



Homer City Hall

491 E. Pioneer Avenue

Homer, Alaska 99603

www.cityofhomer-ak.gov

City of Homer Agenda

ADA Compliance Committee

Thursday, April 14, 2022 at 4:00 PM

Cowles Council Chambers and Via Zoom Webinar

Webinar ID: 998 6324 0301 Passcode: 404451

Dial: 1 669 900 6833 or 1 253 215 8782 or Toll Free 888 788 0099 or 877 853 5247

CALL TO ORDER, 4:00 P.M.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

PUBLIC COMMENTS ON ITEMS ALREADY ON THE AGENDA The Public may comment on items listed on the agenda. If attending by Zoom please use the raise hand option and the Clerk will un-mute your connection. Please state your name for the record and you will have three minutes.

RECONSIDERATION

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

[A.](#) Regular Meeting Minutes for February 10, 2022 **pg 3**

REPORTS

[A.](#) ADA Coordinator Report for April 2022 **pg 9**

VISITORS

PENDING BUSINESS

[A.](#) Proposed Community Survey on Accessibility **pg 10**

NEW BUSINESS

A. Scheduling Jack Gist Park and the Fishing Lagoon for Site Accessibility Review Update

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

[A.](#) Ordinance 22-16 Appropriating Funds for Engineering ADA Access to the Fishing Lagoon **pg 16**

Memorandum 22-047 from Public Works Director as backup **pg 18**

[B.](#) AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit - A Self Service Guide for Assessing a Community's Walkability **pg 20**

[C.](#) AARP Rural Livability Workshop Report - How & Why Small Towns and Remote Communities are Working to Become More Livable for Older Adults and People of All Ages **pg 59**

COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE Members of the Public may comment on any topic. If attending by Zoom please use the raise hand option and the Clerk will un-mute your connection. Please state your name for the record and you will have three minutes to speak.

COMMENTS OF CITY STAFF

COMMENTS OF THE COMMITTEE

ADJOURNMENT

Next Regular Meeting is Thursday, May 12, 2022, at 4:00 p.m. All meetings scheduled to be held in the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska and via Zoom Webinar

Session 22-01 a Regular Meeting of the ADA Compliance Committee was called to order by Chair Donna Aderhold at 4:00 p.m. on February 10, 2022, via Zoom Webinar from the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska.

PRESENT: COMMITTEE MEMBERS ADERHOLD, DEADRICK, GEISLER, AND THORSRUD

ABSENT: COMMITTEE MEMBER VAN HOOZER (EXCUSED)

STAFF: DEPUTY CITY CLERK KRAUSE
PARKS SUPERINTENDENT STEFFY
PROJECT TECHNICIAN MEYER

AGENDA APPROVAL

Chair Aderhold requested a motion to approve the agenda.

THORSRUD/DEADRICK MOVED TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS PRESENTED.

There was no discussion.

VOTE. NON-OBJECTION. UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS UPON MATTERS ALREADY ON THE AGENDA

Scott Adams, city resident and caretaker for the Seafarers Memorial commented that after speaking with Parks Superintendent Steffy and Chair Aderhold they are taking steps to make modifications to the access for the area around the memorial which will make access available for everyone. He provided a hand drawn rendering and will provide a copy for the city.

RECONSIDERATION

SYNOPSIS APPROVAL

A. Regular Meeting Minutes of November 10, 2021

Chair Aderhold requested a motion to approve the minutes.

THORSRUD/GEISLER MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 10, 2021.

There was no discussion.

VOTE. NON-OBJECTION. UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

VISITORS/PRESENTATIONS

PENDING BUSINESS

- A. Memorandum from ADA Coordinator re: Parks Transition Plan and accessibility Surveys

Chair Aderhold introduced the item by reading of the title and invited ADA Coordinator Krause to speak to the memorandum.

ADA Coordinator Krause provided a summary of the memorandum which provided status update on the progress for the Parks Transition Plan. She noted that there were some revisions to the text, created a spreadsheet using the notes provided by committee members and staff from their surveys. The next concurrent step in the process is for Public Works staff to start working on estimates of costs and whether the corrections can be done in house or if a contractor would need to be hired. She stated that she required assistance in pointing out the locations and the Accessibility issues as some of the more blatant access problems can be determined but others cannot just by the pictures. They will then need to work as a Committee to determine the priority of corrections in accordance with the regulations. Mrs. Krause further suggested that they separate the Trails from the Playground and Parks Transition Plan and address a separate Transition Plan for the Trails after they complete this one the parks and playgrounds.

A brief discussion ensued on separating the trails from the parks/playground transition plan and that it was a good suggestion to separate the two. A question was posed on inclusion of trails in parks such as an access trail within the Bayview Park, Bishop's Beach trail and the trails within Karen Hornaday Park. It was recommended by staff that since they have a plan and grant for the Karen Hornaday Park access trail that it be kept separate.

Mrs. Krause pointed out that even if they perform the transition plans separately they will eventually be included with the original transition plan done on the city facilities into one overall transition plan. They could include in the parks transition plan and then be able to show their accomplishments.

Chair Aderhold requested a motion and second.

GEISLER/THORSRUD MOVED TO SEPARATE THE TRAILS FROM THE PARKS AND PLAYGROUND TRANSITION PLAN AND ADDRESS IT AT A LATER DATE AFTER THE COMPLETION OF THE PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS TRANSITION PLAN.

A brief discussion on separating the trails from the parks but that there should be a definition to define a trail in a park compared to a trail to a park. It was also noted that the total amount of trails and number of parks required updating. IT was clarified that the definition would be included in the Trails Transition Plan.

VOTE. NON-OBJECTION. UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

Discussion and questions were facilitated by Chair Aderhold on the following:

- Addressing identification of playground equipment in the pictures shown
- Most of the pictures of the equipment are representative of what needs to be done
 - o The whole park needs to be accessible
 - o Once the accessibility to the park is addressed then they can focus on the features as Accessible Routes are the top priority in accordance with regulations
 - o Using general identifying remarks when stating location in the plan
- The accessibility of the playground:
 - o This is a moving target as there is no percentage or standard
 - o Health and Safety Issues
 - o Depending on the number of features there are in the playground a certain percentage must be accessible
 - o Addressing accessibility for all abilities – visual, physical, mental, emotional
 - o Developing a maintenance plan to maintain accessibility to features
- Features that provide safety issues should be removed, correcting small items such as replacing handholds with adaptive handholds
- Identified the building where the potable water is located on the spit
 - o Distance between the parking and access is not accessible.
 - o There is no designated ADA Parking
 - o There is not a complete ADA accessible route to access the potable water
 - o The handle to the faucet is not compliant and should be replaced with a lever style
- Notes can be provided for the pictures taken at the Fishing Hole
 - o Re-measure the distance on the grill on all sides
 - o Regulations on front reach, side reach and height
 - ADA regulation 1011 cites clear ground approach on all sides, 2-5% slope and 15-34 inches height
 - Interpretation of clear ground approach - requires clarification
- Seafarers Memorial the bench was relocated to the gravel area from the turf
 - o Plans are in progress to install a cement pad to make the entrance accessible
 - remove the height difference where the bricks are located
 - o two benches past the memorial will have a cement pad installed
 - o adding accessible parking spots in areas that are currently designated as no parking which would allow for access – not sure if legal or not along the highway
 - o installing a fence to keep campers from encroaching on the park area
- Recommended designating accessible parking spots in the parking lots across from the memorial and in additional locations around the harbor.
 - o Requires consulting with Port & Harbor on the additional accessible parking spaces
 - o Accessible parking is usually not placed where the loading/unloading is next to the traffic lane as that presents inherent safety issues.
- Public Works Staff has had a discussion with the Committee on the Seafarer's Memorial and has recommended that Mr. Adams speak to the Parks Commission regarding the work that the group of volunteers does in regards to the memorial.
 - o Working in a partnership in making that facility accessible
 - o City as the property owner needs to address the corrections
- Chair Aderhold noted that she would be able to provide information on photos
- Jack Gist has many accessible issues with parking, dugouts, bleachers, etc.

- There is a line item for ballfield improvements in the amount of \$20,000 and they may be able to include some ADA compliance in that and will follow up at the April meeting.
- Lower right field was dedicated but most are recognized by the location within the park
- Priority should be made on accessible parking and viewing
 - Department of Justice has provided guidance on how corrections should be prioritized as follows:
 1. Accessible approach and entry (parking, accessible routes)
 2. Access to programs and services
 3. Access to restrooms
 4. Access to other items (drinking fountains, trash receptacles, grills, benches, etc.)

Chair Aderhold will be able to add notes for the photographs to include notations of locations and submit to the Clerk.

Further points made on the draft plan were as follows:

- Defining whether the picture is depicting the access, feature, bench, etc.
- Whether a user has an accessibility issue does not matter that the feature must be accessible
- Corrections can be simple such as providing a portable ramp
- Primary accessibility for the upper left field at Jack Gist was the steepness of the grade
 - Clerk will send Public Works staff the spreadsheet for adding their information
- Accessibility in winter versus to summer
- Disc Golf course to be considered a trail for accessibility issues.
 - In accordance with regulations it would not require to be accessible but would be a nice feature
 - Plans in the works to include Disc Golf baskets at the HERC

Ms. Geisler complimented Ms. Krause on her knowledge of the ADA requirements.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Memorandum from ADA Coordinator re: Community Survey

Chair Aderhold introduced the item by reading of the title.

ADA Coordinator Krause reported that in her review of various communities Transition Plans she found a community in Washington State that issued a survey and thought that would be a good step for Homer to gauge how this community feels about accessibility and since public participation is one of the requirements by the Department of Justice she felt that it would work putting a survey on the City website, announcing it in the monthly newsletter, possibly putting an announcement in the Homer News. She noted that the survey was short just nine questions, more could be added if the Committee desired that but would like a motion of support to submit the request to the City Manager.

Chair Aderhold requested a motion and second.

GEISLER/THORSRUD MOVED TO SUPPORT FORWARDING A REQUEST TO THE CITY MANAGER FOR APPROVAL TO IMPLEMENT A COMMUNITY SURVEY.

Discussion ensued on the proposed questions and recommendations made were as follows:

- Listing the locations that they would like feedback on since they have numerous state and borough facilities in the city
- Adding access in general
- Remove the words “emergency response” and refine questions to asking how well they are doing their job as that will provide guidance on where they need to improve
- Keep questions focused on accessibility
- If questions are yes or no then an option to provide more information or reword the questions
- This survey will be limited to accessibility and should have a title to reflect that
- Add any other comments as a catch all
- Be concise with the questions. Question 6 was a bit vague and not sure what is being asked.
- Not targeting those with accessibility issues but keeping the questions suitable for the broader audience.
- Submit the survey to Community Recreation and add QR codes that people can access at places like the library and parks, distribution can be paper and electronic

Ms. Geisler requested that the revised questions be submitted back to the Committee before distribution since they made changes.

VOTE. NON-OBJECTION. UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS

- A. Resolution 21-083 2022 Meeting Schedule for Advisory Bodies and City Council
- B. City Manager’s Report for City Council Meeting on January 24, 2022
- C. Resolution 22-008 Increasing the Membership of the ADA Compliance Committee

ADA Coordinator Krause reported that they have not had any applicants so far in response to Chair Aderhold’s question.

ADA Coordinator Krause stated that the City would do their very best to make the committee accessible to a member but they did not have any ASL interpreters contracted in response to Ms. Deadrick.

- D. Community Challenge Grant offered by AARP

ADA Coordinator Krause commented that she thought of Bayview Park when she saw this grant opportunity and agreed that it is offered on an annual basis from AARP.

Parks Superintendent Steffy commented that he is discussing with Rotary as they have shown some interest in the park and expressed his goals for the park dependent on the available funding for the park through partnership.

COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE

Scott Adams, city resident, commented on seeking assistance with access issues at the Fishing Hole and then proceeded to describe his idea of installation of a floating dock for those persons with accessibility issues. He then commented on the access to water at the Clean Out Tank.

COMMENTS OF THE CITY STAFF

ADA Coordinator Krause commented that it was a very productive and good meeting. In response to a question regarding targeted advertisement they would really like to have a member with mobility issues but would also welcome local business owners and members who are involved in the industry.

Parks Superintendent Steffy questioned if targeted member solicitations to the Long Term Care or Senior Center had been considered. He then commented on the Fishing Lagoon ADA Improvements and noted that this issue is under review by the Public Works staff and that the project was listed in the CIP. Mr. Steffy then provided some input on the availability of grants being offered for text to speech software. He commented on the great meeting and complimented ADA Coordinator Krause on her doing so much work and research.

Project Technician Meyer echoed the compliments expressed on the work done by Renee on her research and noted that it was a good meeting.

COMMENTS OF THE COMMITTEE

Ms. Deadrick echoed the compliments expressed regarding ADA Coordinator Krause's accomplishments since the last meeting.

Ms. Geisler commented it was a great meeting and reminded everyone that she was generally available between meetings.

Ms. Thorsrud expressed her appreciation for ADA Coordinator Krause's work and believed that this was one of the most productive committees that she has ever served on. She expressed her appreciation for everyone's efforts and time and their concerns regarding the issues.

Chair Aderhold commented her appreciation for the contributions and thanked Mr. Adams for attending the meeting today.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Committee the meeting adjourned at 6:00 p.m. The next regular meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 14, 2022 at 4:00 p.m. at the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska and via Zoom webinar.

RENEE KRAUSE, MMC, DEPUTY CITY CLERK II/ADA COORDINATOR

Approved: _____



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Office of the City Clerk

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(f) 907-235-3143

Memorandum

TO: ADA COMPLIANCE COMMITTEE

FROM: RENEE KRAUSE, MMC, ADA COORDINATOR/DEPUTY CITY CLERK

DATE: APRIL 6, 2022

SUBJECT: ADA COORDINATOR APRIL REPORT

At the February 10, 2022 regular meeting the draft transition plan was presented with a number of items requiring information. Public Works staff was asked to review the draft and determined whether the corrections listed could be performed in house or if a contractor was required and to also come up with some costs expectations to perform those corrections. Chair Aderhold volunteered to review the photos that she took and provide some input on the locations and corrections required. It was also determined that they would probably need to go back and revisit Jack Gist and the Fishing Lagoon. Chair Aderhold submitted her updates in early March.

Due to heavy work schedule and some special projects this project did get pushed to the bottom of my to do list. I regret that I was unable to complete the progress on the draft transition plan and have determined to get this back to the top of the list starting May 9, 2022.

Public Works was unable to complete their tasks as well due to their work load and Public Works Director Keiser has informed me that she will be issuing a Task Order to one to the contracted engineering firms to provide a cost estimate on performing the corrections to be ready by the June meeting.



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Memorandum

TO: ADA COMPLIANCE COMMITTEE

FROM: RENEE KRAUSE, MMC, ADA COORDINATOR/DEPUTY CITY CLERK

DATE: APRIL 6, 2022

SUBJECT: COMMUNITY SURVEY ON ACCESSIBILITY

At the February 10, 2022 regular meeting the ADA Compliance Committee approved the idea of a Community Survey on Accessibility. Several recommendations were made by the Committee with input from Matt Steffy, Parks Superintendent and Owen Meyer, Project Technician. The recommendations were:

- Listing the locations that they would like feedback on since they have numerous state and borough facilities in the city
- Adding access in general
- Remove the words “emergency response” and refine questions to asking how well they are doing their job as that will provide guidance on where they need to improve
- Keep questions focused on accessibility
- If questions are yes or no then an option to provide more information or reword the questions
- This survey will be limited to accessibility and should have a title to reflect that
- Add any other comments as a catch all
- Be concise with the questions. Question 6 was a bit vague and not sure what is being asked.
- Not targeting those with accessibility issues but keeping the questions suitable for the broader audience.
- Submit the survey to Community Recreation and add QR codes that people can access at places like the library and parks, distribution can be paper and electronic

Due the extent of the amendments made the survey was not forwarded to the City Manager. Once the Committee has approved the format and content it will be submitted to the City Manager for his input and approval. A copy of the memorandum to the City Manager is provided for the review of the Committee.

Recommendation

Review the proposed amended Community Survey on Accessibility and make any additional changes. Make a motion to adopt the Community Survey as amended and forward to the City Manager for review and approval for distribution.

COMMUNITY SURVEY ON ACCESSIBILITY IN THE CITY OF HOMER PARKS, PLAYGROUNDS, BEACHES AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Question 1. Are there recreational activities conducted by the City of Homer, or a park, campground or playground owned by City that you or someone you know cannot be enjoyed because of accessibility issues?

☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, please list the park or program: _____

Question 2. Have you or a person you know with a disability participated in a recreational program or visited a city owned park, playground or beach that was accessible? ☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, please identify: _____

Question 3. Which location owned by the City of Homer is most important to you for the opportunities that it provides? Select all that apply:

- ☐ Karen Hornaday Park ☐ Campground ☐ Playground ☐ Playing Fields ☐ Park as a Whole
- ☐ Mariner Park ☐ Campground ☐ Day Use Area ☐ Gazebo ☐ Park as a Whole
- ☐ Bishop's Beach Park ☐ Beach Access ☐ Pavilion ☐ Restroom Facilities ☐ Park as a Whole
- ☐ Jack Gist Park ☐ Playing Fields ☐ Disc Golf Course ☐ Park as a Whole
- ☐ Ben Walters Park ☐ Pavilion ☐ Restroom Facilities ☐ Playground ☐ Access to Beluga Lake ☐ Park as a Whole
- ☐ Seafarer's Memorial
- ☐ End of the Road Park
- ☐ Nick Dudiak Fishing Lagoon
- ☐ Skate Park
- ☐ WKFL Park
- ☐ HERC for Community Recreational Activities offered

Question 4. In regards to accessibility, rank the following amenities or features found in the location(s) selected in Question 3, in the order of importance to you, your family or a person you know, with 1 as most important.

- _____ beach access
- _____ General Access to facility, restroom, pavilion, ballfield
- _____ picnic table/fire ring/grill
- _____ parking
- _____ shelter/pavilion
- _____ playground
- _____ sports field
- _____ campground

Question 5. Is the City of Homer website accessible? ☐ Yes ☐ No If No, Please provide a brief description on what the City can do to make it more accessible. _____

Question 6. Do the City of Homer Park facilities provide adequate accessible features to citizens with accessibility issues? ☐ Yes ☐ No If No, Please provide a brief description on how the City could improve accessibility: _____

Question 7. What improvements would best promote accessibility to City of Homer parks, playgrounds, ballfields and beaches? Please provide a brief description: _____

Question 8: Is there any other improvements that the City can provide regarding accessibility within the city parks, playgrounds, recreational programs, ballfields, campgrounds, fishing lagoon or website? Please provide a brief description:_____



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Memorandum

TO: ROBERT DUMOUCHEL, CITY MANAGER

CC: ADA COMPLIANCE COMMITTEE

FROM: RENEE KRAUSE, MMC, ADA COORDINATOR/DEPUTY CITY CLERK

DATE: APRIL 6, 2022

SUBJECT: COMMUNITY SURVEY ON ACCESSIBILITY

In reviewing of other municipalities' transition plan development I found that Washington State Parks included a brief survey on their website, at their park kiosks and distributed to municipalities around the state to gather user feedback and input on the accessibility of their facilities. I believe that a similar process would provide additional support and give a more defined accessibility picture of our city parks, campgrounds, playgrounds and recreational programs. A survey would also fulfill the Department of Justice requirement for public participation in the development of the transition plan. The idea was presented to the ADA Compliance Committee at their February 10, 2022 regular meeting and they approved the idea by consensus. I have included an excerpt of the discussion from the minutes of the meeting for your information as an attachment to this memorandum.

The Committee along with Matt Steffy, Parks Superintendent and Owen Meyer, Project Technician reviewed the proposed questions and made several recommendations and amendments which were approved at their meeting on April 14, 2022. We are requesting your approval to distribute the Community Survey on Accessibility to various city facilities such as the HERC, Harbormaster's Office, Homer Public Library, and City Hall as well as the city website and Facebook page.

Recommendation:

Please review and provide any additional recommendations. Approve the distribution of the Community Survey on Accessibility.

- There is a line item for ballfield improvements in the amount of \$20,000 and they may be able to include some ADA compliance in that and will follow up at the April meeting.
- Lower right field was dedicated but most are recognized by the location within the park
- Priority should be made on accessible parking and viewing
 - Department of Justice has provided guidance on how corrections should be prioritized as follows:
 1. Accessible approach and entry (parking, accessible routes)
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Chair Aderhold will be able to add notes for the photographs to include notations of locations and submit to the Clerk.

Further points made on the draft plan were as follows:

- Defining whether the picture is depicting the access, feature, bench, etc.
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NEW BUSINESS

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Chair Aderhold requested a motion and second.

GEISLER/THORSRUD MOVED TO SUPPORT FORWARDING A REQUEST TO THE CITY MANAGER FOR APPROVAL TO IMPLEMENT A COMMUNITY SURVEY.

Discussion ensued on the proposed questions and recommendations made were as follows:

- Listing the locations that they would like feedback on since they have numerous state and borough facilities in the city
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VOTE. NON-OBJECTION. UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS

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**CITY OF HOMER
HOMER, ALASKA**

City Manager/
Public Works Director

ORDINANCE 22-16

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF HOMER, ALASKA
APPROPRIATING \$30,000 FROM THE FISHING LAGOON CAPITAL
ASSET REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE (CARMA) FUND
FOR THE PURPOSE OF FUNDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN
ENGINEERED CONCEPT AND COST ESTIMATE FOR AN
ACCESSIBLE FISHING PLATFORM AT THE NICK DUDIAK FISHING
LAGOON. CITY MANAGER/PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR.

WHEREAS, The ADA platform at the Nick Dudiak Fishing Lagoon has deteriorated and
no longer serves its purpose of providing ADA access to the fishing waters; and

WHEREAS, Funds are available in the Fishing Lagoon CARMA Account; and

WHEREAS, The likelihood of securing a grant for construction of a new access platform
would be greater if we had an engineered concept and reasonable cost estimate.

NOW, THEREFORE, THE CITY OF HOMER ORDAINS:

Section 1. The Homer City Council hereby amends the FY22 Capital Budget by
appropriating \$30,000 from Fishing Lagoon CARMA Account for the purpose of funding the
development of an engineered concept and reasonable cost estimate for an ADA accessible
fishing platform at the Nick Dudiak Fishing Lagoon as follows:

<u>Account</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Amount</u>
156-0397	Fishing Lagoon CARMA	\$30,000

Section 2. This is a budget amendment ordinance only, is not permanent in nature,
and shall not be codified.

ENACTED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF HOMER, ALASKA, this ____ day of _____, 2022.

CITY OF HOMER

KEN CASTNER, MAYOR

43

44 ATTEST:

45

46

47

48 _____
MELISSA JACOBSEN, MMC, CITY CLERK

49

50

51 YES

52 NO:

53 ABSTAIN:

54 ABSENT:

55

56 First Reading:

57 Public Reading:

58 Second Reading:

59 Effective Date:



City of Homer

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Public Works

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(f) 907-235-3145

Memorandum 22-047

TO: Mayor Castner and Homer City Council
THROUGH: Robert Dumouchel, City Manager
FROM: Janette Keiser, PE, Director of Public Works
DATE: 3/18/2022
SUBJECT: ADA Access for Nick Dudiak Fishing Lagoon

Issue: We need funds authorized from the Fishing Lagoon CARMA to pay for engineering for ADA access for the Nick Dudiak Fishing Lagoon.

Background: The ADA platform at the Nick Dudiak Fishing Lagoon has deteriorated and no longer serves its purpose of providing ADA access to the fishing waters. Parts of it have detached from the main body and are a safety hazard. The problem with the existing platform is that it is subject to damage from tidal action and gravel build-up. A new access platform is needed that will better resist these forces. Such a solution will not be quick, cheap or easy. It will, in all likelihood, require grant funding to construct a new access platform.

The probability of securing a grant would be greater if we had an engineered concept and reasonable cost estimate. There is \$110,165 in the Fishing Lagoon CARMA Account available to fund this work. Fishing Lagoon CARMA is one of three specific CARMA “buckets” that was not part of the CARMA consolidation associated with Ordinance 21-30(S). The funds in the Fishing Lagoon CARMA are set aside to care for the specific infrastructure and support future dredging maintenance projects.

Recommendation:

That the City Council appropriate \$30,000 from the Fishing Lagoon CARMA Account to fund the development of an engineered concept and reasonable cost estimate for an ADA accessible fishing platform at the Nick Dudiak Fishing Lagoon

CITY OF HOMER
FINANCIAL SUPPLEMENT

PROJECT NAME	ADA Access for Nick Dudiak Fishing Lagoon	DATE	03/24/2022
DEPARTMENT	Public Works	SPONSOR	City Manager/PW Director
REQUESTED AMOUNT	\$ 30,000		

DESCRIPTION	The ADA platform at the Nick Dudiak Fishing Lagoon has deteriorated and no longer serves its purpose of providing ADA access to the fishing waters. Parts of it have detached from the main body and are a safety hazard. The problem with the existing platform is that it is subject to damage from tidal action and gravel build-up. A new access platform is needed that will better resist these forces. Such a solution will not be quick, cheap or easy. It will, in all likelihood, require grant funding to construct a new access platform. The probability of securing a grant would be greater if we had an engineered concept and reasonable cost estimate.
-------------	--

FUNDING SOURCE(S)	OPERATING	GF CARMA	GF FLEET CARMA	PORT RESERVES	WATER CARMA
	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
	HAWSP	HART-ROADS	HART-TRAILS	PORT FLEET RESERVES	SEWER CARMA
	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

FUNDING SOURCE 1: Fishing Lagoon CARMA		FUNDING SOURCE 2:		FUNDING SOURCE 3:	
Current Balance	\$ 110,165	Current Balance	_____	Current Balance	_____
Encumbered	\$ 0	Encumbered	_____	Encumbered	_____
Requested Amount	\$ 30,000	Requested Amount	_____	Requested Amount	_____
Other Items on Current Agenda	\$ 0	Other Items on Current Agenda	_____	Other Items on Current Agenda	_____
Remaining Balance	\$ 80,165	Remaining Balance	_____	Remaining Balance	_____
FUNDING SOURCE 4:		FUNDING SOURCE 5:		FUNDING SOURCE 6:	
Current Balance	_____	Current Balance	_____	Current Balance	_____
Encumbered	_____	Encumbered	_____	Encumbered	_____
Requested Amount	_____	Requested Amount	_____	Requested Amount	_____
Remaining Balance	_____	Remaining Balance	_____	Remaining Balance	_____

Walk Audit Tool Kit

A self-service guide for assessing
a community's walkability





AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering people 50 or older to choose how they live as they age. With nearly 38 million members and offices in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, AARP strengthens communities and advocates for what matters most to families, with a focus on health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment.

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International: 1-202-434-3525

TTY Users, Dial 711: English: 1-877-434-7598 | Spanish: 1-866-238-9488

AARP Livable Communities

The AARP Livable Communities initiative supports the efforts of local leaders and residents throughout the nation to make their communities more livable and age-friendly.

Web: *AARP.org/Livable* and *AARP.org/WalkAudit*

Newsletter: *AARP.org/LivableSubscribe*

Email: *Livable@AARP.org*

Twitter: *@AARPLivable*

Facebook: *@AARPLivableCommunities*

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HOW TO USE THE AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit

The **AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit** has been created for use by individuals, local leaders, large groups and teams of just two people. In other words, the information in it can be used by anyone who is concerned about the safety and walkability of a street, neighborhood or community.

This walk audit booklet is organized into three parts, and the print edition contains a back cover pocket for storing the tool kit’s worksheets, which are listed below and can be viewed and downloaded for printing at **AARP.org/WalkAudit**. (Photocopying the worksheets for sharing is encouraged!)

As new materials — such as additional worksheets or translations into other languages — are added to the tool kit, we’ll spread the news through the free, weekly **AARP Livable Communities e-Newsletter**. Sign up at **AARP.org/LivableSubscribe**.

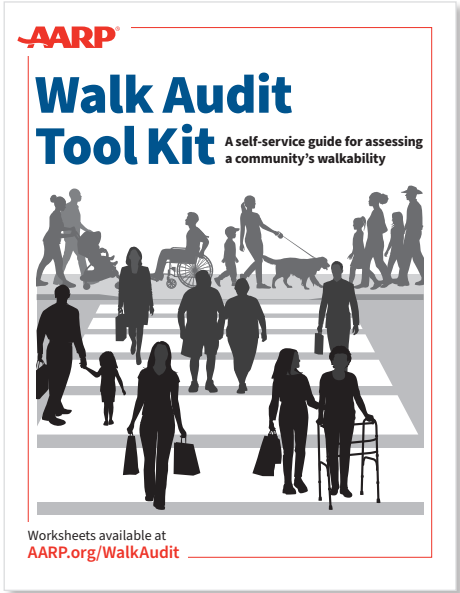


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Walk Audit Worksheets

- 1. Make a Map**
- 2. Who’s Using the Street — and Why?**
- 3. Sidewalks, Streets and Crossings**
(Single-Location Audit)
- 4. Sidewalks, Streets and Crossings**
(Walking Audit)
- 5. Sidewalks**
- 6. Streets and Crossings**
- 7. Street Safety and Appeal**
- 8. Public Transit Access**
- 9. Build a Better Block**
- 10. Winter Weather**
- 11. Summary**

Visit **AARP.org/WalkAudit** to download or order this publication and access its worksheets.

Introduction

THE PROBLEM

Too many communities in the United States are designed exclusively or almost exclusively for automobile travel, with very little consideration given to the needs of pedestrians.

Among the factors that discourage or outright prevent people from walking: multilane roadways, high-speed corridors that are unsafe to cross, a lack of street maintenance, a scarcity of sidewalks.

According to Smart Growth America's 2021 *Dangerous by Design* report, from 2010 to 2019, drivers in the U.S. struck and killed 53,435 pedestrians — an average of more than 14 people each day.

In 2017, an estimated 137,000 pedestrians were treated in emergency rooms for nonfatal crash-related injuries, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

To ensure that walking is a safe, accessible and convenient alternative for people who cannot or choose not to drive — and to reverse the trends in pedestrian fatalities and injuries — it is critical for communities to become more pedestrian-friendly.

A SOLUTION

Local leaders and residents can help make the nation's neighborhoods more walkable by conducting a "walk audit" to identify the roads and intersections that should be walkable and crossable but are instead dangerous (by design) for pedestrians.

A walk audit can help inform local decision-making by prioritizing areas in need of improvement and educating community members about the importance of street and sidewalk design. Participating in a walk audit can help people become better champions for local change.

THE TIME COMMITMENT

It can take less than an hour to complete a targeted, single-location walk audit. Or an audit can become a multi-hour event. The amount of time involved is entirely up to the "auditor" or audit team. ■



▲ Multilane, two-way roadways are common throughout the United States. Unlike most, this thoroughfare actually has pedestrian-supportive features, including sidewalks, crosswalks, traffic lights and pedestrian-controlled Walk/Don't Walk signals. But is this a nice place to walk? Is it even possible to cross the entire expanse at once?

A WALK AUDIT IS ... an activity in which participants observe and evaluate the walkability of a location to identify and document if and how pedestrians can safely travel along a street, navigate an intersection and get from Point A to B and C and so on.

A WALK AUDIT CAN ...

- Gather input about community infrastructure needs and investments
- Educate residents about design elements that support safety
- Empower community members and local leaders to become agents of change

A WALK AUDIT CAN LEAD TO ...

- Reduced traffic congestion and pollution
- Healthier, more active lifestyles
- Increased property values
- Safer streets for people of all ages

WHO CAN DO A WALK AUDIT?

- *Everyone and anyone!*

AARP and Walkability

In a livable community, people of *all* ages can safely walk for fitness and to get where they need or want to go. However:

- A community without sidewalks — or with sidewalks that suddenly end — is not walkable
- Streets that are too wide, have multiple lanes or lack traffic lights are uncrossable
- Public transit stops that pedestrians can't safely access are essentially useless

Because the vast majority of the nation's roadways were designed to move cars *fast*, far too many streets are simply unwalkable.

Walkability is an important issue to AARP because older adults — along with people of color and residents of low-income communities — are disproportionately the victims of fatal motor vehicle crashes involving pedestrians.

In fact, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, the rates of pedestrian deaths in vehicle crashes per 100,000 people are highest for those age 70 or older.

The **AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit** provides community leaders and residents with a way to identify unsafe streets, gather and document needed information and observations, and then advocate for solutions to make streets safer for all users. ■

Walk This Way — or Any Which Way

The words “walking” and “pedestrians” are used in this tool kit as inclusive terms.

To quote the *Inclusive Walk Audit Facilitator's Guide*, published in 2020 by the Minnesota Department of Health, walking “includes both ambulatory and non-ambulatory modes. Walking encompasses all forms of mobility devices, including using a wheelchair, cane, walker or other mobility device that allows the user to travel at human speed.”

Inclusivity is important to the walk audit process since streets should be usable by people of all ages, experiences and abilities.

For that reason, walk audits done by groups or teams are best when they include auditors who walk at different speeds, who “roll” rather than walk, who have vision or hearing impairments, or other differences that impact them as pedestrians.

After all, when a street is safe and accessible for someone with a disability or mobility difference, it is safe and accessible for everyone.

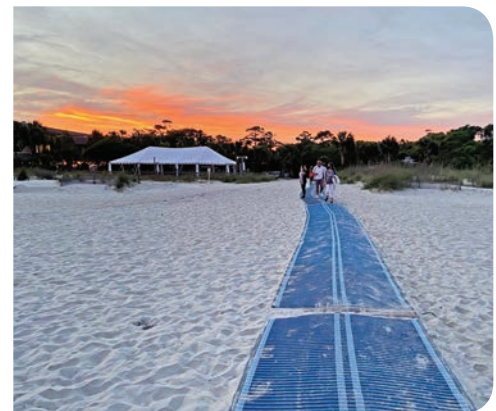


Frederick, Maryland

Creative Solutions

◀ There are two ways to reach the pedestrian bridge that crosses a small canal in the center of town. Option 1: Take the stairs. Option 2: Use the ramp.

▶ A portable beach access mat makes the shore accessible — and walking or rolling on the sand easier — for all visitors.



Hilton Head Island, South Carolina

GETTING STARTED

Step 1: Get *READY***1 WHERE**
IDENTIFY THE WALK AUDIT LOCATION

Visit and map an area where people need or want to walk. The audit location can cover just one spot — such as an intersection or block — or it can take place along an entire route covering several streets and intersections.

Keep in mind:

- The smaller the area, the easier it is to conduct an audit, identify problems and advocate for solutions to get results.
- The larger the audit area, the larger the potential impact.

WALK AUDIT TYPE:**Single-Location Audit**

▼ A person on foot usually can't cover the full expanse of this multilane, two-way roadway all at once. (Look closely. A pedestrian is waiting on the small median until the light changes and it's possible to cross.) This intersection is adjacent to apartments, medical offices, restaurants and several shops, but because walking is both unpleasant and unsafe, people generally drive to destinations in the area.

**2 WHAT**
DECIDE ON A TYPE OF WALK AUDIT

Will the walk audit take place in one location? Or will the audit occur along a route?

This tool kit contains worksheets suitable for an observational single-location audit or a walking audit in which the participants experience an area's walkability (or, more likely, nonwalkability).

Keep in mind:

- A single-location audit allows for observing a specific area at different times of the day. It's also a good activity for people who are unable to remain on their feet for long stretches of time.
- A single-location audit is also a great way to include very young and much older participants in the activity since the auditors can sit in a safe and comfortable spot (such as on a building patio or beneath the shade of a nearby tree) while counting people or cars or whatever their assigned task might be.
- A walking audit assesses the walkability of a larger area, such as between key destinations, and is a useful activity for people who can and want to walk longer distances and can be active for longer amounts of time.

Learn the Lingo

Study up by examining the illustrations and vocabulary words on page 10. Knowing the elements of a streetscape will be very helpful when you write a report (see page 16) and describe to local leaders or transportation officials what's wrong and what needs to be fixed.

3 WHO INVITE PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE

Will the walk audit be conducted by one person or several? If several, how will people of different abilities, ages and life experiences be included?

The tool kit contains worksheets suitable for a solo auditor or a team made up of neighbors, colleagues, community members and, ideally, elected officials or others with influence.

(Having local leaders see and experience the location and pedestrian safety problems firsthand can be a fast track to achieving needed change.)

Keep in mind:

- If the walk audit is conducted by one person, multiple visits might be needed in order to perform all of the desired observations (or to evaluate the street activity at various times of the day) and document them accordingly.
- If the audit is done by two or more people, individual assignments can be made. Train the auditors ahead of time so everyone counts and documents their observations in the same way.
- After a team audit, someone will need to gather and tally the collective results.

4 WHEN CHOOSE A DATE AND TIME

The volume and type of traffic (cars, buses, bikes, pedestrians) will likely vary depending on the day of the week or time of day.

Is the walk audit being done because of concerns about the safety of particular pedestrians, such as schoolchildren, workers, shoppers or retirees? If so, conduct the audit when those people will be present.

If observations are needed during multiple times of the day (including after dark), schedule auditors to work in shifts.

Keep in mind:

- Check the weather forecast! There's no need for walk auditors to endure extreme temperatures, precipitation or wind.
- To be more comprehensive in the audit and secure about the observations, consider repeating the audit in the same spot, in the same way but on a different day.
- Once the audit is done, start preparing the report. (See page 16.) The findings can be shared with the community and presented to local leaders who may be able to solve or help solve the documented problems. ■

WALK AUDIT TYPE:

Walking Audit

► The young people in this photograph are walking home from school along a 1½-mile route dotted with houses, stores, eateries and other businesses — but no sidewalks, crosswalks or mid-block crossings. Due to early school starting times and late-ending extracurricular activities, teenagers often walk to or from school in the dark.



GETTING STARTED

Step 2: Get *SET* ...**1 PRINT THE WALK AUDIT WORKSHEETS**

The **AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit**'s worksheets can be downloaded at [AARP.org/WalkAudit](https://www.aarp.org/WalkAudit) for printing, photocopying and sharing. Some of the worksheets are suitable for a solo auditor. Others are helpful for group efforts. There are options for observational audits that take place in one location, as well as for audits that document the walkability between destinations.

The collection is listed on page 1, and the printed edition of this guide contains a pocket for storing the worksheets.

2 GATHER THE WALK AUDIT SUPPLIES

In addition to the selected worksheets, each walk auditor will need a:

- clipboard
- notebook, pen or pencil, tape measure
- digital or smartphone camera
- printed or online street map

It can also be important to have:

- comfortable footwear
- weather-suitable clothing
- insect repellent
- portable seating
- a beverage and snack
- a hat, sunscreen and sunglasses
- a flashlight or headlamp
- a brightly colored shirt, jacket or safety vest for visibility (preferably one with pockets for holding supplies)



A. Children can't safely cross this street to travel between their homes (in a development on the left) and the elementary school (seen on the right).



B. The street lacks sidewalks and crosswalks.



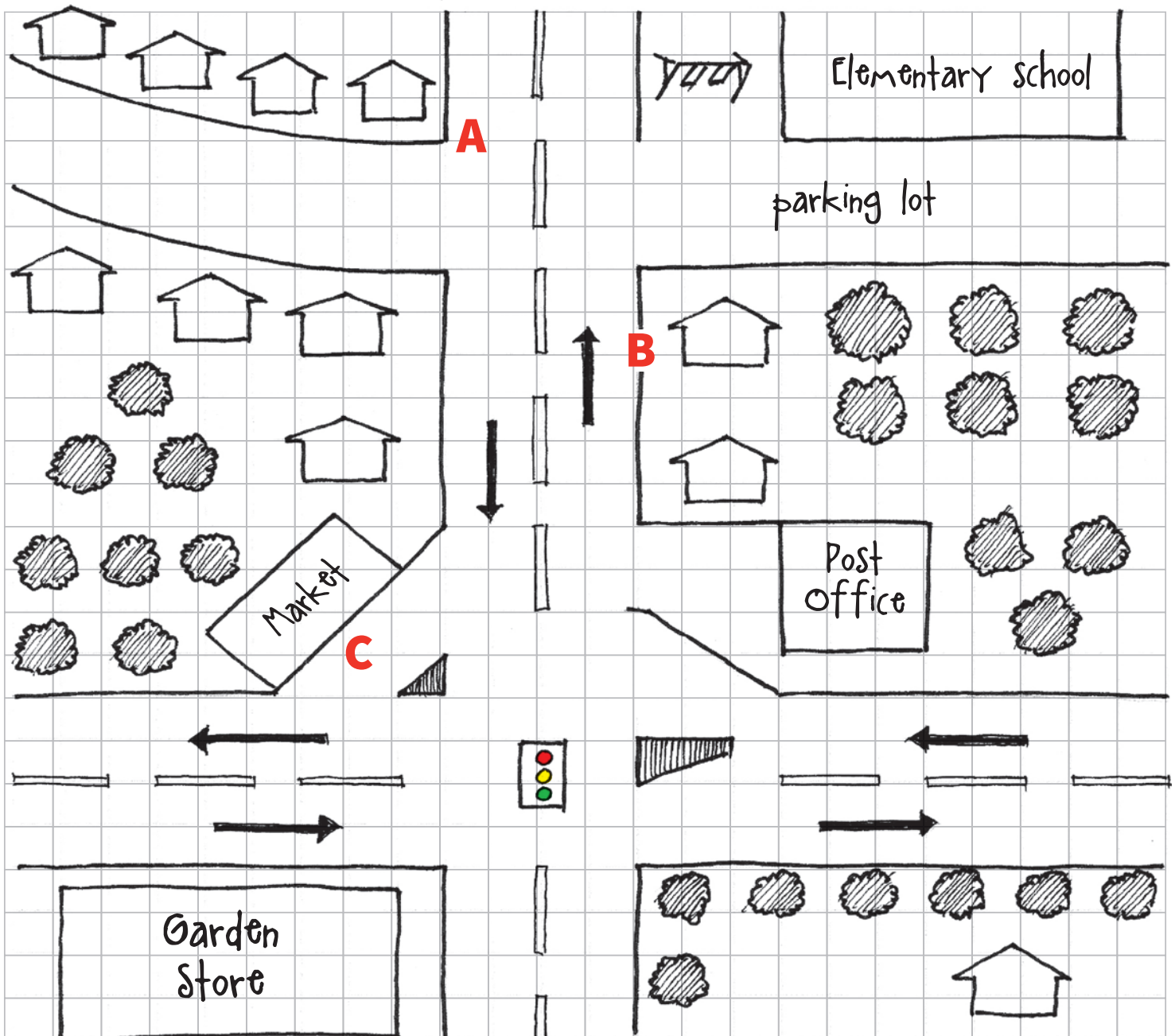
C. With such a large intersection and no crosswalks or pedestrian beacons (described on page 11), walking to the market is difficult and dangerous.

Sample

3 MAKE A MAP

Use a mapping website to capture and print a bird's-eye-view image of the walk audit area, or use our Make a Map worksheet (which can be downloaded and printed from [AARP.org/WalkAudit](https://www.aarp.org/WalkAudit)) to draw a simple map.

- Label the streets and make note of any key features, such as stores, schools and (if they exist) sidewalks.
- Take photographs and/or video of the area so others can see the challenges and strengths.
- Match and mark the photographs and/or video location(s) on the map.
- Indicate any other problem spots or areas of opportunity (e.g., a bus stop with no seating or shelter). ■



STEP 3: GO do the Walk Audit!

1 LOOK AND LEARN

With clipboards and worksheets in hand, go to the audit site. When a walk audit is staffed by many workers or volunteers, the tasks can be divvied up among them.

Audit activities can include:

- Counting cars that pass the location
- Counting pedestrians who walk along and/or cross the street
- Noting demographic characteristics of the pedestrians (e.g., age, physical ability)
- Timing how long the traffic light stops vehicles so pedestrians can cross
- Assessing why people are walking in the location (exercising, commuting, shopping, dog walking, etc.)

Creative Solutions



Washington, D.C.



Lewes, Delaware

Bicycles shouldn't be used on sidewalks, and bikes and stairs are not a good mix. But cyclists sometimes do need to navigate one or both. ▲ A narrow, metal ramp helps cyclists move bikes along steps. ◀ A message stenciled on a sidewalk serves as a safety reminder.

Understanding the “Why”

Although a walk audit needn't involve stopping pedestrians for interviews, it's important to have a sense of why people are walking in a particular area. Doing so can help pinpoint problems and solutions.

Look for clues:

- Pedestrian traffic that picks up around lunchtime might indicate nearby workers are traveling from their jobs to area shops and restaurants. (If so, can they move about safely? Are there crosswalks? Do the traffic lights allow pedestrians enough time to cross the street?)
- Are people driving to eateries, shops and businesses near their homes or workplaces because there's no safe way for them to walk?
- The lack of pedestrians can also provide clues. What could be done to encourage more walking and less driving?

A true example:

A housing development is located next to a public library and a community center.

The residents routinely drive to both destinations. Why?

Conversations with some of the neighbors reveal the (fixable) reason: The sidewalk connecting the neighborhood to the community buildings ends abruptly, forcing pedestrians to either walk in the roadway or follow an uneven dirt path through a wooded area.

Get Inspired!

The AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit gets results!

- Jermaine Mitchell, an assistant professor of exercise and nutrition science at the University of Montevallo in **Montevallo, Alabama**, has his students use the *AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit* to assess the walkability of local neighborhoods. Sidewalks have been fixed and crosswalks added as a result of their work.
- Working with AARP, older residents in **South Austin, Texas**, conducted a walk audit to document the dangers of crossing a busy four-lane roadway that separated a bus stop and the local senior center. With their observations in hand (documented by a video and a detailed report about the results), the auditors delivered their findings to their city council member. A pedestrian hybrid beacon (see page 11 to learn what that is) was installed.
- In **Edgewater, Maryland**, a retirement community was built just three-tenths of a mile from two shopping centers. To get to the retail areas by foot, however, residents needed to cross four lanes of traffic with cars often coming, sometimes dangerously fast, from both directions. Two neighbors joined forces to lobby the county transportation department for a safer street. The result: A pedestrian island (pictured) was installed to provide walkers with a safe place to stand when they can't cross all four lanes at once. In addition, a sensor-operated beacon with flashing lights alerts drivers when a pedestrian enters the crosswalk.



Edgewater, Maryland

▲ This walk audit duo succeeded in getting their county's transportation department to install a pedestrian island.

2 PRODUCE THE PROOF

Although a summary report will be created based on the information in the worksheets, taking photographs and video of the audit location will help clarify what's working and what isn't.

Use the photographs and video (along with the audio if traffic noise is among the concerns) to document and show the overall area as well as the problem spots.

Since many walk audits reveal both bad features and good ones, be sure to photograph the location's positive attributes as well. ■

Details to focus on include:

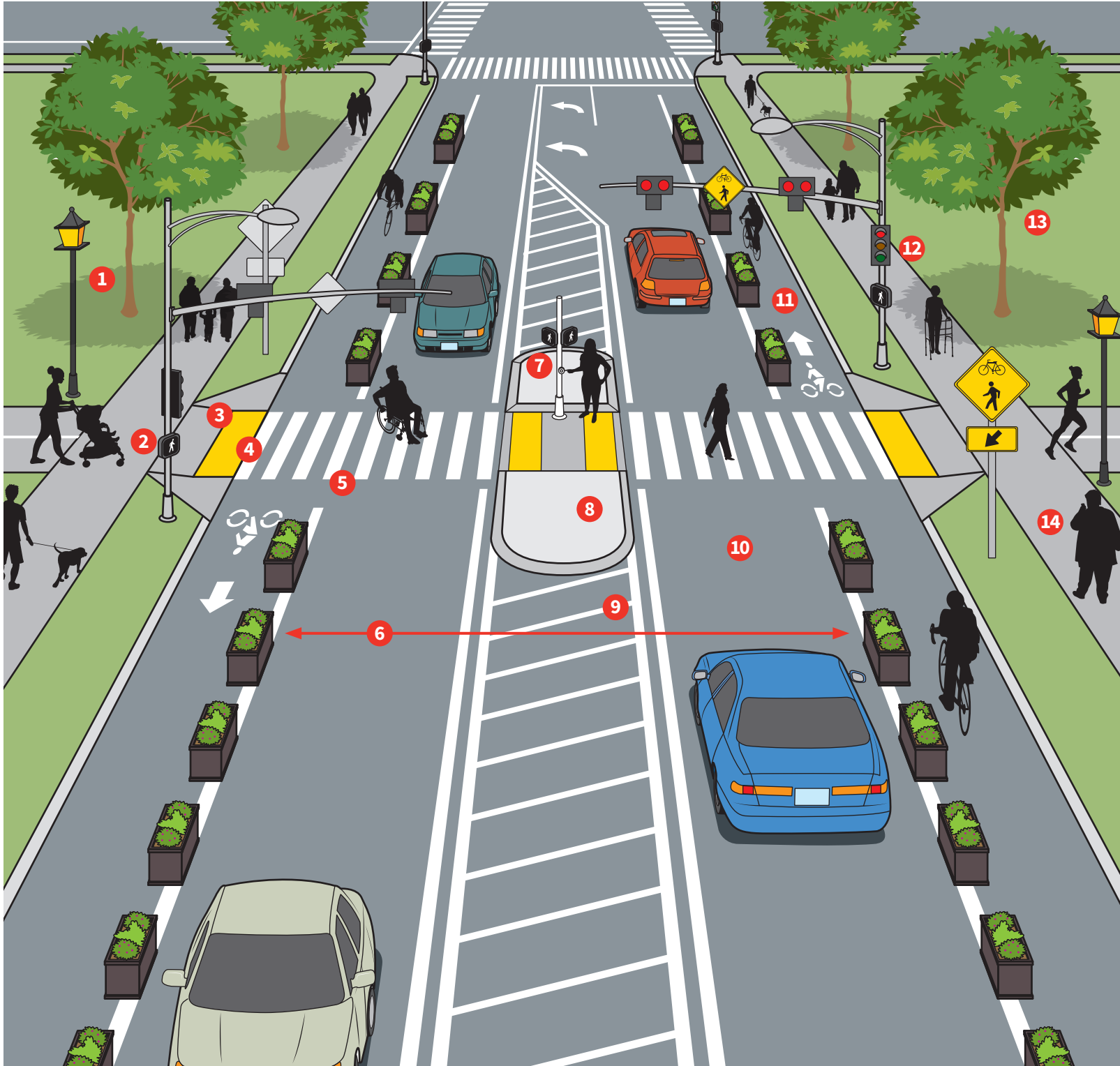
- crossing signals
- overhead traffic lights
- turning lanes
- curb cuts
- sidewalks
- crosswalks and vehicle stop lines
- lighting

Photographs can be taken to show where such safety and pedestrian-friendly features *should* exist.

INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS

A Streetscape Vocabulary List

Transportation planners, engineers and advocates speak in a language that is sometimes incomprehensible to the average reader or resident. Employing terminology used by these professionals in the walk audit report will show that the auditor or auditors have done the necessary homework. Herewith some words and terms for talking the talk.



1 Pedestrian-Scaled Lighting

These light fixtures are positioned lower (about 12 to 14 feet above the sidewalk) than typical roadway or highway lights, are placed more closely together and are directed toward where people walk or bicycle.

2 Signalized Pedestrian Crossing

Properly timed Walk/Don't Walk devices enable pedestrians to complete a crossing before the signal changes and the vehicles move again.

3 Curb Cut (or Curb Ramp)

A solid ramp graded down from the top of a sidewalk to the surface of an adjoining street allows smooth passage for wheelchairs, bicycles and baby strollers.

4 Tactile Ground Surface Indicators

Installed in sidewalks, roadways and other surfaces, the indicators are raised stubs or bumps that warn pedestrians who are blind or have impaired vision that they're about to step into a street.

5 Crosswalk

Marked crosswalks show pedestrians where to cross and signify to motorists that they must yield. Crosswalks are usually indicated by white or yellow painted lines that are about 12 inches wide and extend from curb to curb.

6 Lane Width

When vehicle lanes or roadways are overly wide, pedestrians are forced to walk farther to cross streets. Highways generally have 12-foot-wide lanes. Streets in city and suburban neighborhoods can range from 9 to 15 feet wide.

7 Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon

Unlike a pretimed traffic signal or Walk/Don't Walk sign, this device is activated by pedestrians when needed. (Note: A real streetscape like the one at left likely wouldn't need this type of beacon since the traffic lights and walk signs would be synchronized to enable the crossings.)

8 Pedestrian Island

Also referred to as a crossing island or refuge island, a pedestrian island protects people who are crossing a multilane roadway. An island allows pedestrians to focus on one direction of traffic at a time as they cross, and it provides a place to wait for a gap in oncoming traffic. Another benefit: drivers typically slow down due to a narrowing of the vehicle lanes.

9 Median Strip

A portion of the roadway that separates opposing traffic. The area may be paved, planted, painted (as shown) or raised.

10 Travel Lane

The dedicated space on the roadbed for motorized vehicles to drive on.

11 Bicycle Lane

A designated (ideally barrier-protected) bike lane is safest for cyclists, drivers and pedestrians. On very wide streets, a dedicated bicycle lane can be created by placing an ancillary lane for parked cars directly next to the roadway, and then using the space between the parked cars and the sidewalk as a bike lane. See an example on page 13.

12 Signal Timing

Traffic signal (aka traffic light) timing involves assigning "green time" to the vehicles and pedestrians entering an intersection.

13 Tree Canopy

Street trees provide shade and cooling — and safer streets! In a 2018 study, University of Colorado Denver researchers found that "increased tree canopy coverage was significantly associated with fewer crashes."

14 Sidewalk

If set back from the curb, a sidewalk needs to be at least 5 feet wide — or 6 feet if extended to the curb. For two people to walk together, 5 feet is the minimum suitable width. ■

INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS

What Is a ‘Complete Street’?

A “Complete Street” is designed for all roadway users, whether they’re driving, riding, walking, bicycling or rolling (e.g., pushing a baby stroller, using a wheelchair).

Since not every street can or should be “complete,” Complete Streets policies simply require that the needs of all users be *considered* and, when appropriate, met.

During a demonstration project in Fort Wayne, Indiana, the urban planners of the firm Team Better Block worked with AARP to complete an existing street with a temporary makeover that transformed it from a street for cars into (as seen at right) one for all users.

Designing streets for pedestrians isn’t a new concept. In fact, until the 20th century, people walked *in* the street. Once automobiles arrived en masse, speed and efficiency became the point of street design and transportation planning.

When congestion slowed traffic, roads were widened, traffic signals and stop signs were removed, crosswalks faded away. In many places, being able to safely cross a street on foot or by bicycle is the exception rather than the rule.

Complete Streets policies — also referred to as Safe Streets policies — are being implemented by city, county and state governments nationwide. (See page 22 to learn more.) ■

Streets, Roads and ‘Stroads’

As explained by Charles L. Marohn, Jr., a transportation engineer and founder of the nonprofit organization Strong Towns, “Roads connect places, streets are the framework for building a place.”

According to Marohn, streets support *destinations* — homes, businesses, shops, attractions.

Roads create “the greatest value by providing the *fastest connection*” between two places where people want to be.

The problem, he says, is that too many communities are filled with “stroads,” which are multilane roadways designed to move cars quickly — yet they are populated with businesses, shops, attractions and even homes.

“Stroads are the most dangerous environment we routinely build in our cities,” Marohn declares in his 2021 book *Confessions of a Recovering Engineer*. “A person on a sidewalk has no defense at all if a vehicle leaves the roadway at stroad speeds. The person crossing the stroad is even more exposed and vulnerable. That is true even when they cross at designated places and at specified times.”

A stroad, Marohn emphasizes, “contains the elements of both [a] road and street but fails to provide the benefits of either.”



Fort Wayne, Indiana

- 1** This residential block's Complete Streets demonstration created a one-way roadway with on-street curb parking.
- 2** Landscaping (represented here by potted plants) serves as a "swale," or pervious surface for capturing stormwater.
- 3** A floating parking lane located away from the curb becomes a safety buffer for pedestrians and cyclists.
- 4** A "limitless lane," which is wider and slower than a traditional bike lane, is a shared-use path for bicyclists, people in wheelchairs, joggers and others.
- 5** Pedestrians are provided a very visible crosswalk.
- 6** An existing sidewalk is safely away from the vehicle and bicycle lanes.

INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS

The Scorecard

Walk auditors can use whichever worksheets, measurements or rating system they want — so long as an explanation of the chosen method is provided. Letter grades, numerical rankings or words can be used to score the audited streets and spaces.

It's not unusual for an audit location to have a mix of positive and negative features. For example, the sidewalks might be perfect for walking, but the intersections are difficult to cross. If an overall rating is desired, one can be provided that encompasses the observations as a whole.

Several worksheets in the *AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit* ask the auditor to select an adjective that best describes the street or location's safe walkability. The following words and definitions are provided as an example.

Great: The area is very pedestrian-friendly and safe

Acceptable: The area is mostly pedestrian-friendly and safe

Mixed: The area is somewhat pedestrian-friendly and safe

Poor: The area is absolutely not pedestrian-friendly or safe

Included among our worksheets is a summary sheet (opposite) for tallying, calculating and listing the scores of different audit observations. ■

Creative Solutions

▼ A pedestrian island, bold crosswalk, landscaped median and raised brick-curbs (to prevent cars from parking and impeding visibility near the crosswalk) help make San Pablo Avenue safer for people walking between the small city's schools, senior center and community center.



Emeryville, California

▼ Guardrails and planting strips between a sidewalk and street help protect pedestrians. The pictured location has both as well as a visible crosswalk, school crossing signage, arrows and a flashing pedestrian-activated beacon that provide a collective alert to drivers.



Severna Park, Maryland

Summary

Sample

Record the score totals for each observation type

- Record the total number of yes responses for the category
- Record the total number of no responses for the category
- Record the one-word rating for the category

This information — as well as all notes, photographs, videos and observation discussions — will be helpful for writing a short report and/or preparing a PowerPoint presentation.

Community Name: Anytown

Street/Intersection Observed: Main between Elm Street and Walnut Street

Audit Date: September 23

WORKSHEET	YES RESPONSES	NO RESPONSES	RATING Great Acceptable Mixed Poor
Sidewalks, Streets and Crossings (Single-Location Audit)	9	0	Great
Sidewalks, Streets and Crossings (Walking Audit)	9	2	Acceptable
Sidewalks	10	9	Mixed
Streets and Crossings	2	8	Poor
Street Safety and Appeal	8	8	Mixed
Public Transit Access	2	4	Mixed

NOTES OR OTHER OBSERVATIONS:

Also see the "Who's Using the Street – and Why?"
and "Build a Better Block" worksheets.

TAKING ACTION

Reporting Results, Proposing Solutions

It's not easy to persuade local leaders to make transportation and roadway improvements. Obstacles abound: politics, costs, past practices and, very often, overlapping jurisdictions, such as when a road is managed by the state rather than the county or municipality that it passes through. But individuals and community groups can get the ball rolling — and inspire and achieve needed change — by identifying problems and calling attention to them. Some next steps:

1 PREPARE A REPORT

Summarize the walk audit's findings in a short, easy-to-read and easy-to-share report, handout, PowerPoint presentation and/or video.

As tempting as it may be to share every observation from the audit, elected officials, other local leaders and municipal staff might be put off and overwhelmed by a dense and lengthy document.

Share the most compelling highlights in the summary report. The deep details can be provided later if needed or requested.

A suggested outline of what to include:

- 1. Opener:** This top sheet or introductory slide or video clip should attract the attention of the intended recipient(s), so include a photograph or other visuals that show the location; the name of the community, street(s), route and/or destinations; and a brief statement describing the auditing group or participants.
- 2. Explanation of the Problem:** Provide information about the location, such as why it was chosen. If crash data exists for the location (from, perhaps, the local police, a government agency or advocacy group) include those details, including the time of day, speeds involved, likely causes and outcomes.
- 3. Map:** Download a map from the internet or use our map worksheet to draw one. Add labels and street names as needed.
- 4. Observations and Findings:** Provide a list or short narrative detailing what was observed.

5. The Need: Answer the potential question “Why does this street or location even *need* to be walkable?”

6. Proposed Solutions: No one wants to be handed a problem and simply told to fix it. Share ideas and suggestions for how the observed problems can be solved.

7. Contact Information: The recipients or target audience should know how to reach the audit team to ask questions, collaborate or, ideally, share news that the problems are being addressed and how.

2 SHARE THE RESULTS

If no local leader with the power to pursue a solution participated in the audit, send the report to those who *can* implement the desired changes or advocate for them. Consider sharing the report with local media as well.

- Research the submission options before starting the report — or even better, before the walk audit. That way the information can be gathered and provided in a format that will be the most useful. (Also, many government offices and community groups have an email address, online form or phone number for reporting street and sidewalk problems.)
- Keep a record of who the report was sent to, how and when. If there's no response, follow up.
- Talk to neighbors, friends and family about the results. Encourage them to do their own walk audit or join the continuing advocacy work.


Continued on page 18 ►

Sample Report

The following example slides show how a presentation can be organized and what it could look like

1

Community Walk Audit of Center Street



Between The Villas and The Towne Shopping Center

Conducted by residents of The Villas and several surrounding neighborhoods

2


The Problem

In The Villas, a community for older adults, residents can't safely walk to or from The Towne Shopping Center, located across Center Street.

- There's no traffic light or even a stop sign
- Pedestrians need to cross four lanes of fast-moving traffic
- The street has two lanes of traffic moving in each direction but no median
- There's no pedestrian island
- The painted crosswalk isn't readily visible to drivers
- The area isn't lit at night

3

The Location Map



4

Our Observations

Residents of The Villas and several surrounding neighborhoods audited the street and crossing location.

- Pedestrians had to wait up to 7 minutes to cross all four lanes of traffic
- Pedestrians needed 20 to 40 seconds to cross all four lanes
- Several pedestrians had to wait in the middle of the street to complete their crossing
- Nearly all the pedestrians we observed appeared to be in their 20s or 30s
- The older adults and parents with children we saw drove from the residential areas to the shopping center, even when their destination was the closest business

5

Why the Street Should Be Pedestrian-Friendly

- People of all ages are getting too little exercise and are spending too much time driving or being driven in cars
- Residents who don't drive and/or don't have access to a car should be able to safely walk to the stores and businesses near their homes
- If residents can safely walk to the shopping center — and in doing so walk to the post office, library, grocery store, bank, hair salon, restaurants and medical offices located within it — the community will have fewer cars on the road, which will mean less vehicle traffic and less pollution
- If residents can safely and easily walk to the shopping center, they will be more likely to frequent the local businesses

6

Possible Solutions


The crossing location on Center Street can and should be made safer. Ways this can be achieved include:

- Adding a pedestrian-controlled traffic signal
- Timing the traffic light and Walk/Don't Walk signs so slower pedestrians have enough time to cross
- Painting a crosswalk that is more visible to drivers
- Narrowing the roadway to one lane in each direction at the spot pedestrians will cross
- Placing a pedestrian island between the lanes of opposite-moving traffic
- Installing pedestrian-scaled lighting

7

Contact Us

We want to work with the local government to make Center Street safer.



Reach us by:

- Email: pedestrians@email
- Telephone: 555-555-5555

A report can also include:

- Testimonials (or quotes) from walk audit participants and area residents
- A brief history of the location, if known and if useful in explaining the problems
- A summary of the worksheet results
- Lots of photographs — of both the problems and examples of potential solutions (see page 20)

TAKING ACTION

Reporting Results, Proposing Solutions

3 ASK FOR A MEETING — AND ASK QUESTIONS

If distributing the report doesn't result in the desired action, seek a meeting with local leaders and organizations. In preparation for a scheduled meeting:

- Determine the preferred format for presenting the walk audit findings. For instance, does the local leader want a PowerPoint presentation, a single-page handout, a written report? Should the materials be provided before the meeting or during it?
- Meeting durations are often limited and may be cut short, so be ready to address the top priorities or most egregious problems first.
- Visit Smart Growth America's *Complete Streets Policy Atlas* to identify whether the community already has a Complete Streets policy. If a policy doesn't exist, encourage local leaders to adopt one.
- First implemented in Sweden in the 1990s, "Vision Zero" is a multi-national strategy to, as stated by the Vision Zero Network, "eliminate traffic fatalities and severe injuries among all road users, and to ensure safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all." Check out the network's *Vision Zero Communities Map*. If your community isn't on the list, encourage local leaders to set Vision Zero goals.
- Learn whether the community has attained certification as a *Walk Friendly Community* (from Walk Friendly Communities) and/or a *Bicycle Friendly Community* (from The League of American Bicyclists).
- If the town, city or county is enrolled in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, examine its age-friendly action plan to see if walkability is among its age-friendly goals.

4 TESTIFY!

Another way to pursue solutions — especially if distributing the report doesn't result in the desired outcome or if local officials are unwilling to meet — is to testify in person at a public meeting or hearing.

Unlike courtroom testimony, testifying at a public meeting of a city, town or county council usually occurs during a portion of the meeting when members of the public are invited to speak about a topic of concern.

Testimony rules vary greatly by community and organization. Some meetings require speakers to register and submit materials in advance. Many have time limits (2 minutes, 3 minutes, 4 minutes) per speaker.

A TIP: If more time is needed for explaining and presenting the walk audit findings, bring along others to testify about the topic. Each person can handle a portion of the report or presentation, so instead of a 2-minute airing, the walk audit can be discussed and more comprehensively explained over several minutes from several speakers.

5 PROPOSE SOLUTIONS

Elected officials constantly hear about problems. What isn't as common is for them to hear about a problem *and* a solution.

Strategies, plans and proposals can come from the community. In fact, the chances of achieving positive change increase when knowledgeable community members inform, work with and assist the local leaders and transportation officials who will need to implement solutions. ■

(The website addresses for the mentioned resources can be found on page 22.)

Seeking Solutions

The Types of Elected Officials Who May Be of Help

Outreach should begin at the local level. State representatives can be contacted later if needed or if the roadway in question is within their jurisdiction.

- **Local:** Mayor, County Executive, City Council Member, County Council Member, Town Council Member, Alderperson, District or Ward Liaison, Homeowner Association Board Members
- **State:** Delegate, Senator, Assembly Member, Governor

The Types of Government Departments That Might Have Jurisdiction

- **Local:** Department of Public Works, Department of Streets and Sidewalks, Department of Transportation, Regional Planning Commission
- **State:** Department of Transportation
- **Federal:** Department of Transportation

The Types of Organizations That Can Help Advocate for Change

- Area Agencies on Aging
- Businesses and business advocacy groups
- Civic associations
- Homeowner associations
- Local advocacy organizations (e.g., AARP)
- Local media (newspapers, websites, TV)
- Schools
- Nonprofits
- Walking and bicycling groups

An Aside About Sidewalks

Getting a sidewalk added can be complicated. Among the challenges and considerations:

- Unless the land where a sidewalk will be placed is owned by the municipality, or is an easement area that allows the local government to use of a strip of private property for public use, access for adding a sidewalk could require negotiating with the respective property owners. That might involve buying or taking (through eminent domain) land from a homeowner or business.
- Installing a sidewalk where one doesn't already exist is easier if the work involves filling a gap in an otherwise continuous sidewalk.
- In many areas, the local department of public works or transportation will need to be involved in any decisions about the placement and width of sidewalks.
- Although the responsibility for maintaining publicly owned sidewalks officially falls to the local government, homeowner association or public works department, maintenance of many if not most sidewalks is the property owner's responsibility. (That includes the need to shovel snow and salt or chip away ice.) Some owners fulfill that responsibility, some don't.
- Caring for trees and bushes that intrude upon a sidewalk is usually the responsibility of the property's owner. A local government or homeowner association can send a notice asking the owner to perform the maintenance. If the property owner does not comply, a public works or contracted landscape crew might trim the greenery and bill the property owner.
- Some communities or neighborhoods have ordinances restricting the installation of sidewalks or curbs for aesthetic reasons. Advocating for sidewalks in these areas can be challenging. If adding sidewalks is not possible, the local government can still make the streets safer for pedestrians by employing traffic-calming measures (such as those described in the next section).

TAKING ACTION

Strategies for Safer Streets

Elected officials and other local leaders don't know everything about every aspect of managing or planning for a community's needs. After all, in many communities, local government is a part-time — and unpaid — job. The daily life grind of immediate needs often prevent community leaders from addressing complicated or long-term problems, learning about new and improved best practices, or staying updated about innovative ideas and solutions.

Following are some traffic-calming methods that make streets safer for all roadway users, especially pedestrians. Many local leaders aren't even aware of these terms, definitions and solutions.



Fargo, North Dakota



Bath, Maine

◀ Unlike the towering, “high-mast” lighting used on highways, **PEDESTRIAN-SCALED LIGHTING** brightens sidewalks, crosswalks and any dark spots where people might walk at night. Street lamps also enhance a location's appeal, help pedestrians see potential hazards and make them visible to drivers.



Edgewater, Maryland



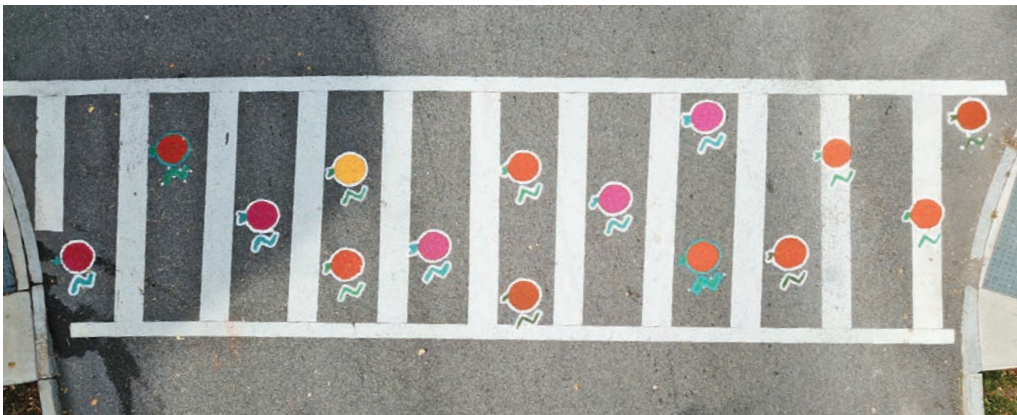
Wayne, Maine

◀ A **PEDESTRIAN ISLAND** provides a safe place for pedestrians to stop and stand at a wide roadway's mid-point. **FLASHING TRAFFIC SIGNS** can (among other benefits) alert drivers to congested areas or to pedestrians crossing the roadway.



Arlington, Virginia

- ◀ By extending the sidewalk, a **CURB EXTENSION** or **BULB-OUT** narrows a roadway to reduce pedestrian crossing distances as well as driving speeds.



Buffalo, New York

- ◀ Artistic **CROSSWALKS** are fun and attractive and draw the attention of pedestrians *and* drivers. Another option (not shown) is a **RAISED CROSSWALK**, which, by being flush with the height of the sidewalk, increases the visibility of pedestrians and serves as a speed hump for vehicles.



Hilton Head, South Carolina

- ◀ When temperatures rise, the shade provided by a **TREE CANOPY** helps cool down streets, sidewalks and entire neighborhoods. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, a dense tree canopy can provide a cooling temperature difference of up to 45 degrees Fahrenheit.



Charlotte, North Carolina

- ◀ A **ROAD DIET** is a solution that reduces the number of lanes and/or the width of a street to help control traffic speeds. (In this example, the road was narrowed by turning the center lanes into a landscaped median.)

Continued ▶



New York, New York

◀ **PROTECTED BICYCLE LANES** and **SIDEWALKS** help organize street traffic and enhance the safety of all users by providing designated travel lanes for vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians.



Washington, D.C.

◀ Another way to make a street more people-friendly is to convert parking spots into **PARKLETS**, which are essentially custom-designed on-street patios that provide parking for people rather than cars. Parklets became a very popular public-spaces solution for restaurants and other businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Chino Valley, Arizona

▲ Outdoor, street-level furnishings are usable and needed by people of all ages. For locations with bus stops or other public transit waiting areas, **SEATING** and **SHELTER** from the elements (rain, snow, a blazing sun) are important — in fact, essential — streetscape features. ■

More Strategies

- If a traffic signal already exists, ask that the **TRAFFIC-SIGNAL TIMING** be adjusted to accommodate slower moving pedestrians, such as children, older adults and people with disabilities.
- A **NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH** group can keep an eye out for speeders, criminal activity and other conditions or activities that prevent people from being able to safely walk.
- The tactics in this section can be introduced to a community through a **POP-UP DEMONSTRATION**, which is a temporary installation (lasting for a few hours, days or weeks) that allows a solution to be tested and tweaked before making a permanent change.

TAKING ACTION

Learn More

ONCE ALL THAT'S DONE, DO IT AGAIN!

- Invite local leaders and decision-makers to join the next walk audit!
- Choose a different street, or several, to learn whether conditions similar to those in the first walk audit exist.
- Get involved to help address the barriers that are keeping the community's streets and sidewalks from being safe and welcoming for all users.
- Download and print the needed worksheets at AARP.org/WalkAudit. If you have the printed edition of the tool kit, store them in the back cover pocket. ■

The Walking College

Established in 2015, the Walking College is a competitive, six-month, remote-learning fellowship offered by America Walks, with support from AARP and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



Participants complete a series of modules covering topics including the basics of walkable design, navigating the public policy process, effectively engaging decision-makers and fostering a local advocacy movement.

By the end of the program, fellows develop a walking action plan that lays out a series of short- and long-term strategies for tackling an identified problem in their communities.

WAYS TO LEARN MORE

The following organizations are advocates for walkability and safer streets for all users. Each has useful resources. Search online for their websites.

Active People, Healthy Nation

America Walks

How I Walk: A Campaign to Rebrand Walking

Institute of Transportation Engineers

National Association of City Transportation Officials

National Complete Streets Coalition

Smart Growth America's Complete Streets Policy Atlas

The League of American Bicyclists

Vision Zero Network's Vision Zero Communities Map

Walk Friendly Communities Recognition Program

Creative Solutions



Bucksport, Maine

▲ Bucksport's Golden Shovel Award is given to the business that does the best job of keeping its sidewalks free of snow. The winner's name is written on the shovel. Much like Miss America's tiara, the prize is handed down to the next champion. BookStacks owner Andy Lacher (shown in 2015) is a repeat winner.

Visit [AARP.org/WalkAudit](https://www.aarp.org/WalkAudit) to view, download and print the worksheets you need. Sharing copies of the worksheets — and adapting them to better serve your community's needs — is encouraged!

1. Make a Map

2. Who's Using the Street — and Why

3. Sidewalks, Streets and Crossings (Single-Location Audit)

4. Sidewalks, Streets and Crossings (Walking Audit)

5. Sidewalks

6. Streets and Crossings

7. Street Safety and Appeal

8. Public Transit Access

9. Build a Better Block

10. Winter Weather

11. Summary

As new materials are added to the tool kit — such as more worksheets or translations into other languages — we'll spread the news through the free, weekly **AARP Livable Communities e-Newsletter**. Sign up at **[AARP.org/LivableSubscribe](https://www.aarp.org/LivableSubscribe)**. ■

AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit

A SELF-SERVICE GUIDE FOR ASSESSING A COMMUNITY'S WALKABILITY

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Page 13: Team Better Block

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Page 20: Melissa Stanton, AARP (Fargo, North Dakota | Bath, Maine | Edgewater, Maryland) | Aging-at-Home Wayne (Wayne, Maine)

Page 21: David Goodman (Arlington, Virginia) | Melissa Stanton, AARP (Hilton Head, South Carolina) | Team Better Block (Buffalo, New York)
City of Charlotte (Charlotte, North Carolina)

Page 22: Melissa Stanton, AARP (New York, New York | Washington, D.C.) | Yavapai Regional Transit (Chino Valley, Arizona)

Page 23: Charles Eichacker, *The Ellsworth American* (Bucksport, Maine)

Back Cover: Melissa Stanton, AARP

Download the worksheets at
AARP.org/WalkAudit
and store them in this pocket.

Get In Touch!

We want to hear about your walk audit. What worked? What didn't? Do you have suggestions for how to improve this tool kit? If the *AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit* helped achieve needed change, please tell us about your success! Email: Livable@AARP.org | Twitter: [@AARPLivable](https://twitter.com/AARPLivable)

Walk Audit Tool Kit

A self-service guide for assessing a community's walkability



Pedestrian and Cyclist Crosswalks
Washington, D.C.



Road Diet, Bulb-Outs, Curb Ramps and more
Cape May, New Jersey



Dedicated Bike Lane
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

In too many communities, people can't safely walk to where they need or want to go due to a lack sidewalks, crosswalks or other safety features that make streets safe for pedestrians *and* drivers.

A walk audit is a simple activity in which an individual or a team observes and evaluates the walkability of a location to document how and if pedestrians can safely travel along a street, navigate an intersection and get from point A to B, C and so on.

Who can conduct a walk audit? Anyone!

The **AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit** can be used by local leaders, advocates, community organizations and residents to ...

- enable people to get around without having to drive
- help reduce traffic congestion and pollution
- inspire the development of pedestrian-friendly streets
- increase exercise opportunities for people of all ages
- gather input about community infrastructure needs
- educate residents about street design elements that support safety
- encourage social interactions among neighbors
- give a boost to property values
- empower community leaders and residents to be the agents of needed change

The **AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit** is free and available for download or order.

Visit [AARP.org/WalkAudit](https://www.aarp.org/WalkAudit).

Make a Map

- Use a mapping website to capture and print a bird's-eye-view image of the walk audit area or draw a simple map of the location in the space below.
- Label the streets and make note of any key features, such as stores, schools and (if they exist) sidewalks.
- Take photographs and/or video of the area so others can see the challenges and strengths of the audit location. Match and mark the images on the map.
- Indicate any other problem spots or areas of opportunity (e.g., a bus stop with no seating or shelter).



Who's Using the Street — and Why?

Community Name: _____

Location/Street Name(s): _____

Audit date: _____ Start time: _____ AM | PM End time: _____ AM | PM

Use hash marks (///) for counting the number of people observed. (Yes, some will likely be counted more than once.)

Use your best guess to determine each person's age range and reason for walking.

WHO'S WALKING?	NUMBER OF PEOPLE
Young children (e.g. elementary school students)	
Teens	
Adults	
Older Adults	
HOW:	
While pushing a baby stroller and/or walking with a child or children	
While using a mobility aid (i.e., a wheelchair, cane, walker)	
While riding a bicycle, scooter, skateboard or other mobility device	
POSSIBLE REASONS:	
Traveling to/from school	
Waiting for and/or heading to public transit	
Commuting to/from work	
Shopping and/or getting something to eat	
Walking/running for fitness	
Walking a dog	
Walking to a park or outdoor public space	
Just out for a walk	
Other/unknown	

ALSO, WHO'S NOT WALKING? Do the observed pedestrians represent the demographic composition of the neighborhood? If not, which segments of the population appear to be missing? Why might that be the case? (Use a notebook or the back of this worksheet to record these answers and observations.)

Sidewalks, Streets and Crossings

**SINGLE-LOCATION
AUDIT**
Community Name: _____

Location/Street Name(s): _____

Audit date: _____ **Start time:** _____ **AM | PM** **End time:** _____ **AM | PM**
Posted speed limit(s): _____ **Do the motorists appear to be obeying the speed limit(s)?** _____

Total number of vehicle lanes: _____ **The street is:** ☐ one-way | ☐ two-way

If more than one lane: Does the roadway have ☐ a median and/or ☐ a pedestrian island?

The street has: ☐ no sidewalk ☐ no sidewalk but needs one ☐ no sidewalk but needs two
☐ partial sidewalks ☐ a sidewalk on one side of the street ☐ sidewalks on both sides of the street

YES | NO | OTHER Skip any statements that don't apply

THE SIDEWALK:

- ☐ ☐ ☐ 1. Is separated from the street by a barrier or buffer (a curb, grass, landscaping)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 2. Is surfaced with a material that is smooth and consistent (e.g., or asphalt rather than bricks)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 3. Is in good condition, without cracks or raised sections
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 4. Is free of obstacles (hydrants, utility poles, overgrown landscaping, trash receptacles)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 5. Is free of interruptions from driveways (such as to/from homes, parking lots, etc.)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 6. Is continuous (no segments are missing) and complete (it doesn't randomly end)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 7. Is wide enough (at least 5 feet) for two people to walk side by side or pass one another
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 8. Has tactile ground surface indicators so pedestrians with vision impairment will know when the path is ending
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 9. Has a curb cut ramp (for use by wheelchairs, baby strollers, etc.) wherever it is interrupted by a street

THE STREET:

- ☐ ☐ ☐ 1. Has traffic lights and/or stop signs at intersections and crossings
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 2. The traffic lights and/or stop signs are clearly visible to drivers and pedestrians
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 3. Has crosswalks
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 4. The crosswalks are well marked and clearly visible to drivers and pedestrians
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 5. Has signage alerting drivers to the presence of pedestrians
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 6. Has a designated bicycle lane
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 7. Has a pedestrian crossing signal, also called a beacon (if yes, complete the next section)

THE PEDESTRIAN CROSSING SIGNALS:

- ☐ ☐ ☐ 1. Are working
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 2. Have a "push-to-walk" mechanism, meaning pedestrians can stop vehicle traffic
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 3. Have audible prompts for people with vision impairment
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 4. Are placed in appropriate locations (if not, make note of where more are needed)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 5. Provide enough time to cross (indicate the amount of time: _____ minutes _____ seconds)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 6. Provide suitable opportunities to cross (indicate the amount of time pedestrians must wait for a traffic light change in order to cross: _____ minutes _____ seconds)

Consider using the "Build a Better Block" worksheet as well.

Walkability of the area, based on the findings above: ☐ Great ☐ Acceptable ☐ Mixed ☐ Poor

Sidewalks, Streets and Crossings WALKING AUDIT

Community Name: _____

Starting location: _____ Ending location: _____

Route: _____

Audit date: _____ Start time: _____ AM | PM End time: _____ AM | PM

Posted speed limit(s): _____ Do the motorists appear to be obeying the speed limit(s)? _____

Total number of vehicle lanes: _____ The street is: ☐ one-way | ☐ two-way

If more than one lane: Does the roadway have ☐ a median and/or ☐ a pedestrian island?

The street has: ☐ no sidewalk ☐ no sidewalk but needs one ☐ no sidewalk but needs two
☐ partial sidewalks ☐ a sidewalk on one side of the street ☐ sidewalks on both sides of the street

YES | NO | OTHER Skip any statements that don't apply

THE SIDEWALK:

- ☐ ☐ ☐ 1. Is separated from the street by a barrier or buffer (a curb, grass, landscaping)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 2. Is surfaced with a material that is smooth and consistent (e.g., concrete or asphalt rather than bricks)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 3. Is in good condition, without cracks or raised sections
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 4. Is free of obstacles (hydrants, utility poles, overgrown landscaping, trash receptacles)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 5. Is free of interruptions from driveways (such as to/from homes, parking lots, etc.)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 6. Is continuous (no segments are missing) and complete (it doesn't randomly end)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 7. Is wide enough (at least 5 feet) for two people to walk side by side or pass one another
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 8. Has tactile ground surface indicators so pedestrians with vision impairment will know when the path is ending
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 9. Has a curb cut ramp (for use by wheelchairs, baby strollers, etc.) wherever it is interrupted by a street

THE STREET:

- ☐ ☐ ☐ 1. Has traffic lights and/or stop signs at intersections and crossings
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 2. The traffic lights and/or stop signs are clearly visible to drivers and pedestrians
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 3. Has crosswalks
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 4. The crosswalks are well marked and clearly visible to drivers and pedestrians
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 5. Has signage alerting drivers to the presence of pedestrians
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 6. Has a designated bicycle lane
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 7. Has a pedestrian crossing signal, also called a beacon (if yes, complete the next section)

THE PEDESTRIAN CROSSING SIGNALS:

- ☐ ☐ ☐ 1. Are working
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 2. Have a "push-to-walk" mechanism, meaning pedestrians can stop the vehicle traffic
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 3. Have audible prompts for people with vision impairment
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 4. Are placed in appropriate locations (if not, make note of where more are needed)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 5. Provide enough time to cross (indicate the amount of time provided: _____ minutes _____ seconds)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 6. Provide suitable opportunities to cross (indicate the amount of time pedestrians must wait for a traffic light change in order to cross: _____ minutes _____ seconds)

Consider using the "Build a Better Block" worksheet as well.

Walkability of the area, based on the findings above: ☐ Great ☐ Acceptable ☐ Mixed ☐ Poor

Community Name: _____

Location/Street Name(s): _____

Audit date: _____ **Start time:** _____ AM | PM **End time:** _____ AM | PM

YES | NO | OTHER Skip any statements that don't apply

THE STREET:

- ☐ ☐ ☐ 1. Has traffic lights and/or stop signs at intersections and crossings
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 2. The traffic lights and/or stop signs are clearly visible to drivers and pedestrians
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 3. Has crosswalks
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 4. The crosswalks are well marked and clearly visible to drivers and pedestrians
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 5. Has signage alerting drivers to the presence of pedestrians
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 6. Has a designated bicycle lane
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 7. Has a pedestrian crossing signal, also called a beacon. (If yes, complete the next section.)

THE PEDESTRIAN CROSSING SIGNALS:

- ☐ ☐ ☐ 1. Are working
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 2. Have a push-to-walk functionality, meaning pedestrians can stop vehicle traffic
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 3. Have audible prompts for people with vision impairment
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 4. Are placed in appropriate locations (if not, make note of where more are needed)
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 5. Provide enough time to cross (indicate the amount of time provided: _____ minutes _____ seconds)
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 6. Provide suitable opportunities to cross (indicate the amount of time pedestrians must wait for a traffic light change in order to cross: _____ minutes _____ seconds)

NOTES OR OTHER OBSERVATIONS:

[illegible]

Walkability of the area, based on the findings above: ☐ Great ☐ Acceptable ☐ Mixed ☐ Poor

Street Safety and Appeal

Community Name: _____

Location/Street Name(s): _____

Audit date: _____ Start time: _____ AM | PM End time: _____ AM | PM

YES | NO | OTHER Skip any statements that don't apply

THE LOCATION HAS:

- ☐ ☐ ☐ 1. Places to sit
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 2. Shade trees
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 3. Grass, flowers and landscaping (if yes, is the greenery well maintained? _____)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 4. Awnings, outdoor umbrellas or other shelter from rain and other weather conditions
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 5. Drinking fountains (if yes, are they working and clean? _____)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 6. Public restrooms (if yes, are they clean and safe? _____)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 7. A transit or bus shelter (if yes, is there seating? _____)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 8. Trash receptacles (if yes, so they appear to be regularly emptied?)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 9. Buildings and/or homes that are well-maintained
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 10. Informative signage
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 11. Well-placed signage
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 12. Streetscape features (art, signage, etc.) that are representative of/suitable for the community
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 13. Pedestrian-scaled lighting
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 14. A posted speed limit that seems suitable (if yes, does it appear that drivers are obeying the limit? _____)

IMPRESSIONS:

- ☐ ☐ ☐ 1. The location/street is a safe and appealing destination
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 2. The location/street is a safe and appealing travel route
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 3. The location/street appears to be safe for users of all ages, abilities, races, income levels, etc.
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 4. The location/street appears to be safe for pedestrians during both the day and night
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 5. Pedestrians appear to be safe from moving vehicles
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 6. Pedestrians appear to be safe from crime, harassment or similar threats

For "No" or "Other" answers, use the space below or on the back of this worksheet to briefly explain the response.

NOTES OR OTHER OBSERVATIONS:

Walkability of the area, based on the findings above: ☐ Great ☐ Acceptable ☐ Mixed ☐ Poor

Community Name: _____

Location/Street Name(s): _____

Audit date: _____ **Start time:** _____ AM | PM **End time:** _____ AM | PM

IMPRESSIONS:

- ☐ ☐ ☐ 1. Pedestrians can safely access and depart from the transit stop or station
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 2. The transit stop or station is in a useful location
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 3. The transit stop or station protects waiting passengers from moving vehicles
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 4. The transit stop or station has suitable seating for waiting passengers
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 5. The transit stop or station features shelter from (check all that apply) ☐ rain ☐ sun ☐ heat ☐ cold ☐ wind
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 6. The transit stop or station is clean and well-maintained
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 7. The transit stop or station is well lighted
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 8. The transit stop or station has useful amenities (if yes, describe what they are)
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 9. The transit stop or station feels safe from crime
 - ☐ ☐ ☐ 10. I would feel safe and comfortable waiting in this location

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Walkability of the area, based on the findings above: ☐ Great ☐ Acceptable ☐ Mixed ☐ Poor

Build a Better Block

Would the safe walkability and appeal of the walk audit location or route be improved by any of the following features? Select those you think could help:

- ☐ 1. Sidewalks (because there aren't any at all)
- ☐ 2. Sidewalk repairs
- ☐ 3. Wider sidewalks
- ☐ 4. Safety barriers between the sidewalk and street (landscaping, low walls, fencing, etc.)
- ☐ 5. Decorative sidewalk features (hanging flower baskets, planters)
- ☐ 6. Crosswalks (because there aren't any at all)
- ☐ 7. Raised crosswalks
- ☐ 8. Artistic crosswalks
- ☐ 9. Pedestrian "bulb-outs" at intersections or crossings
- ☐ 10. Pedestrian island(s)
- ☐ 11. Pedestrian-friendly lighting
- ☐ 12. One-way rather than two-way traffic
- ☐ 13. Outdoor seating and furnishings for public use (benches, tables, parklets, etc.)
- ☐ 14. Decorative and/or directional (also called "wayfinding") signage
- ☐ 15. Public art (sculpture, wall murals, banners)
- ☐ 16. More street-level/street-facing shops and businesses
- ☐ 17. Shelter from the elements (awnings, outdoor umbrellas, etc.)
- ☐ 18. Green space (such as a small park or "pocket park")
- ☐ 19. Street trees and landscaping
- ☐ 20. Improved landscape maintenance
- ☐ 21. Drinking fountains
- ☐ 22. Public restrooms (or, if already present, better maintenance)
- ☐ 23. Litter removal
- ☐ 24. Graffiti removal
- ☐ 25. Trash receptacles
- ☐ 26. Security features (cameras, call-boxes, etc.)
- ☐ 27. Management of off-leash dogs
- ☐ 28. Repair or removal of vacant or rundown buildings
- ☐ 29. On-street parking
- ☐ 30. Parking garage or structure

OTHER FEATURES:

Winter Weather

Community Name: _____

Location/Street Name(s): _____

Audit date: _____ Start time: _____ AM | PM End time: _____ AM | PM

YES | NO | OTHER Skip any statements that don't apply

WALKWAYS (sidewalks or similar pedestrian paths)

- ☐ ☐ ☐ 1. The walkway is cleared of snow after a storm. (If yes, make note of how soon after.)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 2. The walkway is cleared of snow but remains icy
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 3. The walkway is cleared of snow but remains slushy
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 4. The walkway is salted or sanded
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 5. The full-width of the walkway is cleared of snow, slush and ice
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 6. The full-length of the walkway is cleared of snow, slush and ice
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 7. The walkway is accessible (i.e. It's not blocked by snowbanks or piles of plowed snow.)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 8. The walkway is well-lighted
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 9. Pedestrians can use the walkway without being sprayed by slush or ice from passing cars

STREETS

- ☐ ☐ ☐ 1. Crosswalks are visible. (If not, why not? e.g. The paint is faded. There's snow, ice or slush covering the path.)
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 2. Pedestrians crossing the street are clearly visible to motorists
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 3. Bus or public transit stops accessible
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 4. The bus or public transit stop has a shelter to protect waiting riders from bad weather

BUILDINGS AND MORE

- ☐ ☐ ☐ 1. Benches and other outdoor seating areas have been cleared of snow and ice
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 2. The steps, ramps and entries to public buildings have been cleared of snow and ice
- ☐ ☐ ☐ 3. The steps, ramps and entries to businesses have been cleared of snow and ice

Who is responsible for the clearing and winter maintenance of the sidewalk(s) or pedestrian pathway(s)? Check all that apply

- ☐ The local government
- ☐ Each property owner (e.g. business or homeowner/tenant)
- ☐ Other (explain below)
- ☐ Don't know

NOTES OR OTHER OBSERVATIONS:

Walkability of the area, based on the findings above: ☐ Great ☐ Acceptable ☐ Mixed ☐ Poor

Summary

Record the score totals for each observation type

- Record the total number of yes responses for the category
- Record the total number of no responses for the category
- Record the one-word rating for the category

This information — as well as all notes, photographs, videos and observation discussions — will be helpful for writing a short report and/or preparing a PowerPoint presentation.

Community Name: _____

Street/Intersection Observed: _____ **and** _____

Audit Date: _____

WORKSHEET	YES RESPONSES	NO RESPONSES	RATING Great Acceptable Mixed Poor
Sidewalks, Streets and Crossings (Single-Location Audit)			
Sidewalks, Streets and Crossings (Walking Audit)			
Sidewalks			
Streets and Crossings			
Street Safety and Appeal			
Public Transit Access			

NOTES OR OTHER OBSERVATIONS:

AARP Rural Livability Workshop Report

How and why small towns and remote communities are working to become more livable for older adults and people of all ages



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Real Possibilities





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AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With nearly 38 million members — plus offices in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands — AARP strengthens communities and advocates for what matters most to families, with a focus on health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment. The AARP Livable Communities initiative works nationwide to support the efforts of neighborhoods, towns, cities, counties and rural areas to be livable for people of all ages. The initiative's programs include the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, the AARP Community Challenge "quick-action" grant program and educational publications, including this one and others available at AARP.org/LivableLibrary.

AARP Rural Livability Workshop Report

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Visit AARP.org/LivableLibrary to download or order this free guide or other publications. Learn more about rural communities at AARP.org/RuralLivability.

AARP Rural Livability Workshop Report

How and why small towns and remote communities are working to become more livable for older adults and people of all ages

THE WORKSHOP

In June 2019, AARP convened its first-ever national gathering about rural livability — as it relates to people of all ages and, especially, to older adults.

Held in Portland, Maine, the three-day event was attended by AARP staff, volunteers, community partners and livability practitioners representing a range of specialties and locations. (See the list of participating organizations on page 53.)

This report is based on presentations, discussions and activities from the workshop — the videos and materials from which can be found at [AARP.org/RuralLivability](https://www.aarp.org/RuralLivability). The topics covered in this report surfaced while the event was being planned, and were reaffirmed during it as being of greatest interest and opportunity.

The “Local Voices,” “Expert Insights,” “Field-Tested Strategies,” “News Clip” and “Snapshot” items that appear in this publication come from the workshop, related events, media sources and AARP’s work in communities throughout the nation.

The *AARP Rural Livability Workshop Report* is by no means complete regarding the many issues and interests that impact rural communities. But the observations, data and examples contained within these pages can serve to inform community influencers — local, state and national officials; policymakers; service providers; nonprofits; citizen activists; and others — about the needs, benefits, challenges and solutions found in rural places. ■

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▲ Wood Island Lighthouse, Saco Bay, Maine

MUCH ADO ABOUT MAINE

With a median age of 44.9 years old, Maine has the oldest population in the nation.¹ It is also the most rural state: 61.3 percent of its citizens live in rural areas.² Many of the examples in this report are from Maine due to these realities and also because the AARP Rural Livability Workshop took place there. Another reason: Maine is the state with the most rural localities in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. Learn more about the network on page 53.

Introduction

America's demographic future is showing up first in rural areas, where older residents form a greater proportion of the population than in urban areas

One-quarter of all Americans age 65 or older live in small towns and rural communities. That percentage is growing, since the rural population is aging at a faster rate than the nation's population as a whole.¹

According to the AARP Home and Community Preferences Survey, adults in rural areas are more likely than those living in cities and suburbs to say they want to reside in their community and/or current home for as long as possible.²

The realities of aging are playing out in rural communities: In reporting that the number of people age 85 or older will more than triple in the United States by 2050 — from 5.8 million in 2010 to 19 million — the Housing Assistance Council, a rural housing advocacy organization, declares, “This change will have profound implications in rural regions which already have a larger share of seniors and a smaller share of social services than suburban and urban communities.”³

As the importance of community livability for people of all ages becomes more evident, it's critical for elected officials, local leaders, businesses and nonprofits to understand the issues, challenges and opportunities facing rural communities.

Aging in the home where a person lived comfortably for years can be difficult when distance or a lack of transportation is a barrier to needed services. Distance also isolates people who no longer drive and contributes to feelings of loneliness.

Three in five homes in rural areas and small towns were built prior to 1980.⁴ Many lack adequate insulation and age-friendly features such as grab bars and single-floor living. Due to the age and condition of the structures, modifications are often needed but are delayed due to cost and the difficulty of performing the work.

People are leaving rural communities at a faster rate than they are moving to them: Although some rural communities, particularly those in the Western United States, have had slight gains in population over the past 20 years, the majority, especially in Midwestern counties that are economically dependent

on farming, have experienced population declines.

One reason is the growth of industrial agriculture (and decline of smaller, independent farms) and the mechanization of farming (which means fewer farm workers are needed). Another is that the death rate in rural areas of the Northeast and Midwest is greater than the birth rate.⁵

Since 2000, nearly a million people nationwide have left their rural hometowns to move to a larger community (see the related image from Maine on the opposite page), while only 600,000 people have moved to rural counties.⁶ Many of those leaving are young people in pursuit of higher education and careers. The decrease in the working age population in rural areas is leading to labor shortages, sinking home values, reduced tax bases and, consequently, a decline in or loss of municipal services.

Yet despite the overall trend of population decline, some rural counties are attracting new residents, leading to rural places that are increasingly diverse, multicultural and multilingual. In amenity-rich communities that have experienced growth (such as those in parts of California, Colorado and Montana), the influx of relatively well-off new residents is leading to an increase in housing prices,⁷ which both benefits and challenges long-time residents.

Small towns and rural places can be laboratories for change: While most small communities also have small operating budgets that can't accommodate big projects, there are often other resources to tap, such as a deep well of civic involvement among residents.

Because there are typically fewer bureaucratic hurdles, weaving age-friendly considerations into broader local objectives is possible. There may also be more opportunities for innovation and efficient decision-making. Communities that have a strong sense of independence and resourcefulness can be better able to mobilize and tackle new challenges.

As a participant at the AARP Rural Livability Workshop observed, “There's a greater sense of permission in rural areas to try things.” Another said, “Innovation really does exist in small towns and rural communities. Planning doesn't have to take years. We can just do it!” ■



Why small towns and rural communities are great places to live:

- “My neighbors aren’t on top of me, but we’re still very much a community.”
- “Main Street and the town center are real places, not just the name of a shopping center.”
- “We never sit in traffic.”
- “I don’t have to lock my door.”
- “I’m surrounded by nature — trees, flowers, wildlife, fresh air, bright stars at night.”
- “Neighbors are available to help when help is needed and wanted. However, neighbors also know to stay out when help isn’t wanted. We respect the right to privacy here.”
- “If someone comes on hard times, the community helps. It may be a neighbor giving a ride to someone who can’t drive or mowing the grass for a person who can no longer do it themselves. When something really bad happens, like a home fire or large medical bills, we raise funds. We may throw a bean supper or put a donation jar out. There are lots of ways we help each other.”
- “In a rural community, you feel needed. We depend on volunteers to run our town, keep the library open and do a host of other important things.”
- “My cats can go outside. My dog doesn’t need a leash. My chickens can free-range.”
- “Hills and hiking trails are my fitness center.”

Advice from local leaders and advocates in small towns and rural communities:

- “It’s a mistake to assume that a town is dying just because it has fewer residents than in the past. That diminishes all of the positive things going on every day and leads communities to invest energy and resources into attracting new businesses or residents rather than paying attention to the people who are already there.”
- “Pursuing livability work doesn’t mean a community isn’t currently livable.”
- “Outsiders wanting to help a community need to work with residents. People won’t respond if there isn’t a trusted local link.”
- “We need to frame livability differently in rural areas. It’s often seen as strictly an urban concern.”
- “People take pride in the place they live, so we need to work with that. You won’t get anywhere starting with the assumption that something is wrong or missing in their town.”
- “Go in with questions rather than answers, and be prepared to listen.”



EXPERT INSIGHT

“Some of the most talented and resourceful people I know live in rural communities and in communities that are underserved or forgotten. We often have what we need to make places great. We just need the invitation and the knowledge and spark to do it.”

— Andrew Howard, placemaking specialist and co-founder, Team Better Block*

* See page 50 to learn about several of the organizations that appear in this report.



▲ Signage at the airport in Portland, Maine

What Is a Rural Community?

The answer varies, depending on who — or what — is being asked



▲ With nearly 900 farms, more than 70 percent of the land in Champaign County, Ohio, is used to grow crops.

What's perceived as being a rural or remote community can differ greatly by region. People living in the remote Mountain West might not consider the small towns of coastal Maine to be particularly rural. Life in the rural Midwest isn't like life in the rural South or most anywhere in rural or frontier Alaska.

So what qualifies a community as rural?

The **U.S. Department of Agriculture** attempts to answer in an article titled "What is Rural?"¹

"The existence of multiple rural definitions reflects the reality that rural and urban are multidimensional concepts. Sometimes population density is the defining concern, in other cases it is geographic isolation. Small population size typically characterizes a rural place, but how small is rural? Population thresholds used to differentiate rural and urban communities range from 2,500 up to 50,000, depending on the definition."

The definition used by the **U.S. Office of Management and Budget** is based on counties. "Metropolitan" regions include a core county with at least one densely populated urban area of 50,000 or more people, plus surrounding counties where at least 25 percent of residents work in the core county. "Micropolitan" regions include a core county with at least one urban area that has a population of 10,000 to 49,000. All other areas are classified as "noncore." (Some but not all noncore areas are rural.)²

The **U.S. Census Bureau** defines rural as "all population, housing, and territory not included within an urbanized area or urban cluster. As a result, the rural portion of the United States encompasses a wide variety of settlements, from

densely settled small towns and 'large-lot' housing subdivisions on the fringes of urban areas, to more sparsely populated and remote areas."³

(In fact, most rural communities are clustered in the vicinity of urban areas, which has historically been the case "as rural populations resided on farms producing food and other goods for nearby urban centers or resided in small market and mill towns serving the needs of both surrounding rural populations as well as residents of nearby cities.")⁴

Additional definitions come out of other federal and state offices, the variations often based on the work being done or why the question is being asked. One way to achieve some location specific clarity is to use the **Am I Rural?** tool. Provided by the Rural Health Information Hub, the interactive web page can be accessed at RuralHealthInfo.org/am-i-rural. ■



▲ Since many rural areas no longer have a local post office, the presence of one is essentially a confirmation that a community exists. Located in the Florida Everglades, the nation's smallest post office (Ochopee 34141) serves about 300 residents.

THE AMERICAN FRONTIER

Yes, it still exists!

According to the **National Center for Frontier Communities**,

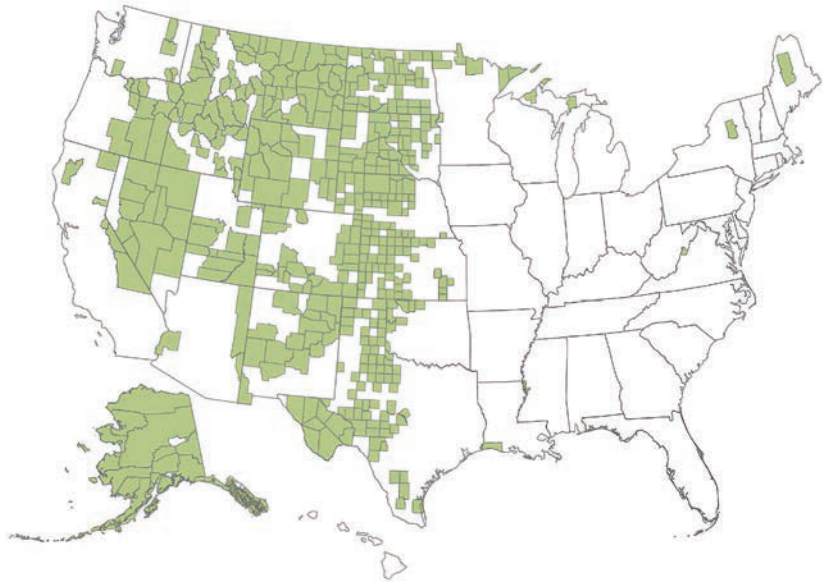
“Frontier America consists of sparsely populated areas that are geographically isolated from population centers and services.

“Frontier, like rural, suburban, or urban, is a term intended to categorize a portion of the population continuum. Frontier refers to the most remote end of that continuum (in some states the wilderness designation is considered most remote).”¹

“Unfortunately, there is not a single universally-accepted definition of frontier,” notes the **Rural Health Information Hub**. “Definitions of frontier used for state and federal programs vary, depending on the purpose of the project being researched or funded.

“While frontier is often defined as counties having a population density of six or fewer people per square mile, this simple definition does not take into account other important factors that may isolate a community.

“Therefore, preferred definitions are more complex and address isolation by considering distance in miles and travel time in minutes to services.”² ■



▲ **Frontier counties (marked in green) are often defined as having a population density of fewer than six people per square mile.**

The **National Rural Health Association** identifies several factors to consider in classifying an area as frontier.³ The following conditions, explains the association, “may cause significant problems in access to health services, create poor economic opportunities and other conditions causing health and social disparities.”

- population density
- distance from a population center or specific service
- travel time to reach a population center or service
- functional association with other places
- service or market area
- availability of paved roads
- travel inhibiting weather
- seasonal changes in access to services



EXPERT INSIGHT

“Rural is typically defined ... as ‘non-metropolitan’ or ‘non-urban.’ This doesn’t tell us much. Perhaps due to this lack of precision and our nation’s agrarian roots, people still commonly equate rural with agriculture, fields of corn, cows and hardscrabble farmers. This is not only inaccurate; it is wide of the mark. From vibrant college towns to communities gone bust from the flight of paper mills or coal mines, from hopping cultural tourism locales to centers of furniture, machinery and textile manufacturing, rural America is anything but simply farmland, and it is anything but uniform.”

— **The Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group**, “Rural Development Hubs: Strengthening America’s Rural Innovation Infrastructure” (November 2019)

Rural America Stats and Facts

People and places:

- 97 percent of the nation's landmass is rural, but only 19.3 percent of the population (nearly 60 million people) lives there
- 64.4 percent of rural residents live east of the Mississippi River
- Only 10 percent of people in the West live in rural areas
- 46.7 percent of people living in rural areas reside in the South

The most rural states by population by region:

- Northeast: Maine and Vermont (with 61.6 and 61.3 percent of the population living in rural areas)
- South: West Virginia (50.9 percent)
- West: Montana (43.6 percent)
- Midwest: South Dakota (42.9 percent)

As of the 2010 Census, there were 3,143 counties in the United States and a total population of 308.7 million:

- 704 *completely rural* counties accounted for 5.4 million people
- 1,185 *mostly rural* counties accounted for 36.8 million people
- 1,254 *mostly urban* counties accounted for 266.6 million people

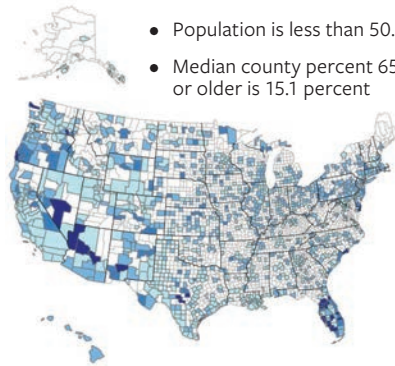
Poverty in rural America:

- Of the nation's 353 "persistently poor" counties, 301 — or 85.3 percent — are in nonmetro or rural areas.
- The most severe poverty is found in historically poor areas of the Southeast, including the Mississippi Delta and Appalachia, as well as on Native American lands.
- The 2019 poverty threshold was \$13,300 for an individual living alone under age 65 and \$12,261 for a single head of household 65 or older.
- 16.4 percent of rural residents live at or below the poverty line. Of those individuals, 32.0 percent are Black/African-American, 31.0 percent are American Indian/Alaska Native, 24.5 percent are Hispanic and 14.2 percent are White.
- Among the rural poor, 10.1 percent are age 65 or older.

POPULATION AGE 65+ AND 'LEVEL OF RURALITY'

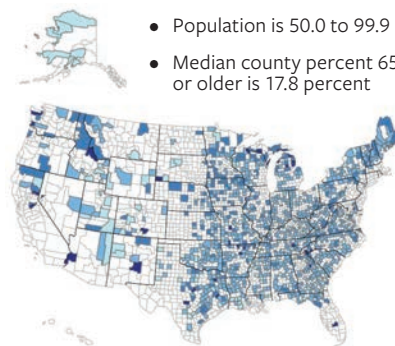
Mostly urban counties

- Population is less than 50.0 percent rural
- Median county percent 65 years or older is 15.1 percent



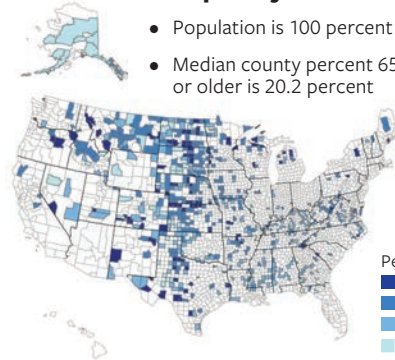
Mostly rural counties

- Population is 50.0 to 99.9 percent rural
- Median county percent 65 years or older is 17.8 percent



Completely rural counties

- Population is 100 percent rural
- Median county percent 65 years or older is 20.2 percent



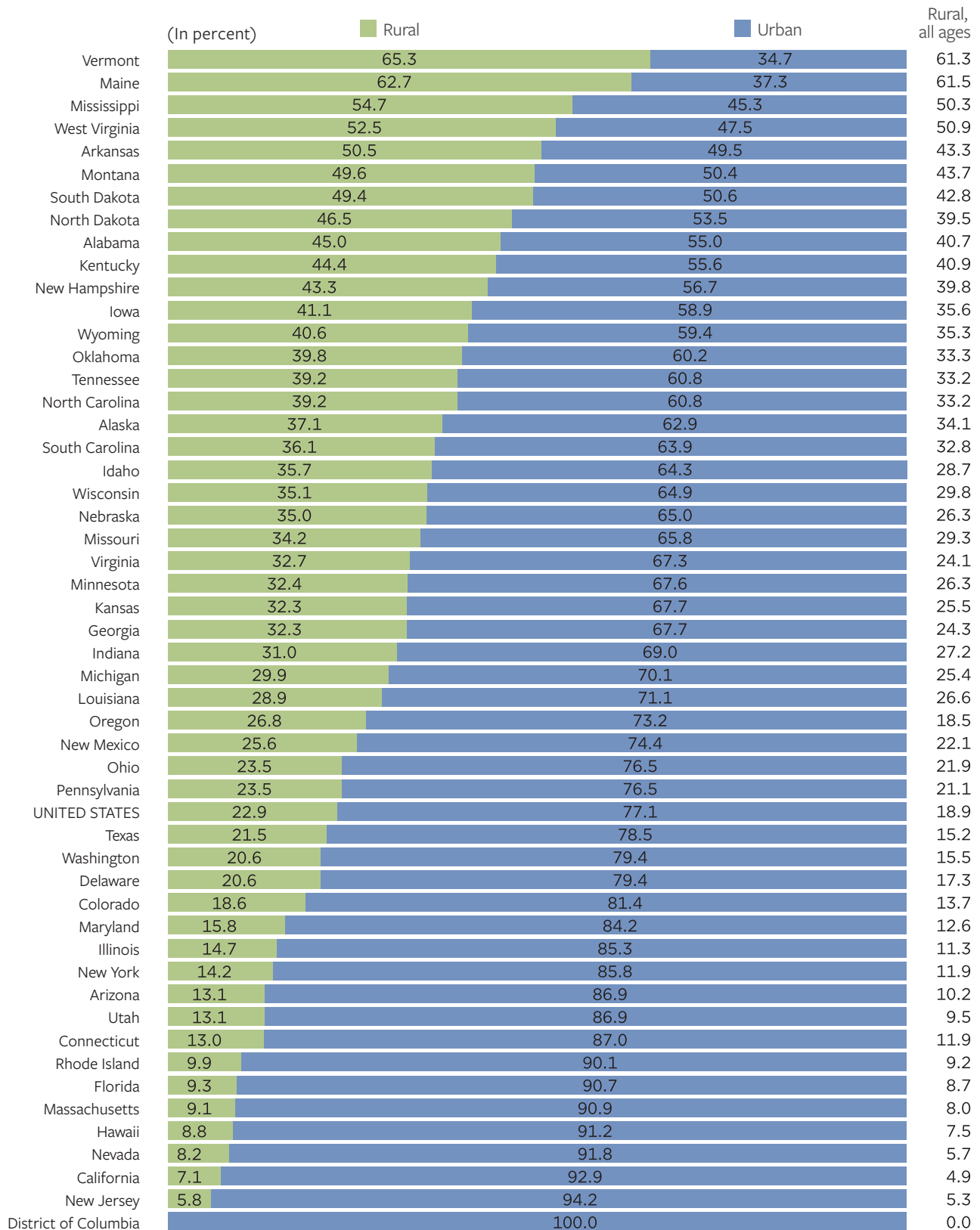
Percent
 ■ 25.0 or greater
 ■ 20.0 to 24.9
 ■ 15.0 to 19.9
 ■ Less than 15.0

RURAL COMMUNITIES AND RACE

"Whites make up nearly 80 percent of the rural population, compared with 58 percent of the urban population. Hispanics are the fastest growing segment of the rural population but make up just 9 percent of the rural population, compared with 20 percent in urban areas. Blacks constitute 8 percent of the rural population, while American Indians are the only minority group with a higher rural than urban share (2 percent versus 0.5 percent). Relatively few Asians and Pacific Islanders (included in the "Other" category) are rural residents, with these groups accounting for only 1 and 0.1 percent of the rural population, respectively. The rest of the "Other" category (accounting for 1.8 percent of the rural population) are residents reporting multiple races.

— U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, "Rural America At A Glance" (2018)

Population Age 65 or Older in Rural and Urban Areas, 2002 – 2016



SOURCES: *Rural America Stats and Facts* (see page 51) | **Population Age 65+ and 'Level of Rurality':** U.S. Census Bureau. Smith, A.S. and Trevelyan, E (September 2019). *The Older Population in Rural America*. Page 17. Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2019/acs/acs-41.pdf>. | **Rural Communities and Race:** U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. (November 2018) *Economic Information Bulletin* 2000. Retrieved from: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=90555> | **Population Age 65 or Older in Rural and Urban Areas, 2002-2016:** U.S. Census Bureau. Smith, A.S. and Trevelyan, E (September 2019). *The Older Population in Rural America*. Page 5. Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2019/acs/acs-41.pdf>

Community Connections

It's important for local leaders to be connected to the community and for community members to connect with one another

The topics in this publication focus on place-based service and infrastructure needs. They apply to people of all ages and include suitable housing, safe streets, community services and the proximity of retail areas.

Of course, those features alone don't make a place a community. A key ingredient — perhaps *the* key ingredient — is the ability and desire of residents to be involved in the community and with one another.

Local government, businesses, organizations and individuals all play a role in cultivating an age-friendly community, one where younger and older people can live, play, work or volunteer. When towns are small and remote, having opportunities to interact with fellow residents is especially important.

But connecting with neighbors, being with family and friends, and simply seeing and speaking to other people on a regular basis is becoming more difficult in many rural places.

A lack of jobs and other income opportunities lead many working-age adults to leave their hometown. Aside from the transportation and internet-access challenges common in rural communities (and discussed later in these pages), the shuttering of local businesses and Main Street shops due to economic stagnation and competition from retail malls, big box stores, chain eateries and online shopping mean there are fewer places to actually go. It's little wonder that people who live in rural areas have a higher risk for social isolation than their urban peers.

Most adults want to be independent and self-sufficient. However, even people who value their autonomy need social connections. AARP research reveals that three in 10 adults age 45 or older in rural areas lack companionship, feel left out and consider themselves to be too isolated.¹

Loneliness has serious health consequences. A 2015 study by Brigham Young University found that social isolation, living alone and loneliness each

have a negative effect on longevity that is the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day or consuming six alcoholic drinks a day. (In fact, the lack of social connections, the study found, is worse than the impact of inactivity or obesity).²

According to survey results published in May 2019 by National Public Radio, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, one in five rural residents age 18 or older say they always or often feel isolated or lonely.³ Those feelings are often compounded by poverty and, for many frail older residents, illness or disability.

Some simple but effective interventions do exist.

For instance, the Carrier Alert program, a joint effort of the U.S. Postal Service and the National Association of Letter Carriers, enlists mail carriers to keep an eye on the well-being of older and disabled residents along their delivery routes.

In Burnham-on-Sea, a small town in southwest England, the police department created "chat benches." Signs on the benches read, "*The 'Happy to Chat' Bench: Sit Here if You Don't Mind Someone Stopping to Say Hello.*"⁴

Although the opioid epidemic is present in all types of communities, it has wreaked particular havoc in already underresourced rural households. When adults with minor children become addicted or die by overdose, their parents, grandparents or other relatives often become the children's caregivers.

In 2017, 28 percent of custodial grandparents in the United States were living in rural areas.⁵ Even though the majority of parenting grandparents live in urban centers, the concentration of grandfamilies is higher in rural America, where 6.5 percent of grandparents are responsible for one or more grandchildren under the age of 18, compared with 4.2 percent of grandparents in urban areas.⁶

Complex family dynamics, coupled with a lack of services (e.g., support groups, back-up care options, transportation), mean that most parenting

► Nestled in the mountains of Southern Vermont, Grafton describes itself as “a vibrant community, still holding the traditional Town Meeting with participation from a wonderfully diverse population of 600 people.”

▼ The all-volunteer Davidsonville Area Civic Association was founded by residents in 1974 to counter business and government efforts to develop the largely agricultural, unincorporated region in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. Nearly 50 years later, several of the founding members still serve on the group’s board.



◄▲ When distances are great, interactions with neighbors can amount to little more than waving at one another from a passing car. Volunteering is a way people can connect or stay connected with the community they live in. Volunteer-led AARP chapters enable residents to participate in good works, meet new people and — like chapter members from Prentiss, Mississippi (left), and Bessemer-West Jefferson County, Alabama (above) — enjoy good food .

grandparents don’t get the support they need. As a result, these adults are at a higher risk for social isolation, depression and poor physical health than their noncustodial grandparenting peers.⁷

Changed attitudes about age and aging are needed. Age in and of itself doesn’t define an individual’s role and responsibilities. After all, many

people age 65-plus are still in the workforce. Many are primary caregivers for small children or adult loved ones.

In a livable community, local leaders recognize the realities of its residents, provide supports and encourage people to participate in the full range of local activities, regardless of their age. ■

FIELD-TESTED STRATEGIES: Community Connections

EXPERIENCE MATTERS

AGE to age, an initiative of the Northland Foundation, fosters intergenerational connections in northeastern **Minnesota**, where it operates in seven rural counties and three tribal nations.

Although the region makes up 25 percent of the state's landmass and is home to 327,000 people, there are "a lot of lakes and trees between all those people," Lynn Haglin, the foundation's vice president, explains.

When Northland assessed community needs, the top one was the need for greater civic engagement. The second — a surprise, Haglin said — concerned the area's children. As one resident put it, "We want children in our community to know we care about them, we recognize them, and we really hope that when they have gone off to college and figured out what they want to do in life, that they will make their way back to the community if possible."

Each AGE to age program differs in the work it takes on, but each provides a multigenerational approach to community building through social and community engagement. Reading Pals matches older people with elementary school students. Other projects pair teens with older people to create public art or to plant and care for community gardens, which then support local food pantries.

Within the tribal nations in Minnesota, AGE to age programs have focused on Native American culture and traditions, such as blanket making, rice harvesting, beading and learning to speak Ojibwe.

A bonus for many participants is the development of supportive relationships that continue beyond the project work.

"There are many lonely children these days — two parents are working or maybe it's a single-parent household," said Haglin. "We have a lot of poverty in our area. Some kids may be surrounded by children in school, but they don't belong to a group or have connections. The older adults are providing that for the kids, especially for young people who do not participate in sports. There's very little in small, rural communities for youth who have other interests."

For the older adults, participating in AGE to age means fewer days spent alone and, many say, a renewed sense of purpose. ■



EXPERT INSIGHT

"Connecting kids with an older adult is a way to give them the support of a mentor and a chance to feel like a valued member of the community."

— Lynn Haglin, vice president, Northland Foundation, and director, KIDS PLUS, a project that includes the intergenerational initiative AGE to age



SNAPSHOT



Olathe, Kansas, is a mid-sized city (population 137,000) but its Operation Lifeline program can easily be replicated by communities of any size — or just among neighbors.

Since 1979, the Olathe Police Department has arranged for volunteers (some shown above) to make daily telephone calls to older people who live alone. If there's no answer, a police officer is dispatched to ensure that all is well.

The program is free and "truly does save lives," Mayor Mike Copeland told AARP in 2018. "We've assisted people who have fallen during the night and were discovered when they couldn't answer the volunteer's call."

Even when the person does pick up the phone, there have been times, said Copeland, when a caller sensed something just wasn't right. In those cases, the volunteers reached out to family members who were able to help.

PRESERVING THE PAST

After a long-time resident of **Old Orchard Beach, Maine**, donated several dozen old photographs of the town to the Harmon Museum, the local age-friendly initiative, OOB Community Friendly Connection, wanted to include the images in an exhibition.

However, as is true of many communities and even individual households, no one was familiar with the faces in the newly recovered photos or the stories behind the images.

The failed attempts to identify older residents who might be familiar with the pictured people and places inspired the age-friendly team, along with local educators Joanne Dowd and Casey Rossignol, to launch a historical research project. The work would be led by local sixth-graders.

The students divided themselves into photographers, interviewers and hospitality hosts. Longtime residents were invited to the school to share their recollections about earlier days in Old Orchard Beach.

The researchers' methods were very simple — the camera crew placed iPads on music stands and the interviewers asked questions — but the results were not. “The kids blew us away!” said Rossignol. The students were surprised as well.

“I felt more in tune with my community after meeting people who had lived in my town their entire life,” said a student named Izzy. “I became more interested in the history of my town, and I’m not one for history.”

Chloe, a classmate, was similarly moved.

“I interviewed a lady name Velma Williams,” explained Chloe. “She had an interracial relationship with Emerson Cummings, a town council member and math teacher in the high school. When they were dating, people would stare at them. And she would stare back. She told me she really loved him. When some people came to play music on the pier, Emerson and his mom, Rose, gave them a place to stay and would feed them because black musicians weren’t allowed to stay in the hotels.”

By encouraging people of very different ages to sit together, talk and listen, the community’s past became part of its present and future. ■

Find another Old Orchard Beach article on page 38.



NEWS CLIP

“Older adults residing in small towns and rural communities may be especially vulnerable to the dangers of isolated living, but these individuals and their communities, with modest levels of support, can be mobilized to take action against this threat to well-being in later life.”

— **Lenard W. Kaye**, director,
University of Maine Center on Aging,
Bangor Daily News, April 25, 2017



LOCAL VOICES

- “In some communities, it can be hard to bring neighbors together and to create opportunities for the generations to meet and work collaboratively.”
- “If you live in a small town that is very widespread, with not many people, and you have a lot of older people who don’t use the internet and your phone system is not always reliable, it’s hard to get people to know where they are and where you are and how to ask for help or how to join together in any kind of social engagement.”
- “Compared to living in a city or a suburb, there aren’t a lot of supports and services in rural areas for new parents. And there’s really *nothing* for the people who are raising their grandchildren or great-grandchildren.”
- “When I was a new mom, I lived in a small town where older women ran a program that provided local mothers with two hours of free child care at a church nursery school. The older-lady volunteers got to cuddle and care for babies and toddlers and the mothers got a short but needed break. Helpful, intergenerational programs like that can be created in all kinds of communities.”

FIELD-TESTED STRATEGIES: Community Connections

ACTING OUT

Although Broadway shines the brightest spotlight, theatrical productions are staged throughout the country. In fact, in many towns, a high school musical or a concert by the town choir is a big social event.

In a growing number of communities, theater is also being used to educate audiences about local issues and societal concerns, including those specific to the lives of older adults.

The Stagebridge theater company regularly travels to schools and community centers in nearby rural towns and regions from its homebase in **Oakland, California**. Founded in 1978, the company seeks to “enrich the lives of older adults and their communities through the performing arts.”

The productions address a variety of aging-related realities, including depression, downsizing and caregiving. Many of the scripts are original and tailored to the audience. (*Was There Light Before TV?*, for instance, is performed for schoolchildren.) Discussions with the audience follow each show.

A secret to the success of this type of theater is its flexibility. Some performers read their lines while others rely on improvisation. Some of the troupes include actors who have dementia or use assistive devices to move around.

What the productions have in common is that they present older people as active, engaged, vital contributors to the community.

In **Somerset County, Maine**, the Resiliency in Action Interactive Improvisational Theater (an affiliate of the Marti Stevens Interactive Improvisational Theater) pulls residents of all ages into tough, often emotional conversations — on purpose.

In the Somerset productions, acting troupes of two to four people perform short dramatizations, of usually less than five minutes, that abruptly end when the characters reach a moment of crisis.

A moderator then turns to the audience and invites them to ask questions and make suggestions to the still-in-character actors, all of whom are volunteers and many of whom work in public health, education or community advocacy.

Interactive improvisational theater is a way of strategizing solutions to everyday problems. It delves into elder abuse, grandparents’ raising grandchildren, hunger, bullying, and school shootings, among other realities. The scenarios inspire discussions about how the community can be more supportive,



▲ Something is always happening at the historic Lincoln Theater (circa 1875) in Damariscotta, Maine. The venue presents plays, hosts lectures, screens feature films and broadcasts live performances from stages throughout the world.

especially of the most vulnerable. The performances help people see themselves in others.

In fact, the scenarios are often so realistic that audience members cry, get angry and, at times, argue with the characters. At the end of the gatherings, the actors step out of their roles and introduce themselves to ensure that audiences understand they aren’t really, for instance, a fraudster trying to swindle an elderly neighbor.

Employers, organizations and governments seek out the troupes for trainings, interventions and group-learning activities.

As described on the Marti Stevens website, the method provides “learning without lectures, blackboards, experts, flip charts, pencils, or workbooks. It encourages cooperation, critical thinking, respect for others, and taking healthy risks to express oneself in front of peers.” ■

HEAVY LIFTING

Recruiting teenagers for service projects can be tough. Due to school, homework, sports and jobs, young people have limited free time. In rural areas, which often have a disproportionately small youth population — one served by regional rather than local schools — many young people spend a lot of time simply commuting to and from school.

To ensure that young residents are involved in its livability efforts, the age-friendly committee in **Cumberland, Maine**, includes a high school student on its leadership council.

Teen involvement is also a priority for the town's semiannual Big Project Day, when residents help older neighbors with household projects they can't handle by themselves. Examples include gardening, repair work, and the installation or storage of window air-conditioning units.

"Relationships now exist as a result of these projects between seniors and our younger folks," said Teri Maloney-Kelly, the event's coordinator. "There are families that didn't realize they had a neighbor around the corner who needed help until they did a project like this." ■



▲ A young volunteer shovels snow off a carport roof as part of Aging in Place Cumberland's efforts to keep the community's older residents safe.

TAKEAWAYS

- Big city solutions — such as a chat bench, acting troupes of older people or a daily check-in call — can, with a little creativity, be replicated in small towns and villages.
- People of all ages and life stages who want to be involved in the community often lack a means of doing so. Empowering them requires tearing down barriers, such as a lack of transportation, and developing programs that fit the community and build connections.
- When seeking volunteers, develop a task (or "ask") that is tailored to potential candidates' interests, needs and availability.
- Activities that build on what people enjoy or need can engage residents who aren't involved in other aspects of community life.
- When addressed in nonconfrontational or non-embarrassing ways, difficult conversations about community issues — such as senior hunger, elder abuse or the impact of drug addiction on families — can take place and lead to solutions.
- It may take a little imagination to bring people of different ages together in a community, but it can be done when they share a common interest and when members of each age group can feel they're making a meaningful contribution. Working together in a community garden or recording the stories of older people are two activities that bring groups together on the basis of a common interest and give residents of all ages a sense of purpose.
- Young people care about their communities. When they're more involved in making decisions about projects designed to improve livability, they'll be more engaged in the projects and more interested in volunteering.
- The best way to find an effective program for a community is to seek the input of its residents.

Outdoor Spaces and Public Places

Just because someone has a yard or acres upon acres of land doesn't mean they have no need for parks and community gathering spots

Local parks and public spaces can help build a sense of place and social belonging, and this is true whether the community is suburban, urban or rural. However, the ways parks and public spaces are designed, maintained, programmed and funded don't always meet the needs of the people the places were meant to serve.

A rural community's identity, tax base and municipal priorities are affected when the population grows or shrinks or when the community experiences changes in its economic base. As a result, the local government's ability to fund basic services — such as education, infrastructure and public safety — is put to the test. Pinched for funds, there might not be room in the budget for investing in parks and other vital public places.

The disappearance of Main Street businesses and the increase of empty storefronts reduce foot traffic to once-thriving downtowns. With fewer visitors and a decline in the tax base, it may not be feasible for a small city or town to invest in the amenities and activities that can enhance its center.

The consequences of such declines undermine the health of both people and places.

As the National Main Street Center declares: "Downtowns are the heart of our communities" and "a community is only as strong as its core."

Time outdoors, either in one's own yard or a public place, helps people be more active; reduces obesity; and improves blood pressure, bone density and cardiorespiratory fitness.¹ Access to natural areas help people manage feelings of stress, anger and aggression; lessens social isolation; and improves coping abilities and cognitive function.²

For children, time spent in quality outdoor spaces can enhance creativity and problem-solving, reduce hyperactivity, and improve focus and behavior.³

Green spaces and trees play a vital role in overall ecosystem health by absorbing stormwater runoff and pollutants. Great parks and public spaces also

build community pride, enhance local economies, increase civic engagement and bring people together — for fairs and festivals, flea markets, cookouts, family reunions and other events and activities.

Small local parks are as important as large, regional, state or national parks.

In fact, the Trust for Public Land believes that all Americans should have a park or green space within a 10-minute walk of their home.⁴ While access to natural places takes on a different meaning in urban as opposed to rural settings, the point is that all people should be able to easily access a safe, outdoor, natural space.

And people really do need places *to go to*.

As sociologist Ray Oldenburg writes in *The Great Place*, in addition to home and work, people need "a third place," which he defines as a destination where a person can "relax in public ... encounter familiar faces and make new acquaintances."

Andrew Howard, co-founder of the placemaking and urban design firm Team Better Block, observes that, "the typical place in need of our team's help are old Main Streets, places that used to be active but are now essentially dead. We always ask, 'What did this place used to be like?' Then we work to make it like that again. Our goal is to reclaim cities and communities for the public good, one block at a time."

Such places and spaces need to be engaging, safe and accessible — the latter meaning that in addition to being navigable for people with disabilities, the larger population needs to be able to get to the location. And once they're there, programming (e.g., exercise classes, ranger-led hikes, special events) is essential to keep them coming back.

An often overlooked outcome is that spaces and places need to be suitable for users of vastly different ages and life stages. As livability expert Gil Penalosa, founder of 8 80 Cities, explains in what has become his mantra: "If everything we do in our public spaces is great for an 8-year-old and an 80-year-old, then it will be great for people of all ages." ■



▲ Located near Denali National Park, Talkeetna, Alaska, is a very remote, very small (population 875), very welcoming community with an active Main Street that's listed on the register of National Historic Places.

▼ A waterfront park and Little Free Library box is a popular spot in Eastport, Maine, the easternmost community in the United States.



◀ Combining funds from an AARP Community Challenge grant (see page 49) with the talents of local artists and volunteers, the Black Belt Treasures Cultural Arts Center created mosaic benches for Camden, Alabama's historic downtown. "We hope that as people shop, walk and do business in town, they'll stop and rest and learn a little bit more about our community, our history, our culture," said a center director.



◀ The Tolani Lake community in the Navajo Nation is located in a barren, sparsely populated region of northeastern Arizona. The closest shopping is an hour away. Schools and medical services are even farther.

FIELD-TESTED STRATEGIES: Outdoor Spaces and Public Places

REINVENTION AND REPAIR

Outdoor public places needn't close due to the cold. In 2015, community leaders in **Anchorage, Alaska**, voted to turn a former greenhouse property that was in disrepair into a much-needed 12-acre recreation area and green space in the city's east end.

The Muldoon Town Square Park is usable year-round, with a playground, picnic shelter and running track. In the winter, the track becomes an ice skating rink. A small or rural community in a cold climate can replicate and even improve upon the idea.

In a similarly cold and snowy community hundreds of miles to the southeast, the senior center on the **Blackfeet Reservation in Montana** is well-run and well-used, but has very limited outdoor space.

Located across from boarded-up houses, the center was connected to a park that had no trees or shade or protection from the wind and snow. Discarded pets turned semiwild dogs roamed freely.

When the community's elders were asked about their concerns and wishes for the senior center and park, their top priorities were safety, shelter from the wind, and a place to gather and socialize. The tribe



▲ A curvy ice skating track in Anchorage, Alaska.

used grant funding to install a secure wooden fence with decorative iron gates around the center and outdoor space. Young people put down sod and built planters according to specifications provided by the elders, who can now garden without having to stoop over or sit on the ground. ■

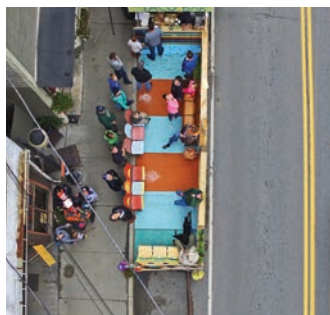
BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME

With help from AARP and the placemaking firm Team Better Block, a push for better walkability and a livelier downtown is helping transform and reinvigorate **Bethel, Vermont**.

After Tropical Storm Irene battered the town in 2013, residents organized ad hoc efforts to fix the place up. It began with a fall festival, during which the Bethel Revitalization Initiative encouraged people to imagine what they wanted for the town.

That brainstorming led to an ambitious, free “pop-up” college (dubbed Bethel University) in which residents taught lessons based on their own skills and interests. The program “helped create a sense of pride and possibility for the first time in years,” said a local leader. The new energy led Bethel to look at more ambitious changes, so the town hosted the state's first “better block” project.

During an October weekend, a downtown block on Main Street received a makeover featuring street plants, crosswalk enhancements and a protected lane for cyclists and wheelchair users. Pop-up shops (some of which became permanent) opened in several of the long-vacant storefronts. ■



◀▲ By turning two Main Street parking spots into a temporary parklet, the downtown location (shown from the sidewalk and sky) became a popular place for people — and a taco booth — rather than cars.

HAVE A SEAT

A common sight in all types of communities are bus and transit stops where people are standing and waiting. They're standing because the only place to sit is on the ground.

In **Jackson Hole, Wyoming**, several young families, older adults and people with disabilities were living near a bus stop that consisted of a sign and nothing else but weeds and trash.

After a bench financed by an AARP Community Challenge grant (see page 49) was installed, neighbors added landscaping. One volunteered to water the plants, another said he'd remove snow from the bench in the winter. The bus stop was transformed by a small infrastructure investment and lots of public support.

To encourage pedestrian traffic in its small business district, **Port Orford, Oregon**, installed

four benches with attached planters.

The seats gave the business district a boost and provided a needed place for shoppers to rest, people watch, talk to friends and enjoy the town. The benches were constructed by a crew from the nearby correctional facility. High school students made plaques to recognize the inmates for their work and AARP for helping to fund the building supplies.

A few well-placed benches can make any destination a lot easier for people to visit.

When residents of **Bangor, Maine**, told a local livability committee that seating was needed outside the Cross Center, a large event venue, the advocates asked the manager to install benches in key locations. "Sure," he replied. "We have benches in storage out back."

With little effort and no cost to the advocates, the benches were supplied and installed. ■



SNAPSHOT



In addition to being functional, seating can be an attraction, such as in the Napa Valley town of **Yountville, California**, where a plaza in front of the community center is sometimes set up like a living room, with furniture arranged to facilitate conversation. The space also has two pianos at which anyone can sit and tickle the ivories.



NEWS CLIP

"As the nation's first cross-country multiuse trail, the Great American Rail-Trail will connect people of all ages and abilities with America's diverse landscapes and communities. Nearly 50 million people living within 50 miles of its route will be able to call this iconic American infrastructure their own as the trail delivers new access to the outdoors and new opportunities for physical activity and recreation. Hundreds of communities along the route will experience new opportunities for business development and tourism. ... Whether bridging gaps within and between communities; creating safe walking and biking access to jobs, transit, shopping and green space; or serving as recreation for cyclists, runners and casual daily explorers, this will be America's trail."⁵

— **Rails-to-Trails Conservancy**, announcing the preferred route for a 3,700-mile walk/bike trail that will stretch between Washington state and Washington, D.C.

Visit [RailsToTrails.org](https://www.RailsToTrails.org) to see the route and learn how much of it is already open for use.

FIELD-TESTED STRATEGIES: Outdoor Spaces and Public Places



LOCAL VOICES

- “When people hear talk of parks, they often think of national parks or state parks. What we’re lacking are small, local parks and local public places where we can spend a bit of time without having to plan for an outing that will take an entire day.”
- “I wish we had a downtown, center of town. A place to go and maybe bump into people you know. We have strip malls and big box stores.”
- “Being an older person stuck alone at home can be sad and lonely. But the places we have for seniors to gather are also sad and lonely.”
- “Cities have their hazards and dangers, but so do rural areas. Boredom and nothing to do or place to go can lead to people using illegal drugs or drinking to excess just to pass the time.”
- “We have a great library in this town. There are classes for people to learn to use their cell phones and iPads, book groups, and many activities. Since I had my stroke and have to use a walker, though, I can’t get inside. There is no parking near the ramp, and I can’t do stairs.”
- “Our local grocery store has reserved special parking for people with disabilities and for seniors, new moms, and pregnant ladies. I just love seeing those signs, because it means we are all welcome.”
- “The town got some grant money and invested in a wheelchair accessible trail that goes through some woods and to the lake. Eagle Scouts designed and built beautiful benches with scenes from our town history. Everyone goes there now.”

PARKING FOR PEOPLE

The revitalization of downtown **Kuna, Idaho**, has been an ongoing process involving businesses fixing up storefronts and sidewalks being repaired. Street lights, benches and plantings were spruced up. Streets were repaved.

Improvements were happening — except in one key area: the Bernie Fisher parking lot, adjacent to a walk-bike trail, the Kuna Senior Center, and the business district.

Blighted, oversized, largely vacant parking lots are not hard to find in communities throughout the United States. The Kuna lot fortunately had great potential as a pedestrian-friendly public plaza.

To spark the community’s imagination and hoped-for change, the city and Idaho Smart Growth hosted a Park for a Day event so residents could experience the parking lot as a pedestrian plaza. There was live music, a food vendor and sketches of how the expanse of asphalt could be transformed.

Attendee suggestions tended toward using the space for short-term, recurring events, such as an Oktoberfest or themed dance nights. ■



▲▼ An often-empty parking lot in downtown Kuna, Idaho, could be repurposed as an ice-skating rink.



GET WET! HAVE FUN! TAKE A HIKE!

Charles City, Iowa, was struggling due to vacant storefronts and plant closings. The population was shrinking. Flooding had destroyed an entire neighborhood.

But the removal of a dangerous dam along the Cedar River enabled the city to transform a section of the waterway into the state's first whitewater park. The effort excited local young people and brought needed tourism dollars to town.

In **Fort Lincoln, North Dakota**, the Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park has to contend with both harsh weather and limited staffing. Among the park's doable and successful event offerings are a competitive fitness hike, a nighttime "glow" hike and a multiday Halloween-themed Haunted Fort event. Visitors who participate in 12 of the park's monthly hikes earn a free one-year park pass.

In **Carlsbad, New Mexico**, the support of local gas and oil companies, businesses and individual donors enabled the creation of Friendship Park, a "playground for everyone" that includes equipment suitable for people with special needs. ■



▲ The development of a whitewater park helped change the fortunes of Charles City, Iowa.



EXPERT INSIGHT

"It's easy to say we can't build friendly environments for physical activity in rural settings because it costs too much, and we're afraid of change in rural communities, and we don't have the resources, and we may not even have the technical know-how, and we are suffering population decline.

"In fact, rural communities and small towns may be uniquely advantaged to build fully accessible environments where it's convenient and inviting and safe to get out and move under your own power. Rural communities that build inclusive environments that invite everyone to get outside and move have a higher quality of life, and the local economic energy is better."

— **Mark Fenton**, transportation, planning and public health consultant and adjunct associate professor, Tufts University

TAKEAWAYS

- When a local park or the downtown area offers fun, worthwhile activities, it encourages residents to engage in outdoor recreation and boosts both the local economy and the community in general.
- A property lot or small piece of land may not look like much, but it can be turned into an inviting park or other public space, even if only for a special event.
- Pop-up events are a great way to gauge public support for long-term change. Ask businesses, the local government or the community at large to supply or help create the materials and elements needed to make an event happen.
- Whether in urban or rural areas, hiking trails and park spaces can have a positive impact on real estate values, business activity and community identity.

Housing

Rural regions have an acute need for housing that is affordable as well as accessible for residents of many ages and abilities

The housing stock in rural America is “older than that of the nation as a whole, heightening the need for, and the cost of, repairs, maintenance, and accessibility retrofits,” states a report by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which also notes that in 2013, 63 percent of rural homes were built before 1980.¹

In many rural communities, much of the housing stock dates back to the early 20th and even the 19th centuries. Unless a renovation has occurred, many of these homes lack a first-floor bedroom or toilet. Few older homes are wheelchair accessible.

The majority of homes in rural areas are single-family residences, which are often far too large for empty nesters and require a level of maintenance that is costly, physically demanding and time-consuming.

According to AARP research about rural home ownership, nearly two out of five properties need major modifications to accommodate residents who want to age in place.²

Modifications come with a significant price tag, but making the needed changes is often preferable, safer and more cost effective and realistic than staying in an inaccessible home or downsizing to a newer, more accessible residence.

About 80 percent of older adults in rural communities own their homes,³ and among those residents nearly all own their homes free and clear.⁴

“But the structure isn’t appropriate, the size is not appropriate,” declared David Lipsetz, CEO of the Housing Assistance Council, at the AARP Rural Livability Workshop. “There is a small percentage of rental to move to. There’s an enormous need for affordable, right-sized housing.”

Another barrier to uprooting for more suitable housing is that the equity accumulated by older rural homeowners tends to be less than that of older homeowners in urban areas. This is because rural homes are generally less expensive. For instance, in 2017, the national median price of a rural single-family home was \$159,300 compared with \$207,800 for urban communities.⁵

But as in any neighborhood, housing values in

rural areas can be a boom or a bust.

Stagnant or declining values are devastating for people planning to relocate who had counted on their home as an asset. In some areas of the rural Midwest, housing prices have stagnated at 1990 levels. From 2000 to 2016, rural regions in Ohio, Indiana and Michigan saw a decrease in housing values of up to 7 percent.⁶ Such values generally benefit home buyers rather than owners.

Although increasing and very high housing prices and shortages are common in booming cities, the same situations exist in many rural places.

This often happens in picturesque areas that attract tourists and well-to-do retirees.⁷ For instance, in Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota and South Dakota, rural home prices increased by 40 to 78 percent from 2000 to 2016.⁸ High-income buyers compete with one another for available properties, which raises asking prices and boosts the housing market to levels that many current or returning residents can’t afford.

Rapidly increasing property values make life tough for existing homeowners as well. They often find themselves asset rich but cash poor due to steep increases in real estate taxes and other costs. If they sell their home, they might not find an affordable and suitable house or apartment elsewhere in the area.

Colorado is a place where soaring housing prices, compounded by high utility costs, are creating problems for both young and older residents, neither of whom can afford to live where they already have a life.

Among the other challenges: Many communities in rural America struggle with endemic, multigenerational poverty. To make ends meet, residents of various ages are often forced to move in with others, leading to overcrowding.

The nation’s opioid epidemic has added both community and household hardships. When adults with young children become addicted or die, their parents often become the children’s guardians. An empty nest becomes full again.

The lack of housing that’s safe and affordable, and size and place appropriate, impacts people of all ages and life stages. ■



▲ Oregon's Willamette Valley is stunning. But living far from services and neighbors can be isolating.



▲ Old homes, such as this rural Maryland farmhouse built in 1850, often have a lot of stairs and are expensive to maintain.



▲▼ Among the benefits of life in a rural downtown (such as Harrodsburg, Kentucky) are walkability and (in Nelsonville, Ohio) front row seats at the parade.



FIELD-TESTED STRATEGIES: Housing



MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING

Across the United States, there's a mismatch between the housing stock and what the market wants and needs. This is partly due to changing demographics, such as the rapidly aging population and shrinking household sizes.

A practical solution is something called “missing middle housing.”

These types of residences (see the illustration, above) are described as missing because very few have been built since the early 1940s due to zoning constraints, financing difficulties and the shift to automobile-centric patterns of development.

Where the structures do exist, they easily go unnoticed because — and this is a good thing — they blend right in. Original missing middle homes are located in walkable urban areas as well as in historic small towns and Main Street districts.

As a housing type, missing middle homes are close to amenities, mix well with other building types, never exceed the scale of a house (height,

width, depth) and can be purchased or rented. Many of the properties are designed as live-work units.

While new missing middle housing projects are becoming more common in large cities, they're also located in smaller communities, including **Papillion, Nebraska, and South Jordan, Utah.**

“Missing middle housing types are a great way to deliver affordable housing choices by design since they're of a scale that most communities would support,” explains Daniel Parolek, founder of Opticos Design and the architect who coined the term “missing middle.”

The concept can also broaden housing discussions, including with people or groups that bristle at words like “density” or “multifamily.” Conversations can develop around a question such as “Where will downsizing empty nesters live when they need to be in a less car-dependent home, but want to remain in or near their community?”

One answer is missing middle housing. ■

LOCAL VOICES

- “We have people who’ve lived in a home their family has owned for generations, and when it comes time to turn over the keys, it’s very difficult. Once people are in the smaller places, they are usually happier. But the transition of leaving their house, of getting rid of their possessions and downsizing, is emotional and physically difficult and even dangerous when they’re older and they try to make repairs or do the packing and moving themselves.”
- “Aging in place isn’t a viable option for people who can’t afford to maintain or retrofit a home. Finding affordable, comfortable, high-quality housing is especially challenging in rural areas.”
- “We think of roommate housing as being only for college students or young people. But there’s no reason why older people shouldn’t be sharing a large home. Doing so provides everyone involved with companionship, help when needed and a more affordable way to live.”

FIND AND SEEK

Rural residents sometimes have problems accessing emergency services. Conversely, first responders can experience problems finding and reaching rural residents.

Common reasons for the latter include a home being difficult to find due to hidden or missing house numbers, the home being inaccessible because a driveway is too narrow or is covered with snow or overgrown with vegetation, or the road to the home is poorly maintained.

To address the first issue, the Georgetown for All Ages Committee in **Georgetown, Maine**, helped create, distribute and install large, reflective house numbers that can be clearly seen from the road at each of the town's 500 homes. The service was free.

In **Davidsonville, Maryland**, the Boy Scouts raised funds for their troop by creating and selling, for \$5 each, reflective house-number signs (pictured). In **Phippsburg, Maine**, the town asks residents to ensure that their driveways are wide enough and that trees are kept trimmed so fire trucks will have full access to all homes. ■



▲ Reflective house-numbers help both residents and first responders.

BOARDING SCHOOL

Gowanda, New York, needed affordable housing for its older residents. An old school building stood vacant until it was converted into 32 apartments for low-income adults age 62 or older. The building also contains a medical office, an adult daycare facility, a food pantry and counseling services.

The town of **Hallowell, Maine** (population 2,400), is home to more older adults than school-age children.⁹ In 2016, after years on the market, the Maine Industrial School for Girls, a 19th century institution for “wayward” young women, was converted into Stevens Commons, a 55-acre mixed-use campus with affordable rental apartments for people 55 or older.

Forgiveable loans from the Community Development Block Grant program and the nonprofit Community Housing of Maine funded the housing for older residents. ■



EXPERT INSIGHT

“Some native elders are living in the home they’ve lived in for decades. A lot of those homes are intergenerational, and they’re crowded because they have kids and grandkids in the home. That can deteriorate the homes. A lot of our tribal housing programs’ main job is maintaining housing stock. But the tribes are also in a unique position. Because of the housing shortage, every time they build a new unit, it’s something they can really consider and tailor to the particular individuals they’re trying to serve.”

— **Tony Walters**, Executive Director
National American Indian Housing Council



NEWS CLIP

“Many homes here [in Ogallala, Nebraska] were built for a far different time, before mechanization, when you needed big families to work the farms. Most are outdated. The few that are on the market ... often need thousands of dollars’ worth of upgrades. Most people can’t — or aren’t willing to — pay that.”

— “Rural America Faces a Crisis in ‘Adequate Housing,’” *Weekend Edition*,
National Public Radio, August 11, 2018

FIELD-TESTED STRATEGIES: Housing

COMFORTABLY HOME

To help older residents maintain their homes, nonprofits in many communities organize volunteers who assist with simple chores, weatherization and routine maintenance.

In rural **Putnam County, Ohio**, for example, a local men's organization partners with the national nonprofit Habitat for Humanity to replace roofs, repair siding, install stair railings and grab bars, and even add plumbing to equip homes with running water.

The Honey Do Crew does the same for low-income adults in **Kanawha County, West Virginia**.

In **Trappe, Maryland**, AARP Foundation partnered with Habitat for Humanity to host workshops that provide home maintenance tips and teach older homeowners how to perform simple repairs.

In many places, state and local housing authorities are also helping to make homes safer and more comfortable for older residents. In 2017, **Maine's** state housing authority launched a repair program to assist older people who want to remain in their homes but can't afford the needed repairs and modifications. Participants receive an in-home assessment to identify low-cost, high-impact changes that can make their home safer.

The renovations are paid for by the state and are performed by a housing agency employee who is also a certified aging-in-place specialist. The most common modifications: installing bathroom grab bars, adding insulation, and making it easier and safer to enter and exit the home.

During the program's first two years, the average cost of materials per home was \$1,578. In that same timeframe, the program reduced the rate of in-home falls by 79 percent and decreased the number of hospital visits, including trips to the emergency room, by 61 percent.¹⁰ ■



▲ Home repair volunteers in West Virginia.



▲ A volunteer driver for the VegiCare program.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

The Village to Village Network is a national umbrella organization that supports nonprofit, community-based, volunteer- and neighbor-run aging-in-place arrangements called Villages.

Where the programs exist, residents typically pay dues to their local Village, which then connects them with services, activities, and support from volunteers and vetted vendors.

The first Village was established by neighbors in Boston's Beacon Hill. In rural areas, a Village program might serve several small towns.

CommunityCare of Lyme, the Village affiliate in **Lyme, New Hampshire**, doesn't charge membership fees and its services are available to all residents, regardless of age.

The organization's mission is to "build on Lyme's heritage as a warm, welcoming and service-oriented community by building partnerships, embracing new ideas and designing systems that improve our individual and collective sense of well-being."

A men's group, called Those Guys, provides transportation services and performs minor household tasks and seasonal chores.

Farmers donate vegetables to the VegiCare program, which distributes produce to households in need. The SouperCare program delivers homemade soup to people who are ill, going through a life transition (such as a new baby or the death of a family member) or have a disability that makes it difficult to prepare their own meals. ■

SENIOR-SAFE SMOKE ALARMS

Fire prevention and detection is especially important in rural areas, where most residents get water from private wells on their property. Fire hydrants — which exist only where there’s a piped, municipal water supply — are rarely available.

Firefighters either transport water to the site in tanker trucks or extract it from nearby lakes, ponds or swimming pools. Since most rural areas depend on volunteer firefighters, the response time may be slower, too, despite the level of devotion. (See page 44 for more about firefighting.).

As part of the Senior Safe Program in **Casper, Wyoming**, Rotary volunteers and Casper College fire science students work with the fire department to install smoke detectors, carbon monoxide alarms, night-lights and LED bulbs, which last longer, shine brighter and use less electricity than traditional incandescent bulbs.

Thanks to funding from local organizations, including AARP Wyoming, there is no cost to homeowners. Between 2014 and 2019, 60 volunteers installed more than 2,000 smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms in 300 homes. ■



SNAPSHOT



The Fire Rescue squad in **North Yarmouth, Maine**, installed key safes on or near the entry doors of homes with older residents who live alone. The town’s first responders are the only people who can open the lockbox that contains the key. A tracking system records when each box is opened and by whom.

ROOMS AND MORE FOR RENT

Since the **Mount Washington Valley in New Hampshire** attracts tourists year-round, real estate prices are high. By matching older homeowners who have an extra bedroom with home seekers, the HomeShare MWV program enables older residents to generate income from rent and not live alone.

To expand housing options statewide, the New Hampshire legislature legalized the creation of accessory dwelling units (or ADUs), which are secondary residences attached to a single-family home or built on the same property lot. ■

TAKEAWAYS

- Many older residents want to remain in their small town or rural community, but a lack of aging-suitable and “right-sized” housing options limit their ability to do so.
- Solutions needn’t always be implemented by government officials. Neighbors, even distant ones, can check on one another.
- Neighbors can also provide services to one another (e.g., raking leaves, plowing snow), meet for meals, share equipment, offer rides and do errands together.
- Local governments can convert unused schools or other town-owned buildings into smaller, more centrally located housing for older people who need to downsize or for younger residents seeking a starter home.
- Rural communities need to “find” or create their missing middle housing — and introduce the concept of cohousing and home-sharing as residential options.
- Accessory dwelling units can help address housing shortages, enable family members to live near one another and allow homeowners to earn rental income. (See page 49 for how to learn more.)
- The presence of housing choices that are affordable and appropriate for individuals and families at different life stages enables people of all ages to thrive in a community.

Transportation

It can be difficult if not impossible for nondrivers in rural areas to get where they need or want to go

“**E**very rural place has a transportation issue and may not even know it,” declared John Robert Smith, chair of Transportation for America and a former mayor of **Meridian, Mississippi** (see more on page 30), at the AARP Rural Livability Workshop.

“Transportation affects the creation of jobs and whether people stay in the community,” said Smith. “It affects whether young people can take classes at the community college. Whether Grandma can get to her critical oncology appointment. Whether workers can get home from the third shift at the plant.”

In survey after survey, transportation is a top concern for people who want to age in place. According to AARP research, nine out of 10 adults in rural areas drive to get around in their community.¹

Why? In most rural places, living without a car can mean living an isolated, dependent and disempowered life. There are solutions — and numerous challenges for implementing them.

Transportation funding at every level of government is tightening.

Barriers, bureaucracies and an inability to coordinate between local, regional, state and federal jurisdictions leads to a disconnected transportation network with mixed priorities and vast limitations.

There is further dysfunction among the different types of providers: public, private, organization-based and volunteer-operated.

To manage through the cost-cutting and chaos, and then better coordinate services, the Age-Friendly Berkshires team in **Massachusetts** invited all transportation providers in the region to meet and collaborate. A direct result was *The Berkshire County Transportation Guide*, which is updated biannually.

The Transportation Management Association advocates for funding and programs to help people connect to the “last mile (or seven miles in the most rural areas)” between public transportation and their home. In 2019, the association partnered with the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles, AARP Massachusetts and Dementia Friendly

Massachusetts to offer AARP Smart Driver classes and CarFit workshops. (See page 49 for information about the AARP Driver Safety program.)

Some seemingly small barriers to making transportation more accessible are still significant.

For instance, many houses of worship have a vehicle that sits idle in a mostly empty parking lot for much of the week, used only on certain days to shuttle nondriving worshippers.

While the same vehicle could take people to the grocery store and medical appointments, providing that kind of service involves spending more on fuel and insurance — and requires a driver. Sometimes, finding a driver is the most difficult part.

During the AARP Rural Livability Workshop, representatives from **Grayson County, Virginia**, and **Holly Springs, Mississippi**, confirmed that even though each community had a vehicle ready to provide its older residents with rides to medical appointments, neither could find a qualified driver.

Without public transportation options, people who aren’t able to drive must depend on friends, neighbors, family members or volunteers. Some rural, all-volunteer driver programs are relatively small and informal, limited to one community; others have paid staff and serve a large region.

Either way, whether someone is leaving their home for medical care, shopping or social opportunities, getting around depends on the dedication of volunteers, many of whom are retirees who will only drive during daylight hours.

“There is a stress,” said Smith, “on finding enough drivers to meet the need.”

In a survey of volunteer driver programs in **Minnesota**, 68 percent did not have enough drivers, forcing the groups to turn down requests.² Nationwide, the number of volunteer drivers in a community drops significantly when seasonal residents relocate for a few months each year.

Another problem is the lack of information about existing services. While larger municipalities often have apps or websites detailing transit options, routes and schedules, many smaller communities rely on volunteers and social service groups to both



▲ Like many of the nation’s fast-moving, multilane commercial roadways, traveling in a vehicle is a must for shopping along or crossing Route 491 in Gallup, New Mexico.

disseminate transportation information and provide the needed services.

The nonprofit organization Feonix: Mobility Rising is an AARP partner that’s working to fill those information and service gaps for “vulnerable and underserved” communities in, among other states, **South Carolina, Texas and Michigan.**

And then there’s the demographic reality that one in five drivers in the United States is age 65 or older.³ Due to health issues or simply normal aging, many older adults choose to limit their driving or turn in their car keys entirely.

According to the AAA, people typically outlive their driving years by seven to 10 years.⁴

It’s important for rural communities — actually, *all* communities — to help residents plan for a future when they might not drive. It’s also important for communities to provide transportation options for people of all ages.

Although walking typically can’t serve as the sole form of transportation for nondrivers, and bicycling may not be viable for everyone, both should be included on the transportation menu.

In fact, according to a Rails-to-Trails Conservancy report,⁵ people in towns with a population under 50,000 walk nearly as much as people in urban and suburban centers, thanks to streets with little traffic and businesses within easy walking distance.

Being able to walk, bike or safely “roll” to one’s destinations keeps people connected to their community and is good for the local economy.

Rural communities are becoming healthier and more socially connected by implementing traffic calming solutions and making creative, low-budget improvements to — among other street-level features — sidewalks, crosswalks, recreational trails, lighting and bicycle lanes. ■

FIELD-TESTED STRATEGIES: Transportation

COMPLETING THE STREETS

A “Complete Street” is a roadway that is safe and useful for pedestrians, cyclists, drivers and passengers.

The approach, explains the National Complete Streets Coalition, “integrates people and place in the planning, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of our transportation networks.” Doing so “helps to ensure streets are safe for people of all ages and abilities, balance the needs of different modes, and support local land uses, economies, cultures, and natural environments.”

In **Brookings, South Dakota**, the emphasis of downtown development is on creating walkable neighborhoods. Planters, benches, safe pedestrian crossings and public art make the area attractive. Businesses that are accessible to all ages and abilities encourage everyone to shop and spend time there.

In **Ennis, Montana**, the town government worked with local partners, including the Montana Center for Independent Living, to design the first sidewalks for its Main Street. The sidewalks are now fully accessible — for wheelchair users, people pushing baby strollers, everyone. Children can even safely walk to school and to local parks.

Residents of **Manzanita, Oregon**, want to keep the small-town vibe and live in harmony with the surrounding natural environment. The oceanside community is a popular vacation destination and retirement location. To encourage people to walk and bike, the town committed to making all of its streets at least 20 feet wide so they can be shared safely by drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians. ■



SNAPSHOT

After a community survey, **North Yarmouth, Maine**, realized there was widespread concern about traffic speeds in its village center.

In response, the town and the Living Well in North Yarmouth

committee created the “Kite in Your Sight? Please Slow Down” campaign, in which 40 colorful kites were placed in spots known for speeding.

The project’s theme built upon the success of the annual North Yarmouth Kite Festival. In the street safety effort, plastic kites from a local discount store serve as visual “don’t speed” reminders.

To educate drivers, an overhead banner stretching across the entrance to town declared, “Welcome to the Village Center. Kite in Your Sight? Please Slow Down. Our Community Thanks You.”

The effort was a hit with kite-spotting children, their parents and local safety officials.



EXPERT INSIGHT

“Before automobiles were common, my great-grandfather would catch a ride into town with the mailman. People used to know their neighbors and barter things all the time. Not so much anymore. Many times, if you’re in a community where you haven’t had transportation options for a long time, you just give up on once-routine parts of life. You don’t even think about going to have coffee with your friends on Tuesday or going to the VFW on Friday night anymore, because it’s been years since you’ve been able to do so.”

— **Valerie Lefler**, Nebraska-native and founder of Feonix: Mobility Rising

CATCHING A RYDE

Residents of all ages in a seven-county region of south-central **Nebraska** can 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 due to vision loss.

"But RYDE Transit takes me wherever I want to go," he said, "City Hall, home, work. 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."

About half of all RYDE Transit riders are over age 50, but many children take RYDE Transit to after-school activities. Passengers are asked to book their rides 24 hours in advance if possible, while return trips are more flexible.

"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 more than 60 public transit providers in 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 governments, foundation grants, local United Ways, and individual donors. ■



NEWS CLIP

"The nation's rural population is declining while greater percentages of people living in far-flung places are relying on mass transit. That's because these places are home to populations that are aging, and increasingly low-income. This translates into growing numbers of people who can't or shouldn't drive, or that can't afford a car or its gas and upkeep."

— "It Makes Rural Living Possible: Rural Transit Districts Help Many Get Around," *The Southern Illinoisan*, February 14, 2019, citing research by the American Public Transportation Association

NEIGHBORS DRIVING NEIGHBORS



▲ In Mount Vernon, Maine, a twice monthly, two-car shopping excursion starts with socializing over coffee and a quick bit to eat.

Neighbors Driving Neighbors is a grassroots nonprofit serving five rural communities in central **Maine** — specifically **Vienna, Fayette, Mount Vernon, Belgrade** and **Rome**.

The drivers describe themselves as "volunteers providing rides for those who don't drive so they can more easily stay in their homes."

The destinations need to be within 35 miles ("or so") from the passenger's home.

In a three-year period, 44 drivers provided more than 2,000 free rides to 100 neighbors to help with medical appointments, errands and social activities.⁶

The grant- and donation-funded service grew out of a community forum in which residents identified transportation as a problem in need of a local solution. The organization is run by a part-time manager and a volunteer board. The clientele are older residents and people with a disability.

"I feel better not burdening family," one passenger explained.

The drivers say the work is rewarding because they can help someone directly and meet new people. In at least one case, the time spent volunteering was actually relaxing.

"The driver was so sweet," a rider reported. "My appointment was long but she said it was okay because she took a nap in her car." ■

FIELD-TESTED STRATEGIES: Transportation



◀ Greyhound buses and Amtrak's Crescent Line (between New York City and New Orleans, Louisiana) stop at Union Station in Meridian, Mississippi.

LOCAL VOICES

- “In rural areas it’s often like a village system, where family and neighbors provide rides when needed. But now the people who were the primary ride givers are getting old themselves.”
- “Many rural areas do have public transit buses or vans, but many older residents have never, or hardly ever, used them. Our transit agency now brings vehicles to community events so older people can see what it’s like to board and ride.”
- “In some places, transit vans en route to a city or large town will pass through a small town or rural area without stopping. That’s a wasted resource and missed transportation opportunity.”
- “Communities need a ‘one-stop shop’ for coordinating all rides in a region.”
- “People are often more willing to scrape together the money to pay for a ride than to ask someone for the favor of a ride.”
- “There’s a myth that rural communities aren’t walkable. Many do have walkable downtown areas. When I go to my wife’s hometown in North Dakota, we park the car and walk the entire time we’re there.”
- “Some rural communities have a distinct town center. For those that do, downtown walkability is key. For areas without a central downtown, it’s still important to be able to take walks for recreation and health.”

IF YOU BUILD IT THEY WILL COME

Established at the crossroads of two railway lines, **Meridian, Mississippi**, was a thriving city throughout the late 1800s.

During his 16 years as mayor, John Robert Smith recognized the potential of his hometown to again serve as both a destination and transportation hub.

The restoration of Union Station in the late 1990s made the facility one of the best multimodal transportation centers in the country and helped revitalize the city’s downtown.

In addition to housing Amtrak and other transit providers, the upgraded building was designed with meeting rooms and event spaces for community activities as well as weddings and other celebrations.

Smith’s advocacy for the restoration of the Grand Opera House of Mississippi — and the development of an arts district and arts education centers — made Meridian and its walkable downtown a place people want to visit and live in.

According to the Great American Stations Project, “Meridian’s tremendous success story has provided ample inspiration for other small cities.” ■

CATCHING A FLIGHT FOR CARE

In some parts of rural America, specialty medical services — including for organ transplants, ongoing burn treatments and even cancer — can be hundreds of miles away.

People in need of distant care are often helped by pilots who volunteer with “public benefit flying” organizations. (The nonprofits that provide such services include the Angel Flight programs, each of which covers a specific state or region.)

Using their own small planes and covering all costs, the pilots transport patients to distant medical facilities. They also assist with disaster response, animal rescue efforts and family reunifications.

Visit AirCareAlliance.org to learn which organizations serve what areas. ■



SLOW DOWN FOR PEDESTRIANS

The downtown area of **Wayne, Maine**, appears suddenly when a driver travels along Route 133, a busy state highway with fast-moving traffic

Because of curves in the roadway and a hill, pedestrians crossing Main Street often aren't seen by drivers until the last moment.

"Logging trucks and other large trucks race through town, barely slowing down as they do," Stan Davis, a member of the community's aging-at-home committee, told AARP in 2017.

An AARP Community Challenge grant helped the town acquire two "Reduce Speed" beacons that were installed at either end of the downtown. The town also purchased portable pedestrian-crossing signs.

"They'll help keep everyone safe as they cross the road to the post office, the library, the restaurant, the school, the dam where people swim and the farmers market," Davis added. ■

◀ **Wayne, Maine's town manager (far left) and aging-at-home coordinator stand with a flashing traffic sign that alerts motorists to *slow down*!**

TAKEAWAYS

- Contrary to common assumptions, walkability is an important part of small-town life.
- It can be difficult if not impossible for nondrivers in rural areas to get where they need or want to go. Rural transit services and choices can be improved through better coordination and communication and through expansion, including ride-sharing and, yes, safe ways to walk and bike.
- While ride-sourcing and -sharing services, such as Uber, Lyft, Via and GoGoGrandparent, are easy to find in urban and even suburban areas, they are often not available in rural places.
- Autonomous vehicles (aka: self-driving cars) could be a solution for getting nondrivers around the vast distances of rural regions, but they're part of a future not yet on the docket. In fact, most experts believe rural areas will be the last to see the technology.
- Look at all the organizations in a community — from faith-based groups to businesses to regional transportation authorities — as potential sources of transportation solutions and services.
- There's a real need to improve "last mile" mobility, such as the trip to and from the bus stop.
- Most older Americans grew up walking and bicycling. Many would do more of each today if provided safe routes for doing so.
- Public transit waiting areas need to be safe and provide both seating and protection from bad weather.
- Volunteer drivers are the heart and soul of volunteer transportation programs. Successful recruitment strategies include scheduling flexibility and stressing the community benefit.
- To retain volunteers, it's important to find creative ways to thank them, keep them busy (but not too busy) and provide ongoing training that benefits them personally and maximizes their effectiveness.
- Transportation options are a lifeline for rural communities. As John Robert Smith, the chair of Transportation for America, warns, "Without transportation choices, we face the continued depopulation of small town and rural America."

Healthy Living, the Economy and High-Speed Internet

Essential needs include nearby medical care, reliable internet access and innovative thinking about work and economic development

Many of life's modern conveniences aren't readily found in some small towns or rural areas. That can include access to medical care, high-speed internet service, reliable and safe drinking water, reasonably priced healthy food, and other services and products that urban and suburban communities generally take for granted.

For instance, the availability of potable water depends on the presence and quality of a drilled well — and the absence of natural and man-made pollutants. A 2018 report in the *New Republic* found that half of the 5,000 drinking water systems in the United States that received health violations in 2015 served 500 or fewer residents.¹

Even when the water is safe to drink, if there's an electrical blackout due to a storm, high winds or even high use, a home that doesn't have a gas- or solar-powered backup generator may be left without power, heat, cooling, or telephone and internet service. Residents can also be left without running water and a working septic system since most private wells and sewage septic system pumps run on electricity.

Although food is grown in rural areas, it is increasingly difficult for rural residents to find fresh meat, fruit and vegetables in their local stores.

For one in five rural communities, a supermarket or fresh food options are more than 10 miles away.² The U.S. Department of Agriculture classifies such communities as "food deserts."³

In many areas, the proliferation of dollar stores, which sell discounted household goods and packaged foods, undermines local grocers that haven't already shut their doors due to the influence of mega-supermarkets such as those within Walmart or warehouse stores.⁴ The on-demand grocery delivery services (Instacart, Peapod, Shipt, AmazonFresh) that feed many urban and suburban residents are costly options and usually not available in low-population areas.

Local solutions to the scarcity of fresh food

include informal volunteer transportation services, community gardens and food pantries. A church in rural **Conetoe, North Carolina**, for example, started the Conetoe Family Life Center, a 21-acre community garden and bee farm. Half of the produce is donated to low-income families.

In **Newport, Vermont**, a remote community with high unemployment where one in four residents are age 65 or older, the Fresh Start Community Farm coordinates multiple garden sites (one on the lawn of a local business) and chooses plantings based on what will grow best in each location. Some of the sites include safe places for children to play while parents are working in the garden.

A community grant from AARP Vermont was used to add raised planting beds so people can garden without getting down on the ground. The gardens are harvested weekly during the three-month growing season and volunteers receive a share based on the number of hours they work.

"While younger people do the manual labor, like 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," Patricia Sears, a former AARP Vermont volunteer state president, explained in 2015. "A pride has developed in the neighborhood, and the people are taking care of one another."

In **Lenox, Iowa**, a store owner provided the healthy food solution. Ramsey's Market sells groceries and runs both a Mexican restaurant (called Tiger Taco) and a hardware store. The market features weekly low-cost "Fresh Deals" that include meat, fruit and vegetables. To meet the needs of residents who can't get to the store, Ramsey's makes free deliveries for orders over \$50 and charges \$2 to deliver smaller orders.

Great distances and a lack of medical providers, particularly for specialty services, can make it difficult for rural residents of any age to access health care, even if they have insurance or can afford to pay out of pocket. Only 10 percent of the



▲ In many rural or remote communities, it can be hard to find an open store or restaurant during the “off-season.” Seasonal closings are common in areas that attract tourists (such as Boothbay Harbor, Maine, pictured) but also occur in less destination places, with “winter schedules” beginning as early as September.

nation’s physicians practice in rural communities.⁵ For many people, an emergency room is the medical provider of first and only resort.

That’s assuming they live in an area that still has a hospital. More than 100 rural hospitals closed during the 2010s,⁶ and many of the nation’s 2,000 rural hospitals are struggling to survive due to factors including unpaid patient debt. Patients are likewise struggling due to their unpayable medical bills.

According to a 2019 article in the *Washington Post*, the Poplar Bluff Regional Medical Center — a for-profit hospital serving **Butler County, Missouri**, and other rural counties — has filed thousands of lawsuits against its patients with balances due. More than 35 percent of the people in Butler have unpaid medical debt on their credit report. Some of the defendants derisively refer to their court appearances as the “follow-up appointment.”⁷

Even when care is nearby, it can be inaccessible due to a lack of transportation. That’s partly why the regional hospital in **Paris, Texas**, helps fund a shuttle service — cheekily named the Paris Metro.

With the rise of the internet, a rural renaissance

was widely predicted. People would be able to live and work anywhere, and millions would move into idyllic smaller communities where, with the push of a button, the world would be at their fingertips.

Overlooked in that vision were the physical barriers to connectivity (mountains, oceans, distance), the cost of developing or updating the necessary infrastructure, and the influence and interests of various corporations, stakeholders and special interests.

For-profit internet providers want to invest in areas flush with potential customers. Sparsely populated rural regions don’t provide the desired bang for the buck. Yet in more than 20 states it’s actually illegal for a municipality or community to develop its own internet network.⁸

Fixed (i.e., installed) and mobile high-speed internet access (also known as broadband) are now the norm in densely populated areas, but the services aren’t available in all rural communities. In fact, as of 2019, 98 percent of urban areas nationwide had some sort of high-speed internet access compared with 69 percent of rural households.⁹ *Continued ►*

Even where the service does exist, the cost, coupled with those of computers and smartphones, can be too much for a cash-strapped household. Yet, in many ways, high-speed internet is now an essential utility, like electricity or water.

In some situations, reliable high-speed internet is a matter of life and death. That was the case in 2016, when a **Sioux Falls, South Dakota**, emergency medicine physician with the telehealth network Avera eCARE guided a physician's assistant, located 700 miles away in rural Montana, through the treatment of a child badly injured in an ATV crash.¹⁰

When telehealth services are an option, patients can participate in routine and follow-up medical appointments from home.

Another reality is that due to a lack of career opportunities and modern services, young people are leaving rural regions. Depending on the community, such migrations are debilitating or at least a matter of concern. While older residents in many places are more than capable of performing the jobs that need doing, as the population ages it may become more difficult to find essential services in rural areas.

High-speed internet access can be the key to a small town's ability to survive and its residents to thrive. For instance, knowing that more than 50 percent of its residents are age 50 or older,¹¹ remote **Eastport, Maine**, made securing high-speed internet a priority so it could attract younger residents who are able to work for distant employers.

While the topics addressed in the previous chapters are each vital to rural livability, economic opportunity, available health services, and high-speed internet access are necessary for a chance at success and a comfortable standard of living. ■



SNAPSHOT



Millinocket, Maine, once supplied some of the largest newspapers on the East Coast, including *The New York Times*. The Great Northern Paper Company's mill operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week, providing jobs and good incomes for residents, many of whom had immigrated from Europe and Canada. The community's fortunes changed in 2008, when the mill closed its doors after a series of corporate acquisitions and ultimately a bankruptcy. As the nearest town to the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail, Millinocket is still frequented by hikers and others who love the outdoors. To provide the local economy with an off-season, pre-winter-blues boost, the town hosts an annual marathon — *in December*. The marathoners and their supporters shop, socialize, eat and drink. Nearly 2,000 runners braved the cold (25°F but sunny) in 2019.



EXPERT INSIGHT

“At its essence, smart growth is about shaping the quality of the place, and then that place shapes the lives of the people who live there. Our 21st century economy is no longer based on tools and spools. Only 10 percent of our economy is manufacturing today. It is about the knowledge economy. Large businesses, industry and tech firms are moving into downtowns. Why? They are chasing the workforce they can't get to move to the more distant office or research park. Businesses are moving to downtowns, where walk scores, transit and bike scores are better because that's where the workforce wants to be. And that doesn't mean living in big metropolitan areas.”

— **John Robert Smith**, chairman, Transportation for America, and former mayor, Meridian, Mississippi

Healthy Living

FIELD-TESTED STRATEGIES

STREET SMARTS

An available and powerful resource in or near many small towns and rural places are the students and researchers at educational institutions.

Jermaine Mitchell, an assistant professor of exercise and nutrition science at the University of Montevallo in **Montevallo, Alabama**, has his students create wellness programs specific to the needs and interests of local older adults. (So if a person or group enjoys square dancing, the fitness activities might feature music and dance steps.)

The students also use the *AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit* (see page 49) to assess the walkability of Montevallo neighborhoods. Sidewalks have been fixed and crosswalks added due to their work.

Says Mitchell: “Service learning projects form partnerships of faculty, students and communities to put knowledge and skills to work on today’s most critical problems.” ■



▲ University students in Montevallo, Alabama, met with local leaders about improving street safety.



NEWS CLIP

“Rural clinics and hospitals are closing across the nation. When they close, it’s hard for younger families and older residents to stay in town — and harder to attract new businesses, or attract replacements for the doctors, nurses and other health-care workers who may be retiring from their practices or just leaving town.”

— Deborah Fallows, “The Surprising Rural Health-Care Legacy of the ‘60s,”
TheAtlantic.com, September 4, 2019

HELPING HANDS

The Healthy U program at the **University of Wyoming** in **Laramie** provides a free six-week, 40-hour training to people with chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, pain and depression.

Participants learn how to best manage their illness. They then take what they’ve learned into rural communities as volunteer “peer leaders” who support others with chronic conditions. Similar programs exist in rural parts of **California, Colorado, Kentucky, Mississippi, South Dakota** and **Vermont**.

A study by the National Council on Aging found that chronic-disease self-management programs save money, increase medication compliance and reduce emergency room visits.¹² Participants report leading more active lives, experiencing less depression and having fewer sick days. ■



EXPERT INSIGHT

“Because nurses are uniquely woven into the fabric of the community — in schools, workplaces, homes, prisons, hospitals, assisted living facilities, and other community spaces — they are positioned to be a more powerful part of improving health and health equity.”

— Center to Champion Nursing in America, an initiative of AARP, AARP Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

FIELD-TESTED STRATEGIES: Healthy Living

COMMUNITY NURSING



◀ Suzie Zimmer, a community nurse in Washington state's Chelan Valley provides preventive care, medication management and other supports to frail and vulnerable adults so they can live independently and reside in their homes for as long as possible.

Community nurses are a trusted and primary source of care where medical services and supports can be hours away. These licensed clinicians live in the areas they serve. They deliver care and supports in local settings, including within houses of worship, community centers and patient homes.

Some community nurses are paid. Many volunteer their expertise and are affiliated with faith-based organizations. (In Christian churches, these providers may be referred to as “parish nurses.” Those working within the Jewish faith are known as “congregational nurses.” In Muslim communities, they’re called “crescent nurses.”)

In **Lyme, New Hampshire** (also noted on page 24), a pair of parish nurses offer drop-in office hours and make house calls.

In **Hope, Alaska**, a nurse serves about 200 people, providing care and case management services to people who have complex medical conditions, developmental disabilities or mental health diagnoses.

Established in 2017, the Chelan Valley Community Nurse Program in **Chelan, Washington**, provides assessments, education and prevention services and acts as an essential link between uninsured residents and health care systems. Funding from grants and donations enable the services to be offered for free.

As part of the Guilford Cares program in **Guilford, Vermont**, volunteer community nurses do house calls to help residents manage chronic illnesses. Other supports include a friendly-visitor program, medical equipment loans, a food pantry, and transportation services for medical appointments. ■



LOCAL VOICES

- “People who have spent a lifetime living in rural areas want the life and are aware of the trade-offs. Their attachment to the community where they have lived can keep them here even when needed medical services, home care and caregiver supports aren’t available.”
- “One of the challenges in rural retirement destinations — the kinds of places where people want to vacation and fantasize about living — is that people move there when they’re healthy and active and able to enjoy all the community has to offer. But they don’t plan for what life will be like when they’re no longer able to drive, or they develop a chronic illness, or need help to live independently in their homes.”
- “Our little town is lucky. We have one old-fashioned general medicine physician. The problem is that he is 78 years old.”
- “When they closed the local nursing home and then shut down the hospital, it took the heart out of our community. If there’s an emergency, it’s a two- or three-hour wait for an ambulance now, and if someone needs to be in a nursing home, the nearest is more than two hours away.”
- “Opioid deaths are 45 percent higher in rural areas than in the cities. That has a huge impact on our communities — for children born to addicted moms, businesses that can’t find the workers they need, and for older people helping raise the children. Even if someone wants to beat their addiction, there isn’t any treatment within a reasonable commute.”

The Economy

FIELD-TESTED STRATEGIES

THE CAR IS NO LONGER KING

“Traditional Main Streets are back,” declared John Robert Smith, during his presentation at the 2019 AARP Rural Livability Workshop.

The former mayor of **Meridian, Mississippi**, and current chair of Transportation for America, was telling a story about **Conway, Arkansas**, which he says attracted three tech firms that chose the small city over a suburban office park because each felt that “Conway has a cool downtown.” As a result, the businesses could attract the workers they needed.

Part of why **North Dakota** has a statewide Main Streets program is that it sees the redevelopment of its small towns into places with vibrant downtowns as a way to keep and lure young adults and families as residents.

“Vibrant community centers are a fundamental element of workforce development. North Dakota’s Main Street initiative provides community leaders with direct access to tools and resources to capitalize on their community’s strengths and make sound planning decisions,” reads the Main Street ND page at *ND.gov*. “These efforts help create vibrant communities that attract and retain the 21st century workforce North Dakota needs to compete and succeed in a global economy.”

Smith said he found that younger generations “move to where they want to be, then they find a job. They find a place that’s vibrant and attractive”



▲ Conway, Arkansas, is a member of Main Street America, a revitalization and preservation-based economic development program of the National Main Street Center.

According to Smith, “47 percent want to live in large metropolitan areas. Only 12 percent want to be in the suburban cul-de-sac neighborhoods they may have grown up in, 40 percent want to live in small towns and rural places — provided they have high-speed internet access and a downtown with a little pop that’s authentic. These economic and demographic shifts have big implications.” ■



NEWS CLIP

“McGregor [Minnesota] once had a bustling downtown, full of stores, bars and restaurants. People shopped and socialized there, running into each other and stopping by each other’s homes. ... But that started to change a couple of decades ago ... when the local economy began to decline. Stores like Walmart and Costco arrived, pushing out local businesses. Minnesota’s timber industry, a big source of employment, began to struggle. And family farms did, too, as the farms became less profitable and young people moved away looking for other careers. ... Today, downtown McGregor is eerily quiet, with only a handful of businesses, such as a car repair shop, a bowling alley, a health center, a church and a funeral home.”

— “Bringing Together Young and Old to Ease the Isolation of Rural Life,”
All Things Considered, National Public Radio, August 7, 2019

SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS CAN LEAD TO LONG-TERM CHANGE



▲ A pop-up demonstration project in Old Orchard Beach, Maine, inspired positive change.

Washington Street in **Old Orchard Beach, Maine**, had seen better days. As part of its age-friendly communities work, AARP Maine invited the urban design and placemaking firm Team Better Block to the oceanfront town. The goal: help the community see the neighborhood's potential.

In July 2019, the consultants and local volunteers stenciled lobster and shell shapes onto sidewalks and crosswalks. They added planters, outdoor seating and took over two vacant storefronts to open a pair of temporary pop-up eateries: *Specially For You*, a bakery, and *The Local Eatery*, a burgers and hot dogs spot.

More than 250 residents showed up for the free meats and sweets. The local Salvation Army band provided live music.

Although the shops were gone within hours of their grand openings, seeds had been sown, and the buildings' owners subsequently reopened *The Local Eatery*. The bakery didn't follow suit, but the space is now home to a community-focused police station. When it's open, free coffee and doughnuts are available to anyone who drops by.

"Making what was a small investment of time and volunteer energy is paying off beyond what we could have imagined," said Louise Reid, the assistant town manager (who retired in 2019 at age 82). "The neighborhood is excited about the new businesses and, for the first time in decades, hopeful about what the future can bring." ■



LOCAL VOICES

- "For too long, the measure of success for a young person raised in a rural area is that they leave the community for college and launch a well-paid career in the city. The young people who stay behind are unfairly seen as failures."
- "We need to value all paths a young person can take in building a life. If everyone is pushed to go to college, and if work that involves physical labor or noncollege skills is held in low esteem, who will build our houses, drill our wells, maintain our power grid, fix our cars, open and run local businesses, and work on our ranches, farms and fishing boats? All of these jobs are essential to the survival of every community."
- "Our community has 1,018 residents, is very rural, and our main problem is our K-6 school has only 43 students. How do we attract young people to move to our community when we don't have broadband, roads and industry — and property is expensive?"
- "We have to dispel the myth that rural towns are only good places to visit and to live in old age. Our communities need to become more attractive places for young people to live, work and do business."
- "The issue is infrastructure. If we had broadband in our community, young people who work from home or who want to start small businesses of their own would stay. These days, you can't start a business or telecommute without internet. But that takes investment by the town. In my town there's no interest in spending money. Economic development is key, but it won't suddenly appear. We have to work at it."

High-Speed Internet

FIELD-TESTED STRATEGIES

LIBRARIES ARE HOT SPOTS

Today's public libraries are destinations for books, of course, but also for activities, equipment (see the photo of skis, below) and — perhaps most importantly in many rural communities — high-speed internet access.

But since many rural libraries have limited hours and depend on volunteers as staff, the doors are often locked when people need an internet connection. As a result, it's not uncommon to see the parking lots of closed libraries filled with cars, inside which are adults who need the internet to search for work or parents with students who need the internet to do homework. (The dining areas and parking lots of fast-food eateries often serve a similar purpose.)

To address the lack of home-based internet, school districts in **Athens, Georgia**, and **Winterset, Iowa**, reached out to local businesses with free Wi-Fi and asked them to display decals that let students know the location is a safe and welcoming place for them to do their homework.

In **Coachella Valley, California**, school buses equipped with internet routers are parked overnight in residential areas that don't have connectivity. The bus-based routers enable students to complete their assignments.

In 2017, **Oklahoma State University** launched the Rural Library Hotspot Lending Program in the towns of **Elgin, Perkins, Seminole** and **Haskell** — the latter of which has a population of 1,900, half of whom had no home access to the internet.¹³ During the one-year pilot, the program provided up to seven mobile hotspot devices to each town's library, to be lent just like a book for one week at a time.

The American Library Association has information about setting up hotspot lending programs. (Use the keyword "hotspot" to search ALA.org.) ■

Check Out the Internet Here!

Mobile hotspots are available for Okemah Public Library cardholders!

- Works anywhere a Sprint signal is available (home, around town, on the road)
- Connect up to 10 devices at once (phones, tablets, laptops)
- Connect to 4G LTE (high speed) service, unlimited data
- 1-week checkout period

Sponsored by



▲ Libraries in Oklahoma and elsewhere are lending mobile hotspots (shown above and held by a librarian, below) to patrons who otherwise won't have Wi-Fi access. ▼



▲ Public libraries are customizing their offerings to meet community needs. Skis, snowshoes, mountain bikes, canoes and kayaks are among the holdings of the "Katahdin Gear Library" within the Millinocket Memorial Library in Maine. Most equipment can be checked out by residents for one week.



EXPERT INSIGHT

"Entrepreneurship and innovation thrive in rural towns where people are connected. Access in these communities to reliable high-speed internet is crucial to that success."

— **Krista Burdick**, community engagement officer, LOR Foundation

See page 50 to learn more about LOR.

FIELD-TESTED STRATEGIES: High-Speed Internet

COMMUNITY-CREATED INTERNET

“In the mid-2000s, several towns in east-central **Vermont** determined that robust broadband telecommunications services were a necessary part of their continued sustainability,” explains the history page on the website of ECFiber, the local internet provider.

“Local broadband committees reached out to wireless service providers, but wireless proved to be unsatisfactory in our hilly wooded terrain.” In response, two dozen small towns joined forces to create ECFiber.

When residents of rural **St. Francis, Kansas**, felt the burden of the digital divide, they reached out to Eagle Communications, which brought high-speed internet to the town. Every home and business now has access to St. Francis’ fiber network. After more than five decades of losing population, the town is seeing new businesses open shop and home construction is on the rise.

Internet access in **Grayson County, Virginia**, was so lacking that residents described their connectivity as “advanced dial-up.”

In March 2019, the state’s governor signed legislation that will bring high-speed internet to the rural county. The delegate who advocated for the service declared, “We’re way past the point where broadband is a simple luxury. It’s as much a necessity these days as electricity.”

A community-created internet carrier could help Project MILES in **Larimer County, Wyoming**. MILES is an acronym for *Mobility, Inclusiveness, Locations, Everywhere, Simple*.

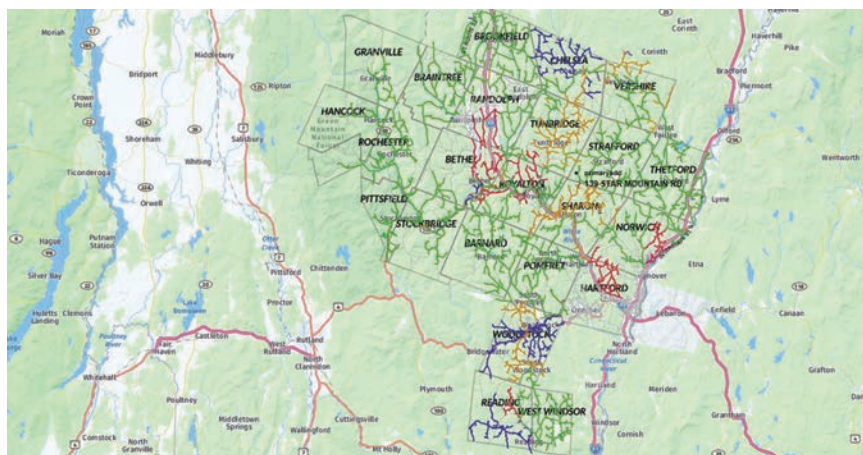
The idea is that people should be able to find appropriate transportation services with one click



▲ A poster in a shop window promotes a community-based effort to provide the Mount Katahdin region of northern Maine with “lightning-fast, responsive, stable, and affordable fiber internet connections for every home and business — at no cost to the community and without using taxpayer dollars.”

or one call. The larger goal is to use data and local resources to build “systemic solutions” rather than short-term programs. As noted after the project’s test pilot, however, solutions can’t be delivered by smart software alone.

“All software services with real time driver information transfer will require internet and/or satellite service,” states the pilot summary. “A One-Click/One-Call service will need to have processes in place to address the needs of riders who reside in and drivers traveling to rural areas with limited connectivity.” ■



◀ The cluster of colored squiggles represent ECFiber’s present and planned coverage area. The “nonprofit fiber-to-the-premises network” connected its first customers in 2011 and promotes itself as providing “Wicked fast internet for rural Vermont.” As of mid-2019, the network was serving 3,500 customers, who paid \$66 a month for basic internet (25 megabits per second) or \$149 for high-speed (700 mbps) service.



LOCAL VOICES

- “Many people in rural areas haven’t been exposed to high-speed internet, so they don’t understand its value. Lots of folks think it’s only for watching movies or playing games.”
- “Much of the newer farm equipment — including tractors — use GPS technology and require internet access.”
- “There are a lot of drawbacks with slow internet speeds. Decent-size companies will not move into a community without broadband. We have lost out because we don’t have it.”
- “People think rural communities don’t want ‘new-fangled’ technology and that they’re averse to change. That could not be farther from the truth. Children in rural areas need broadband to do their homework, same as city kids. The catch is that the rural kids can’t take their tablets or computer to public Wi-Fi. If they don’t have it at home, they don’t have it. Rural older folks want to be healthy, same as city folk. Telemedicine can be a huge help, but only if they have broadband. In the city, telemedicine can make life more convenient, but in rural areas, it might be the only option within 200 miles if a person needs, say, speech therapy.”



NEWS CLIP

“Many Illinois farmers are handicapped by the lack of high-speed internet in the rural areas where they perform their livelihood. This compromises an advantage long held, as the state is in the center of the breadbasket of the world, which supplies food for the masses.”

— “Rural Internet Access a Must for Farmers,”
Daily Journal, Kankakee, Illinois,
September 11, 2019

TAKEAWAYS

- Even a one-day pop-up demonstration event can inspire residents to imagine what permanent change can look like in their community.
- Rural communities that have high-speed internet can support telemedicine services, robotics-related work, collaborative care models and other innovative medical solutions.
- Telemedicine can save lives, especially in remote regions and towns without direct access to emergency or specialty medical care.
- Community and faith-based nurses provide much-needed help managing chronic illnesses and disability in rural communities. They are a critical link between residents and the health care system.
- Reliable, affordable high-speed internet service can help older adults avoid isolation and remain independent as they age by enabling them to use services such as online banking and shopping.
- Public libraries play an important role in small towns and rural communities. They are places where people can gather and find needed information. For many, the library is their only access to fast and reliable internet service.
- Without access to high-speed internet service, communities suffer, losing out on opportunities for local businesses to prosper and people to learn, find jobs and stay healthy.
- High-speed internet is critical for attracting businesses and enabling people to live locally if they telework or want to start a business.
- Both young adults and older adults want to settle in vibrant towns that ensure basic connectivity to jobs and information via the internet.
- When local utilities or for-profit corporations are unable or unwilling to expand high-speed internet service, it may be possible for a community or small cooperative to develop its own nonprofit network by financing, installing and maintaining a cell tower or other infrastructure and operations.

Extreme Weather and Disasters

Changing weather norms and weather-related events often have tragic consequences in remote and rural places

Intense weather patterns and disasters such as droughts, extreme temperatures, floods, wildfires, blizzards and mud slides, among other hazards, can be especially dangerous in rural communities, where distance, inadequate communication, a lack of emergency equipment and a fragile utility grid are common. Each event can prevent residents from being reached during a crisis or can require evacuation, permanent relocation, or extensive repairs and rebuilding.

Disasters are often hardest on older residents. Since there is a higher concentration of older adults in small towns and rural areas than in other parts of the nation, disaster planning and responses need to include a special focus on older people.

There are a number of reasons for the greater vulnerability. Some older residents are isolated, with few if any friends or relatives to check on them. People with chronic illnesses, such as hypertension or diabetes, have a harder time bouncing back after a disaster. Reduced mobility can make it difficult to get out of the house. Stockpiling medication and food is often impossible for people who struggle to afford those items in the first place.

The fear of the unknown, concerns about leaving pets or being far from familiar medical providers, a lack of transportation options (see page 26) and previous successes sheltering in place are among the reasons why people resist leaving their homes, even when an evacuation order is in place.

The vulnerability of older residents extends beyond the emergency itself. Researchers have found that older people experience an elevated risk of death in the year that *follows* a natural disaster.¹

Interestingly and ironically, the rugged independence (“We can take of ourselves, thank you”) that is valued by many

residents of small towns and rural communities can lead to uncoordinated and inadequate responses to an emergency. In some cases, emergency personnel aren’t even aware of where vulnerable residents live.

An attendee at the AARP Rural Livability Workshop shared that an effort to make sure every home in her community had large, readable house numbers (see an example on page 23) was met with resistance. Some residents, protective of their privacy, said they didn’t want to be so easily found.

No government, organization, community, household or individual can fully prepare for every crisis or catastrophe, be it climate- or weather-related, a result of human error or treachery, or a natural disaster.

However, governments, organizations, communities and individuals can prepare and plan for the likely emergencies — nor’easters in Maine, tornadoes in the Midwest, blizzards in the Rockies, hurricanes in the Caribbean, earthquakes or wildfires in California. ■



▲ September 2017 marked the first time in recorded history that two hurricanes — first Irma, then Maria — struck the same area within two weeks. After weathering both storms, AARP Virgin Islands staff helped distribute relief supplies.



▲ Hurricane damage in remote Ramrod Key, Florida



▲ A tornado funnel near McCook, Nebraska



▲ A wildfire near North Bonneville, Washington



▲ A frozen landscape along a Montana highway



▲ Flooding in Healdsburg, California



▲ Drought conditions in Squaw Valley, California

FIELD-TESTED STRATEGIES: Extreme Weather and Disasters

MAKING RADIO WAVES

The need for a community radio station came to Fran Kaliher in 2012, on the day a flash flood overwhelmed **Two Harbors, Minnesota**.

“Every way I tried to drive into town was impassable,” she recalled about her small community (population 3,700). “That’s when I thought, ‘We need to have a radio station so people could find out what’s happening.’”

Kaliher shared her idea with folks around town, including Leo Babeu, who had worked in radio when he was younger. Their creation, KTWH, has a broadcast radius of up to 10 miles.

Four dozen volunteers and two part-time workers operate the station out of a crowded three-room studio behind a Vietnamese restaurant.

The on-air schedule ranges from Linda Lee’s polka show to *The Flip Side*, on which both sides of hit 45-rpm records are played.

Since KTWH streams over the internet, snowbirds wintering down south can follow their grandkids’ games — and stay informed about the Two Harbors weather forecasts and any worrisome consequences. ■

SIGN UP FOR SERVICE — AND SHARING

In many places, emergency responders serve an entire county or region rather than a specific town or village. As a result, they often don’t know where individuals who need special assistance reside. Some communities have created questionnaires that residents or their caregivers can complete in advance to alert first responders to a person’s medical condition or disability.

That’s the case in **Sagadahoc County, Maine**, where residents with special needs can instruct first responders about how to access their home and find their “File of Life” listing the names of medical providers, medications being used, emergency contacts and even pet care instructions.

Questionnaires are also used to seek community help. One used in **Phippsburg, Maine**, asks, “Do you own and are you willing to loan equipment — such as snowmobiles, boats, ATVs, generators, etc. — that we may use in an emergency situation?”

Among the most pressing emergency needs in rural areas, however, involve the recruiting, training and retention of first responders — and ensuring that enough are nearby when a call comes in.



▲ Two Harbors Community Radio is a listener-supported station with a mission to “build community ... through intergenerational grassroots participation” and “an open forum for all voices to be heard in an atmosphere of respectful inquiry into our shared social issues and respective cultural expressions and beliefs.”



▲ Members of the multigenerational Larimore Volunteer Fire Department in Larimore, North Dakota.

“If they’re young enough, they’re working out-of-town,” Dale Trosen, of the **North Dakota** Firefighter’s Association, told the *Grand Forks Herald* in 2017. At the time, 96 percent of the state’s fire departments were staffed by volunteers. Another challenge, he explained, is the engulfing nature of today’s fires: “Thirty years ago, you could get to a fire and make a difference. We had more time,” he said. “There’s so much plastic now, which burns a lot faster.” ■



▲ After Hurricane Maria passed, AARP Puerto Rico staff and volunteers delivered more than 7,000 bags of groceries to older people living alone in 26 towns. Similar outreach efforts were launched in early 2020 after a series of magnitude 5 or greater earthquakes struck the island.

CREATE LEADERS

In 2017, Hurricane Maria devastated the U.S. territory of **Puerto Rico**, leaving large parts of the island isolated unto itself, disconnected from running water, electricity, medical care and usable roadways.

For many, survival required relying on neighbors because assistance would be a long time coming.

“When your government is bankrupt, you have to invest in the people. That means integration, social participation and empowerment,” José Acarón, director of AARP Puerto Rico, told an audience at the AARP Rural Livability Workshop. “If any change was going to happen after Maria, it was going to be house by house, street by street and community by community.”

To ignite that change, the AARP office restructured its existing Community Leadership Academy program to focus on three areas of livability: Community Supports and Health Services, Civic Participation and Employment, and Social Participation.

After attending the five-day training program, local volunteers are encouraged to take what they learned back to their home community to mobilize residents and create positive change from within. ■



EXPERT INSIGHT

“When life as you know it literally changes overnight, what do you have? Some people have their family right beside them. Others have only their neighbors. That’s when the word ‘community’ takes on a different and perhaps its truest meaning.

“One of the biggest lessons learned from Hurricane Maria was that the more widespread and disconnected communities are — such as in rural areas or sprawling, unwalkable suburbs — the more susceptible people are to the hazards that come with disasters. When modern infrastructure and services collapse, the luxury of space and privacy transforms into isolation and vulnerability.

“Having survived this life-changing event, I understand firsthand the necessity of building more resilient and integrated communities. Doing so promotes solidarity and security for all residents in times of an unstoppable disaster — and, perhaps more importantly, during every day of our lives.”

— José Acarón, state director,
AARP Puerto Rico



NEWS CLIP

“Rural communities are some of the most politically disenfranchised when it comes to climate policy, and [the 2018] National Climate Change Report showed they’re also among the most at risk when it comes to the effect of climate change. This could mean stronger storms, more intense droughts and earlier freezes.”

— KCUR 89.3 Radio/Harvest Public Media,
Kansas City, Missouri, June 17, 2019

A GOLDEN SOLUTION FOR SLIPPERY SIDEWALKS

“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,” said Pearl Swenson, a resident of **Bucksport, Maine**, in remarks before the town council. “Those [snow] banks come up, and my legs don’t work like they used to,” she added.

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 town also shaved down the concrete edges of several sidewalks, “making it easier for pedestrians to shuffle onto them when a slick layer of ice renders normal footsteps difficult,” noted the local paper, the *Ellsworth American*.

Several Bucksport businesses do shovel the sidewalks outside their doors, partly because it’s good for business and partly because they could win the annual Ella B. Rayner Golden Shovel Award, named after a longtime Bucksport resident who was an advocate for pedestrian safety.

“It’s a lively competition that the various shoveling groups and businesses take very seriously,” observes Lori Parham, AARP Maine state director.



▲ In Bucksport, Maine, a golden shovel is given to the business that does the best job of keeping its sidewalks free of snow. BookStacks owner Andy Lacher is a repeat winner.

The full-size, gold-painted 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 — when there is one. Due to a lack of snow in 2016, the competition wasn’t held. When winter came roaring back the following year, the shovel was in play again. ■



SNAPSHOT

Designing parks and other spaces so they can dry out and bounce back after flooding is one way a community can protect itself from likely hazards. For instance, when the Napa River floods, this park and trail area in **Napa, California**, is closed off by levees and solid gates, thus shielding the adjacent business district from the water and fast-moving logs propelled by the rapids. The bench is bolted to the cement so it remains in place even when submerged.



CHARLES EICHACKER FOR THE ELLSWORTH AMERICAN | MELISSA STANTON, AARP



LOCAL VOICES

- “It’s hard to get residents to engage in disaster planning when a disaster isn’t looming.”
- “The small, rural areas that are devastated by hurricanes or other disasters don’t receive the resources or attention provided to larger communities.”
- “Many older and vulnerable residents will not or cannot evacuate without significant help. If no one is able to provide direct assistance — ranging from packing up their essentials, securing their home, and transporting them to a shelter or other safe place — most older people have no choice but to stay.”
- “Fears about access to medical care and medicines are a big part of why people don’t evacuate when told to.”
- “We’re losing neighbors. We’re losing farms because some just can’t afford to pick up the pieces after a disaster.”
- “When the floodwaters recede, it’s often out of sight, out of mind. Things look dry, they look normal, but what’s left behind is devastation. Recovery takes a lot longer than people ever expect.”
- “When distant homes are scattered throughout a large area, first responders often don’t know where exactly people live.”
- “It’s hard to recruit first responders. The work is dangerous. It’s unpaid. The older residents are aging out of being able to do the physical aspects of the work and younger people need to focus on finding or keeping a paid job and on caring for their children. They can’t drop everything and run to put out a fire.”

TAKEAWAYS

- Communities where neighbors know and can look after one another are more resilient and better able to protect themselves in times of disaster — and they can recover more efficiently in the aftermath.
- Even simple solutions, such as posting visible house numbers, are important, effective ways of preparing for a personal emergency or a large-scale disaster.
- High-speed internet and local communications platforms (such as a community radio station, local news website or social media feed) are needed to keep people informed about weather emergencies and other important alerts.
- Emergency preparations need to be done long before a disaster occurs.
- It’s critical for first responders to be able to quickly determine who needs help, where they are located and what they need.
- Many older adults have already lived through weather-related or similar emergencies and can tap into those experiences to help themselves and others.
- Rural communities can benefit from employing a team of community nurses and social workers who will identify and reach out to those most in need of help when a disaster strikes, thus calling on other residents, first responders and care providers only if absolutely necessary.
- Since all-volunteer emergency response teams are increasingly difficult to staff, local or regional governments may need to establish a greater number of full-time, salaried first responder positions and teams.

Closing Thoughts

Demographic changes make it imperative that local leaders approach community planning and design differently than how it has been done in the past.

The communities that thrive and survive are those where children can grow up safely and supported, and where residents want to remain and grow old.

There are many reasons why people value living in rural towns and communities — these include easy access to natural places, neighbors who help when help is needed, and the premium placed on privacy and independence. The majority of rural residents want to remain in their communities as they age, despite the potential difficulties.

Some of the overall takeaways and insights gathered during the AARP Rural Livability Workshop and from this report:



▲ A domestic turkey pays a house call at a Maryland farm.

- Rural communities are tight-knit and pride themselves on coming together to tackle challenging problems.
- The distances to services and stores — even to neighbors — can amplify the challenges of aging in rural places.
- With fewer layers of bureaucracy, small towns and rural areas are the kinds of places where change is possible. The decision-making process can be more efficient than in larger communities or cities. In fact, small communities can be the perfect laboratory for testing new ideas.
- Small and temporary changes often lead to big improvements.
- Like all communities, rural communities that celebrate all generations see an increase in civic participation.
- Larger livability initiatives — such as building workforce housing, addressing food insecurity or enhancing transportation services — often benefit from a regional rather than purely local approach.
- Developing safe, accessible, welcoming public spaces encourages residents to connect with their neighbors and be physically active. An added bonus: communities with these places can attract tourist dollars.
- Since more and more people of all ages are living alone, housing solutions need to include nontraditional models, such as cohousing, shared housing and accessory dwelling units.
- High-speed internet is an essential service. The lack of high-speed internet access makes it hard if not impossible to attract young adults to a community, and it limits opportunities for entrepreneurs, for telemedicine, online banking and distance learning.
- Small downtowns are valuable assets, provided they are walkable, feature needed shops and services, provide places to gather and, ideally, reflect the community's location, history and culture.



EXPERT INSIGHT

“If we want to change our communities for the future, it can’t be a vision that ends with us. The vision needs to be at a point 30, 40 years out. A point in time that I care about and will not occupy.”

— John Robert Smith, former mayor of Meridian, Mississippi, chairman of Transportation for America, during a presentation at the 2019 AARP Rural Livability Workshop

Learn More

A selection of programs, publications, organizations, agencies and websites

AARP PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

AARP Livable Communities

The AARP Livable Communities initiative develops resources for local leaders, policymakers, municipal staff, placemaking professionals, citizen activists and more. AARP staff and volunteers working at the national-, state- and local-level provide direct support in hundreds of communities. The website [AARP.org/Livable](https://www.aarp.org/Livable) features free publications, a subject-based articles archive, links to reports from AARP Research and the AARP Public Policy Institute, and information about the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities (also see page 53).

AARP Livable Communities e-Newsletter

Created for community influencers, this free, weekly, award-winning newsletter is an easy way to stay informed about livability efforts and ideas: [AARP.org/LivableSubscribe](https://www.aarp.org/LivableSubscribe)

AARP Community Challenge

This annual small-grants program provides funds to nonprofits and local governments for “quick-action” community improvement projects: [AARP.org/CommunityChallenge](https://www.aarp.org/CommunityChallenge)

AARP Livability Index

The index calculates a score for communities throughout the United States based on the services and amenities that impact people’s lives the most. Searches can be customized by location and livability domains: [AARP.org/LivabilityIndex](https://www.aarp.org/LivabilityIndex)

AARP States and Local Chapters

AARP is present in communities nationwide, working from offices in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, as well as hundreds of volunteer-run chapters: [AARP.org/States](https://www.aarp.org/States) and [AARP.org/Chapters](https://www.aarp.org/Chapters)

AARP Home and Community Preferences Survey

This recurring survey by AARP Research asks adults age 18 or older what they want and need in the places they live: [AARP.org/RuralLivability](https://www.aarp.org/RuralLivability) and [AARP.org/LivableSurvey2018](https://www.aarp.org/LivableSurvey2018)

AARP Driver Safety

Among the program’s online and local offerings is the AARP Smart Driver program, a refresher course for people age 50 or older. Drivers in many states qualify for an auto insurance discount upon completing the course: [AARPDriverSafety.org](https://www.aarpdriver.org)

AARP Foundation

With a focus on alleviating poverty among older adults, AARP Foundation supports economic opportunities and social connectedness efforts that can prevent and reduce senior poverty: [AARP.org/Foundation](https://www.aarp.org/Foundation)

Center to Champion Nursing in America

An initiative of AARP, AARP Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the center works to ensure community access to highly skilled nurses: [AARP.org/Nursing](https://www.aarp.org/Nursing)

AARP PUBLICATIONS

Each of the following titles is free and available in print or by download via the URLs below or [AARP.org/LivableLibrary](https://www.aarp.org/LivableLibrary).

AARP Roadmap to Livability

This six-part collection contains subject-specific strategies for launching or advancing community-based livability efforts: [AARP.org/LivabilityRoadmap](https://www.aarp.org/LivabilityRoadmap)

- *Book 1: AARP Roadmap to Livability*
- *Book 2: Community Listening Session Tool Kit*
- *Book 3: Housing Workbook*
- *Book 4: Transportation Workbook*
- *Book 5: Health Services and Community Supports Workbook*
- *Book 6: Economic Development Workbook*

AARP HomeFit Guide and Here to Stay: Home Upkeep for All

Some of the nation’s oldest and least aging-friendly housing is located in rural areas. These AARP publications provide information about making a home safer for people of every age: [AARP.org/HomeFit](https://www.aarp.org/HomeFit) and [HereToStay.AARPFoundation.org](https://www.aarp.org/HereToStay)

The ABCs of ADUs and Accessory Dwelling Units

Accessory dwellings are secondary residences attached to a single-family home or built on the same property lot. ADUs can help address housing shortages, enable family members to live near one another and provide homeowners with a way to earn rental income: [AARP.org/ADU](https://www.aarp.org/ADU)

Making Room: Housing for a Changing America

Filled with ideas, solutions, photographs, infographics and floor plans from a National Building Museum exhibition of the same name, *Making Room* is a rallying cry for a wider menu of housing options: [AARP.org/MakingRoom](https://www.aarp.org/MakingRoom)

Engaging the Community to Create Community

This guide by AARP and Cities of Service provides examples of collaborations between public officials and residents to identify needs and solutions: [AARP.org/LivableLibrary](https://www.aarp.org/LivableLibrary)

Creating Parks and Public Spaces for People of All Ages

Developed by AARP, 80 Cities and The Trust for Public Land, this guide can help communities develop safe, healthy outdoor places for people of all ages and abilities. Rural examples are included: [AARP.org/LivableParks](https://www.aarp.org/LivableParks)

The Pop-Up Placemaking Tool Kit

Produced by AARP and Team Better Block, the tool kit is a practical guide to demonstrating and building support for needed community features: [AARP.org/Livable-PopUp](https://www.aarp.org/Livable-PopUp)

AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit and Leader Guide

Walk audits enable community members to document street safety problems for sharing with local officials as a way to advocate for change: [AARP.org/WalkAudit](https://www.aarp.org/WalkAudit)

Where We Live

A collection of inspiring ideas and solutions from America’s local leaders: [AARP.org/WhereWeLive](https://www.aarp.org/WhereWeLive)

Continued ►

ORGANIZATIONS

Citizens' Institute on Rural Design empowers rural residents to capitalize on local and regional assets in order to guide the civic development and future design of their own communities: Rural-Design.org

880 Cities brings people together to enhance mobility and public spaces with the goal of creating vibrant, healthy and equitable communities: 880Cities.org

Feonix: Mobility Rising creates mobility solutions, systems and programs to increase the transportation options for people in underserved communities: FeonixMobilityRising.org

Housing Assistance Council assists in the development of housing and homeownership for working low-income rural families and farmworkers, with a focus on high-need groups and regions, including Indian country, the Mississippi Delta, the Southwest border colonias and Appalachia: RuralHome.org

LOR Foundation partners with rural communities in Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico to accelerate ideas and elevate the rural voice: LORFoundation.org

Main Street America, a program of the National Main Street Center, works to revitalize older and historic commercial districts to build thriving neighborhoods and economies: MainStreet.org

National American Indian Housing Council advocates on behalf of Native housing entities and efforts to provide culturally relevant, quality affordable housing for Native people: NAIHC.net

National Center for Frontier Communities serves as a voice for people and programs in frontier communities and raises awareness of frontier issues among policymakers, agencies and the public: FrontierUS.org

Opticos Design is an architectural and planning firm that champions “missing middle housing” choices so people can live in affordable, sustainable, walkable places: OpticosDesign.com

Rural Health Information Hub is a clearinghouse for data and resources about rural health: RuralHealthInfo.org

Rural Institute Inclusive Communities focuses on improving life for rural Americans with disabilities: RuralInstitute.umn.edu

Smart Growth America and several of its programs (including the **National Complete Streets Coalition** and **Transportation for America**) provide supports and resources for rural places: SmartGrowthAmerica.org

Strong Towns advocates for community- and sustainability-focused development that improves the resiliency and financial strength of cities, towns and neighborhoods: StrongTowns.org

The Trust for Public Land works to save land for people to enjoy, from neighborhood parks to national parks: TPL.org

Team Better Block is a planning and placemaking firm that works with local leaders and community members to create useful public spaces: TeamBetterBlock.com

Village to Village Network is an umbrella-organization for locally created aging-in-community programs: VTVNetwork.org

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

In addition to the services and information that's available from state, regional and local governments, the federal government departments and agencies listed below are among those with programs and resources that can be helpful to local leaders and residents of rural communities: USA.gov

- **U.S. Department of Agriculture**
- **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development**
- **U.S. Department of Transportation**
- **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**
- **Federal Emergency Management Agency**

RURAL REPORTS

Creating an Age-Advantaged Community: A Tool Kit for Building Intergenerational Communities that Recognize, Engage and Support All Ages

Many rural communities are adopting livability practices, in part to attract young families. This Generations United tool kit provides successful examples. Available via GU.org

e-Connectivity @ USDA: Broadband Resources for Rural America

This report helps navigate the agencies within the USDA to find the programs, grants, loans and supports that can help expand rural internet service. Available via RD.USDA.gov

Emergency Preparedness and Recovery: A Tool Kit for Rural Communities

Produced by the Texas Chapter of the American Planning Association, the tool kit addresses the need for partnerships between emergency management personnel, local government and service organizations. Available via RuralCenter.org

Exploring Strategies to Improve Health and Equity in Rural Communities

A look at how the strengths and assets of rural areas can be leveraged to address community needs. Available via NORC.org

Rural Development Hubs: Strengthening America's Rural Innovation Infrastructure

Hubs build on community assets to improve public health, economic development and community engagement. Available via AspenInstitute.org

Rural Risk Communication Tool Kit

The Georgia Department of Community Health's Southeast Health District provides advice for connecting with rural communities about weather disasters and other emergency events. Available via RuralRCKit.org

Smart Growth in Small Towns and Rural Communities

An examination of strategies that can help rural communities achieve growth and development goals while maintaining a rural character. Available via EPA.gov

Tips for Designing Transit Services and Infrastructure That Promote Livability

Produced by the National Rural Transit Assistance Program, the guide explains how rural communities can enhance transit and make roads safer for cyclists, motorists and pedestrians. Available via NationalRTAP.org

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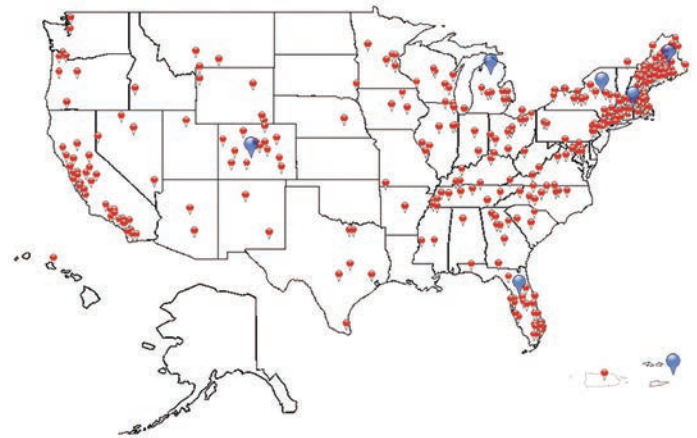
AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities

The **AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities** — a program of the AARP Livable Communities initiative — encourages local leaders to implement the types of changes that make places more livable for people of all ages, especially older adults.

Several of the communities that appear in this publication belong to the network. Among them:

Grayson County, Virginia; Winnemucca, Nevada; and numerous small, rural and remote towns in **Maine**.

The work that happens within the network is hands-on and locally determined and directed. While membership does not mean the community is currently “age-friendly,” or that AARP is endorsing it as a place to live, membership *does* mean that a community’s elected leadership has made the commitment to actively work toward making their town, city, county or state a great place to live for people of all ages.



▲ This map represents the network’s membership at the start of 2020. The red pins indicate the city, town and county members. Blue pins mark the member states or territories. Learn more about the network and check out the ever-growing member list by visiting AARP.org/AgeFriendly.

The Workshop Roster

In addition to AARP staff and volunteers from throughout the nation, representatives of the following organizations participated in the AARP Rural Livability Workshop. (If a state isn’t indicated, the organization has a national presence.)

- 880 Cities
- Age-Friendly Coastal Communities (ME)
- Age-Friendly Biddeford (ME)
- Age-Friendly Georgetown (ME)
- Age-Friendly Jackman (ME)
- Age-Friendly Raymond (ME)
- Age-Friendly Readfield (ME)
- Age-Friendly Saco (ME)
- Age-Friendly Sullivan (ME)
- Age-Friendly Surry (ME)
- Aging 2.0 (ME)
- Aging Well in Waldo County (ME)
- Alaska Housing Finance Corporation
- Aroostook Agency on Aging (ME)
- Auburn Recreation Department (ME)
- Augusta Age-Friendly Committee (ME)
- Berkshire Interfaith Organizing (MA)
- Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (MA)
- Bethel Area Age-Friendly Community Initiative (ME)
- Bicycle/Pedestrian Committee (ME)
- Big Project Days (ME)
- Boise State University (ID)
- Bucksport Bay Healthy Communities Coalition (ME)
- Build Maine
- Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce (NM)
- Cary Medical Center (ME)
- Charles City Area Chamber of Commerce (IA)
- Citizens Health Action Team (ME)
- City and County of Honolulu (HI)
- City of Auburn Recreation and Sport Facilities (ME)
- City of Bath (ME)
- City of Cuba City (WI)
- City of Danforth (ME)
- City of Hallowell (ME)
- City of Saco (ME)
- Community Friendly Connection (ME)
- Cumberland Aging in Place (ME)
- Eastern Area Agency on Aging (ME)
- Eliot Aging in Place Committee (ME)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency
- Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park (ND)
- Fourth Economy Consulting (ME)
- Freeport Community Services (ME)
- Friends in Action (ME)
- Gibson Center for Senior Service (NH)
- Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands
- Grayson County S.A.C. (VA)
- Hallowell All Age-Friendly Committee (ME)
- Healthy Island Project (ME)
- Healthy Peninsula (ME)
- Housing Assistance Council
- Indiana Electric Cooperatives
- International Council on Active Aging
- Island Connections (ME)
- ITNAmerica
- Living Communities Foundation (ME)
- Living Well in North Yarmouth Committee (ME)
- LOR Foundation
- Maine Center on Aging
- Maine Community Foundation
- Maine Council on Aging
- Maine Department of Health and Human Services
- Maine Development Foundation
- Maine Office of Elder and Disability Services
- MaineHousing
- MCH, Inc. (Maine)
- Mercy Care for the Adirondacks (NY)
- Millinocket Regional Hospital/Thrive Penobscot (ME)
- Montana State Government
- National American Indian Housing Council
- North Dakota Department of Commerce
- Northern Hilltowns Consortium of Councils on Aging (MA)
- Northland Foundation (MN)
- Oak Hill Assistive Technology (CT)
- Office of U.S. Senator Angus King (ME)
- Oklahoma State University
- Old Orchard Beach Community Friendly Connection (ME)
- Opticos Design
- Palermo Community Center (ME)
- Partnership for Age-Friendly Communities, Larimer County (CO)
- Portland Office of Elder Affairs (ME)
- Senior Services, Forsyth County (NC)
- Somerset County Public Health (ME)
- South Dakota Community Foundation
- Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission
- Strong Towns
- Team Better Block (OK)
- The Trust for Public Land
- Town of Bowdoinham (ME)
- Town of Bucksport (ME)
- Town of Fryeburg (ME)
- Town of Kennebunk Committee on Aging (ME)
- Town of Madison (ME)
- Town of Ogunquit (ME)
- Town of Scarborough Community Services (ME)
- Trafton Senior Center/Sanford-Springvale YMCA (ME)
- Transportation for America
- Trinity Green, LLC. (ME)
- Tufts University (MA)
- University of Alaska Fairbanks School of Natural Resources
- University of Maine Center on Aging
- University of Montevallo (AL)
- University of Nebraska
- University of New England (ME)
- University of North Carolina Wilmington
- University of South Florida
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Vitruvian Planning (ID)
- Wayne Aging at Home (ME)
- West Virginia Municipal League
- Westbrook Housing (ME)
- Windham Human Services Advisory Committee (ME)
- Yarmouth Aging in Place (ME)

AARP Rural Livability Workshop Report

How and why small towns and remote communities are working to become more livable for older adults and people of all ages



▲ Lake Winnepesaukee, Meredith, New Hampshire



▲ The road to Casper, Wyoming



▲ A home and orchard in Chesnee, South Carolina



▲ A hayfield in Huntsville, Utah

America's demographic future is showing up first in rural areas, where older residents form a greater proportion of the population than in urban or suburban areas.

One-quarter of all Americans age 65 or older live in small towns and rural communities. That percentage is growing, since the rural population is aging at a faster rate than the nation's population as a whole.

According to the AARP Home and Community Preferences Survey, adults in rural areas are more likely than those in cities and suburbs to say they want to reside in their community and/or current home for as long as possible.

In June 2019, AARP convened its first-ever national gathering about rural livability — as it relates to people of all ages and, especially, to older adults. Held in Portland, Maine, the event was attended by AARP staff, volunteers, community partners and livability practitioners representing a range of specialties and locations.

This report is based on presentations and conversations from that event, as well as related meetings, media sources and AARP's work in communities throughout the nation.

While the *AARP Rural Livability Workshop Report* is by no means an exhaustive examination of the many issues that impact rural communities, the data, observations and examples contained within these pages can serve to inform community influencers — local, state and national officials; policymakers; service providers; advocacy organizations; citizen activists; and others — about the needs, benefits, challenges and solutions found in rural places.

To learn when AARP releases new livability publications, sign up for the free, weekly **AARP Livable Communities e-Newsletter:** AARP.org/LivableSubscribe.

