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September 21, 2016

Patricia Oh
AARP Maine
Age Friendly Communities
Maine

Dear Ms. Oh:

The Belfast City Council, at its meeting of August 16, 2016, unanimously approved a motion for the City to seek membership in the AARP and World Health Organization (WHO) sponsored Age Friendly Community Initiative. The Council whole-heartedly supported the motion with the main question asked being --- Why hadn't the City sought such designation earlier!

The City of Belfast prides itself on being a good community in which to live. Community leaders also recognize that a disproportionate number of our residents are over 60, nearly 1 in 3, and that our elder population is growing at a faster rate than any other segment of our community. As such, the City Council is very interested in pursuing approaches which may help the community to better understand the needs of its elder residents and to identify proactive steps that we can take to ensure the community is a supportive environment in which persons can age in place.

We are thrilled and encouraged that an initial meeting about the needs of our elder citizens quickly resulted in a grassroots effort that asked the City Council to officially join them by seeking AARP designation. We note that City staff and City residents participated in the grassroots effort. In moving forward, our community is committed to investigating and implementing specific measures that address the eight domains identified by AARP: Outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information, and community and health services. The Council, at several of its recent meetings, has openly discussed housing concerns, particularly the unavailability of rentals and how the cost of housing is making it difficult for some to live in Belfast.

The City is prepared to participate in a community-wide assessment that targets the needs and interests of our elder residents. Once those results are received, we will seek broad community discussion of the results, and then determine how we can positively move forward. We envision Aging Well in Waldo County taking the lead role, and City staff as well as elected and appointed officials will be involved.

Thank you for your consideration of membership for the City of Belfast to the Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities.

On behalf of the City,

Walter Ash, Jr.
Mayor