outlets, ranging from Hulu to gas-station monitors. Each video mimics a group therapy session, with the bicyclist complaining “You don’t see me!” and the driver protesting “You don’t stop!” Every Grand Rapids resident has likely encountered the Driving Change message at least nine times.

“It wasn’t a super complicated message,” says Schulz, but it has proven to be far more effective than what bicyclists and motorists are typically told, which is to share the road.

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**DRIVING CHANGE SAFETY RULES**

**For BICYCLISTS**

1. Be visible.
2. Obey all traffic signs and signals.

**For MOTORISTS**

1. Watch for bicyclists, especially when making right-hand turns.
2. Leave 5 feet when passing bikes.
INDY REVS UP FOR BETTER TRANSIT
INDIANAPOLIS and MARION COUNTY, INDIANA
Transit Drives Indy

On Election Day 2016, nearly 60 percent of Marion County voters approved an income tax increase—one of the first in the nation—to support an expansion of public transit.

The referendum allows the area’s city-county council to impose an additional income tax of up to 0.25 percent—that’s 25 cents on each $100 of taxable income—to expand the region’s IndyGo bus service. The funded transit plan will put more buses on the streets, allow for more frequent service and extend the hours of operation so all routes can operate seven days a week. There will also be funding for three rapid-transit bus lines.

Supporters had formed Transit Drives Indy—a broad coalition of faith, environmental, business, civil rights and nonprofit groups (including AARP Indiana)—to make public transit more convenient and accessible to commuters, households in poverty, older residents, people with disabilities and people who don’t own a car.

Observes Sarah Waddle, state director of AARP Indiana: “A better-connected Indianapolis that serves all is essential to building a livable community.”

Local voters said yes to higher taxes for better bus service.
LOOK AT THIS SAFETY SOLUTION
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY
City of Louisville

The numbers weren’t good. The rate of pedestrian deaths in Louisville was higher than the national average. Among the reasons: distracted drivers and distracted pedestrians.

With the help of a three-year, $307,000 grant from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Louisville launched a citywide traffic-safety awareness campaign. “The culture is changing, which is why education is so important,” says Vanessa Burns, Louisville’s director of public works.

Look Alive Louisville is a multiprong, multidepartment effort created in 2015 by the city’s department of public works, in collaboration with the school system and the local police.

With Louie the Looker as the effort’s mascot (chosen by a naming contest), the initiative has its own Facebook page and website, educational print materials, a video that reenacts a fatal pedestrian crash, an interactive curriculum for grades K through 12, and a 30-minute presentation targeted to adults.

To catch speeders and drivers who don’t yield to pedestrians, police officers wearing highly visible civilian clothes attempt to cross the street. In addition, the Louisville police has stepping up enforcement at known trouble spots. Cyclists and pedestrians who have encountered a dangerous vehicle can submit a “Close Call” form.

In a related initiative, to identify and solve infrastructure-related problems, city engineers and workers fix cracked sidewalks, poor signage and traffic signals that don’t allow enough time for people to cross a road.

Burns thinks that the most effective way the city has raised awareness is by wrapping a city bus with the Look Alive Louisville logo and messages.

“Pause for pedestrians, people weren’t born with bumpers,” is written on one side of the wrap, along with information about Louisville’s pedestrian fatality statistics. The other side of the bus displays artwork created by children (from a Design-A-Bus contest) and a lifesaving message: “Stop, look and listen.”

Louisville is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities
Rides for Rural Retirees
Sammamish, Washington, and Nearby Communities
Eastside Friends of Seniors

Need a ride? The answer for many older adults who don’t drive is a resounding yes. They need a lift to a medical appointment, a store, a pharmacy, a friend’s house—the list goes on.

More than 8 million Americans over the age of 65 don’t drive, according to the National Household Travel Survey—and often for good reason. With age comes slowing reflexes and waning vision, and Americans typically outlive their ability to drive safely by seven to 10 years. Millions of other older people are sidelined because of limited or no access to public transit.

Older people needing a ride in rural Snoqualmie Valley and Bellevue, or the fast-growing Seattle exurbs of Issaquah and Sammamish, can call Ramona Lawrence. As the client-services coordinator for Eastside Friends of Seniors, Lawrence helps older adults get out of their homes as needed so they can stay put as desired.

The Eastside Friends’ Door-Through-the-Door Transportation Service connects non-driving residents age 60 or older with a cadre of volunteer drivers who will provide a free ride and, if needed, serve as escorts to a healthcare provider’s office or through the aisles of a supermarket. (The volunteers will put away the groceries, too.) Clients must be able to manage their own appointments and use private transportation with minimal assistance.

The goal is to help older people live independently with dignity.

Eastside Friends of Seniors has been in the drivers’ seat for two decades, first as a church-affiliated volunteer group and, since 2009, as a charitable nonprofit community organization. In 2016, Eastside’s volunteers drove more than 400 senior citizens nearly 45,000 miles, doubling its total from 2012.

Typical Eastside clients range from those with short-term transportation needs—say, recovering from joint-replacement surgery—to drivers who have been forced to shift into park permanently, often because of vision problems.

Many of the volunteers are retirees themselves. They see their donated driving as a “really good service they may need someday,” says Lawrence. (“They call it karma kickback,” Swanson adds.) Others drivers are area parents who bring along their children, imparting life lessons about service and community.

Before she was on staff, Lawrence was a volunteer. Her involvement began decades ago with an infant daughter who, she says, “was a fussy baby but liked riding in the car.” Among Lawrence’s memorable clients was a woman she drove to the grocery store every week for eight years—starting when the passenger was 95 years old. “We strive to maintain quality of life,” she says.
RIPPING UP ROUTES FOR THE RIGHT RIDE
HOUSTON, TEXAS
Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County

The population of Houston and its surrounding communities has nearly doubled since 1980, and the area’s crowded freeways are evidence of that fact. A light rail service that opened in 2004 does help and is popular, as are some commuter bus services. But the city’s local bus system had barely changed from the hub-and-spoke design established in the mid-twentieth century, when the downtown was still Houston’s primary destination.

Consequently, many commuters, older adults, students and low-income people most in need of public transit had limited or no means of getting around. Bus ridership sank.

In 2015, the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (known locally as METRO) dramatically shifted the bus system to a grid network that better serves the travel patterns of Houstonians and connects more conveniently to the city’s three light rail lines with 22 high-frequency bus routes that offer service every 15 minutes or less.

During the first year of the New Bus Network, as the revamped routes have been dubbed, ridership was up 1.2 percent on local bus lines, compared to a more than 20 percent decline over a decade. Use of the overall system, which includes light rail and commuter bus routes, was up 6.8 percent.

The redesign of the local bus routes also boosted weekend and late-night service, and increased the number of bus shelters. It also introduced Next Bus Texting and fare payment options for riders’ smartphones.

Houston’s ability to abandon and reinvent an outdated operation can be helpful to other municipalities that are currently experiencing rapid population and geographic growth or expect to in the near future.

*Houston is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities*
TRANSIT TRAINING GETS EVERYONE ON BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

Navigating any city’s transit system for the first time can be intimidating. The experience can be especially frightening for someone who, because of age or disability, finds climbing stairs, understanding maps, using fare cards or anything else about the excursion overwhelming.

In the nation’s capital, such wary riders can find comfort in the D.C. MetroReady Travel Training program, which is a free, personalized introduction to the Metrorail and Metrobus system that serves the District and parts of suburban Virginia and Maryland.

Metro’s trainers work with individuals and groups to discuss every aspect of transit use, from schedules, to SmarTrip fare cards, to senior and disability discounts, to planning a trip using Metro’s website. The trainers offer station tours, explain safety and accessibility features, identify station elevators and demonstrate how to board a bus when using a wheelchair. They also provide resources such as large-print pocket guides and information about locating Braille markings.

The training is customized for each participant, so Metro staff will walk the new riders through exactly how to use a bus or train to get from their home “to the grocery store, to church, to the wellness center, anywhere,” says Reginald Ward, a Metro system orientation specialist. “It gives them independence.”

Washington, D.C., is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities

Brigid Doherty, an orientation mobility specialist and travel trainer, teaches a customer with a visual disability to navigate the D.C. Metro.
SEASIDE STREETS MADE SAFER
MYRTLE BEACH, SOUTH CAROLINA
City of Myrtle Beach

Every summer, this community of 30,000 explodes into a busy tourist town of 350,000 people getting to and from the beach and shops and eateries by walking, bicycling, driving, riding, rollerblading or skateboarding.

“We with our millions of visitors and growing population, we have a dynamic transportation environment,” said Mayor John T. Rhodes in 2016, when the community was named a winner of the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Mayors’ Challenge for Safer People, Safer Streets. The purpose of Myrtle Beach’s winning category, Fix Barriers, is “to make streets safe and convenient for people of all ages and abilities.”

To get a handle on the hubbub, the city adopted a Complete Streets policy (see page 56) and conducted bicycle safety and walkability audits. Myrtle Beach also identified gaps in the continuity and connectedness of its sidewalks and mapped and measured every existing sidewalk.

Parts of Ocean Boulevard, the city’s main drag along the beach, have already been enhanced by reducing four lanes of traffic to three; adding bicycle lanes on both sides of the boulevard; and installing new high-visibility crosswalks and protective medians to serve as refuge areas for pedestrians.
SKI POLES MAKE SLIPPERY STREETS SAFER
JACKSON, WYOMING
Senior Center of Jackson Hole

Living in a ski-resort town is great for winter-sports enthusiasts. It’s not so great if you’re trying to walk along an ice-slicked street.

That scenario was among the concerns raised during a meeting at the Senior Center of Jackson Hole, home base of Age-Friendly Jackson Hole, to assess and address a variety of needs.

In response to worries about traveling between the center and a nearby residential area, staff placed ski poles and weighted rubber trash barrels at each side of the crossing. Pedestrians could then grab two poles to cross safely and then leave the poles in the barrel on the other side. A similar barrel-and-poles pairing was set up between the parking lot and the building.

“Perfect solution for a ski town!” says Becky Zaist, the center’s executive director.

Another issue raised at the meeting was the lack of handicapped parking spots in Jackson, which made access to medical and dental appointments difficult. In response, the center:

• Surveyed senior center users and people attending a health fair about where additional handicapped parking is needed.
• Surveyed and mapped all public and private handicapped parking spaces in Jackson. The maps are given to local businesses for their websites so customers can identify the most accessible parking in advance.
• Surveyed the condition of private handicapped spaces and discovered that many lacked signage or were in poor repair.

Zaist and members of Age-Friendly Jackson Hole are coordinating with the Town of Jackson’s municipal government and the local Chamber of Commerce to address the area’s handicapped-parking needs.

Jackson is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities.

RYDES TO THE RESCUE

ADAMS, BUFFALO, DAWSON, FRANKLIN, GOSPER, HAMILTON and KEARNEY COUNTIES, NEBRASKA
Community Action Partnership of Mid-Nebraska

Nondrivers who live in rural areas typically have two choices when they need to go somewhere: (1) ask a friend or family member for a ride, or (2) don’t go.

Residents in a seven-county region of south-central Nebraska have a real second option, which is to contact RYDE Transit (Reach Your Destination Easily) for a low-cost door-to-door ride.

John Fagot, the mayor of Lexington, Nebraska, is a regular rider. He doesn’t drive because of vision loss. “RYDE Transit takes me wherever I want to go—City Hall, home, work,” he says. “Life would be difficult for many people in the county without it. People depend on it. They could not keep their jobs. They could not do their daily errands.”

Lexington, a community of 10,000 residents, accounts for roughly 10,000 RYDE Transit rides per year. Small buses and mini vans run Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. In the larger cities of Kearney and Hastings, the service is available from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. The rides cost $1 or $2 for a local trip and up to $8 for an out-of-town visit.

About half of all RYDE Transit riders are older than 50, but many children take RYDE transit to after-school activities. Passengers are asked to book their rides 24 hours in advance, if possible, although there is flexibility on return trips.

“When you’re at the doctor, you don’t know if it will be 10 minutes or two hours,” RYDE Transit Director Charles McGraw points out.

RYDE Transit, which is one of the more than 60 public transit providers working in rural and urban Nebraska, is run by the Community Action Partnership of Mid-Nebraska, which also manages the region’s Head Start programs, numerous senior centers, WIC programs and food banks. Funding comes from local municipalities and counties as well as the state and federal government, foundation grants and contributions from local United Ways and donors.
COMPLETING THE STREETS
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA • STATE OF FLORIDA
City of Fort Wayne and the Florida Department of Transportation

Complete Streets is the simple, common-sense policy of designing, building and operating streets so anyone can safely and comfortably use them, whether on foot, on a bicycle, in a car or by transit, regardless of age or ability.

The policies call for considering the needs of all potential roadway users for any new road construction or significant renovation. It does not, however, mandate that every road be suitable for all users. (For example, high-speed interstates don’t need to have crosswalks and sidewalks.)

More than 1,000 agencies nationwide have adopted Complete Streets policies. The website of the National Complete Streets Coalition keeps the most, yes, complete list.

AARP is part of the broad coalition promoting this solution nationwide. In Fort Wayne, Indiana, Mayor Tom Henry and AARP Indiana were joined by more than half a dozen community partners (including the local chamber of commerce) in a successful push for Complete Streets legislation in November 2016.

“The Complete Streets resolution will guide the development of new and reconstructed streets in neighborhoods across Fort Wayne. Complete Streets are those that allow motorists, bicyclists, public transportation vehicles and riders, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities to move safely along and across streets,” reads a statement issued by the city.

The pressing need for Complete Streets becomes clear when you look at Florida, which is home to many older Americans as well as—according to the 2016 Dangerous by Design report by the Complete Streets coalition—nine of the 11 most dangerous metro areas for walking in the United States. This isn’t a surprise, say the authors, given that “Florida has been the most dangerous state for walking since we first began tracking these numbers in 2009.”

The State of Florida adopted Complete Streets policies in 2014 and adopted an implementation plan in 2016. As head of the Florida Department of Transportation for the southwest region, Billy Hattaway led the charge to translate these goals into visible improvements in communities. Already, the state has reduced its minimum traffic lane width, which allows for increasing the width of bike lanes and sidewalks.

Once the state’s new Complete Streets handbook is finalized, the department will train its employees, local government staff, elected officials and the consultant industry on the new planning and design guidance.

Vanderbilt Avenue in Brooklyn, New York, was redesigned to include Complete Streets safety features like a landscaped median, bicycle lanes and clearly marked crosswalks.
Bike infrastructure makes roads safer for all users. Even people who will never ride a bicycle benefit from streets with dedicated or protected bike lanes or shoulders that lessen the chance of cyclists, pedestrians and vehicles colliding.

People of all ages will walk, if it’s safe and convenient to do so. Going for a walk in the woods is a fine way to spend a good-weather day. But linear parks (see page 60), urban trails and continuous sidewalks are a practical way to connect neighborhoods and provide pleasant pedestrian access to shops, restaurants, services, schools and workplaces.

Rural regions need the right rides. Many people in must-drive places don’t drive. Solutions exist, but one size won’t fit all. Communities need to customize based on where they are and who needs a lift.

CHECK OUT THESE RESOURCES: AARP.org/walk-audit and AARP.org/livablepolicy
The AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit provides individuals, groups and local leaders with step-by-step instructions and checklists for examining intersections, sidewalks, driver behavior, public safety and more. Policies and research from the AARP Public Policy Institute address issues including land use, housing and transportation—all of which facilitate aging in place.
Neighborhoods, entertainment, parks and cultural districts are connected by the Indianapolis Cultural Trail (see page 61). The Glick Peace Walk section includes the historic Scottish Rite Cathedral.
PUBLIC PLACES AND OUTDOOR SPACES

Livable towns, cities and neighborhoods have a sense of place. They are destinations, not sprawl. They are communities for spending time in, not passing through. They are places where people of all ages can live, work, learn, play, relax and gather.
A TOWERING TRAIL
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
City of Chicago, The Trust for Public Land and The Friends of The Bloomingdale Trail

Linear parks created where rail lines once lay or rose above city streets have become the hottest thing in urban recreation. Manhattan launched the movement in 2009 with the opening of the High Line, which transformed an elevated rail line into a must-see destination with a walking path, art displays, great views and high-design landscaping.

Chicago’s Bloomingdale Trail—named for the train line that once traveled the route—runs almost 3 miles west to east through the city’s northwest side. It is wider than (in some spots) and nearly twice as long as Manhattan’s High Line and, unlike New York’s park, allows people to ride bicycles and walk leashed dogs. (See page 43 to learn about the Atlanta BeltLine, another linear urban park.)

In addition to being a place for fitness and fun, The Bloomingdale is a useful community connector for residents of the nearby neighborhoods, which are socioeconomically diverse and Chicago’s most densely populated. Within a 10-minute walk of the trail and parks there are 80,000 residents, a quarter of whom are children. Seven public schools, five parks, two playgrounds and a YMCA are within a block of the trail, which is the centerpiece of a larger parks project called The 606. (It was named for the first three numbers of Chicago ZIP codes.)

After The Bloomingdale’s unveiling in June 2015, Chicago Tribune reporter Blair Kamin observed that the people using the trail “get that it’s different from an ordinary suburban bike trail that cuts through a forest. In addition to offering sweeping views of the skies (and, every so often, the downtown skyline), The 606 provides intimate views of city neighborhoods—their houses, streets, alleys and people. This relationship is symbiotic: The neighborhood and the trail are scenery for each other.”
PUBLIC PLACES AND OUTDOOR SPACES

A TRAILBLAZING SUCCESS
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA
Indianapolis Cultural Trail, Inc., with public and private sector partners

An 8-mile urban bike and pedestrian path, the Indianapolis Cultural Trail runs through the city’s downtown and connects neighborhoods, entertainment amenities, parks, 40 miles of Indianapolis trails and six distinct cultural districts. The Mass Ave district, for example, features art galleries, live theater, restaurants, shops and nightlife venues. The Fountain Square Cultural District is described as “funky” and “anything but square.”

Groundbreaking for the Trail—which features countless routes, multiple public art installations and more than two dozen bike-share stations on or near the Trail—took place in April 2007. Funding for the $63 million project came from federal transportation funding and private financing. (“No local tax money was used for the Trail construction,” the official Trail website states.)

The grand opening of the Trail occurred in May 2013. Two years later, the Indiana University Public Policy Institute issued a report on its initial economic and community impact. Property assessments within approximately one block of the Trail rose 148 percent from 2008 to 2014, an increase of more than $1 billion in assessed property value. When users were asked if they felt safe on the Trail, 95 percent said they did.

“With so much to offer, the Cultural Trail has become a destination for residents and visitors alike,” said Mark Lawrance, then director of the Institute. Former mayor Greg Ballard wholeheartedly agreed: “The impact is significant,” he said, “and it will continue to grow in the years ahead.”

The Indianapolis Cultural Trail connects six unique neighborhoods, called districts, including the Fountain Square Cultural District (above).

The Pacers Bikeshare program offers 250 bicycles from 29 stations on or near the Trail.
FINALLY, A PUBLIC SQUARE WORTHY OF PUBLIC USE
CLEVELAND, OHIO
City of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County

More than 200 years ago, cattle roamed the pastures of Cleveland’s Public Square. Today, the four-block area of the city’s downtown buzzes with bocce competitions, yoga classes, a farmers’ market, food trucks and outdoor concerts and performances. On sunny days, children splash in a reflecting pool and adults walk along a butterfly-shaped promenade through acres of flowering gardens. In the winter, the pool converts into a skating rink.

Public Square is “KeyBank’s front door,” The Plain Dealer quotes Beth Mooney, chief executive officer of the Cleveland-based KeyCorp, which helped pay for a massive revitalization of the location that took 15 months and $50 million to complete. The new Public Square reopened in June 2016.

Prior to the redevelopment, the original intent of the Public Square as common ground for Clevelanders had been buried beneath two busy roadways that crisscrossed and divided the area. To create the new family- and age-friendly community space, civic groups turned to James Corner, the landscape architect who transformed an elevated freight rail line into Manhattan’s popular High Line Park. In Cleveland, Corner closed one of the square’s streets and covered it with a sweep of Kentucky bluegrass. The other roadway was restricted to buses only, drastically cutting congestion.

“The biggest impression is that the square, once dominated by traffic and carved into meaningless, unattractive quadrants, now feels like a single, unified space,” wrote Steven Litt, art and architecture critic for The Plain Dealer.

“It’s just delightful, and it certainly is senior-friendly,” says Wynne Antonio, a retired teacher and Cleveland resident for more than five decades. “There are places to sit down everywhere! It’s also very walkable.”

Public Square has brought new energy to downtown. “The history of downtown Cleveland as a residential neighborhood goes like this,” journalist Eric Sandy wrote in Cleveland Scene. “There were very few people living here, and then there were lots of people living here.” At the start of 2016, the number of residents in the downtown was nearly 15,000, up by 70 percent since 2000. Downtown rentals were boasting a nearly 100 percent occupancy rate with long waiting lists. According to the Downtown Cleveland Alliance, construction in the area could bring as many as 4,000 new apartments.

Cleveland is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities

Cleveland’s historic Public Square—for decades dominated by asphalt and traffic—is now a unified and enjoyable space.
GET GREEN, BECOME SMARTER
DUBUQUE, IOWA
Mayor Roy D. Buol and Dubuque City Council

Citizens in Dubuque can discover a wealth of advice and practical tools about improving their lives and those of future generations by tapping into the resources of Smarter, Sustainable Dubuque. Launched by Mayor Roy D. Buol and the City Council, the project grew out of a partnership with the IBM Watson Research Center, which in 2009 named Dubuque one of the nation’s first “smarter” sustainable cities as part of its “Smarter Planet” initiative. The partnership includes more than two dozen companies and several state and federal agencies.

The project’s mission is to provide every household in this scenic Mississippi River town (population: 58,400) with information for making the best choices about health and wellness, transportation, water use, electricity use and solid waste through access to the latest technology and data-gathering methods (see the box below for more). Various studies and pilot projects already conducted in Dubuque showed the potential for significant reductions in resource consumption and household costs, along with gains for the natural environment.

The IBM Watson Research Center is drawing on the research in Dubuque to create sustainable models that can be implemented in communities with 200,000 or fewer people, where more than 40 percent of all Americans live.

Mayor Buol believes the program addresses one of the biggest obstacles to environmental progress. As he told Popular Science, “I’ve always been concerned about the energy and resource use in this country.... There are better ways of doing things, but as citizens of the world we don’t have the real-time information so we can make better decisions when we’re using energy and resources.”

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**HEALTH & WELLNESS:** A pilot study using a community-engagement process and a phone app showed how to increase people’s physical activity, especially walking.

**TRANSPORTATION:** Using analytics and algorithms generated through smartphones, local officials were able to chart commuter travel patterns to improve public-transit routes and timing of traffic signals.

**WATER:** Use declined 6.6 percent among households participating in a study that updated water meters, targeted leaks and provided fuller access to data on individual use.

**ELECTRICITY:** A partnership between the city, the state, the local power utility and IBM Watson Research Center allowed participating households to better monitor their electricity use, resulting in lower consumption and power bills. The study showed that 26 percent of the household use was from so-called phantom power drawn by plugged-in appliances not in use.

**TRASH & RECYCLING:** A website portal offered select households detailed waste-disposal information and tips for how to improve their recycling habits.
To quote a popular Chinese proverb, “The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now.”

In a neighborhood setting, street trees provide shade, safety, greenery, storm mitigation, energy savings and fresh air. Trees also buffer street noise, enhance privacy and sometimes help hide unattractive views.

The U.S. Forest Service estimates that the presence of street trees increases adjacent home values by an average of $13,000. The National Main Street Center reports that a good tree canopy can increase retail sales by about 10 cents on the dollar.

“Trees are a valuable resource that provide many benefits to our community, and we need more of them,” declares the City of Bowie, which has a tree-canopy goal of 45 percent.

Toward that end, Bowie launched the City of Bowie Tree Rebate Program. Available on a first-come, first-served basis until the rebate funding is used up, the program, allows city residents to purchase up to two trees per household at any Maryland nursery or store. (The state of Maryland runs a $25 rebate program, and the promotions can sometimes be combined. Additional funding and rebate programs, including for community or homeowner association common spaces, are often offered at the county level.)

Eleven species of Maryland-suitable trees qualify. Those with a predicted maximum height of 30 feet or less can be purchased for the $50 rebate. Taller trees qualify for the $100 offer. Proof of purchase requires both a receipt from the sale and a photo of the tree planted on the owner’s property.

As part of a multifaceted neighborhood renewal effort, 99 steel basket-style planters were installed along Elmwood Avenue, a main transportation corridor in the area.

Two problems cropped up: The funding neglected to include money for purchasing plants, and the empty planters looked just enough like the trash bins they were placed beside that they were soon filled with garbage. The planters quickly became an eyesore.

The solution: AARP Rhode Island contributed money to buy dwarf juniper plants to fill the planters. (Dwarf junipers are sturdy evergreens that wouldn’t become so large that they would block the views or outgrow the containers.) Partner groups donated soil and equipment. AARP volunteers and other community members stepped up to plant the plants.

In no time at all, the planters were seen as a great improvement for the entire neighborhood.

Volunteers planted dwarf junipers to brighten a main thoroughfare.
NEIGHBORHOOD FIX-IT LISTS
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON
City of Seattle

In a city as big as Seattle, it’s not always easy to feel a personal connection to the local government. City officials wanted to change that and, at the same time, encourage more autonomous community leaders.

In 2014, the city launched the Find It, Fix It Community Walks with the aim of bringing residents, city officials and local police together to tackle smaller-scale neighborhood problems like street lamp outages, sidewalk damage, graffiti and overgrown vegetation. With the help of an app that allows residents to report problems in their neighborhoods, the city chooses up to seven areas per year to view on foot with residents. The officials work with residents to plan and organize the walks. City representatives lead the walks.

During the walk, neighbors talk with department directors and city officials about how they can work together to solve problems facing the community. After the walk, the participants discuss options for fixing the problems using resources in the neighborhood and city departments. A post-walk report provides updates on the progress. The result: Residents gain an understanding of how problems are addressed, and city leaders gain an up-close-and-personal glimpse into the daily concerns of constituents.

The fix-it jobs range in complexity, effort and enthusiasm. Some walks result in simply connecting residents to the city department needed to address a problem. But bigger revitalization projects have grown out of the walks as well. After a walk in the Belltown neighborhood during the summer of 2016, a community gardening program called Belltown P-Patch Gardeners applied for and won a Find It, Fix It grant to re-energize a community garden with new plantings and restore a small garden mural without greatly altering the original artist’s painting.

The program has resonated because of the consistent support of community members and partners. “We have gotten a lot of feedback and people seem very happy, particularly that we come back after the walk to find out more, creating a relationship,” says Paige Madden, one of the program coordinators. After hearing about Find It, Fix It, other cities have inquired about duplicating the program. Because the program requires many hours of planning and follow-up, Madden’s primary advice is “start small.”

Seattle residents and city officials walk together to tackle big and small neighborhood problems.

Seattle is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities

Seattle residents and city officials walk together to tackle big and small neighborhood problems.
A 16-acre public green, Tattnall Square Park hails back to the mid-1800s. A century later, during the 1970s and ‘80s, both the City of Macon and the park had fallen into decline.

In 2011, Friends of Tattnall Square Park, a grassroots community nonprofit, began thinking about ways to improve the park and, more specifically, how to create an engaging landscape that would be safe and welcoming for all users.

The following year, the group applied for and received a Knight Neighborhood Challenge grant, which financed the purchase of 200 new trees. At the same time, residents of the City of Macon and the County of Bibb voted to consolidate their governments to both save money and avoid a replication of services. The new community, called Macon-Bibb, enrolled in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities. As part of that relationship, AARP Georgia, joined by the Walkable and Livable Communities Institute, worked with the community to assess the walkability, livability and age-friendly features of the area surrounding the park.

The resulting report helped engage key players and provided recommendations for how to improve the park and its adjacent roads. Among the enhancements that followed: adding prominent, ADA-compliant gateways to define the park’s boundaries and entrances; installing wider, smoother sidewalks to better serve older pedestrians and people pushing strollers; establishing new benches and seating areas (many of which are made of stone and blend into the landscaping); declaring the park’s interior vehicle-free; and constructing a modern roundabout, which helped make the nearby streets safer by slowing fast-moving traffic around the park.

In 2014 the City Parks Alliance recognized Tattnall Square as a Frontline Park, a designation that promotes “inspiring examples of urban park experience, innovation and stewardship.” Several annual events—including children’s programs and the Sidewalk Chalk Festival—attract visitors from the neighborhood and beyond.

“People of all ages can enjoy nature, without being a consumer, without purchasing anything. It’s free,” says Andrew Silver, chair of Friends of Tattnall Square Park. “Up to 1,000 people visit every week to enjoy the open space and trees.”

Macon-Bibb is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities

Once a jewel turned eyesore, Tattnall Square Park is a treasure again.
LEI THERE BE LIGHT
HIGHLAND PARK, MICHIGAN
Soulardarity

As part of a deal to resolve $4 million of debt to the local utility and reduce a reported $60,000-per-month electric bill, in 2011 DTE Energy removed more than 1,000 city streetlights in Highland Park, leaving the community’s 10,000 residents in the dark.

In response to the debt-imposed blackout, Soulardarity, a grassroots collective nonprofit, began raising money to install solar-powered streetlights on Highland Park’s dark streets.

The installation cost of a solar streetlight ranges from $6,500 to $10,000, with maintenance costs of $100 per year per light. In 2012 the group’s Solar Street Lighting initiative raised enough money through a crowd-funding campaign to purchase a single streetlight, which it installed at 150 Victor Street, near the site of pioneering automaker Henry Ford’s historic Highland Park factory.

A few years later, a few more streetlights went up, one in front of resident Nandi Frye’s house. “That light, it really shines bright on my street. I love that solar light,” she told Michigan Radio.

In 2016, Soulardarity installed 50 home and alley lights. The program has expanded from basic models to include commercial and alley-level lighting as well as solar phone chargers and solar generators.

The ultimate goal is to restore all of the city’s streetlights. Unfortunately, unless a wealthy benefactor appears, that moment could be light-years away. But with the people power behind the initiative, there is hope that throughout the city’s streets there will, eventually, be light.

Highland Park is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities.

PROJECT PARKLET
ANAConDA, MONTANA
Building Active Anaconda Team and America Walks

Anaconda-Deer Lodge County (population: 9,200) is a consolidated city-county government with Anaconda, Montana’s ninth-most populous city, at its heart.

Over the past several decades, life in the once bustling downtown greatly diminished, leaving behind a community characterized by a struggling economy, poor health record, and vehicle-oriented, sedentary lifestyle. Montana Highway 1, a fast-moving thoroughfare, runs through Anaconda’s commercial area via two separated one-way avenues.

In 2014, the Building Active Anaconda Team collaborated with the nonprofit organization America Walks to run a community-based workshop with a focus on creating a walkable downtown. The groups decided to repurpose a public parking space to create a parklet, which is typically a site that has been created from a small piece of land, such as a former parking space.

The Anaconda Parklet Demonstration Project was ready for visitors on September 23, 2014. Approximately 30 workshop attendees participated in a downtown walk and visit to the parklet demonstration site. “People care about place and destination,” Scott Bricker of America Walks explained. “Stopping is just as important as walking. Walkable districts have higher commercial values.”

Although the project was intentionally temporary, plans are in the works to build and place a “permanent but portable” parklet so people can sit and enjoy a treat from the nearby bakery, coffee shop or ice cream counter.

Says Gloria O’Rourke, director of the Anaconda Community Foundation, “The whole idea is to encourage people to come downtown, and stay.”

A pop-up parklet becomes a social spot.
Most people in the United States have never been to Elmira, but they have almost surely been near a product that was built in this city of nearly 30,000 residents, which boasts a 150-year history as a hub of manufacturing.

The City of Elmira is home to Kennedy Valve (fire hydrants), The Hilliard Corporation (clutches and brakes), CAF USA (locomotives and passenger trains) and Trayer (heavy-truck and chassis parts). It’s also home to a medical school (Elmira College) and a maximum-security correctional facility.

The area has experienced a downturn in population since its heyday in the 1950s. The decline began after flooding from Hurricane Agnes destroyed many businesses. Over time, the compact and walkable city center felt more like a ghost town, visitors and former residents report, than a welcoming place for people, businesses and prosperity.

In 2016, the state of New York chose Elmira as the winner of a $10 million Downtown Revitalization Initiative grant. (Elmira was one of 10 locations across New York state to be awarded state grant funds to rebuild historic city centers.) The money, said Mayor Daniel Mandell, will help transform Elmira’s downtown “into an attractive destination for residents, businesses and college students.”

Jennifer Herrick-McGonigal is the executive director of Elmira Downtown Development, Inc., a nonprofit working to revitalize the area. A goal of the city’s public-private revitalization planning committee is to make Elmira especially attractive to young professionals and empty nesters alike.

The vision, she says, is both broad and possible: “We want our downtown to be a place to live, work and play. These buildings are more than 150 years old. They can stand the test of time.”

Elmira is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities.
As executive director of the recycling enterprise Eco-Cycle, Suzanne Jones has worked on reducing waste in Boulder for years. She was elected to the Boulder City Council in 2011 and became mayor in 2015. Among her goals is to make Boulder a Zero Waste Community.

Although Jones has recused herself from voting on zero-waste policies (given that she is still the leader of Eco-Cycle), the city has taken up the charge. In 2015 the city council adopted a universal zero-waste ordinance that expanded waste-disposal regulations to include all residents and people working in Boulder by requiring them to subscribe to trash and recycling services.

Businesses must train employees in the effort and provide bins and signs clarifying what is compostable (food and plants, coffee and tea, paper cups and plates, and other paper products) and what is recyclable (plastic bottles, paper and cardboard, aluminum cans and glass bottles).

The immediate goal is to combat a startling statistic: At least 70 percent of Boulder waste that’s sent to landfills is recyclable or compostable. The hope in Boulder is that by 2025, all houses, apartments, townhouses and businesses will generate new materials from 85 percent of their waste.

According to the EPA, about 42 percent of greenhouse gas emissions come from how we produce, consume and dispose of our stuff. “We’re not going to get national leadership on this issue,” Jones says about reducing carbon emissions. “The cities have to lead.”

Boulder County is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities

Boulder Mayor Suzanne Jones stands before a wall of flattened plastic containers at a recycling center.
Aspiring cyclists of any age can safely practice their pedaling.

**THIS GARDEN GROWS SAFE BICYCLISTS**
**KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON**
Cascade Bicycle Club and King County Parks

Green light: Go! Children on two wheels are zipping around a new bicycle playground in King County, Washington, pausing for pint-sized traffic lights and navigating realistic turn lanes.

The **White Center Bike Playground**, designed and built in 2016 by the Cascade Bicycle Club and its community partners, features a small-scale, closed course streetscape, complete with lane markings, signage, crosswalks, intersections, one-way roadways, a roundabout and more. The second of its kind in Washington State, the playground is a space where cyclists of all ages can learn the rules of the real roads and hone their skills in a safe, comfortable setting.

Like LEGO and Danish pastry, the concept of a bike playground is an import from Denmark, which has several bicycle playgrounds—sometimes called traffic gardens—including the Children’s Traffic Playground in Copenhagen, where the streetscape includes child-only traffic lanes.

After seeing the Danish model, Seattle-based landscape architect Steve Durrant of Alta Planning + Design discussed the idea with the Cascade club. He offered to design the playground. Elizabeth Kiker, then executive director of Cascade, was familiar with the concept after being involved in building a bike playground in Arlington, Virginia.

“It’s not about learning to ride a bike,” says Kiker. “It’s about learning to ride a bike safely. I thought it was a fantastic idea!”

A $75,000 King County Youth Sports Facilities Grant helped pay for the construction. The new bicycle playground replaced two rarely used tennis courts in White Center, an ethnically diverse, unincorporated community about 8 miles south of Seattle. (The YES Foundation of White Center and the White Center Community Development Association were involved in the effort, too.)

“White Center doesn’t have a lot of sidewalks. This is a way for kids to learn how to ride on the road and for parents to teach their kids,” Jessica Emerson of King County Parks told the *West Seattle Herald*. And the traffic garden is just the thing to help build a stronger community.
By building a high school and a senior center in a shared space, Swampscott saved money and gained intergenerational lessons. Some members of Swampscott’s senior senior class (below) are all smiles.

**THIS HIGH SCHOOL HAS A SENIOR CENTER**

**SWAMPSCOTT, MASSACHUSETTS**

Town of Swampscott

The Swampscott Senior Center on Boston’s North Shore was ailing. Housed in an old Victorian house, the center had three flights of stairs and limited on-street parking. The only handicapped-accessible area was in the windowless basement. The senior center wanted to relocate, but municipal funds and land within Swampscott (which is just 3 square miles) were limited. At the same time, the town’s public schools were overcrowded. A new high school was needed.

In Swampscott (population: 14,000), the number of older adults is about equal to the number of homes with school-age children. Rather than compete for town funds, the high school and the senior center joined forces to build a space that could accommodate both. The two facilities share a plot of land and are essentially one building, with the ground-level senior center occupying a 7,500-square-foot space that’s attached to the high school. To prevent students from colliding with older citizens in the halls, the senior center has a separate entrance.

Combining the two projects saved the town between $300,000 and $400,000 by tapping the senior center into the high school infrastructure (mechanical, electrical, water systems) already in place. Joe Markarian, chair of the school building committee, acknowledges that the shared building—described on its entrance signage as Swampscott High School and Senior Center—is probably the most expensive project the town will ever see. But, he adds, “in hindsight, it was a bargain. It’s a civic asset and encourages other uses.”

Senior center members sometimes participate in a tap class in the high school’s dance studio. The students and the seniors occasionally interact, such as when World War II or Korean War vets visit history classes to share their experiences. Students help the seniors with their cell phones, computers and tablets. Student athletes sometimes talk sports with the senior center’s men’s club. Students have come by to learn to knit or cook, and senior center members are provided free tickets to school performances.

Says Marilyn Hurwitz, the senior center’s director: “We have 10 times the opportunities here than we did before.”
VACANT LOTS CREATE CLEANER WATER
DETROIT, MICHIGAN
Detroit Water and Sewerage Department,
Detroit Land Bank Authority
and the University of Michigan

More than one in three Detroit properties, nearly 140,000 in total, were foreclosed in the decade leading up to 2015. That’s the equivalent of more empty, abandoned or torn-down homes in Detroit than there are houses in all of Buffalo, New York.

It’s an eerie streetscape, newly popular with horror filmmakers and macabre tour guides.

But some residents and advocates for Detroit’s renewal are seeing green—not red—in their altered landscape. More specifically, through a partnership between the University of Michigan and the city, four Bioretention Gardens have been built in vacant lots on Detroit’s west side. While beautifying the neighborhood, the gardens improve water quality in the region.

“The fact that the city of Detroit needs to demolish thousands of properties turns out to be an opportunity for the city of Detroit to also clean its storm water,” says project leader Joan Nassauer, professor at the University of Michigan School of Natural Resources and Environment.

The landscape architects developed a design that uses gravel to fill the hole left behind when the city demolishes a house. Stormwater flows from the street into the gravel, where it is stored and infiltrated. On top of the gravel, the design uses flowering shrubs and perennials in a neat flowering garden to enhance the neighborhood. The four gardens can manage 1.2 million gallons of storm water each year.

The neighborhood looks brighter, but the benefits go well beyond the block. In Detroit, untreated water from residential toilets flows through the same pipes as rain or storm water to the city’s treatment plant. In downpours, the system can get overwhelmed, and untreated sewage can enter the Rouge River, which flows into the Detroit River, which empties into Lake Erie. By decreasing the amount of street runoff reaching the combined sewer system, the new gardens reduce the chance of untreated sewage overflowing into the waterways.

“Projects like these are going to be extremely important as we move forward in the city,” says Palencia Mobley, deputy director and chief engineer at the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department. “It allows us to use vacant land and make it more productive, while at the same time eradicating blight.” By 2025, predicts Nassauer, there will be “hundreds of gardens.”
TAKING BACK THE STREETS

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA
City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, Knight Foundation, BlueCross BlueShield of North Carolina and Partners for Parks

Through centuries of human existence, everyone used roads—people walked, kids played, neighbors chatted and, of course, vehicles moved. Only over the past 50 to 100 years have the streets in front of our homes been dominated by automobiles. In fact, according to some state laws, pedestrians and bicyclists have the same right to be on the road as cars do.

Charlotte is among the more than 100 communities across the United States that are reviving this tradition with Open Streets celebrations, all of which descend in some way from the Bogotá Ciclovía in Colombia, which debuted in 1976 and is still held every Sunday, enticing nearly 2 million people outdoors to enjoy 75 miles of car-free streets. (See the box at right to read about the smaller-scale but very successful open-streets work in Brownsville, Texas.)

Charlotte-Mecklenberg held its inaugural Open Streets 704 in May 2016. Named for the city’s area code, the four-hour event is also a way for residents to “experience the city together in a way that’s just not possible in a car.” Among those can’t-do-from-a-car experiences are the event activities (ranging from dancing to making crafts to cooking demonstrations) that take place in four interactive zones.

A few years ago, as part of its efforts to make Charlotte walkable every day of the year, the city produced a video and series of humorous posters showing pedestrians of all ages and abilities struggling on sidewalks blocked by trash cans, yard waste, parked cars and poorly placed greenery—comparing their experience to roller derby, 50-meter hurdles and other daunting activities.

About the campaign, the city’s Americans with Disabilities Act coordinator said, “We took a unified approach, showing that when you assist any one group, it helps everyone.”

One of the nation’s most popular open-street gatherings takes place several times a year in Brownsville, Texas, which lies along the U.S.-Mexico border. In 2012, city leaders seeking to address Brownsville’s high rates of poverty, obesity and diabetes found inspiration from the Bogotá Ciclovía and decided to host its own CycloBia. (The unusual spelling is purposeful, to make the word appear more similar to “cycle” and include a B for Brownsville.)

“The program is not just fun and it’s not just about health,” says Rose Gowen, a physician and an elected city commissioner. “Downtown merchants and restaurants along the route have seen substantially higher sales receipts on CycloBia days and nights. They are seeing that people moving down a street on foot or on a bike spend more time noticing their storefronts and sampling what they have to offer than those who whiz by in a car.”

Each Brownsville CycloBia attracts 4,000 to 10,000 people. “Our CycloBia gets people off the couch and out and about and active,” Gowen adds. “It stimulates the economy, it’s fun, and—best of all for the participants—it’s free!”

Brownsville is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities.

The Brownsville CycloBia attracts thousands.
TAKEAWAYS

- People of all ages want to get out and about. But they need good places to go. Greenery, gathering spots, and great outdoor and indoor locations help combat isolation and foster community.

- Details and decorating do matter. Street trees help spruce up commercial streets, and streetlights are often most noticed when they are gone or have burned out. Graffiti needs to be eliminated. Problems need to be identified and then fixed.

- Nature does nurture. Reducing waste reaps rewards. And who would have thought that urban blight could be an opportunity for cleaner water?

CHECK OUT THESE RESOURCES: [AARP.org/livability-factsheets](http://AARP.org/livability-factsheets) and [AARP.org/livable-popup](http://AARP.org/livable-popup)

The AARP Livability Fact Sheets collection consists of 11 easy-to-read, award-winning livability resources that can be used by local leaders, policy makers, citizen activists and others to learn about and explain what makes a city, town or neighborhood a great place for people of all ages. When done right, temporary livability projects can lead to permanent change. The AARP Pop-Up Demonstration Tool Kit explains how.
Community centers equipped with swimming pools help people of all ages stay active and healthy. That’s why pools are even popping up in facilities geared toward only older adults. (Learn where on page 81.)
HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Location matters for real estate values as well as for the overall well-being of individuals and a community. A safe, healthy, livable community enables its residents to achieve and maintain good health, and access the health-related care, services and programs they will need throughout their lives.
Mayor Acquanetta Warren (center) created the Healthy Fontana initiative (which includes the annual “Let’s Move on the Trail” fitness event, pictured) to reduce obesity and obesity-related illnesses in her city.

GET FIT FONTANA
FONTANA, CALIFORNIA
Mayor Acquanetta Warren and the City of Fontana

While attending a meeting with representatives from the local medical center, Acquanetta Warren, then a member of the Fontana City Council, learned that her city had some of the worst rates of obesity and obesity-related illnesses in all of California.

The information had an impact. Concerned about the health of her community as well as her own diet and lifestyle, Warren decided it was time for a change. “It was my desire to bring a program that focuses on our health because without a physically healthy community, we cannot be a healthy city,” she explains. Warren started a campaign against what she dubbed youth “di-obesity,” and in 2004 she officially launched Healthy Fontana, a program focused on nutrition, active living, smart growth and health-enhancing community partnerships.

“The idea is to have the public, businesses, medical facilities and nonprofits collaborating to create a healthy community not only in body, but environmentally and economically,” says Warren, who became Fontana’s mayor in 2010 and was reelected in 2014.

Nutrition and active living are educational components for which city staff visit community centers and teach tasty and fun ways to be healthy. The interactive lessons provide the community with options for how to lead a healthier life through controlling portions, eating a balanced diet and understanding the importance of reading nutrition labels.

The smart growth component is designed to connect the community and make people aware of alternative modes of transportation—such as public transit, bicycle lanes, walking paths—as well as mixed-use zoning. Fontana has a 7-mile walk-bike trail going from its east to west borders, and an 11-mile north-south trail is in the works.

Given that partnerships better enable programs to survive and thrive, the initiative works with nonprofits, local businesses, corporations and government agencies as well as individual residents. Healthy Fontana offers “junior chef” healthy cooking classes and is present in the city’s after-school programs, which include a 60-minute active period in which running, tag games and various sports activities are planned. For adults, there are numerous walking groups, fitness classes, and tobacco-cessation and weight-management programs.

“It takes an entire community coming together with a common goal to enhance lives and achieve results,” says Warren.

Since the inception of Healthy Fontana, the city of 210,000 has seen a reduction in obesity rates and obesity-related illnesses. According to the San Bernardino County Department of Public Health, Fontana had a 47 percent reduction in obesity-related hospitalizations since 2002 and a 46 percent reduction in obesity rates in both children and adults between 2008 and 2012.

Over the years, the Healthy Fontana program has won several awards, including in 2016, when the U.S. Conference of Mayors recognized Fontana as the leader among midsize cities for eliminating childhood obesity.
“We are facing a mental health crisis,” said Chirlane McCray, the wife of New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio. One in five Americans—including her parents and daughter—have experienced depression or some other form of mental illness or substance abuse, she points out. “When Bill became mayor and I became first lady, I knew we had to do everything possible to bring comfort and resources to those who are suffering.”

McCray has done that largely by championing ThriveNYC, a public health initiative launched in November 2015 and led by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. ThriveNYC is providing $850 million in funding over four years for a comprehensive set of mental health programs, including an ambitious effort, in partnership with the National Council on Behavioral Health, to offer free Mental Health First Aid Training to 250,000 people, including first responders such as police officers and firefighters.

The core eight-hour Mental Health First Aid course teaches participants how to identify, understand and respond to people who may be experiencing a mental health problem or crisis. Trainees are armed with a five-step action plan for both crisis and noncrisis situations. A special certification is offered for individuals who regularly interact with 12- to 18-year-olds.

The training for working with adults includes lessons about providing assistance to older adults, veterans and military families, and students at colleges and universities.

The goal is to make on-the-scene first aid for mental-health issues as widely available as conventional first aid, such as CPR. And McCray hopes the work of ThriveNYC will lead people to seek professional help for conditions including anxiety, depression and substance abuse as readily as they now get, say, a flu shot.

Mental Health First Aid was created in Australia in 2001 by Betty Kitchener, a nurse, and Anthony Jorm, a professor and mental health researcher at the University of Melbourne. Since its inception, their program has been adapted for use in many countries, including the United States, which now has roughly 1 million people trained to provide emergency mental health assistance.

New York City is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities.
An economically diverse and geographically vast northern suburb of New York City, Westchester County is home to the award-winning Livable Communities Caregiver Coaching Program, which provides professional training to volunteers who, as “caregiver coaches,” offer one-on-one mentoring and support to family caregivers.

Volunteer caregiving coaches help often-overwhelmed family caregivers understand their options and make informed decisions about caring for an older or disabled loved one in their own or that individual’s home. The coaches become a stabilizing force and sounding board.

The nurses, social workers and geriatric care managers who teach the 12-hour caregiver-coaching curriculum, which the Fordham University Ravazzin Center on Aging developed, are also volunteers. They teach the caregiver coaches about the aging process, the challenges family caregivers face, potential scenarios they might encounter as coaches, common solutions and specific coaching techniques, such as how to convey factual information clearly.

Once trained, the coaches are encouraged to make a one-year commitment to the program and participate in a monthly meeting. Several rules help to protect the safety and privacy of the coach, the caregiver and the care recipient. For example, the family caregiver and the caregiver coach communicate only by telephone, never in person. In addition, the caregiver coach does not go into the family caregiver’s home or meet the care recipient.

As a phone-based service, the program is especially useful for rural areas or situations in which caregivers feel especially isolated. Many people need, or will need, access to no-cost emotional and informational support. To emphasize that reality, the Westchester program often quotes former First Lady Rosalynn Carter: “There are only four kinds of people in the world—those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers and those who will need caregivers.”

Westchester County is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities.
As detailed in the first book of the Where We Live series, when Oklahoma City showed up on a fitness magazine’s list of the nation’s fattest cities, Mayor Mick Cornett challenged himself and his community to lose a combined one million pounds. (Cornett announced the challenge while standing in front of elephants at the Oklahoma City Zoo.)

The city reached its goal of one million pounds lost, but for Cornett that was just the beginning. The weight-loss challenge began a community conversation about obesity and health. The next step, he said, would be about the long term.

As part of that effort, in March 2017 Oklahoma City opened the first of four Senior Health and Wellness Centers designed to “connect Oklahoma City’s seniors with important services, and also with each other.”

Operated by the nonprofit Healthy Living and Fitness, the center that opened in northwestern Oklahoma City provides a facility and programming to improve the physical and emotional wellness of “Oklahoma City adults 50 years and forever.” (The Healthy Living OKC website describes the age eligibility and politely notes, “50 years old is the lower age limit.”) The nearly 40,300-square-foot wellness center features a heated indoor saltwater swimming pool, multiple fitness studios, classroom and conference spaces, an art room, demonstration kitchen, café, billiards room and health care clinic.

A paid monthly membership is required ($30 per person or $50 for two individuals from the same household), and people who live beyond the city limits can join.

The Senior Health and Wellness Centers stem from an Oklahoma citywide $777 million capital-improvement program called MAPS 3, which uses a one-cent, limited-term (April 2010 to December 2017) sales tax to pay for debt-free, quality-of-life improvement projects in Oklahoma City. Voters passed MAPS 3 knowing Senior Health and Wellness Centers would be built as a part of the program.

“With the opening of this senior center, Oklahoma City is becoming a better and more livable community,” Mayor Cornett said about the wellness center’s ribbon-cutting ceremony. “There’s no question this MAPS 3 project will help improve the health and wellness of the people over 50 who live in and around the area. This is a great investment in our residents.”

Oklahoma City leaders joined Mayor Mick Cornett (third from right) to celebrate the opening of a health and wellness center for “adults 50 years and forever.”
Although white sand beaches and warm ocean breezes are prized perks to live near at every age and life stage, Honolulu makes the Where We Live cut because of the work being done to ensure that its older residents can live healthy, active, independent lives.
With its perfect weather, beautiful surroundings and access to the freshest possible pineapple, Hawaii has a lot going for it health-wise. The state leads the nation in longevity and its residents have the longest healthy life expectancy. A typical 65-year-old in Hawaii can expect to live another 16.2 years in good health.

But the state's population, and specifically that of its capital, Honolulu, is aging at a rate faster than that of the overall United States. In 2030, 24 percent of Hawaii's population will be age 65 or older, compared to 21 percent nationally. In Honolulu, 27 percent of residents will be 65 years and older by 2040.

To ensure that its older citizens can live healthy, active, independent lives, Honolulu joined the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities in March 2013 and is working on implementing an age-friendly action plan.

“As an age-friendly city, safety and quality of life will improve for all, from keiki to kūpuna,” said Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell, referring to both younger generations and older adults.

Honolulu is implementing its age-friendly work with the help of partners in government, nonprofits, foundations, the private sector and academia. The Kaiser Permanente Community Benefit has provided $151,000 to the effort because it “recognizes that a healthy community is vital to the health of the whole person, so age-friendly work is a natural extension of our integrated care model,” said Mary Ann Barnes, R.N., regional president of Kaiser Permanente Hawaii. Other funders have signed on too, including Thrive, Hawaii Pacific University, the City and County of Honolulu, AARP Hawaii, Alexander & Baldwin, Inc., Gentry Homes, Hawaiian Electric Industries Inc., Ward Village and others.

Age-Friendly Honolulu's goals address housing, transportation, civic participation and employment, outdoor spaces and buildings, communications and social involvement, and community support and health services, for which the action plan's vision statement reads:

“We envision a community and health care system that is prepared for the growing needs of a rapidly aging population. The health of our citizens is of highest priority. Our community will promote healthy behaviors and active lives for persons of all ages. Guided by people’s preferences, need for affordability, and the direction of local and federal policies, our health care system will integrate community support and health services that offer a full continuum of care for people to ‘age in place.’”

Honolulu is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities
A GUIDE TO HEALTHY AGING
LITTLETON, COLORADO
City of Littleton

Nearly 40 percent of the people living in Littleton, Colorado, are age 50 or older, making its population among the oldest in the surrounding metro Denver area. Although counties rather than the cities in the region typically handle human services, Littleton felt it needed to help connect its older residents to the resources the community had to offer.

“The Aging Well Resource Center is structured to be a navigation service,” explains Phil Cernanec, the former mayor of Littleton and a member of its city council. “Some folks are still challenged by electronic searching and coordination.”

Occupying a small office in Littleton’s public library, the resource center is a place where older residents and caregivers can either drop in or schedule an appointment with a staff member who can help identify and prioritize needs, and then discuss the available community resources.

Information and assistance is available about food and nutrition, health and health care, utilities, housing, education, recreation, senior advocacy, employment, in-home care, home repair, Medicare, Medicaid, transportation, volunteer opportunities, veteran benefits, Social Security and caregiver support—and this is only a partial list.

Linda Haley, a manager of housing, community development and senior resources for Arapahoe County, is a fan of the free service and its setting: “Placing the center in a comfortable, familiar location that lots of people already visit is very important.”

Kay Wilmesher of the Aging Well Resource Center meets with client David Pirnack.

BUILDING A HERITAGE OF HEALTH
HORTON, KANSAS
Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas

While discussing the health problems that challenge the Kickapoo Tribe—including diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity—Fred Thomas, the tribe’s vice chairman and tribal administrator, repeatedly refers to the traditions and heritage of his people.

Take tobacco, for example. He maintains that health problems that arise from smoking are because members of the tribe fail to pay proper respect to tobacco, which holds an important place in ceremonial life. In addition, the smokers are setting a bad example for the next generation.

“If you have a good, healthy life,” Thomas says, “you’ll become a role model for the unborn future.” Several Tribal Health Initiatives expand on that theme. At a community garden, older people educate young people about food, farming traditions and “the reproduction of life itself.” It’s also a place to celebrate the benefits of hard, dirty work.

“When I was a child, you had to pull weeds,” Thomas says. “If you take care of life, it’s going to take care of you.” The crops raised in the garden are a welcome addition to the diets of families on the reservation. Another healthy initiative provides tribal employees with weekly paid time off to exercise.

Some of that activity takes place on safe and attractive walking trails mowed into the prairie. One path connects to the sovereign nation’s veterans’ park and goes past the powwow grounds. Beyond providing enjoyable exercise, the route is designed to funnel pedestrians away from traffic on a busy roadway.

Helping provide guidance for these initiatives is Dr. Jamie Jacobsen, a Native American physician who practices in the reservation’s health clinic. She has gained her patients’ trust and confidence, and her presence has helped many become more aware of their health status. Dr. Jacobsen finds ways to encourage everyone toward healthy eating and exercise goals.
Residents of Alexandria—a city of 11,000 that Mayor Sara Carlson declares “is easy to get to, yet hard to leave”—enjoy hundreds of lakes, lots of fine dining, antiques shopping and a vibe that embraces rest and relaxation.

Vital Living Alexandria (VLA) was launched in 2013 with a goal of making life even better for older adults who live in and around the city. It was one of four Wellness 50+ pilot programs in Minnesota created by the Vital Aging Network, a nonprofit that promotes self-determination, civic engagement and personal growth for people as they age. Nearly 45 percent of Alexandria’s residents are 45 or older.

To empower older adults to “build their own playbook for aging well,” VLA adopted health and wellness strategies developed by the National Council on Aging. As part of the effort, participants are encouraged to make and maintain small but meaningful changes in such areas as physical activity, sleep, healthy eating and hydration, financial fitness and medication management.

“They don’t have to be marathon runners,” VLA volunteer Ann Clayton told the Echo Press, “but they do have to work on strength, flexibility and balance.”

VLA has also partnered with the community-education division of the local public school system to offer workshops and discussions including “Community Equals Care” and “Aging with Gusto,” the latter a three-session workshop that invites people to explore how they feel about growing older or about their loved ones getting older, and how they “can better prepare for the inevitable.”

That may sound like a bummer of a class, but as the National Council on Aging points out, “Aging has changed remarkably since the last generation entered into retirement. … The result is that most older adults are unprepared for this new stage of life.”

Participating in activities such as fitness classes and educational programs “encourages aging mastery—developing sustainable behaviors across many dimensions that lead to improved health, stronger economic security, enhanced well-being and increased societal participation.”

Alexandria is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities.
MORE THAN A FOOD BANK

SHAWNEE, OKLAHOMA

Community Market of Pottawatomie County, the City of Shawnee and community partners

Located in the heart of Oklahoma, Pottawatomie County has a population of 75,000, and nearly half of them live in Shawnee, the county seat.

In a 2014 AARP-commissioned study, almost half the residents surveyed reported that “they or someone in their household has experienced food insecurity,” and two-thirds said someone close to them (such as a neighbor or friend) has experienced the problem.

The revelation spurred the community to respond in a way that upends traditional approaches to feeding those in need. The Community Market of Pottawatomie County has been open since July 2016, and in its first ten months provided 1.4 million pounds of food, helping some 1,800 families each month.

The Shawnee-based facility is intentionally called a market, not a food bank or pantry. People using the market shop as if it’s a grocery store, explains Daniel Matthews, the market’s executive director: “They have total choice. The only difference is that they don’t pay at the end.”

The design and management of the market seeks to remove the “stigma of the handout,” he says. The food comes to the market from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s commodities program, the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma and local grocery stores, as well as the 7,000-square-foot garden in the market’s parking lot. The emphasis is on healthy and fresh food; the market provides tons of produce.

But unlike a typical grocery store, the market also connects people with financial literacy advice, substance abuse counseling and job assistance through initiatives including the Senior Community Service Employment Program. To introduce or enhance food prep and culinary skills, the market offers cooking classes in an on-site kitchen and distributes healthy recipes.

Among the market’s founders and partners: Community Renewal of Pottawatomie County (We help neighbors restore community through intentional relationships), Avedis Foundation (We’re here for good), Gordon Cooper Technology Center, the Oklahoma State University’s Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service and AARP Oklahoma.

“Our focus is not just on feeding the line,” says Matthews. “It’s on shortening the line to create more self-sufficiency.” His particular passion is helping the area’s children and seniors: “Every kid deserves a chance, none should go to bed hungry, and our seniors deserve our honor and respect, and to live out their days with dignity after giving so much to us as our parents and grandparents.”

Clients shop at the market as they would at a grocery store—the only difference is they don’t pay at the end.
The Old Pueblo, as Tucson has been known since sometime in the 1800s, has a new appellation: City of Gastronomy. In 2015, Tucson became the first community in the United States to earn that coveted designation from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), thanks in no small measure to the fact that the city has the longest agricultural history in North America, stretching back more than 4,000 years. (For example, members of the Tohono O’odham nation still harvest cholla buds from the buckthorn cactuses that grow in their community of San Xavier and sell them from a store on their 820-acre cooperative farm in Tucson.)

By becoming part of UNESCO’s Creative Cities Network, launched in 2004 to promote sustainable urban development, Tucson joins more than 100 cities around the world in the creative fields of crafts and folk art, design, film, gastronomy, literature, media arts and music. Tucson’s exotic Spanish-Indian past, in fact, has a lot to do with its modern standing as a culinary capital. Descendants of fruit trees introduced in the 1690s by a Jesuit missionary who worked with the Tohono O’odham yield figs, peaches, quinces, olives and pomegranates. Ancient foods from the desert—agave, amaranth, cactus pads, mesquite pods, and tiny wild pepper chile tepin—are in greater demand than ever before. And Tucson is home to Native Seeds/SEARCH, a nonprofit that conserves and distributes heirloom seeds. Even the Pima County Public Library offers seeds that patrons can grow and plant at home.

“We are serving as a nursery grounds for new innovations, not merely for preserving our food heritage,” says Gary Paul Nabhan, an agro-ecologist and a food writer—and the endowed chair in food and water security at the University of Arizona’s Southwest Center who initiated Tucson’s application for the UNESCO designation. The innovations Nabhan cites are happening in restaurants, food trucks and numerous food fairs, festivals and farmers’ markets that welcome community-garden growers as well as artisanal producers of heritage foods.

The waste-not ethic is visible everywhere. Students at the University of Arizona who call themselves the “Compost Cats” collect food waste on campus and from dozens of nearby businesses to convert into compost.

Refugees affiliated with the nonprofit Iskashitaa Refugee Network recover more than 100,000 pounds of edible fruit and other produce every year from trees in boulevard medians and from the yards of residents and businesses unable to pick their own citrus, pomegranates and dates.

Tucson Mayor Jonathan Rothschild sees the UNESCO designation as “an opportunity for Tucson’s chefs, farmers and ranchers, as well as our businesses, academic institutions and nonprofits, to be represented on the world stage.”

Tucson is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities
For too long, too many residents of Sioux Falls turned up their noses at sweet peas, succulent pears and even the slenderest stalks of asparagus. In a 2009 survey, the metro area’s residents had the worst rates of fruit and vegetable consumption in the United States.

Live Well Sioux Falls—particularly its Eat Well, Live Well program—is changing the way Sioux Falls shops, cooks and eats. In fact, there was a day in April 2016 when “a local store actually sold out of asparagus!” reports Mary Michaels, Eat Well, Live Well Sioux Falls’ public health prevention coordinator.

Eating asparagus is a tangible achievement for a city where, according to a 2015 community health assessment, two out of three residents reported being overweight or obese. When asked the number of servings of vegetables, fruits and fruit juices they had consumed during the prior day, 17.2 percent answered none. Meanwhile, nearly 50 percent of all Americans suffer from chronic health conditions that are largely preventable through better nutrition and healthier habits, notes Michaels.

Led by the City of Sioux Falls Health Department, the Eat Well, Live Well initiative focuses on educating residents, but it relies on partners including the city’s hospitals, community organizers, restaurateurs and grocers.

Each month, Eat Well, Live Well chooses one seasonally appropriate vegetable or fruit—such as winter spinach in January or summery peas in July—and asks a local chef to develop an easy-to-make showcase recipe.

In October 2016, the offering was apple nachos, an invention of Scott Teal, executive retail chef for Sioux Falls’ Empire Hy-Vee supermarket. (Teal’s recipe calls for slicing apples, drizzling them with a sauce of microwave-warmed honey, water and peanut butter, and topping with a sprinkle of granola.)

Recipe cards are shared at stores, in workplaces, at places of worship, on Facebook and also directly among the community’s WIC and SNAP (formerly known as food stamp) recipients. In 2015, Live Well Sioux Falls printed about 1,000 recipes each month. By early 2017, they had to triple that number.

Additionally, Eat Well, Live Well uses a program called Pick it! Try It! Like It!, with information provided by South Dakota State University’s agricultural extension offices. (Pro tips: Pick apples with smooth skin, and try slicing and baking them into apple chips.) Other free services and activities include grocery store tours that are aimed at low-income residents, including recent immigrants and refugees. The curriculum includes guidance on reading nutritional labels, comparing prices, and buying from all four food groups—including, of course, fruits and veggies.
HEALTH AND WELLNESS

TAKING A LONG WALK FOR WELLNESS
WICHITA, KANSAS

Mayor Jeff Longwell

On the last Wednesday of the month, Jeff Longwell, Wichita’s mayor since 2015, typically goes for an hour-long walk. All are invited to join. The outing, dubbed Walk-a-Longwell, is part fitness, part focus group. “We want people to be healthier,” Longwell says. “It’s also a good way for me to chat with the public and a great opportunity for everyone to see our beautiful downtown.”

While Longwell acknowledges the monthly walks aren’t enough to tackle the obesity problem in Sedgwick County (28 percent of adults are obese, and another 36 percent are overweight), he says it’s a good way to start. Longwell has been encouraging employers in and around Wichita to sponsor their own monthly walks and to promote other fitness activities and programs for their workers.

The Walk-a-Longwell effort comes on the heels of the Wichita City Council’s approval of $1.6 million in projects to expand the city’s network of bicycle and walking paths. The paths are an avenue to both physical wellness and emotional happiness. “We’ve seen reports that walking is the number one priority that people want to do for a leisure activity,” Longwell notes. “And we want to provide safe, pleasurable places for them to walk.”

CHEF SANAA ABOUREZK’S SAUTÉED ASPARAGUS & RICE

The owner-operator of Sanaa’s 8th Street Gourmet, a popular Middle Eastern restaurant in Sioux Falls, has published three cookbooks and competed on Food Network’s Beat Bobby Flay. This was her contribution to Pick It! Try It! Like It!

1 pound fresh asparagus
¼ cup olive oil
1 red pepper, chopped
½ cup chopped onion
¼ cup diced carrot
1 garlic clove, minced
½ teaspoon grated fresh ginger
½ teaspoon turmeric
2½ cups water
Salt
1 cup basmati rice

Cut the asparagus into 1-inch pieces. Discard the tough ends. Heat the olive oil in a pot and sauté asparagus for one minute, then remove the asparagus and set aside. Add the red pepper, onion and carrot to the pot and cook over medium heat for 3 to 4 minutes. Add the garlic, ginger and turmeric and stir until well mixed. Add water to the vegetables and salt to taste. Bring to a boil, add the rice, stir and leave on a low heat to simmer for 20 minutes. To serve, spoon the cooked rice and vegetables into a bowl and top with asparagus.

Wichita residents can join Mayor Jeff Longwell (in suit jacket) for a monthly walk and talk.
In 2013 the City of Santa Monica set out to measure, with as much precision as possible, the well-being of its more than 90,000 residents. How healthy were they? How were they doing economically? Did they have a strong sense of community and connection? Did the environment and their physical and social place in that environment help or hamper the people who live there?

“It sounded simple,” recalls Julie Rusk, the City of Santa Monica staffer who has steered its Wellbeing Project from the get-go. “We’ll measure what matters most: how people are doing. And then we’ll use that information to guide our work. There was just one thing: No one had ever done it before.”

Teaming up with Bloomberg Philanthropies, researchers from the RAND Corporation and the UK-based New Economics Foundation, the city defined six categories that reflect the well-being of Santa Monica and its residents (see the box at right). Then it set about targeting the city’s resources, policies and programs to drive measurable improvements in each area.

A case in point: Researchers discovered that fruit and vegetable consumption was markedly lower in an area of Santa Monica with a high concentration of residents eligible for SNAP benefits (formerly food stamps) who were not enrolled, and also found these residents were unlikely to take advantage of the nearby farmers’ market because they thought it was too expensive. So the Wellbeing Project arranged for the county to staff a booth at a popular neighborhood park once a week to sign up people for SNAP and let them know that, thanks to a special city program, their SNAP funds double in value when used at the farmers’ market.

From a statistical standpoint, few stones were left unturned. In addition to asking a great deal of questions, researchers for the Wellbeing Project analyze social media data (such as Twitter posts and Foursquare check-ins) to gain information about, for example, how the community is using the parks and other recreational facilities and participating in community activities.

Because the Wellbeing Project pinpoints where things are going well and where attention is needed, the data helps city agencies respond strategically, says Rusk, and develop targeted solutions to specific challenges. Thanks to the city’s open-data platforms, all the Wellbeing Project data is available to others for exploration and analysis.

Indeed, Rusk hopes to create a nationwide network of well-being projects that can learn from one another. She might not have to wait long. Her team has already heard from more than 30 cities interested in replicating Santa Monica’s success.

Data from the Wellbeing Project helped connect food-insecure residents with nearby farmers’ markets.

PROVIDING HELP EXACTLY WHERE IT’S NEEDED
SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA
City of Santa Monica

In 2013 the City of Santa Monica set out to measure, with as much precision as possible, the well-being of its more than 90,000 residents.

Data from the Wellbeing Project helped connect food-insecure residents with nearby farmers’ markets.

CATEGORIES FOR DETERMINING WELL-BEING

1. Outlook
2. Place
3. Health
4. Economic Opportunity
5. Learning
6. Community
An estimated 1,500 people over age 65 in Tempe, Arizona, have dementia. The city’s mayor, Mark Mitchell, openly discusses how Alzheimer’s has touched his family with the diagnosis of his mother.

The number of people experiencing some form of dementia is increasing at a rapid rate across the nation and in Arizona, where the Alzheimer’s Association projects increases of 44.2 to 71.9 percent between 2015 and 2025. By the year 2050, an estimated 15 million individuals nationwide will have dementia.

Tempe and communities throughout the United States realize that residents with dementia need increased services and supports, as do the family members who care for them. Membership in the Dementia Friendly America network is one way a town, city or other community can engage in the issue in a guided way with peer support. Tempe is among several communities nationwide that are implementing the Dementia Friendly America program, which is based on the successful efforts of more than three dozen Minnesota communities.

“The goal of the Dementia Friendly movement is really to prove that we are a community, and that we are not powerless as a community,” said Mayor Mitchell at the Dementia Friendly Tempe kickoff summit in 2016.

Becoming dementia-friendly is truly a community-wide effort, and membership is a community responsibility. The roadmap involves a multistep process with outreach to local caregivers, the business community, service providers, faith leaders, health care professionals, city staff and the public at large.

Among the many features of a dementia-friendly community is that first responders are trained how to interact with people who have memory impairment (and are thus forgetful and often confused) or have significant memory loss (which means they are essentially living in the past and don’t retain much of the present).

The community is provided with information about how to be of assistance—such as if someone with dementia is lost or behaving anxiously in public—and how to access resources and help if dementia impacts their own households.

For example, the Tempe Public Library hosts a weekly Memory Café, which it describes as a “comfortable, safe and engaging place for people living with memory loss along with their care partners to meet with others in a like situation.” A health care professional is present at each café event. Residents are encouraged to drop in, grab a cup of coffee and take some time to simply visit, sit for a bit and talk.

(AARP is a founding partner of Dementia Friendly America. Learn more at dfamerica.org).
“Parts of Newport include food deserts where it’s hard for some residents in the more challenging neighborhoods to get nutritious and affordable ingredients for meals,” Patricia Sears, a Newport community advocate and economic development specialist, told AARP.

Unemployment in Newport (population: 4,500) is among the highest in the state, and one in four residents of the very remote community is age 65 or older. That is why, as then head of the Newport City Renaissance Corporation and president of AARP Vermont, Sears helped create the Fresh Start Community Farm.

In another food desert, some 1,300 miles to the south in Birmingham’s very low-income West End, Ama Shambulia, a chef and the director of wellness for Urban Ministry, transformed a cast-off city lot into a working organic garden called WE Community Gardens. “We provide resources and information about sustainable gardening and natural food preparation to increase the health and well-being of a community overwhelmingly challenged by food insecurity and the lack of healthier food choices,” states the website for Urban Ministry, which is an inner-city ministry of the United Methodist Church in Birmingham that offers all of its programs “on a completely non-sectarian basis.”

The Fresh Start Community Farm gardening project started in the spring of 2011. Instead of offering individual garden plots, a board and a group of garden managers coordinate multiple garden sites (one on the lawn of a local business) and choose plantings based on what will grow best in each location. Some of the sites were able to incorporate requests from neighbors, including safe places for children to play. A community grant from AARP Vermont was used to add raised planting beds, which enable people to garden without bending or getting down onto the ground.

Volunteers keep a record of their time. The gardens are harvested weekly during the three-month growing season, and volunteers receive shares of weekly harvests. Any of the leftover harvest is donated to community food shelves, local Meals on Wheels, schools and other community organizations in need.

“While younger people do the manual labor, like the digging and weeding, older people grow the seeds in their homes over the winter and instruct the kids on how to care for the plants,” says Sears, noting that many of the older adults had grown up on farms. “A pride has developed in the neighborhood, and the people are taking care of one another.”

In Birmingham, WE Community Gardens, founded in 2008, lives out its mission of “Growing Food, Growing Community” by training and employing young people from the community, providing support for local gardens, and hosting events and gardening classes (sometimes with AARP Alabama). The produce grown is sold at local farmers’ markets, and produce baskets are given to seniors and others in need of extra help. Urban Ministry also runs the WE Community Café. Open once a week, lunch is prepared by Chef Ama, an instructor and the young workforce. All are invited to visit and dine on a pay-as-you-can basis.

Newport and Birmingham are members of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities.
TAKEAWAYS

▸ Local leaders are taking the lead. They haven’t traditionally been fitness coaches, but many today are doing just that. They know that a community made up of fit, healthy people is a more productive place for everyone.

▸ Hunger is happening in many places. Food insecurity is a growing problem. Looking at data, asking questions and being a good listener are ways to ensure that residents can find the food they need.

▸ Caregivers need care too. Individual residents can offer insights and information. The community can collectively be of help.

CHECK OUT THIS RESOURCE: AARP.org/livabilityindex
The AARP Livability Index can provide location-specific data (go ahead, type in an address) about seven categories, including health. Learn how to answer the question “How livable is your community?”
“This ride is for everyone,” declare the hosts of Le Tour de Ham, a “slow biking” group in Birmingham, Alabama. “No spandex or fancy bike required. We travel 10 miles in a basically flat ride.” (Learn more on page 100.)
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Local leaders and residents who work together foster respect and achieve results. Activities that are welcoming to all—young, older and in between—enable neighbors to learn from one another, honor what each has to offer and feel valued and proud about themselves and where they live.
“Courageous conversations and honesty are the drivers for community betterment,” says Waterloo Mayor Quentin Hart, discussing Reaching for Respect: Our Police, Our Partners, a 2016 event in which police officers and citizens confronted one another onstage in order to avoid conflicts in real life.

The city has experienced tension between community members, particularly African Americans, and the predominantly white police force. (Waterloo has a larger African-American population—about 15 percent of the city’s 68,000 residents—than any other community in Iowa.) In the weeks before the Reaching for Respect gathering, the city had paid out settlements in two police abuse cases, and an editorial in The Des Moines Register criticized the Waterloo Police Department’s conduct. Experts on community policing and diversity training had also visited Waterloo to work with the police.

While onstage at the Reaching for Respect event, which took place at a local church, resident Carah Mabry pretended to be a teenager driving a car filled with rowdy friends.

When Waterloo Police Sergeant Shawn Monroe pulls her over, Mabry refuses to provide her ID and films the encounter on her cell phone. In the skit, Monroe places her under arrest, which he could do because by law, drivers suspected of criminal or dangerous behavior must show their ID to police when asked. Mabry didn’t know that.

“I did a scenario that is real,” Mabry said. “It happens every single day.” The role-playing and ensuing discussion were helpful, she said. “We need more interaction with the community and law enforcement. This is my community, my home, and I know if I want to see something changed, I have to get involved.”

Mayor Hart, who is African American, observed that all present at the workshop likely received some feedback they didn’t want to hear, but that was part of the point. “When we engage, when we work together, we will move forward together at amazing speeds for change,” he said. “It’s about reaching for respect.”
EXTENDING AN OPEN INVITATION TO A NEIGHBORLY WALK
PORTLAND, OREGON
City of Portland, AARP Oregon and Oregon Walks

To get more people walking on a daily basis—to benefit their health and help the environment—AARP Oregon, Portland’s Bureau of Transportation and the nonprofit advocacy organization Oregon Walks have teamed up to create a free intergenerational walking tour program called NeighborWalks.

Another equally important program goal is to encourage neighbors to meet one another and introduce Portlanders to parts of the city they might not know.

The walks, each of which is led by a volunteer, occur from May through September, begin at 10 a.m., last from two to two-and-a-half hours and typically cover anywhere from 1.5 to 2.5 miles (or, translated for fitness trackers, anywhere from 3,000 to 5,000 steps). Many of the walks are also suitable for people who use wheelchairs or motorized scooters.

Launched in 2015, the NeighborWalks outings are growing in popularity. More than 500 people joined the program’s seven walks during its debut year. In 2016, the participant count topped 750 people for 10 walks.

Among the dozen offerings for the 2017 season: a walk of Portland’s Upper Alphabet District, which is described in the NeighborWalks brochure as an invitation to

“Get to know the ABCs of the historic Alphabet District and learn about Portland’s founding fathers for which the streets are named. Check out old historic homes and new structures reflecting Portland’s architectural diversity.”

After the walk, participants are welcome to stick around for a social hour at a local eatery.

The walks are so welcoming and casual that no registration is required. Says Bandana Shrestha, director of community engagement for AARP Oregon: “We want people to just show up and join us as we walk and celebrate how great Portland is for people of all ages and abilities.”

Portland is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities

Bandana Shrestha (left) of AARP Oregon leads Portlanders with two feet and four on a neighborhood walking tour.
CREATING A MORE POSITIVE COMMUNITY
REHOBOTH BEACH, DELAWARE
CAMP Rehoboth and the Rehoboth Beach Police Department

Although the year-round population of Rehoboth Beach—a one-square-mile city on the Atlantic coast—is fewer than 1,400 people, summer brings an explosion of vacationers, part-time residents, weekenders, renters and day-trippers, many of whom are LGBT.

In 1991, not long after moving to Rehoboth, Steve Elkins met with incoming Police Chief Creig Doyle about a series of attacks on LGBT people at the start of beach season. Elkins, now executive director of the gay and lesbian community-service group CAMP (Creating A More Positive) Rehoboth, describes the 1980s and early ’90s as a tense time in town.

Many homeowners who were angered by the increasing presence of LGBT people favored a bumper sticker that declared, “Keep Rehoboth a Family Town,” Elkins recalls. The city’s outspoken mayor, John Hughes, agreed. The seasonal officers the town hired to help manage the beach crowds were wary of the LGBT community, and the feeling was mutual.

With guidance from Elkins, Doyle launched a specialized training program for the largely young and inexperienced summer officers. At first he hired consultants to educate the force about hate crimes, cultural diversity, sexual orientation and identity, and the need to be respectful toward all people reporting incidents.

But after a few summers of the consultant-led workshops, Doyle asked Elkins to take over the training. (“Why am I paying other people to do it?” Elkins remembers Doyle joking.) Hence, the creation of CAMP Rehoboth Sensitivity Training for seasonal police officers.

Fast-forward two decades: Elkins is still leading the CAMP Rehoboth trainings. “When we ask the group the standard question, which is whether they know someone who happens to be gay or lesbian, two raise their hands and say they are gay,” says Elkins. “And another officer says he’s not gay but he has two mothers. It’s gone from a fear of us demanding something from them to a mutual goal of helping everyone feel welcome.”

Another benefit of mutual kindness and respect is that the comfortably air-conditioned CAMP Rehoboth Community Center is one short block from the often-sweltering beach. The seasonal officers are welcome to pop in and cool off during breaks and to grab free bottles of water as needed.

Another change with time: A decade after helping fuel antigay fervor, the mayor who praised the divisive pro-family bumper sticker told a reporter that his views had changed. A better bumper sticker, he said, would read “Keep Rehoboth a Diverse Town.”

Spouses Steve Elkins (left) and Murray Archibald founded the CAMP Rehoboth Community Center.
Forget personal jet packs and flying cars. When San Francisco residents dream about the future of transportation, they see new subway lines—thanks to a 2015 ordinance, passed unanimously by the Board of Supervisors, that requires the city to develop a framework for subway expansion.

The developing Subway Vision plan, which multiagency Connect SF is coordinating, is part of a broader commitment by city leaders to meet the transportation needs of the San Francisco area, which is among the fastest-growing places in the United States.

“In the 1970s, we opened BART and the Market Street Subway,” Supervisor Scott Wiener told the city’s transportation committee in 2016. “Rather than follow those two visionary achievements with continued subway construction, however, we simply patted ourselves on the back and stopped. We need to move forward.”

Because the city has committed to a collaborative process, starting in August 2016, San Franciscans were encouraged to draw so-called Dream Maps of their desired future subway lines by using a mapping tool that was available online and in pop-up booths throughout the city. More than 2,600 ideas were submitted—over 25 percent in languages other than English—and then charted in heat maps that illustrated residents’ desires to expand the service eastward and southward.

Connect SF is using that community input to plan subway routes that could move tens of thousands of people a day. And actually moving is key. In San Francisco, the average driver wasted 83 hours in traffic during 2016, according to transportation analysts. Only drivers in New York City and Los Angeles had it worse.

San Francisco is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities

San Francisco residents are helping plan expansions to the city’s subway system.
A RIDE FOR EVERYONE
BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA
Residents Stan Palla and Veronique Vanblaere

Described by its organizers as a “social bicycle ride for the sheer fun of it,” Le Tour de Ham is a cycling outing for people of all ages. “All bicycles and abilities welcome. No spandex required.”

A relatively slow biking group that travels at speeds of 10 to 12 mph at most, the biweekly bicycle ride does a 10-mile, largely flat loop around Birmingham and promises not to leave any rider behind. Tuesdays the cyclists gather at 6 p.m. and wheels are rolling by 6:15. Saturday mornings’ slower, beginner-paced ride meets at 10 a.m. and sets off at 10:30.

As an “unsanctioned and unsupported event,” states the tour’s Meetup page, participants ride at their own risk and are expected to come equipped with water, a spare tire tube, lights and a safely functional bike. The ride ends with food, drinks and fun at a local eatery, often with discounts for the Tour de Hammers.

This widely known and celebrated event was created in 2012 by friends Stan Palla and Veronique Vanblaere. Palla imagined the ride as a way to bring people together, especially bicyclists and artists. He didn’t expect that families, retirees and all sorts of locals and even tourists would join the fun.

“At first three people, four people would show up. Six at the most,” Vanblaere told a reporter. “And then one day we were at 150.” As Le Tour de Ham’s Facebook page declares, “Invite your friends.”

Birmingham is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities

ASK, LISTEN, TALK, DO
FRANKLIN, NEW HAMPSHIRE
City of Franklin and the University of New Hampshire

Like many communities in rural New England, the riverfront City of Franklin, once a thriving mill town, has been experiencing the challenges of a struggling downtown, an aging population and, for almost one-quarter of its residents, poverty.

In the spring of 2015, the city’s leaders, in partnership with the state university and others, hosted a three-day workshop called Franklin for a Lifetime. In welcoming the attendees—a mix of Franklin residents and invited experts—Mayor Ken Merrifield said, “In this workshop, we will think about ‘What could Franklin do to attract businesses, workers and their families?’
as well as “What could Franklin consider in order to support its citizens who wish to stay with us as they grow older?”

As preparation for the workshop, a steering committee engaged 119 community members (among Franklin’s nearly 8,500 residents) through storytelling groups, a children’s artwork project, one-on-one interviews and focus groups. Residents praised Franklin for being a community where people help one another. The challenges focused on the downtown’s limited selection of stores and eateries, a lack of transportation options, inadequate housing and a need for more communication about local activities and issues.

The workshop resulted in five key action areas for Franklin: marketing, community events, housing, civic life, and arts and culture.

At the one-year anniversary of the workshop, a gathering was held to celebrate the achievements to date, including renovating the abandoned Riverbend Mill compound into affordable housing.

In its article about the community’s progress, the Citizens’ Institute on Rural Design, which helped lead the workshop, declared: “By creating vibrant public green spaces, diversifying amenities and businesses downtown, and expanding housing options, particularly for the older residents, Franklin is effectively planning for an aging population, while increasing livability and sense of place for all residents.”

ASKING TAXPAYERS HOW TO SPEND THEIR MONEY
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA
Mayor Sam Liccardo and Council Member Raul Peralez

Municipal budgeting—yawn, right? Not in San Jose, California, where residents of the city’s District 3 have embraced a collaborative version that puts the typically top-down process into the hands of citizens.

“It seems like budgeting and spending is usually done in a black box that we don’t have eyes on,” says San Jose neighborhood leader and AARP member Bert Weaver. “But with this kind of participatory budgeting, we really got a close view of what we would spend on.”

The process kicked off in 2015 with the allocation of $100,000 by San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo and Council Member Raul Peralez to a pilot project called D3 Decides. It ended in May 2016 with the city’s commitment to pay for eight projects that voters selected, including upgrading lighting on pedestrian paths ($36,000), paying artists to transform utility boxes into works of art ($19,250) and installing soccer nets in parks ($600).

Over six months, residents engaged directly in a democratic practice that is credited as beginning almost 30 years ago in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, where as many as 50,000 people a year have shaped as much as 21 percent of the city’s budget. Today, participatory budgeting has spread to more than 1,500 cities worldwide. The process typically works like this:

Step 1: Brainstorm ideas through civic meetings and online tools.

Step 2: Take those ideas and develop them into feasible proposals.

Step 3: Vote!

In San Jose, residents generated more than 150 ideas in 2015, ranging from tree pruning to installing tether-ball stations. Then, a group of 18 budget delegates, including Weaver, researched those ideas and narrowed them down to a list of 27 that could be implemented on city property with public funds. All District 3 residents over the age of 15 were given an opportunity to vote, either online or in person at various locations. In the end, more than 500 residents had their voices heard.

San Jose’s venture into participatory budgeting “demonstrates how embracing ideas that come directly from our neighborhood advocates can help us improve our city with modest public funds,” said Mayor Liccardo.

In fact, the process went so well that District 3 residents were later asked another question: “How would you spend $250,000?” The answers ranged from self-cleaning park toilets to solar-powered cell-phone charging stations.

San Jose is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities
IN PRAISE OF POP-UPS AND POPSICLES
SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA
City of Saint Paul and artist Amanda Lovelee of Public Art Saint Paul

As one of two artists-in-residence for Saint Paul's city government, Amanda Lovelee remembers the exact moment she realized the standard community-meeting model wasn't going to work.

It was 7 p.m., and Lovelee had arrived for a meeting in the basement of a nursing home. She was excited about sharing plans for a redesigned neighborhood playground. “Seven or eight people showed up,” she recalls.

Those few attendees were the voice of the community that night, Lovelee says, while many others—like those who work evenings, couldn’t find or afford a sitter, or were unsure about stepping inside a strange place—were left out of the conversation.

Lovelee’s solution: Pop Up Meetings. After receiving permission from the city’s director of public works, she secured a city vehicle, painted it orange and drove it to parks, festivals and other public places, bringing city staff and sometimes even Mayor Chris Coleman with her. Instead of expecting residents to show up at a location that the city government selects, the Pop Up Meeting takes city officials to where the people are.

To encourage public participation, the traveling roadshow gives away mint-lemonade ice pops that a local business donated. (A sign reading “Ask us how to get a FREE St. Pop” helps start the conversations.) “It’s very different than standing in front of people with a PowerPoint,” says Lovelee.

Mayor Coleman praised the pop-ups for getting city staff in touch with “folks who normally aren’t going to be at the chamber of commerce breakfast,” he says, “people who don’t feel like they’ve been included so far.”

During the summer of 2016, the second year of the pop-up meetings, more than 1,600 people filled out surveys about what they would like to see in their communities. Almost 70 percent had never before attended a public meeting.

Pop Up Meetings have become key in Saint Paul’s community-engagement toolbox. When city staffers were seeking ideas for a new comprehensive plan, the mobile meeting vehicle showed up during a summerlong series of neighborhood barbecues sponsored by the police department and held at city parks and recreation centers. The Pop Up Meeting team also appeared at a winter solstice festival. In a nod to the season, rather than ice pops, hot cider and s’mores were served.
A city police department’s Facebook page may seem an unlikely place for funny stories about snowstorms and empathy for tourists, never mind outstanding writing. But through posts, photos and videos, @BangorMainePolice carries the message of community policing to the constituents of Maine’s third-largest city and to the page’s more than 200,000 followers nationwide and sometimes beyond.

Written tongue-in-cheek with gentle sarcasm and deep affection, the department’s Facebook page is part police blotter, part Policing 101 and part visitor’s guide. Sergeant Tim Cotton took charge of the account in 2014, when he became the department’s public information officer. His duties include managing the Facebook page, which had fewer than 10,000 fans when he received the password.

The only restrictions placed on Cotton by the top brass are to avoid posting about religion or politics. That’s not a problem, as he always finds something to write about, from recounting a visit by Daisy Troop 2131, to thanking a nearby community for helping locate a disoriented man who’d gone missing, to offering advice for how to behave on St. Patrick’s Day. (“Post only one photo of green beer… Make sure you have a sober driver if you decide to become mobile. … Do not tease or touch the driver while in motion.”)

There is method behind the madness, as Cotton told Boston.com: “[Police] need to have interaction with people for something other than crime, addiction or mental illness. I wanted to present us in a positive light, and I think in these times, it doesn’t hurt to have some humor.”

For example, a 2016 post offered advice to Mainers about how to properly represent the state when interviewed by media about snow:

“In order to make ourselves more interesting to the summer people, they expect a certain level of Maine ‘flavor’… If you are wearing a hat with flaps (and you should be) please make sure one flap is up and the other is down. The down flap should be on the side closest to the camera… If you do not have a red-and-black plaid flapped hat, or a dog, make sure you are standing near a woodpile… If you don’t have a woodpile, make sure you do the interview in front of small pine trees. Shorter trees make you appear taller.”

Cotton’s sense of fun is effectively engaging. Fans stop by police headquarters to have their picture taken with the Duck of Justice (DOJ), a taxidermied waterfowl that serves as his sidekick. The page’s content and the tone is quintessential Maine humor, and Cotton is the first to say it might not work for every community. What’s important, he says, is making sure people understand that police do care about the people they protect.

In keeping with Cotton’s practice, this item will end with the sign-off he uses for his Bangor PD Facebook posts: “Keep your hands to yourself, leave other people’s things alone, and be kind to one another.”

Bangor is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities
Visitors to the Wish-Igloo could write messages on the structure’s wooden plaques.
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

TURNING PARKING SPOTS INTO (FUN!) PUBLIC SPACES
COVINGTON, KENTUCKY
Curb’d and Renaissance Covington

Just like any park, a parklet is a public space where people can sit and relax. The difference is that a parklet is the size of a parking spot—in fact, it often is a parking spot.

When the Ohio River city of Covington wanted to give its business district a boost, Renaissance Covington, a local nonprofit, worked with parklet coordinator Sam Conover, who founded Curb’d, a design competition to encourage “walkability, connectivity and placemaking.” Financed by a $150,000 grant from the Haile/U.S. Bank Foundation, the Curb’d effort resulted in five whimsical parklets that were sited specifically to connect Covington’s two city centers, the main downtown and an area called MainStrasse Village.

The parklet Hopscotch Gardens, located in front of the Braxton Brewing Company, featured two hopscotch courts. The Boxing Ring, outside the Cutman Barbershop, included mini punching bags and a Rock ’em Sock ’em Robots game. The parklet Ride, located in front of a restaurant called Inspirado, contained a stationary bike that riders could pedal to power an outdoor movie theater. The Wish-Igloo parklet near the Left Bank Coffeehouse encouraged visitors to write a wish and hang it up. A giant interactive xylophone lured passersby into the parklet staged outside of Stoney’s Village Toy Shop.

From May through October 2016, the streets and sidewalks of Covington were an engaging and sociable destination.

“I thought we would stop maybe a minute at each and move on,” a Cincinnati blogger posted enthusiastically about his visit to Covington with a bicycling group. “No, that didn’t happen, everyone got pulled into the parklets’ gravity field and had to be dragged away, metaphorically kicking and screaming. Parklets are parking space-size transporters that take you to amazing places.”
Salt Lake City’s pedestrian challenges began with the city layout Mormon leader Brigham Young developed in the nineteenth century. His plan called for blocks measuring 660 square feet with streets that were 132 feet wide. (“Wide enough to turn an oxcart around without resorting to profanity,” he purportedly said.)

Those sizable blocks were eventually divided and subdivided, with makeshift alleyways popping up as shortcuts. The downtown alleys became a quandary for contemporary planners. People wanted to use the shortcuts, but they didn’t always feel safe—and pedestrians heading into the alleyways couldn’t always predict where they’d emerge on the other end.

In 2012, urban planners were trying to figure out what to do with the series of public and private alleyways that cut through the downtown area’s expansive city blocks.

Inspired by artist Candy Chang’s street art project in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, urban designer Molly Robinson decided to crowdsource the answer by setting up six Community Chalkboards on which she wrote the prompt “I’d love this alley if ...” The chalkboards became so filled with answers that they had to be erased daily (after photographing the
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

SMART BOOKS, GOOD EATS AND COLD BREWS
BURLINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA
Mayor Ian Baltutis

When Ian Baltutis was campaigning door to door to become the mayor of Burlington, residents raised various issues. Invariably, someone would mention a book relating to the topic. Baltutis kept a running list so he could read the books when he had time.

After becoming mayor in 2015, he launched the Mayor’s Book Club so residents could read a selected nonfiction book and talk about how it relates to life in Burlington. The books can be checked out from the Alamance County Public Libraries. Baltutis leads the monthly discussions, hosting both a lunchtime session (which rotates among different city restaurants) and an evening gathering at a local watering hole.

When the club read $2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America, staff and volunteers from the local food pantry and homeless center joined the discussion. An ex-convict from a nearby residential program took part in the analysis of Just Mercy, a book about the prison system. With Dreamland: The True Tale of America’s Opiate Epidemic, the city’s police chief and a drug enforcement officer attended. For the discussion about The Maker Movement Manifesto: Rules for Innovation in the New World of Crafters, Hackers, and Tinkerers, author Mark Hatch joined the conversation via Skype.

Discussions last about an hour, and participants usually stay on to socialize. In addition to the book list Baltutis compiled on the campaign trail, reading choices come from members of the community and library staff. Fittingly, as Burlington’s top elected official, Mayor Baltutis gets the final vote on what the book club will read.

Mayor Ian Baltutis (back row, second from right) with fellow readers.
LISTENING TO THE NEEDS OF NEIGHBORHOODS
COLUMBUS, OHIO
Mayor Andrew J. Ginther and the Columbus City Council

The city had been hearing from constituents, especially in Columbus’s neglected areas, that their neighborhoods needed more attention.

To meet those needs, Mayor Andrew J. Ginther announced in his 2016 inaugural address that he was establishing the Department of Neighborhoods.

The new department consolidates those gateway services under one roof:

- The Columbus Community Relations Commission, which helps bring civic leaders, business leaders, citizens and elected officials together on issues of ethnic, racial and cultural diversity.
- The Neighborhood Pride Program, which works to strengthen community activism, build stronger neighborhood-city relationships and empower neighborhoods and businesses to work with the city to improve their community.
- The Neighborhood Liaisons team of advocates, each assigned to an area in the city, works directly with residents and neighborhood organizations.
- The 311 Call Center, which processes requests by residents, businesses and visitors for nonemergency city services.

“This dedication to neighborhood improvements and ease of access to elected officials benefits residents of all ages,” says the mayor’s office. “By decreasing barriers and focusing on resident needs, the Department of Neighborhoods will ensure that their voices and concerns are heard.”

Columbus is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities.

SERVICE IS THEIR MIDDLE NAME
50 cities (and counting) nationwide, including DETROIT, MIAMI, NEW YORK, ORLANDO and PHOENIX
Cities of Service

What’s the best way to cultivate authentic, effective citizen engagement in a city?

According to Cities of Service, a national nonprofit that helps mayors tap the knowledge, creativity and service of citizens, the answer is appointing a Chief Service Officer.

The concept of a senior-level administration official who can implement and oversee a comprehensive, citywide citizen-engagement strategy attracted attention in 2009, when then Mayor Michael Bloomberg named New York City’s first-ever chief service officer.

Bloomberg founded the Cities of Service coalition in 2009 with 16 other mayors, and in 2010 the organization awarded Leadership Grants so other cities could introduce the program.

Using one of those grants, Orlando, Florida, hired Marcia Hope Goodwin as its first chief service officer. Under her leadership, the city launched Orlando Cares, a plan to engage volunteers in high-impact initiatives like expanding preschool enrollment, improving childhood literacy and increasing graduation rates. Now a permanent program funded by the city and private sponsors, Orlando Cares engages everyday citizens, as well as businesses, nonprofit organizations, neighborhood associations and faith and educational institutions to help the city thrive.

The idea has since spread to dozens of other cities, from Philadelphia to San Jose. In 2016, with $450,000 in support from JPMorgan Chase, Cities of Service helped Detroit, Miami and Phoenix hire their own chief service officers.

Myung J. Lee, executive director of Cities of Service, calls chief service officers “force multipliers” who can be instrumental in getting citizens to show up and open up. “Cities and citizens can achieve amazing things together and strengthen relationships in doing so.”

Cities of Service’s work is made possible with continued support from its founding partner, Bloomberg Philanthropies, and other funders including the Rockefeller Foundation and Walmart Foundation.
TAKEAWAYS

- **It’s important to talk.** But talking needs to happen in a way the message can be heard. How and where information is shared matters.

- **It's essential to listen.** Conversations are two-way experiences. Leaders and community members need to ask questions of one another, listen to the answers, discuss the matter at hand and then follow up with action (even if that action is a commitment to talk again).

- **It really helps to have some fun.** Community issues are serious issues, but occasional silliness and even popsicles can lead to solutions.

CHECK OUT THIS RESOURCE: [AARP.org/livable-lessons](http://AARP.org/livable-lessons)

The [AARP Livable Communities Livable Lessons Collection](http://AARP.org/livable-lessons) features field-tested strategies for building community connections and creating great places for people of all ages.
Among the benefits of living and working in or teleworking from Eastport, Maine, is the ability to enjoy kayaking and other outdoor pursuits. (Learn more on page 122.)
WORK, VOLUNTEERISM AND OPPORTUNITY

A livable community includes ways for people of diverse ages and experiences to be productive and actively engaged by (depending on their needs and life stage) working for pay, developing new skills or volunteering for an important cause or project.
Albuquerque's There's a Better Way program, founded by Mayor Richard Berry (right), helps get people working for pay so they won't need to panhandle.
According to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, unsheltered homelessness in Albuquerque dropped by more than 80 percent between the years 2009 and 2016.

One reason for that decrease is **There’s a Better Way**, which Albuquerque Mayor Richard Berry launched in 2015 after seeing a man holding a sign that read, “Want a Job. Anything Helps.”

“We’re trying to give people a better option than standing on a street corner panhandling,” explains Berry. “So now we actually go out with a van and offer to hire them to do day work.”

The participants are paid $9 an hour, which is slightly higher than the city’s $8.80 minimum wage, and are provided lunch and overnight shelter if needed.

“We’ve cleaned up more than 400 city blocks and picked up more than 120,000 pounds of weeds and trash, so our beautiful city looks even better,” says Berry. Also notable is the **Heading Home Project**, founded in 2011, through which the city has been able to house more than 650 chronically homeless individuals. By doing so, Albuquerque is saving money—$6 million yearly, according to a study—because when people have housing they are off the streets and out of the crisis situations that require more extensive, and costly, city services.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, homelessness among veterans in Albuquerque has reached the level of “functional zero” (which is a housing measure for having fewer homeless people living on the streets than in some form of housing). News of Albuquerque’s day-work program has inspired cities including Chicago, Seattle, Denver and Dallas to adopt it. Berry has fielded interest from officials in Calgary, Canada, and Melbourne, Australia, too.

Recent court decisions have made it harder for cities to prohibit panhandling, but, says Berry, prohibition just kicks the problem down the road. That’s why he suggests the Better Way as a better way.
Montgomery College’s Lifelong Learning Institute enables older students (like Roger Karr, pictured in an archaeology class) to enroll in courses for discounted prices.

**FREE TUITION FOR COLLEGE SENIORS**

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND**

Montgomery College

It’s back to school for Beth and Sam Steel. He’s studying Introduction to Music Technology. She’s taking Water Exercise in the six-lane indoor swimming pool. Both are several decades older than most or all of their classmates.

As part of its **Senior Tuition Waiver Program**, Montgomery College, the county’s highly ranked community college, enables Marylanders age 60 and older to enroll in credit classes but pay only the fees—no tuition. (The caveats: The applicants must register online in the final three days of a registration period and can join a class only if there is room.)

Fees for classes are typically $7 to $10 per noncredit teaching hour, usually less for credit courses. For example, after a one-time application fee, in-county tuition for Beth’s water exercise class is normally $122, and fees are $67. So Beth’s bill for the class is $67.

The tuition waivers can also be used for certain noncredit workforce-development and continuing education classes, and classes in the college’s Lifelong Learning Institute, which is aimed at students age 50 and older. The college’s three campuses and satellites have served almost 60,000 students. In fiscal year 2016, nearly 3,400 older residents received a tuition waiver.

The classes most popular among older students include art, archaeology, literature, languages, information technology, history, politics, music, personal finance and wellness. Many are taking courses in order to upgrade their skills to continue working.

The older students “serve as role models for younger students in their commitment to lifelong learning and in their study habits,” says Natasha Sacks, program director at the Lifelong Learning Institute. “They enrich classroom discussions with their experiences and serve as advocates and champions of the college in the community.”

*Montgomery County is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities*
LEARNING FOR ALL AGES, CARING FOR ALL STAGES
MARSHFIELD, WISCONSIN
City and School District of Marshfield

In 2001, students in the Careers with Kids classes at Marshfield High School in Wisconsin asked why the school had a transportation lab and science lab for students considering careers in those fields, but no facility for students to gain hands-on experience caring for children or the elderly.

In response, six years later, the Tiny Tiger Intergenerational Center opened, comprising a child-care center and adult day-care center where students can volunteer and work in preparation for a career in human services. (The headline for this article is the center’s slogan.)

Classes are offered in caregiving, life-span development, career pathways and activities that connect generations. In addition, adults in the day program visit the child-care center, where they can rock a baby to sleep, color alongside a toddler or read to a preschooler.

“The child’s need to explore can alleviate the elder’s boredom,” explains Jennifer Fredrick, career and technical education coordinator for the Marshfield School District. “A child’s need to interact can alleviate the older adult’s loneliness, and the child’s need for guidance can alleviate the elder’s helplessness.”

About 100 students from Marshfield High take classes in the Human Services Academy and can walk across the street to the center, which serves 130 children from infant to school age. The high school students and the young children become comfortable around older adults as well as with people who have memory impairment or a physical disability.

Students carry this greater awareness and empathy with them when they leave the center.

Adds Fredrick: “There’s a demand for professional, compassionate caregivers.”

Three generations plant a vegetable garden at the Tiny Tiger Intergenerational Center.
LOCAL LESSONS HELP REVIVE A LOCAL ECONOMY
BETHEL, VERMONT
Bethel Revitalization Initiative

A community of more than 2,000 people scattered across more than 45 square miles of hills and valleys in Vermont’s Green Mountains, Bethel is in the midst of a transformation.

The town has its share of challenges. The compact, historic downtown and four village centers were once bustling with industry, but the large employers have long since dwindled, leaving empty storefronts and limited employment opportunities. Like much of northern New England, the community’s population is older, with a median age of 43 as of 2015. In 2011, Bethel unexpectedly hit rock bottom when Tropical Storm Irene swept through and devastated the town.

An ad hoc community group called the Bethel Revitalization Initiative sprang up after the flooding. As part of its work to bring life back to the town, in 2014 the initiative created Bethel University, a unique pop-up (temporary) college to showcase and connect the rich assets and talents from within the community.
The university operates for one month each year, during which anyone can teach a course on just about any topic.

Bethel U courses, which take place in multiple town locations, have ranged from Zumba to backyard beekeeping, quilting to wine tasting to emergency preparedness. All classes are free and accessible to anyone of any age, whether they reside in or outside of Bethel.

For older adults in particular, the university provides an opportunity to share their skills and experience, serve as mentors and learn new things. The hope for Bethel at large is that by promoting the many talents of the town’s residents, word will spread and more residents will come out to meet, mingle and engage with their neighbors—and give people from other areas a reason to visit.

In 2017, the pop-up university’s fourth year, Bethel U drew more than 1,000 registrations for its 77 course offerings and attracted participants from more than 55 towns and five states.

Small entrepreneurs are becoming increasingly important and numerous among Bethel’s more than 250 registered businesses. Newcomers, including people who can telework for jobs based elsewhere, are arriving. All bring with them the potential to revive and drive a vibrant local economy.
Within two years of its founding in 2003, Maricopa, a 47-square-mile area located in Pinal County, Arizona, became one of the fastest-growing communities in the United States. Construction projects, housing starts, new residents and new businesses made Maricopa a poster city for development and affordable homes. But in 2008, the bubble burst.

“People moved here with hopes and dreams, and the recession crushed them,” says Mayor Christian Price.

With the economic upswing, growth has since resumed. To benefit its local tax base and provide the jobs, retailers and services that Maricopa’s nearly 50,000 residents need, the city is actively encouraging the creation of more locally based businesses. Residents are helping that effort by volunteering in two city-sponsored initiatives.

The Maricopa Citizen Leadership Academy is a six-week program designed to transform residents into actively engaged citizens who get involved in local government.

Volunteers with the Maricopa Advocate Program are empowered with information about Maricopa’s rise and fall, as well as its current and future plans for growth. Price launched the program after witnessing the effectiveness of citizen ambassadors working in Phoenix.

“We were looking to solve a problem,” says the mayor, referring to his city’s hard-to-shake recession-era reputation. “Bad news spreads like wildfire. How do we take away the negativity?” Residents, he realized, could help bridge the divide between the government and the private sector.

One such resident is Ted Yocum, a Maricopa Advocate Program volunteer who proudly arms himself with “information on our community center, city hall and the entertainment multiplex,” he says, “and I keep road maps in my car, so if anyone is looking at property or real estate ads, I can help them find the house—or take them there myself.”

Says Mayor Price: “We have an army of people working for us instead of against us.”

Members of the Maricopa Citizen Leadership Academy watch a demonstration.
A partnership of Princeton Public Schools and the Princeton Senior Resource Center, the GrandPals program connects local kindergarteners and first- and second-graders with grandparent-esque volunteers (ranging in age from their late 40s to mid 90s) who commit to visiting the school once a week to read and talk to the children.

The program grew out of a reading experiment at one school in 1997. With the stated goals “to foster positive intergenerational relationships and to create a lifelong love of reading and learning in our young children,” GrandPals now pairs about 110 volunteers with more than 250 children at four schools. The bonds between the student and grown-up GrandPals (the term is used to describe both the kids and the adults) are formed quickly.

Wrote one volunteer about reuniting with her GrandPals after a brief absence: “As I entered the first-grade class, my two darling GrandPals, Andre and Jon, came running over to me. One hugged my legs so tightly it was hard to walk, while the other piped up, ‘This is my favorite part of my favorite day!’”

In 30- to 40-minute sessions at each school’s library, GrandPals usually meet with the same children for the entire school year. However, says GrandPals director Olivian Boon: “We often get new students in the middle of the year, most of whom do not speak English. We try to match them with someone who speaks their language, who can ease them into the stories. We’ve been able to provide GrandPals who speak Greek, Mandarin, French, German and Spanish, among other languages.”

Teachers find that the intergenerational program helps young children focus and encourages shy youngsters to become more social. Because the teachers work with many of the same GrandPals from year to year, they know which GrandPal they can assign to the reserved child, to the overly active youngster, to the student who needs special encouragement and to the child who simply needs a good, friendly listener.

Princeton’s GrandPals program fosters positive intergenerational relationships.
The Power of Watchful Eyes and Attentive Ears

Clarksdale, Mississippi

Clarkdale residents and AARP Mississippi

Seniors for a More Livable Community (SMLC) began in 2012, sprung from a meeting between AARP Mississippi and seven older women from Clarksdale, a predominantly African-American city of nearly 18,000 residents, one-third of whom are age 50 or older.

Over the years, crime in the community had increased. And the original seven women agreed that for Clarksdale’s older population to be heard, their group needed to grow. Five years later, SMLC had grown to 50 active members who could collectively engage more than 200 Clarksdale citizens when needed.

Soon after its creation, SMLC began having conversations with the mayor, city commissioners and police chief about making Clarksdale safer. SMLC organized an AARP Mississippi Meet Your Neighbor event, at which the police chief praised the more than 100 residents who had gathered to organize into neighborhood-watch groups.

For another event, walkability expert Dan Burden visited the city and joined 50 residents, two city commissioners and AARP Mississippi for a walking tour and discussion about making Clarksdale’s streets and public places safer.

Simple actions, like fixing broken windows on abandoned buildings, explained Burden, could deter criminal activity because the building would look cared for. About a historic block that had fallen into disrepair, he described the potential to develop the area so “anybody who is going to be bad is not going to be bad here, and hopefully not even in your community at all.”

In 2014, SMLC and the city installed and unveiled official Neighborhood Watch signage in more than a dozen Clarksdale neighborhoods. In 2016, Mayor Bill Luckett commended Seniors for a More Livable Community for starting strong neighborhood-watch groups and said crime was decreasing in the areas that have such groups, in large part because Clarksdale’s older citizens help serve as a set of community eyes and ears.

As one resident told a local TV station, she and her neighbors watch out for “strange people we don’t know in the neighborhood, and a lot of young people that are constantly walking back and forth like they’re trying to scope out what’s going on. Who’s at home and who’s not at home.” Another resident, posting on a Crime Prevention Tips website, confidently declared: “We are determined to take our community back!”

Ivory Craig of AARP Mississippi helped organize the installation of Neighborhood Watch signs in Clarksdale.
In January 2016, when Stephanie Burke became Medford’s first new mayor in 28 years, among her first acts of business was to relaunch the Senior Work-Off Abatement Program, a long-dormant initiative that lets residents age 60 and older spend time working at City Hall in exchange for a reduction of their property-tax bill.

Qualifying homeowners can work up to 136 hours for a maximum tax abatement of $1,500, which is nearly a third of the average Medford tax bill.

“We were originally going to start with 25 seniors helping out by greeting people at City Hall and doing other clerical jobs,” Burke says. But as the 2016 presidential election inspired residents to head out in droves for early voting, she saw a huge demand for assistance at the polling stations. So the number of workers increased. The participants relished the sense of community and purpose.

Diana Gorman, who helped register voters, describes her work experience with the abatement program as a “love fest.” Greeter Carolyn Zumpanti was energized by getting to “learn a lot about City Hall.”

Burke is so pleased with the program that she recommends other cities give it a try. But she offers one bit of advice: Hire or assign a dedicated coordinator so participants have a single point of contact and avoid having to navigate a “mishmash” of municipal offices.

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**SCHOLARSHIPS FOR HIGH SCHOOL AND OTHER SENIORS**

**NORTH CENTRAL OHIO**

Ohio District 5 Area Agency on Aging

Applicants for college scholarships and grants are typically high school seniors. But a scholarship-granting initiative in Ohio is open to applications from truly senior seniors.

For more than a decade, the Ohio District 5 Area Agency on Aging, a network of local services agencies for the elderly, has been offering **educational grants and scholarships** of $800 to $2,500 to students who want to further “their education goals in a field benefiting the aging network.” Grantees must be at least 18 or a senior in high school, but there’s no upper age limit. The purpose is to help the people who want to benefit older Americans acquire the education or training they’ll need to do so.

Eligible applicants must live in Ashland, Crawford, Huron, Knox, Marion, Morrow, Richland, Seneca or Wyandot counties. Recent recipients have chosen to study nursing, occupational therapy, neuroscience and social work. But an older person working or volunteering for an aging-related effort can also use the funds to improve his or her skills.

The award is based on the applicant’s grade point average, field of study, community activities and experiences, as well as a one-page essay about how the applicant’s goals will serve the aging population. (In lieu of recent grades, older applicants must have achieved at least a sophomore status in an accredited technical school, college or university.)

The educational funding comes from revenues raised through paid sponsorships for the area agency’s annual meetings.
WANTED (AND WELCOME) TELECOMMUTERS!
EASTPORT, MAINE
City of Eastport

In 2003, when Lora Whelan moved to Eastport, 1,600 people lived in the remote, easternmost community in the United States—a 3.5-square-mile city near the Canadian border. A little more than a decade later, the population count had dropped to slightly above 1,300, with more than 50 percent of the residents age 50 or older.

Whelan, the publisher of the local newspaper, The Quoddy Times, understood that for Eastport to thrive and survive, the community needed more people. Knowing that several of the city’s residents telework for national and global companies, she wondered, “What if Eastport could attract more telecommuters?”

After convincing the Eastport City Council to make telecommuter recruitment a municipal initiative, Whelan created a survey for 20 local teleworkers, who formed an ad hoc telecommuting committee. What, she asked them, made Eastport so appealing?

“I was getting a constant refrain,” Whelan recalls. “The cultural events—Eastport has an arts center, museum, symphony, theater—affordable housing, walkability, generous volunteerism, friendliness and a school system with low student-to-teacher ratios.”

The Eastport Telecommuter Recruitment website launched in September 2016, and inquiries soon came from as far away as Alaska.

That Eastport is two hours from a major airport and shopping mall, and much of the drive is along narrow side roads, is not considered a detriment by the city’s residents.

Colie Brice, a teleworking IT consultant, moved to Eastport with his wife and their grade school–age son in 2012 after hearing about the city from a friend. One visit convinced the couple to buy a house: “Twenty times less expensive than it would be in New Jersey,” he says about their former home state. “We’ve lived in some really cool places, but I’ve found the experience here unparalleled,” says Brice. “The community is eclectic and creative. We got out of the New York metropolitan area, and right away our blood pressure came down dramatically.”

Despite his joy, Brice is quick with a warning: “If you need to be near a big chain restaurant, you will be disappointed!”

Eastport is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities.
With the increasing ability of many employees and entrepreneurs to work remotely, Eastport, Maine, is encouraging telecommuters to make the small town their home.
“Bringing unity to our community” is the motto of the **Month of Miracles** in Jackson, Tennessee, an annual activity during which some 1,500 residents volunteer their time and skills for the benefit of their city (population: 68,000) and neighbors.

Launched in 2013, the event is, says Mayor Jerry Gist, a “new city tradition” and Jackson’s “own unique way of observing National Volunteer Month.”

How it works: A person or group, seeing the need for a service project, can submit details—including the number of volunteers and supplies required, a time estimate and confirmation of the beneficiaries’ permission. A committee reviews the submissions, and those it selects become official “miracles.” In order to qualify as a miracle project, all work must take place within the city limits and be performed and completed during April. People or groups wanting to volunteer then look through the projects posted online at MiraclesInJackson.com and sign up to help. Official sponsors donate the requested supplies or cash.

Among the project choices in 2017: adding handrails to an elderly resident’s porch; supporting Special Olympics track and field events; cleaning yards and trimming bushes at the Humane Society animal shelter; and planting a garden at the Dream Center of Jackson, a program for homeless women and children.

“You lifted up my spirit; you lifted up my soul,” said homeowner Emah Sarah after volunteers repaired her house.

“Month of Miracles helps participants find a volunteer activity that suits their one-of-a-kind personalities and skill sets,” says Gist. “And we hope they’ll continue to assist in the growth and strengthening of the Jackson community for future generations.”

Miracle-making volunteers planted raised gardens for the residents of the Maplewood Health Care Center.
TAKEAWAYS

- **People want to earn their pay.** But work hours and locations and so-called norms are not a one-size-fits-all proposition. Capable workers of all ages—and the communities in which they live or work—can benefit greatly from outside-the-box thinking.

- **Volunteer work is work.** Communities that have residents who will share their time and talents for free are so fortunate. The individuals and groups that give of themselves bring value and need to be valued.

- **Old dogs really can learn new tricks.** Age isn't—and shouldn't be—a barrier to new experiences and education.

**Check out these resources:** [AARP.org/livability-economy](http://AARP.org/livability-economy) and [AARP.org/livable-archives](http://AARP.org/livable-archives)

The **AARP Livability Economy Report** shows how to enhance the quality of life of residents, the economic prospects of businesses and the bottom lines of local governments. The subject-based **AARP Livable Communities A-Z Archive** offers lists and links to hundreds of reports, action plans, studies, articles and more.
Downtown murals are revitalizing communities. (See pages 130 and 136.) To greet visitors bound for a mural exhibition nearby, artist Alexis Diaz transformed a building wall in Fayetteville, Arkansas.
Livable places have spaces where people of all ages can get out and play and have a good time! The presence of shops and theaters and restaurants matters—as do public events and opportunities to make new friends. At any age, loneliness is often as debilitating as a chronic illness. Isolation can be quelled by activities that are welcoming to all.
A DAY FOR EVERYONE TO PLAY
TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND
City of Takoma Park and Let’s Play America

There’s a sing-along in the auditorium, Hula-Hooping down the hall and a giant Connect4 game outside.

The brainchild of Takoma Park resident Pat Rumbaugh, a physical education teacher turned cofounder of the nonprofit Let’s Play America, Takoma Park’s Play Day celebrates community, creativity, physical and mental activity, and fun for kids and adults. (By the way, Takoma Park, which sits immediately northeast of Washington, D.C., is a multiyear honoree of the KaBOOM Playful City USA recognition program.)

The city’s recreation department and Let’s Play America cosponsor four events per year. Let’s Play America also hosts independent events throughout the year.

“We do encourage municipal funding, and we are actively looking for grants and sponsors,” says Rumbaugh. “But volunteers make up a huge part of what we do.” Volunteers take care of publicity and recruit instructors to lead classes in a wide range of activities, from yoga to tai chi to aerobics.

Over the years, a state senator has led a game of Simon Says. Mayor Kate Stewart has been in charge of Red Light, Green Light. Participants of all ages serve as game pieces for human chess.

“People meet other people, they let their inhibitions down, they learn new activities or do things they haven’t done since they were children,” says Rumbaugh. Children get the idea naturally, she adds, but “older people need play just as much as anyone.”

Inspired by the work of resident Pat Rumbaugh (inset, with the king and queen from a game of human chess), the city of Takoma Park hosts events for people of all ages to gather and play.
Costly ticket prices make Broadway shows inaccessible for many New Yorkers and tourists. But for people with mobility challenges, hearing or vision loss or impairment, or conditions such as autism, New York theater can be off limits even to those presented with free orchestra seats to Hamilton.

To make New York theater more accessible to more audiences, the nonprofit Theatre Development Fund (TDF) and The Broadway League, a trade association, host Theatre Access NYC, a ticket-sales website that lets theatergoers with disabilities learn which shows are wheelchair accessible or autism-friendly, or offer hearing devices or sign language.

Assistive services can include open captioning (a text display showing words and sounds from the performance) or audio description (a live or prerecorded narration that is heard through headphones).

“The impact of Theatre Access NYC is immeasurable,” says Lisa Carling, director of accessibility programs for the TDF. “It serves as a model for other cities that want easy-to-find accessibility information for all their shows.” In fact, TDF actively advises theaters and cities nationwide and abroad.

People with a documented disability can join the TDF Accessibility Program (TAP) for free and receive discounted tickets. During a typical year, members can choose from 50 to 60 open-caption performances and two or three that are sign-language interpreted.

In addition, roughly four performances a year are autism-friendly, a result of TAP working with theaters to adjust the lights and sound to make the experience less overwhelming for people with sensory-processing issues. (Recent offerings featured The Lion King, Aladdin, The Phantom of the Opera and Kinky Boots.) If audience members want to leave their seats, designated activity areas and autism specialists are on hand to offer assistance. “It’s a judgment-free zone,” says Victoria Bailey, executive director of the TDF.
INVITING ARTISTS TO MAKE THEMSELVES AT HOME
TORRINGTON, CONNECTICUT
City of Torrington

Located on the Naugatuck River in northwestern Connecticut, Torrington was once a thriving mill town. From woolens and brass in the nineteenth century to bicycle parts and ball bearings in the next, the city provided a steady living for those employed in its factories.

A flood badly damaged the city center in 1955. As economic downturns and other changes followed, manufacturing jobs began to disappear, leaving factory sites vacant. The Artist Relocation Program seeks to stimulate the local economy by encouraging artists to occupy Torrington homes and commercial spaces where they can both live and work.

Torrington city planner Martin Connor marshaled support for the zoning changes that made the live-work occupancies possible. The city’s location nearly halfway between New York City and Boston, and adjacent to well-heeled Connecticut suburbs, is a selling point for visual artists seeking a place to reside, create and connect with savvy collectors.

When residents and visitors stroll around the city looking in gallery and shop windows and attending events, they often seek out a restaurant for lunch or dinner, or they’ll pop into a coffee shop. Artists, Connor says, help “put feet on the street.”

For years, Torrington ignored the river running through it and provided little incentive for people to visit and enjoy the Naugatuck. That’s changing, and art is playing its part. Guided by art teacher Danielle Mailer (daughter of the novelist Norman Mailer), a bare building wall that faces the river has been transformed into Project: FishTales, a vibrant and colorful installation featuring fanciful trout in dazzling neon hues. In sight of soon-to-come public spaces on the waterfront, Mailer created the scene with a loyal crew of volunteers. Extending 186 feet from side to side, the mural also lays down an invitation and challenge to other artists: You’re welcome here to create the next big thing for people of all ages to enjoy.
A grassroots arts exhibition “curated by the community for the community,” Yard Art Day began in Charlotte, North Carolina, on Labor Day in 2012. Now an annual Labor Day event, Yard Art Day encourages Charlotte residents of all ages to participate in a community-wide art installation by creating and displaying art on their front lawns, balconies and—for the lawn- and balcony-less—even the tops of cars.

The only display rule: The art must be visible from the street. The 24-hour free event runs from midnight to midnight and defines art as all types of creative talent, including poetry, storytelling and dancing. Examples of recent artistic expressions range from traditional paintings, sculptures and crafts to white picket fences temporary transformed by bright watercolor paint and colored tape, beautiful dresses hanging from a crepe myrtle tree, even the lawn-upholstered lawn chair seen above.

(An extensive gallery of Yard Art creativity is on display at YardArtDay.org.)

“It is my dream that for one day people remember that child within them that likes to play creatively without any judgment or restraint,” writes photographer Deborah Triplett, the event’s founder. “For us to cross neighborhood, city boundaries. To be inclusive. Art can do this.” And it has.
Artist and mask-maker Jude Binder, known as the FestivALL Princess, does not speak when wearing what has become her iconic event costume.
HOW A CITY BECOMES A WORK OF ART
CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA
City residents, Mayor Danny Jones and Larry Groce, host of NPR’s Mountain Stage

When Brittany Javins was growing up in Charleston, West Virginia’s capital city, she saw it as a place where there was, she says, “nothing to do.” While attending grad school in Florida, she returned to Charleston as an intern for FestivALL, the city’s eclectic summer arts festival. Three years later, in 2015, she was running the organization and helping guide her hometown’s transformation into a hub for arts and culture in the state and region.

Every summer since 2005, people have streamed into Charleston for music, theater, dance performances, exhibitions, and interactive arts events. Mayor Danny Jones, who has long championed the arts as an engine to drive growth, helped establish the festival, which now lasts 10 days and hosts additional events year-round.

In 2016, FestivALL’s audience swelled to nearly 60,000 people, with more than 300 performances at about 35 venues. Nearly 100 community arts groups took part, and visitors booked more than 3,000 hotel room nights. Javins estimates the festival will have “at least a $1.5 million impact” on the local economy.

The festival’s success has spurred other initiatives in Charleston, including FestivALL Fall, an October mini-festival during which the “City Becomes a Work of Art.” A website features maps and walking tours of the city’s four downtown arts districts. Another Charleston charm is Mountain Stage, a weekly NPR music program that has presented live performances from Charleston for more than three decades. Larry Groce, FestivALL founder and former director, is the host.

Arts and entertainment activities are spurring development by increasing the walkability and vibrancy of Charleston’s streets. Contrary to what Javins’ teenage self believed, she says, “there’s always something fun going on.”

Charleston is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities

FOOD + ART = NOURISHMENT FOR BODY + SOUL
GARY, INDIANA
Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson, artist Theaster Gates and Place Lab

“When we were thinking about what we needed in the city of Gary,” says Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson, “and how we might match those needs to something that we know that people enjoy, we thought the community kitchen, with a component that celebrated art—and with a component that really promoted entrepreneurship—was an opportunity to combine the needs, the desires, the enjoyment, all in one place.”

In 2016, ArtHouse: A Social Kitchen was born—thanks in large part to more than $1.6 million from the Bloomberg Philanthropies Public Arts Challenge and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Knight Cities Challenge. The center shares space with Mama Pearl’s BBQ in downtown Gary, across the street from the U.S. Steel Yard minor league baseball team.

As a culinary business incubator, ArtHouse features a 2,200-square-foot commercial training kitchen. As a cultural center for culinary and visual arts, ArtHouse convenes community dinners on site and in local homes, and hosts exhibitions by local artists. The project’s first art installation decorated its building’s facade with an attention-grabbing solar-powered lighting scheme.

Artist and developer Theaster Gates, who leads Place Lab, a partnership between the University of Chicago’s Arts + Public Life initiative and the Harris School of Public Policy, is ArtHouse’s artistic director. Gates and his placemaking lab engage communities to assess their most critical needs, and then work creatively to meet those needs through the “activation” of public spaces.

“The mayor had this building that was available that had an amazing soul food restaurant in it—but she wanted more stuff to be happening there,” Gates says about the space. As he told the crowd at the space’s November 2016 opening, according to UChicagoNews’ Andrew Bauld, “Already the art is doing what it’s supposed to do, which is just bring people together.”
STORM DRAINS THAT SEND A MESSAGE
FAIRBANKS, ALASKA
Tanana Valley Watershed Association and the City of Fairbanks

Storm drains from the streets of Fairbanks empty directly into the Chena River, a habitat for moose, beaver, fish and migratory birds. Unfortunately, many people mistakenly believed the drains connect directly to the sewage-treatment plant, and used them to dispose of harmful substances like used motor oil. To change that harmful behavior in an educational and creative way, a local environmental nonprofit teamed up with the Fairbanks city government and local businesses.

Established in 2014, the Storm Drain Art Contest seeks proposals for street art based on the themes Storm Water Pollution (to draw attention to litter, vehicle fluids and pet waste), Wildlife (art featuring native birds, fish and mammals) and Quality of Life (focusing on the life-giving and recreational uses of water).

Proposals are put to a public vote, and the chosen artists—who range widely in age and experience—are commissioned to create their scenes using Fairbanks’ street grates, sidewalks and roadways as their canvas, earning $100 for the work and $50 for materials. (Additional partners include the Fairbanks Storm Water Advisory Committee and the Downtown Association of Fairbanks.) Improvements in water quality since the contest began have led to national recognition for the city’s environmental efforts.

In another beautification project, Cushman Street, one of Fairbanks’ main thoroughfares, was upgraded by bringing three chaotic traffic lanes down to two; adding trees, planters and better lighting; and improving the roadway’s traffic signals, directional signage and street drains. Embossed into the iron of the new drains are the words “Dump No Waste” because runoff “Drains to River.”
Two older men are onstage, tussling over a container of delicious fried morsels. “A diet with fried, fatty processed food is the leading contributor to a decrease in blood circulation throughout the body,” explains one man. “You need to eat heart-healthy fat, like olive oil and fish.”

As one actor grabs for the package, the other bolts, causing a hearty laugh from the audience. The scene is from *If You Can’t Stand the Heat, Get Out of the Kitchen*, a series of three half-hour performances about healthy eating and living.

Produced by the Blues City Cultural Center (motto: “arts for a better way of life”), the goal is to bring home health messages in a stimulating, fun and memorable way. The first play premiered in November 2016 at the Orange Mound Senior Center, which serves adults in a historic African-American neighborhood of Memphis.

Leading up to the show, Blues City founders Deborah and Levi Frazier surveyed residents about health issues and related concerns. Among the top-of-mind problems, caregiving stood out and has been incorporated into the shows. Given that Blues City seeks to create theater that addresses the African-American experience, attention is paid to diseases that disproportionately target the audience, like hypertension, diabetes, arthritis and heart disease.

The typical play is under an hour, mixes professional and community performers, and is followed by a talkback with social service agencies, government and nonprofits that can directly address the concerns of the audience. For *Heat*, two of the after-show discussions were led by Rep. G.A. Hardaway, a Tennessee state legislator.

The final performances of the first season focused on depression and emotional health, but Levi Frazier says every show includes some key reminders, like “take your medicine, exercise and watch what you are eating.”
A color explosion lit by muralist Okuda San Miguel made an abandoned house erupt.
This is a story of collaboration and, yes, the unexpected consequences of making a big bet on public art. It’s a story of inviting some of the world’s premier street artists to the second-largest city in Arkansas to create dazzling murals and boost the city’s self-image and curb appeal.

The story starts with local businessman Steve Clark, the driving force behind the nonprofit 64.6 Downtown, named after Fort Smith’s footprint in square miles and dedicated to economic development in what was a deteriorating city center. Clark and his partners believed a festival featuring the world’s coolest urban artists could generate publicity and energy, but they didn’t have the connections to make it happen.

Enter JustKids, a creative house that produces art events all over the world. As The Unexpected: Urban Contemporary Art Festival took shape, the name started to seem inevitable, says the festival director Claire Kolberg. Nobody, the name implies, would look to Fort Smith, Arkansas, a Southern city rich in Western history, for daring urban contemporary art. But in September 2015, eight superstar artists spent a little more than a week in town, creating a dozen extraordinary murals.

A local website celebrated the event: “We were rejuvenated. We all broke a sweat to go downtown and watch a handful of talented people paint cowboys, and Native Americans, and critters all over our beloved historic downtown.”

The festival’s success led to a second edition in 2016, with residencies, installations, performances and videos in addition to ten more murals. Says Kolberg: “We saw the walls of buildings as the canvas on which we wanted to paint our future.” The two festivals, she said, have been a catalyst for at least half a dozen new businesses. The project’s curator, Charlotte Dutoit of JustKids, says Fort Smith “hadn’t seen so many people downtown in decades. It really woke up the town.”

Grain towers at the OK Foods feed mill display Guido Van Helten’s portraits of Fort Smith locals.
THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF ART
TACOMA, WASHINGTON
City of Tacoma

To turn what had become a forlorn post-industrial city into a vibrant destination, city leaders in Tacoma, Washington, made a huge bet.

In the early 90s—following the restorations of the historic Pantages and Rialto theaters as well as the distinctive copper-domed Union Station (now home to a U.S. district court)—Tacoma’s leaders committed to using arts and culture as a strategy for revitalization. A museum district was developed and welcomed a new campus for the University of Washington. City programs and policies attracted diverse artists and creative entrepreneurships, and a grassroots “creative ecosystem”—as Amy McBride, arts administrator of Tacoma’s Office of Arts & Cultural Vitality calls it—grew popular support.

Today, Tacoma residents and visitors encounter art seemingly everywhere. There was a miniature golf course (Pop-Up Art Putt!) with holes designed by local artists. Art enlivens spaces from railroad trestles to the bustling waterfront, once a Superfund site. One source of funding comes from the City of Tacoma’s “One Percent for Art” program, which directs publicly funded construction projects with costs exceeding...
$100,000 to allocate one percent of their budgets for public art.

The economic impact of the city’s nonprofit arts and culture sector grew more than 70 percent from 2005 to 2010, to about $65 million. And it continues to grow. Describing Tacoma, Mayor Marilyn Strickland says: “Art is not the icing on the cake; it is the baking soda that makes the cake rise.”

**Spaceworks Tacoma:** A joint program of the City of Tacoma and the Tacoma-Pierce County Chamber of Commerce, Spaceworks Tacoma supports the development and sustainability of creative entrepreneurs and artists through exhibitions, activation of empty storefronts, and pop-up spaces for artists and entrepreneurs. Spaceworks also offers a 13-week training program for people seeking to grow creative businesses.

**Lincoln District Revitalization:** Community leaders implemented a program using the arts to engage the community in a deep, meaningful way. Small temporary projects included activities like singalongs, a music and art festival, intersection murals, film festivals and intergenerational gardens.

**Mayor Marilyn Strickland speaks at the dedication of an art installation by glass sculptor Dale Chihuly in Tacoma’s historic Union Station.**

**Art Works**

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**Mayor Marilyn Strickland speaks at the dedication of an art installation by glass sculptor Dale Chihuly in Tacoma’s historic Union Station.**

**Now Playing: A Night at the Movies**

**Cutler Bay, Florida**

Town of Cutler Bay Parks and Recreation Department

Cutler Bay, a 10-square-mile town located just south of Miami, does not take full credit for the success of its community movie night events. The gatherings, Mayor Peggy Bell admits, were inspired by the neighboring town of Palmetto Bay: “They had an outdoor movie night, and I realized it’s an affordable way to bring affordable entertainment to the community.”

Bell, then a town council member, suggested the idea to her colleagues. Soon afterward, the city invested in an inflatable movie screen and a projector that could be moved to different outdoor locations.

The **Cutler Bay Movie Night** debuted in 2010, and the monthly screenings run in the fall and winter months. (Summer shows are a non-starter because the temperatures are too darn hot.) Booster clubs, school groups and local food trucks sometimes sell food.

The town stages some of its movie nights on the lawn of the HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital, so people who lack the mobility to participate in typical community activities can join the fun.

“Even if they’ve seen the movie before, people come out,” says Bell. The gatherings provide residents of all ages with a free Friday evening outing. “Younger and older people get to know each other,” observes Bell. “They’re sitting on blankets or in lawn chairs and they’re meeting new people, talking to one another. The night is always a win-win.”

**Cutler Bay is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities**

**Tonight’s feature presentation—Moana.**
HOW BLOCK PARTIES CAN BUILD BRIDGES

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA
Friendly Streets Initiative

In the summer of 2011, volunteers working with neighborhood organizations to make biking and walking safer in Saint Paul sponsored a series of parties along Charles Avenue, which runs through a racially and economically mixed community near the I-94 freeway.

Closing off blocks on Friday evenings, the gatherings featured food from local restaurants, games and the opportunity for neighbors to get to know one another better.

“More than 700 people turned out, and we got a real sense of what the community thought, what they liked and what they didn’t,” recalls Lars Christiansen, an area resident, urban sociologist at Augsburg College and former director of the nonprofit Friendly Streets Initiative. “The whole point of FSI is to transform streets of fear into streets of joy, in ways both large and small, affecting the physical environment and the emotional one.”

Four years later, on St. Anthony Avenue, a street located right next to the traffic of I-94, neighbors whooped it up at the FSI-hosted Better Bridges Bash, an event to connect neighborhoods on either side of the freeway by improving the bridges and making the area friendlier to people when they’re not in cars.

Russ Stark, a member of the Saint Paul City Council, said: “By talking to people where they live, by using block parties and other means to find out what people value on their streets, FSI has helped change how we do civic engagement. We usually hear from a vocal minority on projects, but we don’t necessarily know what the public as a whole thinks.”

That’s why—in addition to enjoying a kazoo parade, a Liberian-American rapper and a community band—partygoers on St. Anthony Avenue were invited to view a photo gallery showing possible improvement projects and put green sticky notes on the ideas they liked, pink on those they didn’t, and yellow on the maybes.

Among the images generating the most excitement: a land bridge covering a section of the freeway with green space; archways, mosaics and murals at entrances to the bridges over the freeway; and medians in busy intersections so pedestrians can safely cross the street.

At another tent, people could share their suggestions on an idea tree. Among those wishes were fewer cars, fountains, a walking path and track and more street parties.
TAKEAWAYS

› All work and no play doesn't work. Livable communities have places people can go to relax and socialize and shop and dine.

› Creativity is a community asset. Lots of people who think they can’t dance, paint, draw or play a sport like to do those things or are willing to try. Encourage them (us?) to go for it!

› Art is smart. Places truly can be transformed by talented people who are able to turn their ideas and visions into something tangible all can see.

CHECK OUT THESE RESOURCES: AARP.org/livability-design and AARP.org/livable-interviews

The AARP Imagining Livability Design Collection is a great source of inspiration and replicable ideas. The AARP Livable Communities “5 Questions for ...” Interview Series features conversations with mayors, managers, policymakers, planners, elected officials, experts, advocates and others who are working to create livable communities for people of all ages.
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As AARP’s chief advocacy and engagement officer, Nancy LeaMond has responsibility for driving the organization’s social mission on behalf of Americans 50-plus and their families.

Nancy leads government affairs and legislative campaigns for AARP, widely seen as one of the country’s most powerful advocacy organizations. She also manages public education, volunteerism, multicultural outreach and engagement, and she directs major AARP initiatives that include supporting family caregivers through advocacy, education and innovative programs and expanding AARP’s local footprint in communities across the country. She also manages a team of 700 staff and more than 17,000 volunteers across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

During her tenure with AARP, LeaMond has led several landmark campaigns: Take a Stand, which demanded that the 2016 candidates for national office recognize and commit to addressing challenges facing Social Security and Medicare; You’ve Earned a Say, an initiative that engaged more than 10 million Americans in the debate over Social Security and Medicare; a multistate utility campaign that saved consumers more than $1.8 billion by fighting home energy cost increases; Health Action Now, which ensured that federal health care reform included critical benefits for Americans 50-plus; and Divided We Fail, an initiative with the Business Roundtable, Service Employees International Union and National Federation of Independent Business that successfully put health care and financial security at the top of the country’s agenda during the 2008 elections.

Nancy is a nationally recognized leader on health, retirement security and other issues important to older Americans. Her career spans 40 years in the governmental and nonprofit sectors.

Prior to coming to AARP, LeaMond served as the Chief of Staff and Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Congressional Affairs at the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR). In this role, she oversaw operations and management of the 200-person agency and coordinated public affairs, private sector outreach, policy development and legislative strategy for the enactment of landmark trade legislation. She successfully managed legislative efforts that helped secure passage of major presidential legislative initiatives, including the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Uruguay Round (GATT) and China MFN.

LeaMond worked extensively on health care and pension issues before entering the trade field, including time in the Public Health Service, the Medicaid program, the Department of Commerce, the Office of Management and Budget, the Department of Education, and on Capitol Hill as chief of staff to a senior member of Congress in the Democratic leadership.

In addition, for five years, LeaMond served as president of the Congressional Economic Leadership Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan forum for education and dialogue with members of Congress on economic competitiveness and trade issues.

Nancy holds a bachelor’s degree from Smith College and a master’s degree in public policy and urban planning from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. She is a former trustee of Smith College, a member of the KB Home National Advisory Board on home and community development and the International Women’s Forum of Washington, D.C. She has been named by The Hill as one of the “Top Lobbyists” every year since 2011. In 2016 she received the What’s Next Boomer Business Innovation Award for Vision, Leadership and Integrity.

Follow Nancy on Twitter @NancyLeaMond

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Melissa Stanton is the editor of AARP.org/Livable, the award-winning AARP Livable Communities e-Newsletter and various AARP Livable Communities resources and publications. She also speaks on behalf of AARP Livable Communities at conferences and events. Prior to joining AARP, Stanton spent more than a decade at Time Inc., where she was a senior editor at LIFE and People magazines and served as the editor-in-chief of various books and special issues. She is the author of two books, and her freelance articles have been published by The New York Times, The Atlantic, Glamour and other media outlets.

Stanton is a graduate of Fordham University and the City University of New York/Hunter College, from which she holds a master’s degree in public health.
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Praise for Where We Live: Communities for All Ages—100+ Inspiring Ideas from America’s Mayors, the first book in the AARP Where We Live series:

“Where We Live provides an organized set of ideas to spark change in communities across the country. This book shows how mayors in cities big, small, rural and urban have found countless ways to improve their communities for their aging population and all residents.”

—Mick Cornett, Mayor of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

“I commend Nancy LeaMond and AARP for writing Where We Live. This book should inspire mayors and other leaders to launch new projects to improve their communities for all of their residents.”

—Michael Nutter, former Mayor of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

WHERE YOU LIVE COULD BE FEATURED IN THE NEXT EDITION OF WHERE WE LIVE

Tell us about your community’s inspiring livability work. Visit AARP.org/SharingLivableSolutions.