

# **Age-Friendly Brookline**

## **An Assessment of Brookline's Age-Friendly Features and Plans to Pursue Additional Age-Friendly Features**

*Narrative Supporting Brookline's Application for Participation in the World Health Organization's Age Friendly Cities Program*

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This proposal supports the Town of Brookline's application for designation as an Age-Friendly City under a worldwide program sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO). The program links participating communities, facilitates information exchange, fosters interventions where appropriate to improve the lives of older people, and provides technical support and training. It does not provide funding.

The **Introduction** describes Brookline's many existing age-friendly attributes, including its population density; walkability; access to public transportation; proximity of services, parks, retail, civic, and social facilities; and access to Boston-area cultural, medical, and educational facilities. This section identifies some preliminary challenges and opportunities, such as the need for more effective information dissemination. The sections that follow provide an overview of existing activities and outline future plans and aspirations in a number of key functional areas that affect senior citizens.

The **Health and Human Services** section details existing programs and activities and identifies several opportunities and future plans, including improved coordination of existing information and referral services, a fall prevention program, and strengthening of an anti-hoarding initiative designed to help seniors reduce clutter.

The **Housing** section describes the Town's housing market, programs, and existing resources, which include about 1,150 units specifically targeted to elderly or disabled residents. Key challenges to increasing senior housing opportunities -- very high housing costs and very limited available land -- will require creative approaches, and the proposed agenda would start with a forum to explore innovative senior housing models.

The **Library** section details the libraries' many offerings, including concerts, book groups, and a program that provides personally delivered books to those who are home-bound. Plans include adding more user-friendly computer services for seniors, improving program advertising, updating the library website, and working toward creation of more transportation to the Putterham branch.

The **Public Safety** section characterizes the Town as a very safe community with many initiatives designed to keep seniors safe. These include a program to help track residents with cognitive disorders; a Senior Alert Program to help seniors reconnect with their families; work to prevent elder abuse or exploitation; and outreach to seniors to familiarize them with Police Department offerings. The department plans to continue to upgrade outreach efforts and make information more available.

The **Parks and Open Space** section identifies 50 properties, including parks, sanctuary or conservation areas, a golf course, and a historic cemetery. It notes the Town's ongoing efforts to maintain and improve them, especially with senior amenities. The Parks and Open Space Division proposes to inventory age-friendly features of Brookline parks, survey older residents about their use of parks and park preferences, analyze age-friendly features of parks near large concentrations of older residents, and use this information to develop an action plan.

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The **Recreation** section provides an overview of the recreation programs of particular interest to seniors that are offered by the Town's Recreation department. Fees for participation in recreation programs are routinely discounted for seniors. The Department plans to continue to offer opportunities for healthy living to seniors and, where possible, to expand those opportunities.

The **Tax Relief** section describes the Board of Assessors programs to provide property tax relief to low-income home owners. The section includes a description of the well-received and growing property-tax work off program that is available to low income older home owners. The Board of Assessors will continue its efforts to assure that eligible home owners are well informed about the property tax relief options that are available to them.

The **Transportation** section provides an overview of the extensive transportation resources available in Brookline including streets, sidewalks, parking lots, fixed-route public transportation, and specialized transportation. Some existing age-friendly transportation features are identified as well as challenges experienced by older residents. Four initiatives are outlined: 1) A project to strengthen pedestrian access to commercial areas, bus and trolley stops, and open space in areas with large concentrations of older residents, 2) An analysis of strengths and limitations of the specialized transportation services available to those who do not drive and are not fully served by fixed-route public transportation, 3) An exploration of the possibility that the Transportation Board might establish a standing pedestrian committee, and 4) Consideration of a demonstration project to use RFID technology to enable pedestrians with disabilities to request extra time at traffic lights to cross streets.

The **Participation** section provides an overview of the extensive efforts of the Town to include older residents and their opportunities for participation in the life of the Town. At the heart of these efforts is the Brookline Council on Aging with its extensive network of relationships to other Town departments and other providers of services to older residents. The Brookline Community Aging Network is a new collaboration between Brookline residents and the Council on Aging that expands opportunities for participation of older residents. Brookline community life is characterized by high levels of resident participation and older residents are extensively enmeshed in all aspects of community life. The major challenge to be addressed will be to provide older residents with full information about the many opportunities for participation that the Town offers.

The proposal includes attention to the special needs of **seniors with low vision**. The Health and Human Services section includes attention to the possibility of providing more effective information services to support older residents with low vision to assist with them in such matters as making home modifications to. A section on **building design modifications for low-vision elders** discusses a plan to assess public buildings frequently used by older people to identify possibilities of introducing design modifications so that those with low vision can use them more effectively. Further, a proposed pedestrian access study will include attention to sidewalk features important to those with low vision.

The proposal concludes with an **Action Agenda** and summary of further **Needs Assessment/planning projects**. Brookline is fortunate to have rich but complex resources to serve older residents. The major challenge is to provide information effectively to residents. The immediate action agenda will be to

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strengthen information services. Needs assessments and planning projects concerned with housing, parks, transportation, and health and human services are likely to result in additional action agendas proposed in the future.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Aims**

Brookline Massachusetts seeks to join the network of Age-Friendly Cities. Participation will assist Brookline in calling attention to the remarkable set of age-friendly features that are already in place. Participation will also stimulate planning to strengthen age-friendly features in several sectors. Through the initiative, Brookline seeks to

- Encourage full participation of older residents in community life
- Encourage activities that enhance the health and well-being of older residents
- Assure strong supports for vulnerable older residents

### **Background**

Located in Eastern Massachusetts immediately west of Boston, Brookline has a rectangular shape that covers an area of 6.8 square miles. Brookline celebrated the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its incorporation in 2005. The Town is fully developed with most of the land in residential use. Brookline has several thriving commercial centers. Education is the Town's major industry. Its population of about 59,000 includes approximately 10,700 (18%) residents who are age 60 and older.

North Brookline, where most residents live, has remarkable age-friendly features that are rooted in its proximity to Boston's commercial and cultural core, its transportation resources, and its housing stock. Brookline is served by 3 branches of a light-rail system now operated by the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) that provides above-ground service in Brookline and subway service in Boston. The system had its origins late in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Reflecting the need for residents to be able to walk to public transportation stops, North Brookline constructed an extensive network of sidewalks. Housing was densely developed particularly along the Beacon Street corridor to take advantage of the rail system. In that corridor, many multi-unit residential buildings were constructed to house middle and upper income residents. In other sections, densely developed housing was constructed to accommodate working families. Most of that housing stock remains and has been well maintained. After World War II, up-zoning in the Beacon Street Corridor permitted construction of some very large multi-residential buildings. Some of those buildings have been converted to condominiums. North Brookline offers a remarkable mixture of single-family homes, small-to-midsize multi-family dwellings, and larger multi-unit buildings.

Brookline benefits from its proximity to some of the major universities and medical facilities located in the Boston area. Boston University is located on Brookline's north border and is Brookline's largest landowner. The Harvard University Medical school complex and the Longwood Medical area in Boston are immediately adjacent to Brookline. Both Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge and Northeastern University in Boston are a short distance from Brookline. Many Brookline residents are employed by these and other institutions of higher education in the Boston area, and seniors especially benefit from proximity to the world-class health care available in the area.

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Brookline has attracted a well-educated population; more than 75% of those 25 and older have college degrees and nearly half have graduate degrees. Brookline residents attach great value to education, cultural opportunities, health care, and municipal services. The Town has an exceptionally strong public education system and an excellent public library. The Town also has an extensive park system including many neighborhood parks and open spaces. Reflecting its sensitivity to the needs of older residents, the Town constructed its dedicated Senior Center in North Brookline a decade ago.

Brookline's commercial areas attract businesses and professional services that serve residents well. In fact, Coolidge Corner, the major commercial center attracts customers from the entire Boston area and beyond.

Because of its history, North Brookline already has the key features that other communities are seeking to achieve through smart-growth initiatives. Brookline has strong housing resources and sufficient population density to make public transportation economically viable. Strong police and fire departments assure public safety. Reflecting a commitment to providing opportunities for those who are disadvantaged, the Town supports many initiatives to assist those who are economically disadvantaged.

This configuration of features makes North Brookline exceptionally age friendly. Older people can find single-level, maintenance-free housing in safe neighborhoods that are within walking distances of public transportation and attractive commercial services. Older residents have easy access to the Brookline Senior Center and the Brookline Public Library. On public transportation, they can easily reach Boston's museums, theaters, and sports entertainment venues.

### **Age-Friendly Challenges**

Although North Brookline has enviable age-friendly features, significant challenges remain and will be outlined here. High on our list of concerns is need for more effective dissemination of information. With many options available to them, older residents are often constrained by lack of information about what is available. The multiple modes of contemporary communication are themselves a challenge for older residents. On the one hand older residents can be overwhelmed by the information they receive from many sources. On the other hand, they often miss information that would actually be useful to them.

Brookline Town Departments recognize the importance of providing residents with information about the services they provide. Town Departments use varied methods to communicate to residents. Nevertheless, these efforts often fall short of their aims. A major action item that Brookline proposes to pursue is the development of more effective communication with older residents about what the Town offers to older residents with respect to support services, opportunities to participate in community life, and cultural opportunities.

South Brookline poses significant challenges to its 1,000 older residents. South Brookline has residential development that is more typical of suburban areas. It is dominated by single-family homes. Public transportation is relatively weak. The bus routes that serve South Brookline do not take residents directly to Brookline's major commercial centers. The area lacks the population density needed to

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support economically viable public transportation. Residents who do not drive an automobile are at a distinct disadvantage. Older residents of South Brookline are less engaged in Town activities than are older residents of North Brookline. The Brookline Senior Center, in particular, seeks ways to encourage of South Brookline to participate to a greater extent in the activities it offers.

### **Origins of Proposal and Organization of the Proposal**

This proposal has been developed by a committee appointed by the Chair of Brookline's Board of Selectmen. The committee includes representatives of the Board of Selectmen, the Council on Aging, and the Brookline Community Aging Network, a citizen's organization affiliated with the Council on Aging.

The organization of the proposal largely reflects the contributions of participating town departments. The sequence in which the departments are presented here is arbitrary. Some departments were invited to participate, notably Health, Library, Board of Assessors, and Planning and Community Development. Other department joined at their request, notably Police and Recreation.

The remainder of the proposal presents an overview of age-friendly attributes and potential future improvements in the following areas: health and human services, housing, library, public safety, parks and open space, property tax relief, transportation, and participation.

## **HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

The Health and Human Service Sub-Committee of the Age-Friendly City Initiative has at its mission the protection of the health and general well-being of Brookline seniors and seniors who may work or otherwise be associated with the Town. Toward that end the Sub-Committee seeks to:

- Identify quality programs and services that promote senior wellness within the Brookline community,
- Strengthen partnerships with town departments and private organizations that provide human service-related assistance to seniors,
- Identify human service needs and develop programs and systems to meet those needs, and
- Increase community awareness of human service programs and activities that exist in Brookline for seniors.

### **Part I. Existing Initiatives**

The Town and its collaborators have a long history of participating in projects relating to senior health and well-being. More recent projects include a comprehensive survey accessing the needs of 85+ seniors that live in Brookline and the Community Health Network Area 18 (CHNA 18) Needs Assessment that provided information about senior life in Brookline and allowed comparisons with other towns in the Greater Boston Area. Our town's Senior Center provides a variety of social activities as well as programs that promote wellness and recovery. One program, "Matter of Balance," provides participants an opportunity to increase their strength, posture, and balance which reduces falls and fall-

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related injuries. The Senior Center also publishes *The Elder Resource Guide* which is periodically updated and provides information on services ranging from government entitlements to mental health providers and much more. Other initiatives include the Hoarding Task Force which is a multi-agency collaboration that provides consultation to reduce clutter in households, annual flu clinics- one is always located at the Brookline Senior Center, kidney screenings, food and nutrition presentations for seniors, and blood pressure clinics at the Senior Center and the Brookline Food Pantry.

### **Part II. Role of Seniors**

All the programs mentioned above involve senior input from conception and development to implementation and evaluation. The Senior Center participants and the Council on Aging work very closely with town departments such as the Brookline Department of Public Health to ensure that programs and services address the needs of seniors. A good example of senior involvement with a town human service initiative is the 85+ study (*Aging at Home: A Study of Brookline's 85 and Older Seniors*). Seniors played an integral role in survey construction and implementation, advising the researcher on survey length, language, and issues to be examined. Seniors also administered the survey and reviewed its findings. Seniors have also provided input and direction in the town's effort to mediate hoarding behavior in the community.

### **Part III. Plans and Aspirations**

The Health and Human Service Sub-Committee has identified several areas that would improve the quality of life for seniors. First, we want to enhance information and referral resources that help seniors find appropriate human service resources within the community by examining ease of access to information via internet and other communication venues, by keeping abreast of best practices to keep information current, by identifying appropriate content that addresses their needs, and by improving coordination among information sources.

Second, fall prevention has been identified as an area of focus to reduce fall-related injuries. Since many falls do not need hospital-level care, there is a sense that the number of falls is under-reported. The Health and Human Service Sub-Committee will advocate for more robust and accessible data. The first phase of the Fall Prevention Initiative will be to collaborate with emergency response providers (emergency response systems, hospitals, and other non-medical sources) to explore ways that fall information can be included in their data systems and to determine how to create public access to this information that does not violate confidentiality restrictions. The subcommittee seeks to improve the quality of the data provided by these reporters by requesting information such as age of person, injury sustained, incident location, and number of falls per individual per year. Ultimately, more robust data will allow the Town to be more specific in targeting its interventions to reduce falls. However, the status of the current data system should not deter or delay the Town from supporting or expanding programs that already exist, such as the "Matter of Balance" program which could be offered at a variety of locations within Brookline.

The town should also continue its efforts to advise seniors of the importance of routine eye examinations and eye care. One out of every six seniors has low or impaired vision, and most



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individuals will have diminished vision as they mature in age. Diminished vision adversely impacts the quality of life for seniors; it is one of the causes of fall-related injuries. Strengthening our collaborations with nearby organizations that specialize in vision care and rehabilitation services such as Massachusetts Association for the Blind and the Carroll Center for the Blind would be beneficial in developing programs that fit the needs of Brookline seniors. The town may explore the development of more extensive informational programs that would increase awareness of the barriers faced by those with low vision and also provide resources to aid in adapting households to be more accommodating to those with low vision. The town may also consider collaborating with local universities that have rehabilitation concentrations to develop programs that allow their students to train community members to conduct home assessments and to suggest home modifications that would benefit those with low vision and other disabilities.

The Human Service Sub-Committee will also seek to support the Hoarding Task Force efforts to mediate clutter in senior homes to reduce a public safety risk and to enable those who hoard to enhance their quality of life and maintain their living situation. Support to the Task Force could include identifying sponsors for Task Force events, identifying resources the Task Force could use to defray costs for cleanups and clinical aspects of hoarding mediation, and establishing a volunteer clutter management team to assist individuals in their clutter-reducing efforts in non-hazardous hoarding situations.

### **Part IV. Summary**

Overall, Brookline has many services available to seniors, ranging from having access to world-class medical care to programs that allow seniors to live independently in the community. Brookline strives to be current in best practices regarding human service programming and delivery. Brookline is sensitive to the needs of its seniors and tries to meet their needs through a variety of town and private programs. The goals we have mentioned above -- improving information dissemination and access, preventing falls, and reducing hoarding behavior -- can contribute to the quality of life of Brookline seniors.

## **HOUSING**

### **Overview**

Brookline has a very diverse housing stock, ranging from single-family homes to high rise, multifamily buildings.<sup>1</sup> Most of the Town's housing units are found in the densely developed northern portion of town, where residences mix with retail, services, and libraries and other civic uses, all situated near public transportation. The southern and western portions of Brookline are less densely populated and largely single family, with some low-rise condominium and rental buildings; southern areas have less access to public transportation. Although north Brookline has many of the attributes of a "naturally occurring retirement community," the different parts of Brookline raise different challenges and opportunities with regard to improving the lives of senior citizens.

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<sup>1</sup> Of Brookline's housing units, only 18.4% are in single-family, detached homes, while 33.2% are in buildings with 20 units or more. Renters occupy 51.2% of all units.

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Twenty-two percent (5,516) of Brookline's 25,092 households include a senior aged 65 or older. Of 26,448 housing units, about 1,150 at 15 properties are specifically targeted to elderly or disabled residents, with 975 of these priced for low- and moderate-income households. Approximately 21% of the Town's households that include seniors live in specifically targeted housing, including 18% in affordable housing units. All but one senior housing property, which includes 153 units, are owned or controlled by the local public housing authority or a mission-driven nonprofit serving the elderly.

Brookline includes many other properties that, because of elevator access, are attractive to seniors. In 2011 research by Brookline Community Aging Network revealed that the Town had 63 condominium buildings with elevators; these buildings have a total of 2,288 units. Brookline also had 49 rental buildings with elevators. These buildings totaled 2,951 units.

Brookline's location, reputation for quality services, and attractiveness as a community has resulted in a mainly built-up landscape where the cost of housing, which has withstood the impact of the recent recession, continues to be extremely high. During 2011, the median sales price for a single-family home was \$1,188,750 and, for a condominium, \$505,000. *The Boston Globe* reports that the advertised median rent for an available Brookline apartment is \$2,778 per month.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, 42 percent of the Town's tenants report gross rents that are 35% or more of their household income.

### **Brookline's Housing Mission/Philosophy**

Brookline seeks to preserve and enhance community diversity by encouraging the preservation of existing and development of new affordable housing opportunities serving households with a range of ages, composition, and income. The cost and scarcity of properties have meant fewer opportunities for forward planning and the reliance on opportunity-driven strategies. The Town's overall goal is the creation, on average, of 25 affordable housing units a year.

Because of high property costs and a strong market, development in Brookline during the past decade has tended to result in high-cost condominiums, a market which appears to have been fueled by seniors most likely downsizing from single-family homes in more suburban contexts. Brookline has taken advantage of this development for affordable housing purposes through a zoning by-law that requires the inclusion of affordable units in new projects meeting certain threshold conditions. The Town also allocates federal HOME and CDBG funds and Town-generated funds, typically requiring them to leverage federal low-income tax credits and/or state funds; uses the sale of Town-owned land to create affordable housing; and actively recruits nonprofit buyer and developers. The Town also operates, as funding is available, a first-time homebuyer down payment assistance program and makes referrals to programs that assist seniors with home rehabilitation needs.

### **Part I. Existing Initiatives**

These policies and strategies resulted in the successful preservation and creation of affordable housing for seniors during the past decade.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Boston Globe*, September 20, 2012. Article cites source as Zillow.com.

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The first implementation of the Town's inclusionary zoning was at a 115-unit assisted living project sponsored by the nonprofit Goddard House, where 17 units are provided at a discounted monthly fee to income-qualified residents.

Working with the nonprofit Brookline Improvement Coalition, Inc., the Town funded the acquisition of a small property and its subsequent transfer to the nonprofit Committee to End Elder Homelessness/Hearth. The buyer used the resource to leverage state affordable housing funding and to redevelop the property as nine small apartments. The group provides service- rich housing to at-risk elders.

When the owner of over 500 units at three properties with expiring federal subsidy contracts sought a buyer, the Town worked with Hebrew Senior Life, using a combination of property tax relief and a direct subsidy of \$1 million to guarantee a minimum of 60 percent affordability for 40 years.

In addition, the Town provides federal CDBG funds to support capital improvements to Brookline's low-income housing owned by the Brookline Housing Authority and offers both property tax exemptions and deferrals to qualifying lower income seniors.

### **Part II. Participation of Seniors**

The Town's Housing Division staff has worked with the Council on Aging and/or its staff as needed or requested, both seeking input on elder needs and providing information about housing programs, funding, and services provided by Brookline and elsewhere.

### **Part III. Plans and Aspirations**

The Town recognizes the diversity of the existing elder population of Brookline and of those who want to move to Brookline. At the same time, it recognizes the economic pressures the Town's attractiveness places on its housing stock and the impact these pressures have on existing elderly residents of modest means. As such, it welcomes the exploration of a variety of creative housing responses to enable senior residents to remain in Town in housing that is affordable and appropriate to their needs.

Thus one important step will be to initiate discussions with elders, senior advocates, and senior housing providers and professionals to identify senior housing needs and to explore additional innovative housing models that are compatible with Brookline's neighborhoods, realistic with regard to the Town's housing market, and that serve both active and frail elders.

The Town's Housing Advisory Board (HAB) has endorsed this proposal and offered to co-sponsor a forum to explore innovative senior housing models. In organizing the forum, we hope to engage both experts in senior housing and older residents who are seeking better housing solutions. Through the forum we hope to spark a town-wide discussion of housing options, leading to an action plan.

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### Summary

In summary, elders of all incomes constitute a significant and growing part of Brookline's population and contribute to its diversity, and the Town will continue to seek opportunities to support traditional affordable housing and seek new solutions for the aging population of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## LIBRARY

### Part I. Existing Initiatives

***The mission statement of The Public Library of Brookline is to provide access to recorded knowledge and information to all the people of Brookline.....***

Brookline has a Main library and two branches. It has been said that the libraries are the de facto community centers of the town. Each building is easily accessible and ADA compliant has special programs and regular services....all aimed at a diverse community and staffed by a knowledgeable and welcoming staff. The Coolidge Corner branch is the busiest branch library in the state and the Putterham branch is third busiest in Massachusetts. All of the libraries have study areas and meeting rooms. Seniors can be seen each morning sitting or standing in front of the libraries waiting for the doors to open. Usually their first choice upon entering the buildings is to head directly to the daily newspapers. All of the libraries have quiet reading spaces with comfortable chairs near the racks of daily publications. The Coolidge Corner branch has an atrium garden, with benches and is most welcoming and pleasant. The Main library, being the largest facility, has several places where seniors can sit, read or work; Main also has a pleasant café with tables and a charming atmosphere. Seniors there can be seen looking up from their reading, smiling at youngsters walking eagerly to the Children's Room which is across the hall from the café. At Putterham the papers are in racks in the center of the bright, often sunny, open area, overlooking a back garden.

### LOCATIONS

Located in the three most heavily populated areas of Brookline, each facility is within walking distance for most and can also be reached via the Elderbus, (Brookline Council on Aging), and public transportation, (MBTA). Their schedules are rather practical. The Coolidge Corner branch is across the street from a large senior housing building. It is common to see groups of neighbors chatting, sitting on benches talking about their books and sharing stories. The Putterham branch is nestled in a somewhat wooded area, on a busy street. All three libraries are surrounded by bustling shopping areas, schools, churches and synagogues.....each creating its own safe community for seniors, known by all as they easily move around in their familiar community.

### PROGRAMS

While programming at all locations is designed for patrons at large as well as those with special needs, seniors are encouraged to take advantage of all offerings. For example, the Main library has monthly

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concerts in season and the historically important Brookline Room. There is a large separate room with many computers, but seniors usually choose to sign up to use the computers in private carrels. All libraries have movies, (contemporary and classics), lectures and discussion groups. Monthly book groups, (Putterham co-sponsors one with the Senior Center) are on regular schedules. Also at Putterham, there is a Friday morning Senior Social; the typical group is about twenty-five who come for coffee, a snack and conversation. Partnering with the Recreation Department for special events also allows the library to expand typical offerings for seniors, who might bring their grandchildren to programs as they did last Spring to play Mini Golf in the Main library on a Sunday morning. Seniors are encouraged to take advantage of services which include:

- Special training on electronics
- Research and references
- Reserving museum passes
- One-to-one computer help
- LIBRARY CONNECTIONS; delivery of books to *shut ins*; this is also a *social* connection
- Facilities and implements for visually and hearing impaired
- ESL conversations

### **COLLECTIONS**

The collections represent the latest publications: books in traditional formats, large print, Ebooks, on tape, PlayAways, Cds, magazines, music, (Cds, DVDs, streaming), daily newspapers, (as well as: foreign, financial, local publications). Also included are extensive Russian, Chinese, Hebrew and a developing Spanish collection. Collection selection is inclusive in every way; choices are designed to appeal to and meet the needs of the broad spectrum represented in the Brookline community.

### **Part II. Participation of Seniors**

While programming at all locations is designed for patrons at large as well as those with special needs, seniors are encouraged to take advantage of all offerings. For example, the Main library has monthly concerts in season and the historically important Brookline Room. There is a large separate room with many computers, but seniors usually choose to sign up to use the computers in private carrels. All libraries have movies, (contemporary and classics), lectures and discussion groups. Monthly book groups, (Putterham co-sponsors one with the Senior Center) are on regular schedules. Also at Putterham, there is a Friday morning Social; the typical group is about twenty-five who come for coffee, a snack and conversation. Partnering with the Recreation Department for special events also allows the library to expand typical offerings for seniors, who might bring their grandchildren to programs as they did last spring to play Mini Golf in the Main library on a Sunday morning. Seniors are encouraged to take advantage of usual services which include:

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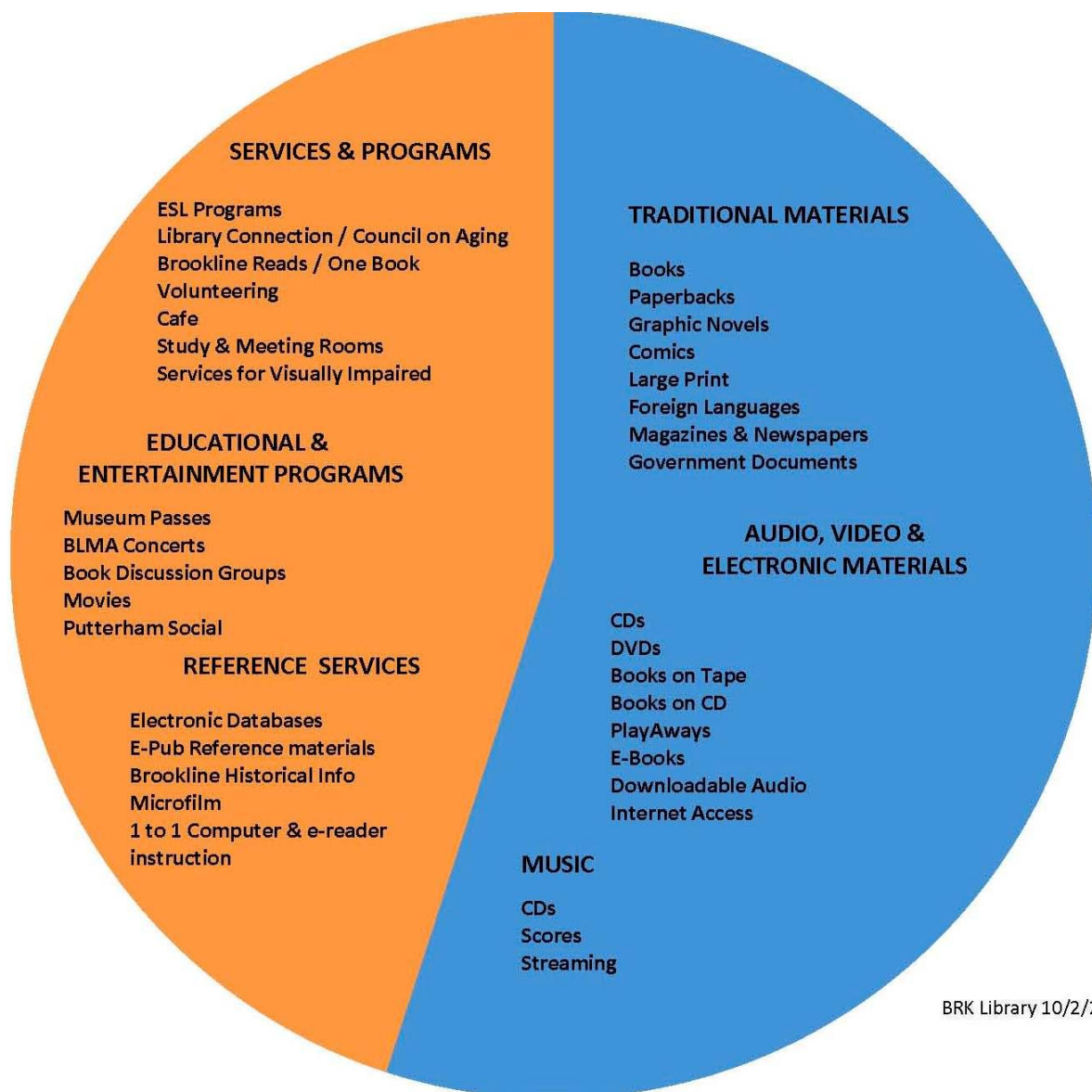
- LIBRARY CONNECTIONS; delivery of books to *shut ins*; this is also a *social* connection
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- ESL conversations

### Part III. Plans and Aspirations

Long range action plans include:

- Improving computer accessibilities, aimed at adding more User-friendly services for seniors
- Increasing and expanding the way programs are advertised updating the library web site
- Creating more transportation to the Putterham branch.

### Library Materials, Services & Programs



BRK Library 10/2/2012

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### **PUBLIC SAFETY**

The Brookline Police Department tries to provide excellent service and a rapid response to all residents of the Town. Due to the vigilance of the Department, statistics show that Brookline's crime rates are significantly below those of neighboring communities. Brookline is one of the safest communities within the immediate Boston urban region. Because of its sensitivity to the special vulnerabilities of many senior citizens, the Police Department is trained to pay particular attention to their needs.

The Brookline Police Department responds very quickly to all calls for assistance. The average response time for emergency calls is under 3 minutes. Due to the high concentration of senior citizens living in the Town of Brookline, the Department has been trained to pay particular attention when responding to a call from a senior citizen to observe whether that resident might be in need of additional services from the Council on Aging, the Town's Health Department, or the Brookline Community Mental Health Center, a public/private organization that provides mental health and substance abuse services for the Brookline area. An officer who encounters someone who needs any of these services will request a follow-up from the Police Department's Community Service Division. That division will try to connect the senior citizen with the appropriate voluntary services, or if necessary, in the event of a serious health or safety hazard, it will notify the Health or Fire Departments of the problem.

#### **Part I. Existing Initiatives**

The Brookline Police Department currently is working on the following programs that particularly benefit senior citizens:

- Homesafe Program—a program that provides residents who are at risk of wandering and getting lost because of cognitive disorders, such as Alzheimer's disease with a personal radio locator bracelet that emits a unique radio frequency through which the individual can be tracked;
- Senior Alert Program—seniors who do not yet have or who do not want the radio frequency bracelets can have a simple metal bracelet with an identification number and the number of the Brookline Police Department, so they can be reconnected with their families.
- Are You O.K.? Program--The Brookline Police Department cooperates with the Norfolk County Sheriff's Office on a telephone reassurance program which places calls every day to the homes of seniors who have enrolled. If there is no answer, a family member is notified and then the Brookline Police are notified. They respond to the home to check on the welfare of the citizen.
- The Police Department also works closely with the Council on Aging on any cases of possible elder abuse or exploitation.

#### **Part II. Participation of Seniors**

In order to understand the needs and concerns of our senior citizens and to have them feel comfortable contacting the Department, the Police Department does the following:

- Periodically the Department holds Senior Citizen Police Academies to familiarize seniors with the workings of the Police Department.

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- The Police Department frequently holds community meetings at various locations around Town such as the Housing Authority Buildings, including those which are dedicated to senior housing, the Senior Center, and the Hebrew Senior Life Community Centers to discuss home safety and other senior issues.

### **Part III. Plans and Aspirations**

The Police Department plans to continue to monitor and get information to seniors on any scams that may be running in the area and which particularly prey on the elderly such as identity theft, home improvement, lottery or contest scams, or credit or loan scams. The Department also has some mobile cameras that could be moved into a neighborhood if someone was attacking or robbing seniors or other citizens in a particular area.

The Police Department will participate in the Age-Friendly Cities initiative to make information about police services more widely available. The Department, for example, will seek to assure that older residents are informed about the Home Safe and Senior Alert services. The Department will also collaborate with the Council on Aging and BrooklineCAN in encouraging older residents to attend Senior Citizen Police Academies. The Department will use both traditional print media and online outreach to keep seniors informed about important public safety issues.

## **PARKS AND OPEN SPACE**

The Brookline Parks and Open Space Division is committed to supporting the interests and needs of all users, including seniors and elderly residents of the community. They work to ensure that each of 50 properties under their control, which includes many parks, several sanctuary or conservation areas, a golf course, and a historic cemetery, is safe, handicapped accessible, and well maintained for both passive and active recreational use. The Parks Department recognizes that healthy activity among older residents contributes significantly to their health and well-being.

### **Part I**

The Parks and Open Space Division completed a plan in 2006 which assessed the level of service in existing parks and open space areas and which enabled the Division and the Parks and Recreation Commission to set priorities and policies for its programs and facilities through 2015 and beyond. The survey determined that over 90% of the Town area is within walking distance to a park, open space, or recreation area which is particularly important for seniors. Many of our parks and open spaces are also convenient to public transportation. Almost all of our parks have a play area for seniors to access with grandchildren, and seniors may chose to go to a park that allows them to let their dogs off-leash during certain hours or they may go to a park with no dogs.

The restoration of existing parks and the creation of new parks, including one which is now underway, are done to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and be fully accessible for those who have any physical handicaps.



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### **Part II**

The Parks and Open Space Division and the Parks and Recreation Commission hold extensive public meetings when renovating or creating a new park. In addition, the Parks and Recreation Commission has several members who are senior citizens. When planning the new park that is currently being constructed, they included the following age friendly aspects: some parking that was reasonably close to the park facilities; eliminating steep or uneven terrain; including some passive recreation and seating areas; and accessible restrooms.

### **Part III**

The Parks and Open Space Division also continues to maintain trees planted between the sidewalks and streets throughout town. This provides shade for walkers. As parks are renovated, features for seniors and handicapped park users are added if they are not already present.

### **Needs Assessment and Planning**

To provide the basis for efforts to make Brookline parks more age-friendly, we will take the following steps:

- 1. Make an Inventory of age-friendly features of Brookline parks.** The aim of this project is to catalog the features of Brookline's many parks with respect to their age-friendly features. This is a substantial task because of the large number of parks of varying sizes and varying features. We will develop a check list of features including benches, paths, special attractions, parking, and rest rooms. We will recruit, train, and deploy volunteers who will collect the information using the check list. In addition to tabulating the objective data, we will debrief the volunteers to obtain their observations on features that attract or detract from use of parks. We will prepare a report in which we both identify strengths of various parks and identify opportunities to make the parks more age-friendly.
- 2. Survey older residents about use of parks and park preferences.** We have included questions on park use and park feature preferences in a survey mailed in August 2012 to all households in Brookline with an older resident. Through the survey we are able to gain information about patterns of current park use and to learn about park features that attract older residents.
- 3. Analyze the age-friendly features of parks within close proximity to large concentrations of older residents.** The aim of this project is to assure access for older residents to attractive open space within walking distance from their residences. The project will be linked to the inventory of age-friendly features described above and the pedestrian access study described in the transportation section. Our interest is in assuring that open spaces are close to large concentrations of older people and that they are accessible for pedestrians and that have features that are attractive to older residents. With the assistance of the Department of Planning and Community Development we have identified five concentrations of older residents by drawing upon U.S. census data and our knowledge of the location of multiunit residential buildings. Most of the concentrations of older

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residents are in the Beacon Street Corridor. One is in the Boylston Street corridor near Brookline Village. We will use our check lists to document conditions. In addition, we will observe use of these parks and spaces by older residents. Further, we will interview older park users and older neighborhood residents about features that attract or detract from the parks or open space. On the basis of this project, we expect to gain insights about how pedestrian access might be improved and how park/open space features might be improved.

**Anticipated Action.** On the basis of our findings, we will develop an action plan. Among the possibilities is that we will identify features that can be added in some parks or features that can be improved to make those parks more attractive to seniors. We may also identify some feasible transportation options that make some parks more accessible to older residents. We may also identify some new activities that can be offered in some parks to make them more attractive to older residents. Collaboration with the Recreation Department in offering those activities is a possibility. On the basis of our better understanding of patterns of park use by older residents and improvements that we are able to make, we will be encouraging greater use of parks by older residents. Although Brookline parks are already appreciated and extensively used by older residents, we expect to be encouraging even greater use.

## **RECREATION**

The Town of Brookline's Recreation Department is inviting and accessible to people of all ages, abilities, and income levels. We recognize that recreation is a vital resource, in particular for our older residents. The Recreation Department offers opportunities from introduction to advanced level, leisure trips and events, as well as social opportunities throughout the year.

### **Part I Recreation Offerings**

Home to the first indoor public swimming pool in the country, Brookline offers aquatic opportunities for the beginner to the master swimmer. The pool facility has three pools in an handicapped accessible building. One is shallow water and is kept at a warm temperature, which provides opportunities for the non-swimmer, as well as rehabilitation and arthritis-specific classes. The larger swimming pool is ADA compliant and includes accessible lifts for swimmers who need assistance getting in or out of the water. Many active Seniors also enjoy using the Town's 18 Hole public golf course which provides both pull carts and gas carts for players to use. The course encourages players of all ages and is host to Men's and Women's Senior leagues, among others. In addition, the Town offers tennis lessons, recreational, and league play on its indoor and outdoor tennis courts. This includes some courts with clay surfaces that can be easier on aging joints. In conjunction with the Brookline Senior Center, the Recreation Department arranges bus trips twice a month for Seniors to go to sporting events, museums, and to shop. The Department also regularly offers health and wellness classes that are appropriate for Seniors.

### **Part II Process**

The Recreation Department continually works to increase its offerings to seniors by partnering with the Senior Center, participating in the regularly scheduled public meetings of the Parks and Recreation

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Commission to discuss new programs or problems with the public, and encouraging Seniors to volunteer to help with the recreation programs for children. The Parks and Recreation Commission has set discounted fees for Seniors (60+) as well as a generous financial aid program to encourage participation.

### **Part III Future Efforts**

The Recreation Department is always looking for ways to support the Brookline Community in developing and maintaining healthy lifestyles. In 2006, the Department participated in the process to create a Brookline Parks, Open space and Recreation Strategic Master Plan. Through that process, they looked closely at access to recreation services and the needs of people with disabilities, which often overlap with the needs of Seniors. Together with the Parks and Recreation Commission they have set policies that directly reflect the importance of our Seniors.

### **Conclusion**

Recognizing that keeping active and healthy is important in all stages of life, the Brookline Recreation Department offers year-round indoor and outdoor access for Seniors to engage at their personal level of ability in swimming, walking, sports or health and wellness classes. The Department plans to continue to offer opportunities for healthy living to Seniors and, where possible, to expand those opportunities.

## **PROPERTY TAX RELIEF FOR SENIORS**

### **Part I Existing Initiatives**

As the town department responsible for assessing our \$15 billion tax base and apportioning a \$163 million annual tax levy, the Board of Assessors knows about the cost and benefits of providing government services to our residents and of the challenges many of our taxpayers face in paying their proportionate share of the burden. Massachusetts law does provide a number of tax relief programs that the assessors manage together with other department or agencies as needed.

Among the tax relief programs available, many are targeted at our senior citizens based on certain age, income and asset limit requirements with an aim to allowing seniors a greater chance to stay in their homes as long as possible. Each year the Board of Assessors presents an article at the annual town meeting seeking authorization to increase the state statutory property tax exemption amounts by 100 percent. For one surviving spouse and elderly tax exemption of \$175, town meeting approves an increase to \$350 and for another senior exemption of \$500; town meeting approves an increase to \$1,000. The total amount of these additional exemption amounts is shifted to all other taxpayers.

Additional programs include a tax deferral option for certain eligible seniors to defer all or part of their annual property tax in each or any year. The tax deferral program allows seniors to stay in their home longer and does not shift the tax to others, but instead postpones the payment, with interest, until the property is sold.

A recent addition to the town's senior taxpayer relief efforts was the adoption of a senior tax work-off program that was co-sponsored by the Board of Assessors and the Council on Aging starting in 2009.

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### **Part II. Participation of Seniors**

Currently there are 30 seniors, 60-years old or older - including one who is 90-years old - in the senior tax work-off program. Taxpayers who participate in the program earn up to \$1,000 in tax relief in exchange for working in a town department for 125 hours. The program has benefitted both the senior taxpayer and the participating town department. To date, town departments who have hosted seniors have ranged from the selectmen's office to town counsel, finance, fire department, recreation, public library, and the senior center. The success of the program has attracted additional departments, who have expressed interest in hosting a senior worker. The work has ranged from basic clerical duties to more advanced office responsibilities requiring computer knowledge or training, to writing manuals and providing guidance and training to other seniors on matters of personal financial management.

The benefits of helping seniors remain in their homes and their community is directly related to the quality of life and well-being for all town residents. Seniors provide a needed perspective on community-wide decisions and knowledge of historic actions taken or contemplated by town leaders. Brookline residents in general are active in local affairs and appreciate the resources provided by the town and its array of public and private organizations. The Brookline Senior Center is not just a place to go to; it is a resource of the town. Helping seniors stay in their home longer provides stability to neighborhoods and creates awareness among neighbors of the needs of others.

Participation in the tax exemption and tax deferral programs for older residents is modest. The Board of Assessors makes persistent efforts to inform residents about the tax relief options that it offers. The modest participation suggests that eligible homeowners remain uninformed.

### **Part III. Plans and Aspirations**

Further efforts to inform residents about tax exemption and tax deferral programs appear warranted. The information-dissemination action agenda of the Brookline Age-Friendly Cities program will include reinforcement of the Board of Assessors efforts to inform older homeowners about these tax exemption and tax deferral programs.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

### **Part I Existing Resources**

Brookline has an extensive network of roads, sidewalks, and parking lots to serve pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. The Town has approximately 100 miles of streets including 154 miles of sidewalks. With the exception of two highways that are state responsibilities (Beacon Street and Boylston Street), the streets are maintained by the Town of Brookline. To accommodate the need for parking in the main commercial areas, the Town maintains 13 parking lots with 615 spaces. In addition, the Town operates a metered-on-street parking system in the major commercial areas. Increasingly, bicycle racks are being provided in commercial areas.

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Brookline is also well served by public transportation. Light rail service is offered by the MBTA to Brookline residents on three branches of the Green line. Two of the lines make frequent stops. Each of the lines runs on an east-west route that travels from Boston to Newton to the west. The MBTA also operates a number of bus routes through Brookline. The most important route connects Brookline with Cambridge.

Specialized transportation is also available for those who cannot use fixed-route public transportation services. The Brookline Senior Center operates both a minibus and a van. On an hourly basis, the minibus provides rides to varied destinations in Brookline. The MBTA offers a paratransit service to destinations throughout its catchment area. Eligibility is limited to those with low income and chronic health care needs. On a limited basis, subsidized taxi services are available to some low-income older residents. The Boston Independent Transportation Network is a new specialized transportation service that offers individualized transportation at rates that are below those of commercial services.

Town transportation policy is established by its Transportation Board. The Board offers residents opportunities to be heard on transportation concerns on issues ranging from parking, automobile congestion, pedestrian street crossings, street maintenance, speed control, bicycle accommodations, and timing of traffic lights.

### **Part II Age-Friendly Features**

Several established transportation policies particularly benefit seniors:

- The MBTA offers reduced rates to seniors
- As described above, some specialized transportation for seniors is provided at nominal rates
- Brookline is engaged in a multi-year program to repair or replace sidewalks.
- Pedestrian crosswalks are repainted twice a year
- In commercial areas the Town has been very aggressive in installing street furnishings such as benches, trash receptacles, and bicycle racks.
- Special permits are available to those providing eldercare to park freely on Brookline streets (parking on streets is otherwise highly restricted)

Some continuing transportation challenges are of particular concern to seniors:

- Specialized transportation programs for those who do not drive and cannot use basic public transportation are limited in scope and are precariously financed. User fees for the MBTA's paratransit service are prohibitive for low-income consumers.
- In spite of the Town's efforts with sidewalks and pedestrian street crossings, pedestrians remain at risk of falling on sidewalks or being struck by motor vehicles and bicycles at street crossings.
- Pedestrians who need to rest frequently are not always able to find benches that provide rest opportunities.
- Some traffic lights do not provide slow-moving pedestrians with sufficient time to cross streets.

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### **Part III Proposed Initiatives**

#### **1. Improved Pedestrian Access in Areas with Large Concentrations of Older People.**

The aim of the project is to strengthen pedestrian access from large multi-unit residential buildings to shopping, public transportation, and parks/open space in selected sections of Brookline with dense concentrations of older people. The initiative will include attention to the special challenges experienced by the many older people with low vision. The project will be concerned with condition of sidewalks, safety hazards associated with tree roots and tree wells, low-hanging tree limbs over sidewalks, hedges and other shrubbery that encroach on sidewalks, pedestrian assistance in street crossings, and benches that provide resting opportunities. The position of benches will be assessed positively when the location of benches provides guidance to low-vision elders and negatively when the placement of the benches poses an obstacle for those with low vision. The project will be carried out in conjunction with the project described in the Parks and Open Space section of this proposal concerned with pedestrian access to parks and open space. The project will draw on census and assessors data to identify concentrations of older residents. Trained volunteers using structured observational methods will document conditions. Recommendations will be developed to improve pedestrian access in the study areas. Results will be reported to the Transportation and Highway Divisions who will be encouraged to adopt recommendations and prepare for implementation. A guide will be prepared for residents to encourage walking, identify safe pedestrian routes, and identify safe walking strategies.

#### **2. Improved Specialized Transportation Options.**

A study will be conducted to examine the strengths and limitations of current transportation resources for Brookline residents who do not drive and who are not fully served by the MBTA's fixed transportation routes. The study will include attention to the van and Elderbus service provided by the Council on Aging, the MBTA's Ride service as it serves Brookline residents, the subsidized taxi fare program offered to low-income older residents, and the new Independent Transportation Network. The project will be concerned with such matters as the extent to which needs are addressed, cost constraints, and scheduling constraints. While the emphasis will be on transportation assistance needed by older residents, the project will be concerned also with needs of other populations. Based on the findings, recommendations will be made to strengthen these services. Information will be prepared to inform residents how to make use of these services effectively.

#### **3. Consider Establishing a Standing Town Pedestrian committee.**

The Transportation Board is being asked to consider the creation of a standing pedestrian committee as a way of assuring continuing attention to pedestrian issues. To assess this proposal, the Board asked to look at the experiences of other municipalities that have standing pedestrian committees. The Board is being asked to consider how this proposed new committee might build on the useful contributions of the Brookline Bicycle committee which reports to the Transportation Board.

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### **4. Extra Time for Street Crossings for Older People and Those with Disabilities.**

We will examine the feasibility of a demonstration project to use RFID technology to permit pedestrians with disabilities to request more time for street crossings at selected locations. The approach is in use in Singapore. We will obtain information on experiences with this program in Singapore and elsewhere. If the evidence is favorable, we will encourage consideration of use of the method in at least one location in Brookline.

## **PARTICIPATION**

Brookline has a representative Town Meeting form of government. Of the 250 elected Town Meeting members, the median age is about 60. This form of government involves a great deal of interaction and attendance at meetings, hearings, and the Town Meeting itself, which is held twice a year for several nights each time. Seniors are heavily represented in this process, particularly at Town Meeting which has the ultimate authority for Town bylaws and the Town budget. In addition, the Town runs with a great deal of volunteer effort on the part of many people, many of whom are seniors, who serve on our boards and commissions.

There are many programs in Brookline that encourage social participation either specifically geared for senior citizens or for people of all ages. Of the Town's population of roughly 59,000 people, 10,700 are age 60 or older. The Town funds a Senior Center building run by the Council on Aging, which not only offers many classes and activities for seniors each day but which also serves as an informal meeting place for senior citizens. The Council on Aging includes 25 citizen members, almost all of whom are seniors, and representatives from the Board of Selectmen, the School Department, the Health Department, the Library, the Recreation department, and the Housing Authority. The Council partners with the Recreation Department, the Adult Education division of the School Department, and others to increase its activities for seniors. It strives to meet the diverse needs of differing ethnic groups within our senior population and differing levels of physical fitness.

### **Part I**

The Senior Center offers a full day of activities Monday through Friday. These include physical activities such as strength training, stretching, line dancing, and yoga. They also include quieter activities such as bridge, scrabble, poetry, painting, and films. There are specific programs offered for the significant senior population that consists of Asian, Russian, and Hispanic immigrant groups, and there is some programming for the gay and lesbian senior population. The Senior Center has formed partnerships with the Town's Recreation Department to provide bus trips for seniors twice a month to sporting events, museums, or for shopping trips. They have also formed a partnership with Center Communities of Brookline (see below) to have a Theater Club that provides transportation to theater events twice a month. The Adult Education division of the Brookline Public Schools offers an array of classes that seniors can participate in, including some on photography and computer usage that take place in the Senior Center. Five days a week the Senior Center also offers a hot lunch program for seniors, which is subsidized by the federal government. Beverages and light fare, such as bagels or muffins, are also

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available mornings at the Center. Periodically, the Center has musical events, and it brings in counselors to help seniors with Medicare paperwork. Many hundreds of senior citizens use the Senior Center. It has 313 volunteers to help with its programs, many of whom are senior citizens themselves. Frequently, the younger, more active seniors plan and help run programs for the more elderly seniors. The Center has a staff of 10 full-time employees, including its director Ruthann Dobek, and a number of part-time employees. The Senior Center has a van that offers many seniors transportation to and from the Center. In addition, the Council on Aging administers a program using federal Community Development Block Grant funds to provide low cost taxi vouchers for seniors who are income eligible. These resources are also described above in the Transportation section.

The Center Communities of Brookline, sponsored by Hebrew Senior Life, offers affordable, non-denominational apartments and services for independent senior living. (These resources received attention above in the Housing section.) They have three buildings with housing in Brookline, two of which are dedicated to senior apartments. They offer residents exercise programs, help with personal or housekeeping matters if necessary and the opportunity to get medical care within the building if necessary. Non-residents may join some of these programs for a fee. In addition to the many activities offered within their buildings, the Center Community buildings are very close to public transportation so their seniors can participate in activities around the Boston area.

The Brookline Housing Authority offers apartments for affordable housing for seniors or disabled people, if the head-of-household is over 60 or disabled and with limited income. This housing is subsidized by the state and federal governments. (See housing section)

The Town of Brookline in partnership with the Council on Aging offers a limited number of senior citizens the opportunity to reduce their real estate property taxes by working for the Town up to 1000 hours. These seniors enjoy the chance to get out and know the Town better while reducing their tax burden.

The Brookline Community Aging Network (BrooklineCAN) is a member-driven, volunteer organization that provides opportunity for older people to participate in Brookline life. BrooklineCAN promotes independent living and quality of life for older residents. A principal purpose is to ensure that older Brookline residents remain a vital part of the town's social, cultural, and civic life. BrooklineCAN also works with town departments, businesses, and other organizations to make the town a better place to live for all Brookline residents.

BrooklineCAN incorporates many of the features of "village" programs that have been developed by older residents of many communities in the United States. BrooklineCAN is distinctive among these organizations in its close relationship to the Brookline Council on Aging, a Town department which offers strong support services to residents. By offering membership at a nominal cost, BrooklineCAN seeks to enroll all older residents and those who are supportive of older residents. Through its livable community agenda, BrooklineCAN also calls attention to Brookline's age-friendly features and encourages the Town to strengthen those features.



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BrooklineCAN draws upon the well-educated, older professionals who are Brookline residents and participate as volunteers. BrooklineCAN will be the source of the volunteers who will perform the major work of the Town's Age-Friendly Cities initiative. In less than two years, BrooklineCAN has attracted 350 members. Many churches and synagogues in Brookline, as well as the nearby colleges and universities offer additional programs and classes for seniors.

### **Part II**

The activities at the Town's Senior Center are governed by the Council on Aging, a majority senior citizen organization which holds public meetings each month. In addition, many activities there are suggested or staffed by the 313 senior volunteers who help keep the Senior Center running.

### **Part III**

There is a wide-spread sense that though there are many offerings for seniors in Brookline, the challenge is how to let seniors know these programs exist, particularly since new seniors regularly move into Brookline to retire. The weekly newspaper in Town publishes a section for seniors which might be increased. The Council on Aging also publishes some resource books for seniors, a printed monthly newsletter, and information on the Town's website. The concept of having an annual information fair for seniors is one idea that is under discussion.

The Council on Aging also plans to regularly review itself to ensure that it is following best practices at the Senior Center and to address new issues for seniors as they arise. It hopes to continue to expand its hours of operation and its program offerings for seniors.

### **Summary**

There are myriad opportunities for senior citizens in Brookline to engage in social interactions. The challenge is to make sure these seniors can get to and from these activities and that they are able to easily find out what is available. The Council on Aging's Senior Center, funded primarily by the Town, is the focal point for many of the opportunities for social interaction and as an information conduit for other programs around Town.

In the future, the Council on Aging hopes to continue to find better ways to get information to seniors as to the resources and events that are available and which may be of particular interest to them. An annual information fair, expanded print materials and an expanded web site presence are all under discussion.

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### **Building Design Modifications for Low-Vision Elders**

To better accommodate older people with low vision, we will encourage feasible modifications of public and commercial buildings in Brookline. We are concerned about both obstacles within buildings that may be hazardous for those with low vision and the potential for providing tactile cues that facilitate safe and effective navigation by older people with low vision. Brookline already has made substantial efforts in its public buildings to comply with requirements of the Americans with Disability Act (ADA). In this initiative, we will emphasize useful guidelines that go beyond current ADA requirements. We will be concerned with such matters as sharp contrasts between brightly illuminated and dark spaces, the use of color contrasts and tactile cues to identify the leading edge of steps, and hand rails that are easily identified without shiny surfaces that can be a source of glare.

We will be concerned initially with public buildings that are extensively used by older people with low vision. These buildings include Town Hall, the main and branch libraries, and the Senior Center. To address our concerns about the entrances and interiors of these buildings, we will establish a task force that includes representation of the Town's Building department, an expert on environmental design for low-vision elders, and low-vision elders. The task force will inspect the buildings to identify their current strengths and limitations in serving elders with low vision. Needs for design improvements will be identified. Cost-effective solutions will be identified. Plans will be made to implement the proposed design improvements. When design improvements have been made, we will ask elders with low vision to test their effectiveness.

We will publicize successful design modifications in public buildings to encourage owners of commercial building to undertake a similar process to make their buildings more accessible to those with low vision.

### **ACTION AGENDA**

#### **More Effective Dissemination of Information**

We are proposing an action agenda to disseminate information about Brookline's age-friendly features. Brookline already has remarkable age-friendly features. The service environment is so rich, complex, and decentralized that residents are challenged to identify needed service resources. The Town is already invested heavily in strategies to disseminate information about its services. Town departments make extensive use of print media and the internet to disseminate information about services. The Council on Aging provides a great deal of information to residents through telephone communication. The Council on Aging also employs professional social workers who provide some individual counseling on a face-to-face basis. In collaboration with the Senior Center, BrooklineCAN offers educational programs on topics of concern to older residents. The Senior Center issues a monthly newsletter in print form. BrooklineCAN distributes its own monthly newsletter that is primarily distributed electronically. Some

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Town departments, notably the Senior Center and the Library place extensive information about their services in the local weekly newspaper.

Some of the information challenge stems from incomplete information about services offered by Town departments. Staff members in various departments frequently have incomplete information on services offered by other Town departments.

Through the Age-Friendly Cities agenda, we have already increased communication among staff members in various departments on matters involving older residents. We will encourage all of those involved in disseminating information on age-related matters to share information with one another and to reinforce various information dissemination activities. Our premise is that residents often need to receive information repeatedly from multiple sources before they absorb it fully. For this reason, we will be emphasizing departmental cooperation and use of multiple media in disseminating information about Town services offered to older residents. This multidepartment collaboration on information dissemination will include all the departments that are part of this initiative: Council on Aging, Health, Police, Transportation, Board of Assessors, Planning and Community Development, Parks, and Recreation. Over the next several years, we hope that other departments will join the effort to strengthen communication.

We will assess the effectiveness of our information dissemination efforts by measuring the extent of use of services where ever possible. We will monitor statistics on use of such services as the home care program offered by the Council on Aging, exercise programs offered at the Senior Center, flu shots received by older residents at clinics sponsored by the Health Department, and the book delivery program offered by the library to home-bound residents.

### **Needs Assessment and Planning**

As indicated above, we will conduct need assessment/planning projects concerned with health (fall prevention), housing (innovative elder housing models), transportation (pedestrian access and specialized transportation), parks (park features and access), and public buildings (as they serve elders with low vision). On the basis of these information collection and planning efforts, we will be developing additional action agendas over the next two years. We will be emphasizing action agendas that can be pursued effectively on a sustainable basis.