



## Toward Building a Livable Community for All Ages

### Age-Friendly Evanston Action Plan

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Age-Friendly Task Force and the City of Evanston

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#### Age-Friendly Action Plan Supporters

A full list of Age-Friendly Action Plan supporters is provided in Appendix 1.



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## Introduction

The United States, along with the rest of the world is aging. A number of factors are contributing to this trend: increased longevity, declining birth rates and the baby boom that occurred between 1946 and 1964. During that time period, 76.4 million individuals were born. The oldest of this cohort is now 70 and the youngest, 47. By 2030 there will be approximately 72.7 million older individuals in the United States, accounting for roughly 20% of the total population. Cities and towns around the world, including Evanston, are taking steps to prepare for this unprecedented growth of the older adult population. The City of Evanston launched the Age-Friendly Evanston initiative in 2013 to ensure that Evanston will continue to be both a good place to grow up and a good place to grow old.

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### What is an Age-Friendly Community?

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The World Health Organization describes an age-friendly city as one that “...encourages active ageing by optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. In practical terms an age-friendly city adapts its structures and services to be accessible to and inclusive of older people with varying needs and capacities.”

Age-friendly cities embrace a culture that challenges ageism and its negative stereotypes of older adults. An age-friendly city is committed to continual improvement of its physical, social and health environment to provide a high quality of life for all residents.

The City of Evanston chose to join the World Health Organization (WHO) global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities and to develop an Age-Friendly Action Plan in alignment with WHO principals and guidelines. The WHO has identified eight aspects of city life to evaluate in terms of age-friendliness: outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information, and community support and health services.



Cities and Communities that participate in the WHO network complete a self-evaluation of these age friendly aspects of city life and commit to develop and implement an initial 3 year Age-Friendly Action Plan of improvement. The City of Evanston received approval of its application to the WHO Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities in December, 2014. In April, 2015 Evanston joined AARP's Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities as well.

#### WHO GLOBAL NETWORK OF AGE-FRIENDLY CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

- ▲ Global Cities: 284
- ▲ Countries: 33
- ▲ U.S Cities: 45
- ▲ Total Population: 113 million



## The Community Context

Evanston is a densely populated, economically and socially diverse community located north of Chicago on Lake Michigan. With a vibrant community comprising many strong neighborhoods, races, religions and levels of income and a highly engaged citizenry, Evanston is a desirable place to live for long-time residents and new arrivals.

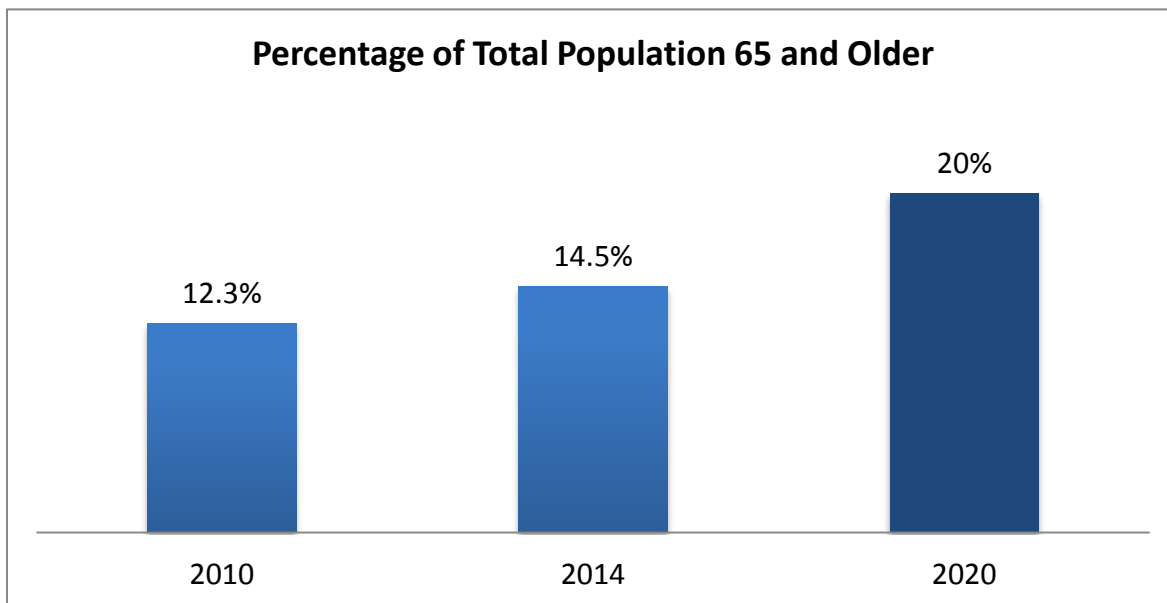
Evanston residents, like 94% of the older adult population nationwide, want to “age in place,” meaning they want to grow old where they have lived for years. As Evanston plans for the future, it is critically important to address both the opportunities and challenges of a growing aging population. This includes fully utilizing the resources, skills, and experience of older adults by including them in the civic, social, and economic fabric of the city along with providing for special needs.

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### Population Statistics

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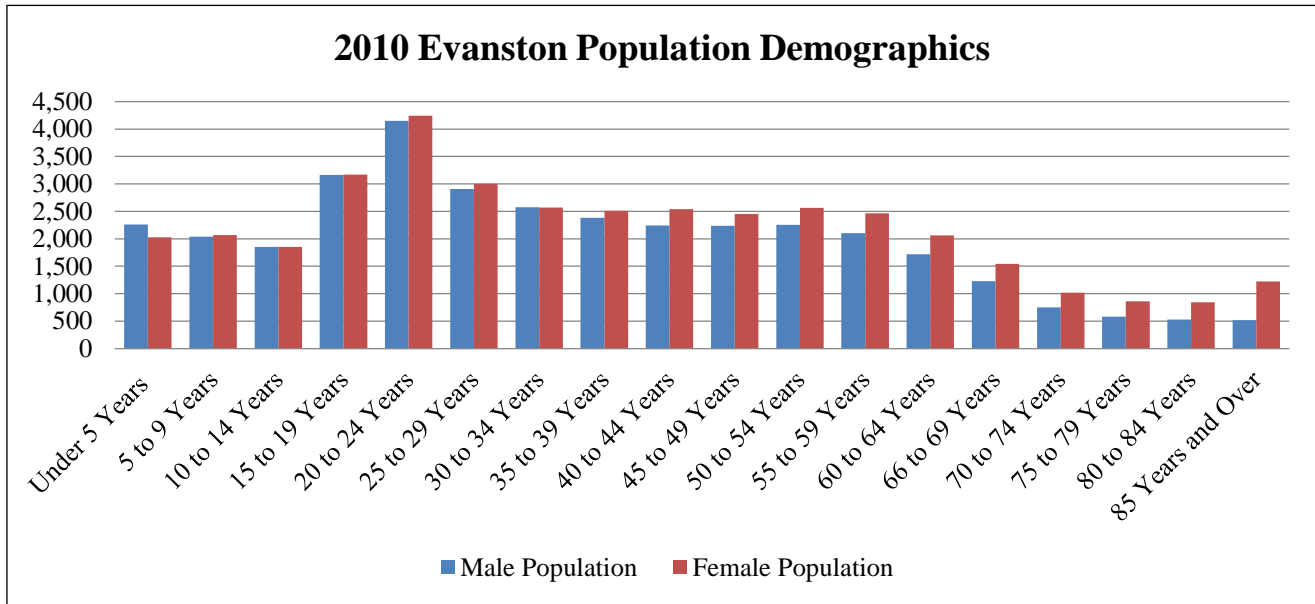
In 2010, Evanston had a population of 9,201 (12.3%) who were 65 years or older, as depicted in the graph below. Evanston’s current population of older adults is an important part of our community. A projected growth of 5.5% from 2014 to 2020 is expected in accordance with total U.S. population trends.<sup>1</sup> According to the 2010 City of Evanston Census, there was a total population of 74,486, comprised of 60% females and 40% males.



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<sup>1</sup> Ortman, et. al. *An Aging nation: The Older Population in the United States*. United States Census Bureau, 2014.





## Why is Being Age-Friendly Important?

The goal of the Action Plan is to educate, encourage, promote, recognize and implement improvements that will make Evanston more user-friendly not only for elder residents but for residents of all ages. Communities that fare best in the 21st century will be those that both tackle the challenges and embrace the positive possibilities that an aging population creates. Evanston is working to be more age-friendly for a variety of reasons described below.

### *The Boomers are Coming! The Boomers are Coming!*

As the largest historical generation of older people in the county age, making communities more age-friendly must become a more central goal; life expectancies are increasing and birth rates are decreasing. Evanston needs to be proactive about how to handle this increase in number of older adults and think creatively about how to best support people into a very old age.

### *It's good for residents of all ages and abilities*

People of all ages and abilities benefit when communities have features that make them more livable. A community that is truly livable for an 80-year-old is also livable for an 8-year-old, and everyone in between.

### *It's a plan for short-term and long-term needs*

Making communities more livable is a long-term process which will take vision, thoughtful planning and entrepreneurial attitudes. There is no one, quick solution that will work for all communities.

Applying an 'age-friendly lens' is a way of planning for both the short-term and long-term needs of all residents over the span of their lifetime.

*Age-Friendly Cities promote connection to home, family and community*

Livable communities enjoy stability and social cohesion. Residents can remain independent and socially active for as long as possible.

*There is an economic value*

Livable communities foster economic development and sustainable commerce. Evanston believes these qualities attract tourists and retirees. Property values rise. Retailers thrive. Everyone benefits from having jobs, shopping, health care, recreation and volunteer opportunities close to home.



# Planning Process

## Age-Friendly Task Force

The Action Plan was developed by the Evanston Age-Friendly Task Force (Task Force). The Task Force began its work in January 2014<sup>1</sup> following appointment by Mayor Tisdahl and approval by the City Council in December 2013. The Task Force members and their focus areas are listed on Page 3 of this Action Plan. The Task Force was asked to develop a three-year Age-Friendly Action Plan aligned with the City's livability goals and the standards set by WHO and AARP. The Action Plan is the result of over two years of work to evaluate, analyze and develop recommendations to make Evanston a more age-friendly city. The plan recommendations are based on data collected through work groups, focus groups, professional roundtable discussions and two surveys.

The Task Force met monthly as a whole throughout the planning process. In addition, individual members formed working groups that met separately around each of the eight WHO age-friendly domains. More than 50 community members participated in the working groups and provided valuable assistance to identify issues and needs, gather additional information and develop recommendations for the Action Plan.

Input and feedback was gathered to assess Evanston's current condition and identify strategies to make Evanston more age-friendly. Feedback was sought from older adults of different ages, income levels, and abilities; caregivers; and volunteers, businesses, social service and health providers and city services. To collect the needed information, the Task Force, with support of their workings groups, conducted outreach including:

- ▲ Focus groups at community centers, senior housing, retirement communities, and community/social groups including the Levy Senior Center, Fleetwood-Jourdain Community Center, Foster Senior Club, North Shore Village, Ebenzer-Primm Tower, Jacob Blake Manor, Jane Perlman Apartments, Victor Walchirk Apartments, The Merion, Greenwood Care, Albany Care, Over the Rainbow, St. Nicholas Church, Walking in Evanston and Women Out Walking.
- ▲ Roundtable discussions with leaders and staff of social service organizations and health providers serving Evanston residents including North Shore Senior Center, Evanston Skokie Valley Senior Services, Housing Authority of Cook County, the Mather, North Shore Retirement Home, North Shore Village, Open Communities, Presbyterian Home, Services for Adults Staying in Their Homes (SASI), Senior Connections, Three Crowns, Visiting Angles, Greenwood Care, Over the Rainbow, JJs List, CJE Seniorlife, and McGaw YMCA.

### Task Force Guiding Principles

- ▲ Recommendations will Reflect Input from Community
- ▲ Seek Out Partnerships to Complement and Enhance Efforts
- ▲ Work to Address Fixable Problems throughout process

<sup>1</sup> Task Force roster, meeting agendas and minutes can be found in the Appendix.

- ▲ Community Survey, Administered October, 2013. The survey was offered in print and on-line. There were 324 responses.
- ▲ Community Survey, Administered May, 2015. The survey was offered in print, online, available by calling 311, and was offered in Spanish as well as English. The survey was keyed to the WHO domains. The survey was distributed in a print version at all Evanston libraries, the Levy Center, Fleetwood-Jourdain, Ebenzer-Primm Tower, Jacob Blake Manor, Jane Perlman Apartments, Victor Walchirk Apartments, Three Crowns, Westminster Place, The Mather, The Merion and at several buildings that meet the definition of NORC (Naturally Occurring Retirement Community). It was publicized on line and by Northshore Village, and other organizations in the community that provide services for older adults. There were 402 responses.
- ▲ Community outreach at ward meetings, community centers, faith communities, and other venues including: the 6<sup>th</sup> Ward, 5<sup>th</sup> Ward, the 2014 & 2015 Aging Well Conference, Levy Center, Fleetwood Jourdain, the 2014 Northshore Village Meals at Home annual meeting, St. Matthews Church American Society on Aging regional meeting and the 2016 ASA national meeting.
- ▲ A summary of the survey results was published by the City of Evanston in May of 2014. The Survey Results and Focus group results are provided as Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 available online at [www.cityofevanston.org/agefriendly](http://www.cityofevanston.org/agefriendly).



## Findings

The clearest finding from the community outreach and data collection process is that older adults who live in Evanston want to stay in Evanston. The reasons people cited for wanting to stay are much the same as the reasons that attract people to Evanston.

However, the Task Force found that while the advantages of Evanston are many, there are also challenges that can impede residents' ability to remain in the community. Increasingly unaffordable housing and the lack of affordable and accessible transportation were the top two cited issues. According to the 2015 survey responses, 43% of respondents reported housing to be the most critical measure in the Evanston community and 28% viewed transportation as the most critical standard of age-friendliness.

Another common theme that became evident in the outreach process was the difficulty residents had in accessing information across a broad range of sectors, including healthcare, social services, activities and opportunities for engagement. The inability to access information contributes to isolation and underutilization of resources and opportunities that exist. We also heard many complaints about street, sidewalk and outdoor space maintenance, parking, and safety.

Based on the information collected, “FOUR A’S” were identified as critical for Evanston’s efforts to support an age-friendly community. These include the following: accountability, affordability, accessibility and actionability. Each theme as it pertains to an age friendly Evanston is described below.

▲ **Accountability:** Constant and careful monitoring of Evanston’s progress to implement the Action Plan is critical to ensure that it accurately reflects feedback received from the community. The Task Force will continue to meet quarterly to serve as a central point for coordinating implementation and progress monitoring including ongoing outreach and collaboration with community members. The Task Force will provide the Evanston City Council with an annual report of the Action Plan progress.

▲ **Affordability:** An environment that is age-friendly requires that access to resources, community services,

### Key Age-Friendly Issues in Evanston

- ▲ Housing Cost & Availability
- ▲ Transportation Gaps
- ▲ Communication Breakdown
- ▲ Poorly Designed and/or Maintained Outdoor Spaces



and other living options should be available to all residents. A number of provisions are already in place in Evanston, such as senior discounts, the benefit card, taxi coupons, etc. However, implementation of this Action Plan will address improvements needed in transportation, housing, social participation, and community/health services.

▲ **Accessibility:** Accessibility is both physical and non-physical. Physical accessibility describes residents' ability to move about the community and reach desired activities and destinations safely and easily. However, accessibility also relates to less tangible forms of access including access to community information, resources, and engagement in social and civic activities. The Action Plan addresses identified gaps in several domains, including outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, communications, respect and social inclusion, civic participation, and community and health services.

**Actionability:** The Action Plan focuses on improvements and enhancements needed to address Evanston's age-friendliness. The Task Force will collaborate with the City, existing working groups and community partners to develop specific timelines and responsibilities needed to fully implement the Action Plan. Several Action Areas require additional funding to fully implement the recommendations and all partners will be engaged to identify and secure the required resources.

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## How the Action Plan Will Be Used

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This Action Plan is intended to be an advocacy tool that outlines Evanston's next steps for supporting a community more inclusive of older adults and more sensitive to their needs. The recommendations support Evanston's existing local plans such as the City's 2008 Strategic Plan, Evanston Project for the Local Assessment of Needs Plan (EPLAN), Evanston Climate Action Plan, Bicycle Plan, HUD Consolidated Plan (Housing), and Neighborhood Plans. The Action Plan also complements the work of several City Boards, Committees and Commissions working in these areas. The Task Force will centralize the reporting of progress towards items in the Action Plan and will collaborate with existing and new efforts to support the Action Plan implementation.



## Age-Friendly Action Plan

The Age-Friendly Evanston Action Plan was developed to address the full breadth of issues affecting quality of life for the city's older adults. The Action Plan is divided into eight areas that incorporate the WHO domains in a way that addresses Evanston's specific context and needs. Each Action Area is described in detail with specific next steps that are needed to achieve the community's vision for an age-friendly city.

In some areas, the Age-Friendly Task Force has already begun to implement recommendations that were a direct result of the Action Planning process. Items that are in progress or are already completed have been summarized as appropriate.

Action Area 1	• Planning
Action Area 2	• Housing
Action Area 3	• Transportation
Action Area 4	• Communication
Action Area 5	• Community Support & Health Services
Action Area 6	• Outdoor Spaces & Buildings
Action Area 7	• Social & Civic Participation and Employment
Action Area 8	• Visioning

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## Action Area 1: Planning

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### *Background:*

Evanston is a well-established, developed community with continuous upgrades and enhancements to both public and private spaces. Programs and services are evolving and changing to meet the needs of the community. The City also has numerous processes that can impact private development to ensure it addresses the community's values. These processes include the approval of large developments through the Planned Development Process and the Design and Project Review Committee.



Incorporating age-friendly considerations into projects and services is most efficiently done during the planning phase. For example, when the City undertakes a park improvement project, it is easier to design the improvements to place seating near walkways and shade rather than trying to fit in these elements after the project has been designed.

### *Action Item 1.1 – Apply an Age-Friendly Lens to all Projects and Programs*

An age-friendly lens must be applied to all proposed city infrastructure projects in addition to new and refined community programs.

- ▲ Develop an Age-Friendly Checklist with input from stakeholders, interest groups and professionals.
- ▲ Work with relevant City departments to apply Age-Friendly Checklist to infrastructure planning and design and program evaluation and improvements.
- ▲ Make Age-Friendly Checklist publicly available to support the community's understanding and support for age friendly improvements.

**“Curb cut-outs** are helpful for those who cannot judge the height of curbs.”



### *Recommended Actions Already Under Way*

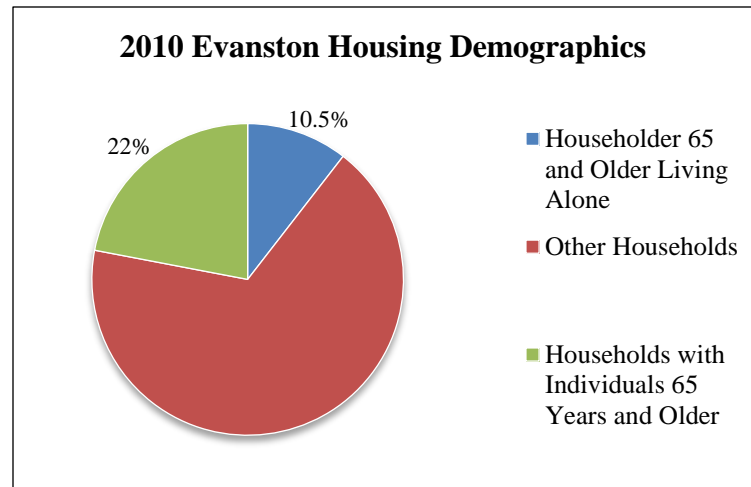
- ▲ The Working Group for Outdoor Spaces and Buildings developed a set of criteria to evaluate the age-friendliness of Evanston’s outdoor spaces and buildings. The Working Group visited each public park in Evanston during the spring and summer of 2015 and evaluated the park based on the age-friendly criteria. The Working Group shared their findings with the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Services and Staff has already acted on a number of recommendations for improvements in accessibility, safety and amenities. The findings are provided in Appendix 4 available online at [www.cityofevanston.org/agefriendly](http://www.cityofevanston.org/agefriendly).
- ▲ An attendee at one of the community outreach meetings pointed out that the PACE bus stop in front of the Levy Center can be a sea of mud in wet weather. The Working Group shared this information with the Public Works Department and the City installed a concrete pad at the bus shelter within a few days of the notice.
- ▲ The City of Evanston website is currently being upgraded and will incorporate changes that help older adults access the site. The Working Groups for Communications and Community Support and Health Services provided the City with recommendations for enhancing the City’s website for older adults.



## Action Area 2: Housing

### Background:

Local research and planning activities suggest that in order to house our aging population and make Evanston friendly to people of all ages and abilities, it is important to assure a full range of housing options that are planned and built to be accessible, affordable, healthy, secure, located near amenities and services and facilitate social interaction. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 32.5% of total households in Evanston included residents 65 years and older, 10.5% of which are living alone.<sup>1</sup> The 2009 Report of the Evanston Task Force on Affordable Housing<sup>2</sup> and the 2008 Business for the Public Interest<sup>3</sup> identified that access to affordable<sup>4</sup> and appropriate housing is an issue for older adults in Evanston. Key challenges include:



- ▲ Insufficient existing affordable and senior appropriate housing stock for Evanston’s current population.<sup>5</sup> Evanston lost over 3300 affordable housing units over a 10-year period (2004 - 2013), which has put dramatic pressure on senior residents looking to find suitable and affordable housing. However, the addition of 329 affordable units added from 2005-2015 has made a slight, but not significant, contribution to the availability of affordable and senior appropriate housing. Evanston’s Inclusionary Housing Ordinance requires 10% of the units in new, residential, mixed use rental and owner-occupied developments with five or more dwelling units, depending on location, to be affordable dwelling units; or developers may pay a fee in lieu of affordable units onsite to the City’s Affordable Housing Fund.
- ▲ Older adults and others on fixed incomes are unable to afford the costs associated with remaining in Evanston.<sup>6</sup> Approximately 30% of survey respondents said that they worry about being able to stay in their homes in Evanston due to cost.<sup>7</sup> Evanston’s Downpayment Assistance Program and the Rehabilitation Program both provide assistance for low income homeowners.

<sup>1</sup> City of Evanston Census: General Profile, Demographic Profile Data. *City of Evanston, 2010.*

<sup>2</sup> Evanston Affordable Housing Task Force (2009) Report submitted to City Council.

<sup>3</sup> Business and Professional People for the Public Interest Annual Report. *BPI, 2008.*

<sup>4</sup> Affordable Housing refers to housing units that are affordable by community residents whose income is below the median household income level.

<sup>5</sup> Community Development “Tools to Expand Affordable Housing” June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015 prepared by Sara Flax.

<sup>6</sup> Based on census date, the median cost of a house is \$395,000, and the median monthly rental is \$1057.

<sup>7</sup> Community Survey for Age Friendly Action Plan. *City of Evanston, 2015.*

- ▲ Increased need of support for older adults to remain in their own homes. Types of support range from access to home health care to adaptations to the homes such as ramps, modifications to bathrooms and kitchens, to overall home maintenance.
- ▲ Barriers to developing new affordable, senior housing. Developers are unable to secure land and financing to make the provision of affordable units. Cost effective and existing tools such as the State of Illinois Licenses program for Supportive Housing have been placed on hold for new waivers in the wake of the financial crisis beginning 2008.

“Affordable housing near transportation is rare.”

#### *Action Item 2.1 – Expand Affordable Housing through Community Land Trust*

Create affordable rental units for Evanston’s older adults using a Community Land Trust (CLT), which is a form of shared equity development and ownership designed to ensure that housing made affordable through public or philanthropic subsidies remains affordable over the long-term. The City should continue to fund and support on-going efforts to expand affordable housing.

- ▲ Develop multi-unit rental buildings which provide a flexible option for seniors who are on fixed or reduced incomes and no longer can adequately maintain their homes. There are many successful models of this type of housing, both local and national.
- ▲ Continue to work with organizations such as Community Partners for Affordable Housing (CPAH) and the Geometry in Construction program at ETHS to renovate existing homes and build affordable housing.
- ▲ Initiate the Buy Back Program to help individuals stay in their home. This program allows the homeowner to sell his or her house and land to the land trust, then buy the house back, lease the land, and remain in their own home. When the owner dies or moves, the home can be sold or bequeathed to the heirs, while the land remains in the land trust.
- ▲ Seek funding for operating support of Community Land Trust efforts aimed at creating more affordable housing units in Evanston.

#### *Action Item 2.2 – Expand Shared Housing Opportunities*

Increase shared housing opportunities in Evanston to help older adults meet the financial requirements of home ownership and allow individuals to age in place by creating available affordable rental stock, providing companionship and support, helping with chores, and offering older adults the opportunity to age in a community where they can share their experience and skills.

- ▲ Provide education and training to support shared housing by partnering with community organizations to train residents regarding landlord/tenant issues and property standards.
- ▲ Partner with a wide range of organizations to publicize and educate the community on the benefits of senior home sharing.



- ▲ Support communications and marketing of shared housing opportunities by developing and providing a well-designed portal for visibility and coordination of resources for shared housing, including services to match willing homeowners with individuals looking for rental space.
  - ▲ Partner with existing organizations to help with home repairs and/or modifications which are needed to expand shared housing. Improvements to enhance accessibility and affordability through energy efficiency upgrades are a top priority.
  - ▲ Continue to fund home sharing programs, such as Open Communities.
- ▲ Research and secure funds to support shared housing. Funding is needed for initial start-up and operations as well as to make home sharing affordable to low income seniors.
  - ▲ Provide health and safety support for shared housing by providing legal support, background checks, transportation resources, social and emotional resources, and medical resources; create partnerships with appropriate organizations where possible.

“We need **creative housing solutions** for those that fall in the middle of the economic spectrum.”

### *Action Item 2.3 – Expand Opportunities for Subsidized Assisted Living*

Subsidized Assisted Living units provide an alternative to nursing home care for low-income seniors and persons with disabilities. They combine apartment-style housing with personal care and other services so residents can live independently with minimal support at a lower cost than is available on the open market. This set-up makes it possible for residents to take part in decision-making about their health, living arrangements and financial planning.

- ▲ Develop or identify an on-going committee or working group to research the feasibility of establishing a facility in Evanston that provides subsidized assisted living.

- ▲ Research status of the current freeze on the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services “waiver” that would allow payment for services that are not routinely covered by Medicaid and work with legislators to un-freeze the waivers.
- ▲ Work with City staff, contractors, developers and other stakeholders to outline the requirements necessary to build an affordable assisted living facility.

*Action Item 2.4 – Explore Innovative Approaches to Expand Affordable Housing Options*

Build upon Evanston’s reputation a leader in sustainable, livable communities by encouraging innovative approaches to expanding affordable housing options for older adults.

- ▲ Encourage continued research and dialogue around “future-oriented” ideas to expand affordable housing for older adults.
- ▲ Research and explore emerging best practices and foster new innovations through design competitions and community design charrettes.
- ▲ Support demonstration projects that would test the appropriateness of innovative housing strategies for older adults in Evanston, such as intergenerational housing, all-age communities and flexible dwelling units.



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## Action Area 3: Transportation

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### *Background:*

An age-friendly community requires a transportation network that is accessible, affordable, safe and responsive to the changing needs of residents and visitors as they grow older. Evanston is fortunate to have a public transit system, private carriers serving various constituencies and other volunteer transportation services. Evanston is also a community that is pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly and continues to invest in non-motorized transportation. Research shows that older adults who no longer drive are at a greater risk of social isolation which, in turn, is documented as a major contributor to declining physical and mental health. Improving transportation is vital to older adults' mobility, quality of life and independence.

### *Action Item 3.1 – Define and Design a Comprehensive Intra-City Transportation Network with Connections to Outside Transportation Networks*

Engage partners and seek funding for a public-private initiative that would link existing transit services (i.e. CTA, PACE, Metra) with private and volunteer services to ensure regular access to shopping, health care, arts and culture, worship, entertainment and recreation.



- ▲ Conduct research to inventory and document existing transportation options and identify gaps and improvements needed.
- ▲ Develop partnerships and support ongoing communication to facilitate an inclusive, coordinated transportation network.
- ▲ Seek funding to implement transportation enhancements to address identified gaps with a focus on linking existing transit services with private and volunteer services.

“Drivers get very upset when I drive in the City on residential streets at 5-10 MPH below the limit. A campaign to **encourage respect** for safe driving would help.”

*Action Item 3.2 – Provide Safe and Efficient Mobility for all by Promoting Rules of the Road Education for Drivers, Bicyclists and Pedestrians*

- ▲ Design an education and enforcement strategy to demonstrate that Evanston is a safe and friendly environment for all modes of transportation.
- ▲ Develop and disseminate public education materials promoting tolerance and the rules of the road to all users.
- ▲ Collaborate with partners across the community including the city, schools, major employers, local businesses, community groups and the public to promote the program.
- ▲ Identify and set measures to evaluate success and regularly collect and report progress back to the community.



*Recommended Actions Already Under Way*

- ▲ The City of Evanston applied for and received a Transit Planning 4 All Grant to provide over \$85,000 in funding to research how the empowerment of older adults and individuals with disabilities at the transportation planning table can lead to improved levels of inclusion within our community. The grant is funded by the U.S. Administration for Community Living and managed in Partnership with the Federal Transit Administration. This grant will assist the City in understanding the routes and services needed by older adults and persons of all ages with physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities and the technology available to meet such travel demands.

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## Action Area 4: Communication

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### *Background:*

Communication and access to information is essential in keeping older adults connected to the community. Evanston has an extensive communication network which includes print and online communication, Evanston 311 non-emergency call center, a local cable channel, several community newspapers and countless community organizations that disseminate information to their constituents. However, surveys and focus groups identified many barriers for older adults accessing information. Improvements need to be made that consider the varying levels of comfort, ability to use and access to the various communication channels as well as content specific to older adults.



“Since everything is on the Internet, we need **more ways to get on the Internet** that are free.”

### *Action Item 4.1 – Improve City-wide Communications and Access to Information with Diverse Media Using Consistent Messaging*

Evanston’s vast communication resources need to be upgraded to incorporate WHO age-friendly standards. These standards emphasize the need for “systematic, effective public distribution services” that are readily accessible to older people with varying capabilities and resources. All residents should have essential information about city and community service and resources as well as know how to access information through a variety of communication methods. Upgrades need to better acknowledge and address individual users and their range of needs including hearing impaired, non-English speakers, those less comfortable with technology, vision impaired, and individuals with cognitive impairment, etc.

- ▲ Identify a Communications-information Liaison within the City of Evanston with responsibility for collaborating with the city’s Community Engagement Division, Senior Ombudsman, and others to ensure effectiveness of ongoing communications and tools.
- ▲ Develop a communications improvement strategy to upgrade all City of Evanston forms of communication and information sharing to assure effectiveness and relevance to best practices for age-friendly considerations. Individual users and their range of needs should be considered in the



upgrade process. Analyze cost, if applicable, of recommended upgrades to communication tools and seek funding if necessary. Strategies to include:

- Update City of Evanston website to increase ease of use for older adults including prominent placement of “Senior Services” information for ease of identification, changes to website font type, size and page contrast, and the creation of content on assisted living and housing for older adults.
- Enhance Public Access Cable TV Channel to include monthly/quarterly broadcast of interviews with the Ombudsman, Assisted Living site managers, and others discussing senior life services in Evanston.
- Update printed materials with reader-friendly fonts and sizes and content specific to Evanston’s older adults. Explore opportunity to create a “Senior section/insert” in the Evanston Roundtable with relevant content.

- ▲ Develop, enhance and promote opportunities for computer training for residents or their caregivers to help them access information available online. Training should include consideration for residents with limited mobility including those at the senior housing facilities in the community or living independently.

It is also recommended that Evanston 311 is expanded to provide information on community social service resources, activities and opportunities for engaging older adults. This recommendation is included in Section 5 because it addresses feedback on the ability of Evanston’s older adults to fully use the community support and health services already available.

#### *Recommended Actions Already Under Way*

- ▲ The City of Evanston has begun providing more information and programming on the Public Access cable TV channel related to city programs and services.



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## Action Area 5: Community Support and Health Services

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### *Background:*

Feedback from the planning process revealed that older adults in Evanston generally have access to community support and health services. However, improvements are needed to transportation, communication, and social and civic participation to better connect Evanston's older adults to the community support and health services which are already available.

### *Action Item 5.1 – Expand Evanston 311 to Provide Information on Community Social Service Resources, Activities and Opportunities for Engagement*

Expand Evanston 311 to provide information on community health and social service resources, recreational activities and opportunities for civic engagement. The long-term goal is to create a one-stop shop number for all Evanston information.



- ▲ Enhance training on voice volume and inflection necessary with some callers, and ensure accessibility to bi-lingual interpreter for non-English speaking callers.
- ▲ Update 311 database to include frequently asked questions about social service and health resources, activities, events, and opportunities to volunteer.
- ▲ Use Library community resource list as key resource for 311 operators to use when making connections to seniors requesting information on resources.

### *Recommended Actions Already Under Way*

- ▲ The Age-Friendly Task Force and city staff are collaborating to improve Evanston 311 experience for Evanston's older adults. An initial training for Evanston 311 operators in strategies for assisting older adults is underway. Specifically, we are planning to train one or two operators to be "experts" in aging. Calls regarding services for older adults that cannot be answered by the regular operators would be transferred to one of these operators.
- ▲ The Age-Friendly Task Force is collaborating with staff at the Evanston Public Library to update the Community Resources page on the Evanston Public Library website.

"It would be useful if there was a **central service** for information on all issues related to the elderly."

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## Action Area 6: Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

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### *Background:*

The built environment is one of the Evanston’s greatest strengths. Evanston is a more than 150-year-old community with buildings, roadways and community spaces that need investment and improvement. Evanston is fortunate to have a large number of public outdoor spaces, with 76 parks, 50 playgrounds and over 300 acres of publically accessible land. Most of the City has sidewalk and commercial spaces spread across nine areas, including Downtown Evanston with shopping, restaurants, and community services. Improvements should be made to ensure that residents and visitors alike can enjoy Evanston’s built environment.

“When walking and shopping in Evanston, I need a place to sit occasionally. **There are no benches** for the elderly to sit and rest while shopping.”

### *Action Item 6.1 – Enhance and Improve Public Spaces for Safety, Quality of Life and Community Access*

Public spaces should be enhanced and improved for comfort, accessibility, and the ability to foster community for all those that live, work, play, grow-up, and grow old.

- ▲ Assess streets, sidewalks, parks, and other outdoor spaces with a focus on accessibility, safety and quality of life.
- ▲ Assess public buildings and other structures (i.e. post office, public transit stations) and identify improvements for accessibility.
- ▲ Repair and rehabilitate public buildings and structures, streets, sidewalks, other outdoor spaces based on assessment results.  
Improvements shall include the following:
  - Street crossings near parks and senior residences
  - Condition of sidewalks near parks, senior residences, residential and business areas
  - Lighting near parks, senior residences, and business areas



- Park amenities and infrastructure
- Accessibility of public buildings and structures
- ▲ Improve snow removal at intersections and near parking meters.
- ▲ Publicize the City's 50/50 Sidewalk Program to encourage private residents to help support sidewalk improvement.
- ▲ Enhance and improve cleanliness of city parks by promoting and enhancing volunteer opportunities including Earth Day, Arbor Day Celebration, and the City's Adopt a Park Program.



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## Action Area 7: Social and Civic Participation and Employment, Respect and Social Inclusion

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### *Background:*

Research and survey results show that Evanston's older adults have a variety of interests and desires for activities outside of the home. These include social, volunteer, employment and civic activities. It is important to both consult older adults during citywide processes and encourage older and younger people alike to work together toward enhancing respect and inclusion as well as social, civic and educational opportunities.



“Since retiring, I have had to build new social connections and that has been a challenge. We are not interested in being segregated to a community of older adults in what resembles a hotel more than a home. I think the focus of the City should be more based on need than on age.”

### *Action Item 7.1 – Improve Access to Social, Cultural, Educational, Civic and Recreational Resources through Outreach Partnerships and Communication*

Evanston will leverage diverse communication methods and partnerships to improve access to activities outside the home for older adults in the community.

- ▲ Update Parks Directory on City website with information on amenities and other age-friendly features.
- ▲ Add places to rest in public places by installing benches in all parks and at bus stops in business areas and adjacent to senior facilities.
- ▲ Provide affordable beach access by instituting a senior beach token rate.
- ▲ Improve accessibility of beach access by installing portable walkways on beaches.

“Very few of the **summer festivals** are accessible for seniors or the disabled.”

- ▲ Improve signage at bus stops, in parks, walking/cycling paths.

### *Action Item 7.2 – Enhance Opportunities and Access to Recreational Opportunities Year Round*

Providing opportunities for older adults to be active and engaged in the community is important year-round. Evanston needs to improve existing avenues and develop new opportunities for recreational activities for older adults.

- ▲ Open more bathrooms year round and partner with local businesses to open bathrooms to non-customers.
- ▲ Provide indoor walking options for winter and all year long by identifying and securing indoor track or other space for indoor walking; promoted widely on City website and with other partners.
- ▲ Create a centrally located public space, or improve an existing space, that can host events and facilitate community activities year round; work to incorporate the interest and needs of older adults in the planning and delivery of activities.
- ▲ Encourage urban farming and gardening in the community; coordinate urban farming groups and garden clubs to provide education to the community and involve knowledgeable seniors as mentors and educators.

### *Action Item 7.3 – Encourage Age-Friendly Business Practices through Education and Development of Business Certification Program*

Evanston will develop an Age-Friendly Business Certification Program considering Evanston’s specific needs that educates and assists businesses in better serving their customers, no matter their age or ability.

- ▲ Create a partnership between City of Evanston, Chamber of Commerce, Neighborhood Business Districts and other stakeholders to develop and administer an Age-Friendly Business Certification Program.
- ▲ Research best practices for Age-Friendly Business Certification Program, looking to other WHO Age-Friendly Cities for model programs. Identify age-friendly features based on business type, such as all restaurants must offer large font menus for customers (Under partnerships for age-friendly certification).
- ▲ Train Volunteers to administer the program and conduct educational activities with businesses to support age friendly initiatives. In particular, focus above training on front-line staff and their interactions with customers of all ages. For example, staff should be able to work with young patrons

who may be making their first purchase (buying a gift for a parent, shopping for themselves for the first time) and work with older customers.

- ▲ Train business district leaders to walk business districts to identify and report hazards to City/311 in the built environment (i.e. pavers and sidewalks that offer trip hazard, sidewalk cafes that limit walking/stroller path, limited curb cuts, and other hazards).
- ▲ Identify and secure funding and support to administer the program.

“I am a local business that caters to seniors and would love to participate in any way I can.”



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## Action Area 8: Visioning

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### *Background:*

The Age-Friendly Action Plan is a pragmatic strategic document based on improving, enhancing and expanding what is already in place. It focuses on actions that will be implemented in the next 1-5 years to address areas of improvement that have already been identified. However, to enhance Evanston as a community that is truly age-friendly for all, it is important to continue looking forward to the next ideas and actions that will make Evanston an age-friendly community for decades to come.



### *Action Item 8.1 – Assemble a Future-Oriented Task Force to Identify and Explore Best Practices and Innovations Worldwide to Achieve a Livable Community for All*

A future-oriented task force is needed to identify and explore best practices and innovations that are emerging in the U.S. and around the world to achieve a livable city for all.

- ▲ Identify stakeholders, partners and community members to serve on a future-oriented task force.
- ▲ Establish a regular interval, at minimum quarterly, and a venue for the task force to meet.
- ▲ Provide recommendations to the City's Health and Human Services Committee.
- ▲ Design pilot projects and submit proposals to secure funding.



## Appendix

### Appendix 1 - Age-Friendly Action Plan Supporters

Remi Akinyemi

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Archana Lal-Tabak

Sheila Liberman

Jessie Macdonald

Judith Mandel

Toni Maloney

Emily Miller

Laura Nutini

Ann Searles

Rita Sheinin

Mary Signatur

Greg Simitz

Barbara Sittler

Susan Slavner

Ana Holland Switchett

Audrey Thompson

Phebe Tinker

Scott Walton

Sue Walton

Alma Woods

Donald Woods

Nancy Yalowitz

## Appendix 2 – Survey Results

## Appendix 3 – Focus Group Results

## Appendix 4 – Building and Outdoor Spaces Review of Parks Summary

Information for Appendix 2, 3, and 4 can be found on the City of Evanston website at [www.cityofevanston.org/agefriendly](http://www.cityofevanston.org/agefriendly).