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AGE-FRIENDLY OKOTOKS

Final Report & Action Plan



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Executive Summary

The population of Okotoks is aging upwards as seen provincially, nationally and globally, with 10% of the population age 65+ in 2016, which increased to 14% in 2021. The Age-Friendly Okotoks Action Plan is designed to support The Town of Okotoks in becoming more Age-Friendly and continuing to meet the needs of the community. This plan will support Okotoks in responding to the needs of the fastest growing demographic: older adults.

An age-friendly community promotes inclusion and supports older adults to maintain their independence. It ensures access to physical, social and service environments to live in security and engage meaningfully in community life. Age-friendliness involves a whole-community approach to consider what can be done collaboratively between government, businesses, the social service sector and citizens of all ages. Together our community can create a physical and social environment designed to support older adults to live safely and stay meaningfully involved in the community as they age.

This Age-Friendly Okotoks Action Plan was created in consultation with the community, service providers, and older adults, and considers global, national and local research, and Town of Okotoks administration data. Findings from the community engagement process in 2022 provided key insights and new ways of looking at current projects, initiatives and possible partnerships with an age-friendly lens. With this plan, Okotoks will apply to become a recognized age-friendly community with a firm commitment to engage and support all community residents to be active, valued and contributing members. The strategies outlined in this plan rely on continued commitment from the Town of Okotoks Council, Administration and local service providers to work collaboratively and efficiently to support the growing population of older adults.

The action plan identifies specific and measureable short, mid and long term strategies to implement and monitor. It builds on the many community programs and services that currently support Okotoks to be age-friendly and emphasizes the need to listen to the voices of older adults, be aware of their concerns, and apply an age-friendly lens to new community projects and initiatives. Working towards becoming an age-friendly community is intended to spark ongoing conversations and awareness of the importance supporting older adults in our community.

Emerging Priorities

While Okotoks has many strengths in regard to age-friendliness, the following issues were identified:

- affordability and accessibility concerns around housing
- Limited housing options
- transportation to outside communities including Calgary
- lack of affordable home maintenance services
- Recreation and local transportation costs are considered prohibitive even with subsidies.
- Loneliness and concerns around isolation, particularly for newcomers and individuals living alone.
- A need for greater awareness regarding programs and services that are available for older adults and how to access them.

Summary of Action Strategies

The Action Plan is organized into eight key focus areas, based on the World Health Organizations age-friendly dimensions.

1. *Respect and Inclusion*

A “sense of community” where everyone is treated with respect, diversity is embraced and all contributions are meaningfully welcomed.

2. *Social Participation and Social Connection*

There is a range and awareness of leisure, recreational, social, cultural, sporting and spiritual activities and opportunities accessible and affordable for all ages.

3. *Civic Participation and Employment*

Older adults are aware of ways to contribute through volunteering and paid work and their strengths and community contributions are recognized

4. *Outdoor Spaces and Buildings*

Outdoor spaces and buildings are safe, well-maintained, & physically accessible

5. *Communication*

Older adults are aware of and can easily access relevant and up to date information about programs and services available to them.

6. *Community Supports and Health Services*

Older adults are aware of and can easily access, in a timely manner, appropriate & affordable supports and services to remain healthy and independent

7. *Housing*

There is a range of appropriate, affordable and safe housing options with choice of style, location and supports that allow people to age comfortably.

8. *Transportation*

Accessible, affordable and alternate transportation and related infrastructure is available for older adults to safely and conveniently get around Okotoks and surrounding communities

Eight overarching action plan goals were established to align with these areas and can be found in *Appendix IV*. Associated short, mid, and long-term strategies include suggestions for new initiatives and/or enhancements to existing services. Some short-term strategies can be quickly implemented to address concerns which were heard. For each strategy a timeline and potential partners were identified. The Town of Okotoks will need to take a lead role in convening and facilitating ongoing conversations with stakeholders to ensure successful implementation.

8 Goals
11 Short-Term Strategies
7 Mid-Term Strategies
3 Long-Term Strategies
6 Ongoing Strategies

Project Background

What is an Age-Friendly Community?

Age-friendly communities (AFC) is an international movement initiated by the World Health Organization (WHO) in response to global aging and urbanization. Today's older adults represent a unique population with many strengths including they are generally healthier, live longer and are better educated than those of previous generations. However, with these strengths come equally unique challenges across our entire society and every generation, impacting infrastructure, transportation, communication, and goods and services. An AFC promotes inclusion and supports older adults to maintain their independence. It ensures older adults have access to needed physical, social and service environments to be able to live in security and engage meaningfully in community life.

There are an increasing number of Age-friendly communities internationally. The movement began in Canada in 2006/2007 when the WHO developed the Global Age-friendly Cities Project, bringing together cities from around the world that had an interest in supporting healthy aging at the community level.

In 2012 the Government of Alberta developed the Aging Population Policy Framework. Complementing the work of the WHO's Global Age-friendly Cities Project, this framework provided guidance in how government, individuals, families, municipalities, non-profit and private sectors and communities can all work together to create age-friendliness, highlighting the unique and distinct objectives, priorities and circumstances of each community.ⁱ Alberta communities that take steps towards becoming more Age-Friendly are able to apply for the Alberta Recognition Award that provides national and international recognition for communities' accomplishments.

Why Make Okotoks an Age-Friendly Community?

Globally, the population 65 years and older is growing faster than any other age group. According to the WHO, there will be a total of about 1.2 billion people over the age of 60 by 2025 and this number is expected to near double to 2 billion by 2050.ⁱⁱ

Canada has seen a gradual but prominent demographic shift to an aging population in recent decades. In 2010, the Town of Okotoks undertook the development of the Social Wellness Framework (SWF), which identified seven key components of social wellness. As part of this process, Okotoks residents were surveyed to obtain feedback about priorities with regard to these components: playing; working; living; engaging; sense of place; moving; and, learning. Although respondents reported that Okotoks is a very good place to live, a number of issues facing older adults in Okotoks were identified.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Town has measured base line indicators identified in the SWF regarding local older adults' unique social wellness needs, and much has been accomplished. There is recognition and continued commitment to ensure the community is resourced and equipped to meet evolving needs as residents' age. In September 2020, The Town's 10-year SWF Update, recommended the following action item, *Develop a strategy to make Okotoks an Age-friendly community.*^{iv}

How was the Age-Friendly Okotoks Action Plan developed?

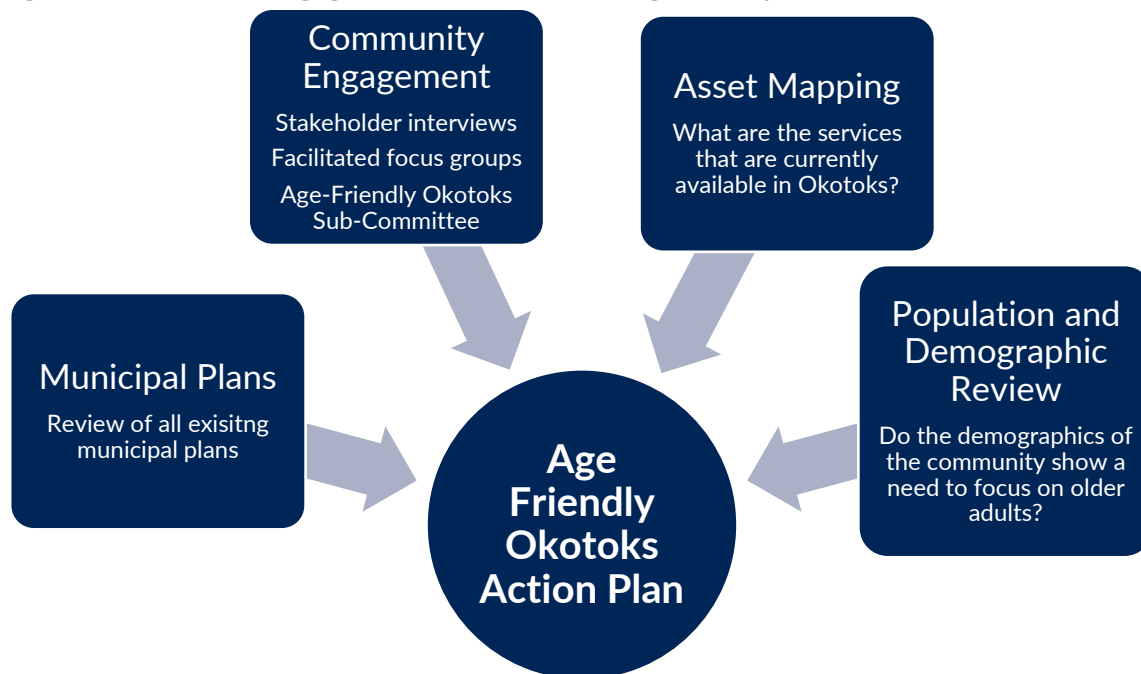
Following the October 2020 release of the Town's 10-year SWF Update report an Age-Friendly Okotoks Sub-Committee (AFOSC) was established under the authority of the Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) Committee to lead the initiative. The committee included older adult community members living and/or working in Okotoks who had related knowledge networks and/or were involved in one of the eight age-friendly focus areas, and included FCSS committee members and Town liaison staff.

Once formed, the AFOSC embarked on a two year process to develop the Okotoks Age-friendly Plan. Year one focused on completing the community profile and community engagement process. Year two built on this with the development of the action plan, report finalization, dissemination of findings and will be completed with an application to the Government of Alberta for the Alberta Recognition Award.

Much of the Plan was developed during the Covid-19 Pandemic with provincial public health orders in place that limited in-person consultation opportunities. Easing of the restrictions in Fall 2022 allowed in-person focus group sessions however, with the ongoing uncertainty during this time, timeframes to complete the community engagement and action planning processes were interrupted and extended.

Creation of an age-friendly community involves policy and best practices of the municipality but also other organizations, businesses, agencies, service providers and citizens. While the Town of Okotoks has taken leadership in gaining a baseline understanding of local age-friendliness, it is important to note that taking action and advancing the vision of an Okotoks age-friendly plan is a community-wide responsibility. To support this multiple stakeholders were engaged throughout the process.

Figure 1: Research and Engagement that Informed the Age-Friendly Okotoks Action Plan



Vision and Guiding Principles

The Age-Friendly Okotoks Sub-Committee(AFOSC) created a vision and set of principles to guide the process. These were shared and resonated with participants during the community engagement and action planning processes.

Vision

Older adults and people with disabilities in Okotoks live and are supported in a caring, responsive, and inclusive Age-friendly community where full potential for well-being is realized as people age.

Guiding Principles

Applies to all Okotoks residents although the Age-Friendly Okotoks Sub-Committee's work mainly focused on the needs of older adults and persons with disabilities.

Dignity

WE respect the dignity, rights and well-being of all residents of Okotoks as they age.

Safety

WE recognize that older adults and persons with disabilities deserve to have an optimum level of physical, mental and emotional well-being including: access to health, legal and social services to help them maintain autonomy and prevent or delay onset of illness; benefit from community support and care when needed; and, to live free of abuse and neglect.

Independence & Access

WE believe older adults and persons with disabilities should have access to a spectrum of opportunities for active, independent and purposeful living including: outdoor spaces and buildings; transportation; technology; affordable and appropriate housing; food and basic needs; opportunities for work; education, and a community that is adaptable to personal preferences and changing capacities.

Participation & Inclusiveness

WE believe all residents benefit when we support healthy aging and that all community residents deserve to meaningfully participate and contribute to the Okotoks community.

WE recognize and capitalize on the strengths and assets that older adults and persons with disabilities contribute in developing and sustaining our Age-Friendly community.

WE value community engagement and recognize it as critical to the community taking ownership in the development and sustainability of creating an Okotoks Age-Friendly Community.

Fairness

WE believe older adults should be treated fairly regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, disability or other status, or income.

Self-determination

WE believe older adults should live life the way they want and make decisions for themselves provided their actions abide by the law and they do not impose their rights and safety on others.

Sustainability

WE believe the aging population will have significant implications for society and community sustainability.

Definitions

Age-friendly - According to the World Health Organization, an age-friendly community is one that "encourages active aging by optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age."^v

Older Adults/Persons: There is no single definition of older adults. The WHO defines older adult based on general lifestyle/circumstances rather than chronological age.

For the purpose of this work, the AFOSC defined older adults as, "Citizens of Okotoks who are around 55 years of age and older, recognizing that everyone ages differently depending on individual life experience and perception of aging".

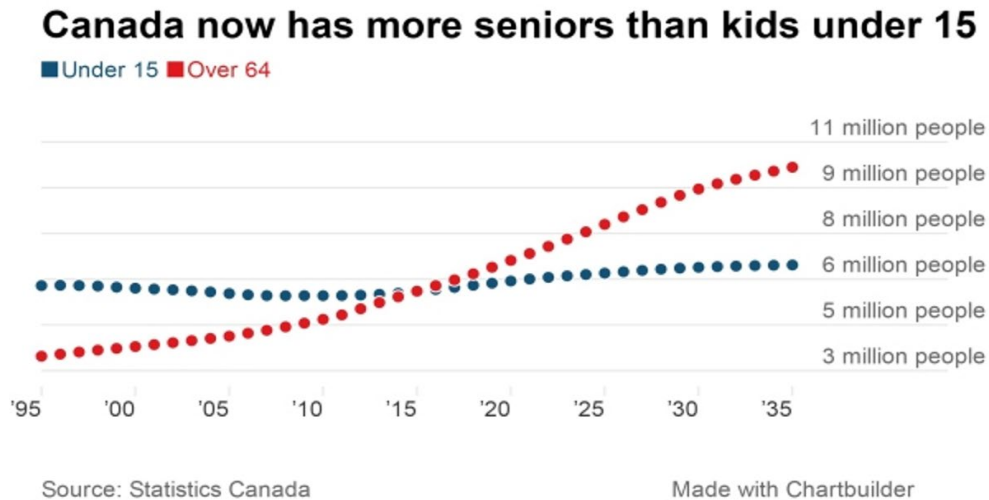
Quality of Life: "An individual's perception of his or her position in life in the context of the culture and value system where they live, and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. It is a broad ranging concept, incorporating in a complex way a person's physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, personal beliefs and relationship to salient features in the environment."^{vi}

Active Aging: "The process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance the quality of life as people age, including those who are frail, disabled and in need of care."^{vii}

The Need for Age-Friendliness in Okotoks

Population and Demographics

A full Community Profile was completed and can be found in Appendix I. The 2016 Statistics Canada report revealed that for the first time in the country's history, the number of Canadians aged 65+ surpassed those under the age of 15^{viii}.



This aging trend is expected to continue increase exponentially over the next decade with reduced fertility and as the baby boomer generation continues to age.^{ix} In Canada, the 2021 Statistics Canada Census Profile shows that the population aged 85 years and older is one of the fastest growing age groups, with a 12% increase from 2016 and representing about 2.3% of our countries total population. Having more than doubled since 2001, this age-group is expected to triple over the next 25 years.^x

As in the province and nation more generally, the population in Okotoks is also aging, with a slight decrease (4.7%) in those 44 years and under, and an increase (49%) in the 65+ population since 2016. Also noteworthy is the “next generation” of seniors, those aged 45 to 65, that make up about 26% of total Okotoks population.^{xi}

Today’s older adults represent a unique population that is generally healthier, living longer and better educated than those from previous generations. With these strengths come equally unique challenges across our entire society and every generation, impacting infrastructure, transportation, communication, and goods and services.^{xii}

Longevity results in older adults who have many strengths, resources and contributions to society. However, as people live longer flexible options for housing, transportation, leisure and health care become increasing more important to meet the diverse needs of an aging population. An Age-friendly community balances these strengths and challenges as people age, reflected in policies, structures and services to ensure support and the ability of residents to “age actively, to live in security, good health and continue to participate fully in society”.^{xiii}

A Diverse Population: Older adults of all ages have varying life experiences and personal characteristics with a broad range of values, beliefs and opinions. For example, someone who grew up during the

depression may have a different world view than a baby boomer^{xiv}. Urban versus rural roots, ethnic origin, educational level and socio-economic status creates diversity. Adding to the complexity is the varying degrees of physical, cognitive and social emotional changes that individuals experience as part of the typical aging process. This heterogeneous group, then, requires a flexible range of services, structures and programs to meet their varying needs.

Creating an age-friendly community helps to dispel myths around aging and decreases ageism which refers to stereotypes of how we think, feel and act towards others based on age. Knowing the facts, and understanding the effects of the aging process inform the services, resources and structures that need to be in place to support people's diverse needs as they age.^{xv}

Healthy Aging Considers All Aspects of a Person's Life. The WHO emphasized a broad range of social, physical, economic, behavioral and personal health determinants that impact the process of aging. These external factors are called social determinants of health. The interconnectedness of these determinants throughout one's life and the accumulation of effects thereof, along with the availability and quality of health and social services are considered to be key indicators for healthy aging and predictors of vulnerability. For example, income levels, food and housing security, physical activity, discrimination and social connectedness have been linked to health outcomes of older adults. Healthy aging then, is a lifelong process of optimizing opportunities for improving and preserving health, independence, quality of life and enhancing successful life transitions.^{xvi}

Practicing age-friendliness promotes healthy and active aging by having structures, policies and programs in place that support people to remain living independently with dignity and respect, preventing illness and injury and having access to needed supports and services they require.^{xvii}

Stronger Community Connections – Bringing the Community Closer Together "Enhanced Culture & Community Health"^{xviii} is a (2022-2025) strategic priority for the Town of Okotoks. Meaningful community dialogue and engagement with residents of all ages promotes inclusion and encourages older adults to actively contribute to their safety, health and well-being within their neighborhood and community. Creating an age-friendly community strongly aligns with this strategic priority. Within this domain, people of all ages, backgrounds and circumstances can interact, share experiences and contribute. Age-friendliness then contributes to a community that "recognizes, appreciates and values contributions made by different members of the community and engages them in all aspects of community life."^{xix}

Covid-19 and its impact on Older Adults: Research highlighted the short-term, and potentially long-term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the older adult population. With increased likelihood of pre-existing health conditions and weaker immune systems in general than younger individuals, older adults have been particularly vulnerable to Covid-19 with alarming serious infection and death rates occurring among this older population.^{xx}

Social distancing requirements along with government mandated closures advising individuals to stay in their home except for essential activities, while deemed preventative in the spread of the virus, resulted in increased isolation among the older adult population. Research supports that a lack of social relationships, discontent with the quality of relationships and low levels of social engagement and participation may have damaging effects on the quality of life for older adults.^{xxi} While digital access helped many older adults feel less isolated and they could access needed services during the pandemic, there is a large number of older adults who are left behind in this virtual world including those with

dementia, hearing loss, impaired vision, those with financial barriers or lack knowledge, assistance or desire when it comes to using technology. As a result, this group may be more vulnerable to stress, loneliness and isolation, all deemed risk factors for the development of mental health concerns such as depression, cognitive impairment and overall quality of life.^{xxii}

The indelible image of the older person living alone and having to struggle — we need to change that. You're going to see more older people home-sharing within families and cohousing across communities to avoid future situations of tragedy.^{xxiii}

The pandemic further shone a light on the need to relook at the long-term care sector in Canada and presents an opportunity to reimagine communities in ways that integrate and support older adults living in a range of environments. While age-friendly initiatives focus on improving the physical accessibility of our communities, research suggests that Covid-19 has shown that digital access at home is now equally critical to our capacity to age-in-place and to our quality of life.^{xxiv}

Ageism, a form of discrimination based on one's age, has been further exposed during the pandemic. Discrimination in different settings like inequitable access to health care and in adequate protection of older adults in care homes results in many harms, disadvantages and injustices, including age-based health inequities and poorer health outcomes. Developing an age-friendly community that fosters older adult's abilities and delivers person-centred integrated care and services responsive to older adult needs promotes healthy ageing and overall well-being.^{xxv}

These insights, by no means exhaustive, are critical in helping to make better decisions on how, where and when to support older adults to be their best. As we move through the long term recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, the timeliness of creating an age-friendly plan seems ever so apparent as the community comes together and looks to adapt how we live and interact with each other moving forward.

Town of Okotoks Municipal Plans

The Age-Friendly Okotoks Action Plan is designed to work with existing and future municipal plans. These are strong foundational policy and planning documents that help position the Town of Okotoks to be an age-friendly community. All future plans should consider the needs of older adults in their development, and as existing plans are implemented they need to consider the fastest growing demographic: older adults.

Town of Okotoks Vision and Mission (2022)

Vision: *A vibrant, resilient, and connected community that fosters the wellbeing of land and people; a community to call home.*^{xxvi}

Mission: *To create and nurture an environment in which people are able to pursue fulfillment of their values, in harmony with community.*^{xxvii}

Strategic Plan (2022-2025)

This plan establishes the Town of Okotoks strategic direction for the four-year elected term of Town Council. It describes the areas Council will focus on and directs the priority activities and services of the Town Corporation for the continuous improvement of our community. Each of the strategic priorities has elements that contribute to age-friendliness including improving diverse house housing options and having "flourishing spaces"^{xxviii} for all. Enhancing culture and community health by creating opportunities for community members of all ages to actively contribute to the safety, health and wellbeing within their

neighborhood and their community in a variety of ways contributes to everyone feeling welcome, strengthening the social fabric and promoting age-friendliness in the community.

Municipal Development Plan (2021)

The new MDP, *Uniquely Okotoks*, outlines the kind of future the community wishes to achieve for Okotoks. The document highlights “Healthy, Safe, Inclusive Community” as guiding principles underpinning all growth and development. It prioritizes safety, well-being and connectedness and looks at all aspects of development through an equity-lens. More specifically, the MDP promotes age-friendliness through planning and designing neighborhoods where people can live, work, play and thrive in their community by providing safe, equitable and integrated transportation systems; better housing options for all ages, educational resources about the benefits of active living; designing public spaces and programs for a diversity of users, ages, abilities, and cultures.^{xxix}

Okotoks Community Sustainability Plan (2016-2019)

The Okotoks Community Sustainability Plan released in April 2016, was developed to guide the creation of new strategies, goals and targets in support of a sustainable future for Okotoks. Supporting community connections was identified as one of the critical steps, with most impact, towards sustainable future success. Developing and making available ‘meeting/workshop kits’, ‘block party kits’ along with advertising and promoting neighborhood parties, park summer concert series and the Neighbourhood Ambassador program helped build connections and community capacity, thereby setting the stage for a variety of future initiatives enabling residents to take ownership of life in Okotoks.^{xxx}

Okotoks Civility Charter (2021)

The Town of Okotoks 2021 (updated) Good Order and Civil Conduct Policy aligns with foundational age-friendly principles as the document envisions, “creating and sustaining a vibrant environment where everyone is treated with respect, civility and dignity”. It further outlines the Town’s commitment to work collaboratively with citizens and all users of its services and facilities to ensure safety, well-being and enjoyment of facilities and services and to promote a safe, respectful and violence free and harassment free work environment for Town representatives.^{xxxi}

Affordable Housing Strategy and Action Plan (2020)

Based on results of a Housing Needs Assessment completed in June, 2019 and work of the Council-appointed Affordable Housing Task Force, the 2020 Affordable Housing Strategy outlines a five year action plan to address identified housing gaps. The plan’s strategic directions align with creating a more age-friendly community and include recommendations to increase a variety of housing options, affordability and the ability to meet a diversity of needs including a place, “where seniors can age in place as their housing requirements change”.^{xxxii}

Growing Together: A Culture, Heritage & Arts Master Plan (CHAMP II-2018)

The 2018 plan guides Town decisions on culture and heritage, and ensures that programs, events, and facilities are provided, and natural heritage sites are protected for all residents to enjoy. The plan has a number of priorities that align with age-friendliness including focusing on connecting and engaging citizens of all ages and backgrounds to nurture grass roots cultural development; building on the health and social benefits of culture to ensure quality of life, community cohesion and individual creativity are realized across all ages in a community; delivering indoor and outdoor activities and events that welcome participation from all ages; and, creating a vibrant civic culture, opportunities for community connection and rich quality of life.^{xxxiii}

Recreation, Parks and Leisure Master Plan (2017)

Approved by Council in May 2017, the plan identifies future requirements for facilities, programs, services, anticipated facility costs, and serves as a strategic roadmap for the delivery of recreation, parks, and leisure in the Town and surrounding area. Health and wellbeing of all citizens along with building community wellness, spirit and culture were identified as the four key focus areas to: *“Ensure residents are engaged in meaningful, accessible recreation, parks and leisure activities”*.^{xxxiv} Implementing strategies such as reducing financial barriers to participation, increasing program awareness and prioritizing social inclusiveness were identified to help meet the needs of a growing, evolving and diversifying community. Specific targets around older adults included: prioritize seniors recreation and active living programs and programming for populations facing barriers to participation (physical, financial, social); ensure that the Towns programming mix encompasses activities that are attractive to all age categories within the seniors population; prioritize multi-generational programming and where possible identify opportunities to provide seniors with an opportunity to engage with youth in a program setting.^{xxxv}

Active Transportation Strategy (2015)

The Active Transportation Strategy defines active transportation as “any form of human-powered transportation – walking, cycling, using a wheelchair, in-line skating or skateboarding”. It highlights key benefits of improved active transportation opportunities including increasing accessibility and social interactions for children, youth, seniors, low income families and persons with disabilities who are often left out when a transportation system depends on personal vehicles only. The 2015 strategy proposes different implementation actions many in line with elements of age-friendliness such as safe walkable pathways, reduced speed limits, improved crosswalk lighting and retrofitting in older areas, all of which promote active participation and enhance overall quality of life for residents of all ages.^{xxxvi}

2010 Social Wellness Framework (SWF)

The 2010 SWF was developed with a strong commitment towards a sustainable future, emphasizing the social aspects of sustainability. The SWF is based on a model that identified seven components of social wellness: working; living; engaging; sense of place; moving; and, learning. Collectively these components were seen to be measurable indicators of quality of life, community well-being and individual health.^{xxxvii} Through this process, older adults emerged as a priority for people living in Okotoks. Older adults were surveyed in consultation with a broad cross-section of the community to understand what was working well and what they needed relative to the seven aspects of wellness. While most older adults indicated that Okotoks is a very good place to live, several concerns related to the availability of a full range of housing and support options and lack of public transportation emerged as barriers and challenges around community connection, and engagement. It was further noted that “given the age profile, the community will grow in significance over the next ten years”.^{xxxviii} Recommendations were directed toward addressing these issues for older adults and the collective community.

Updates: In its September 2020, 10-year SWF update, the Town recommended: “Develop a strategy to make Okotoks an Age-Friendly Community,”^{xxxix} Recognizing the continual shift in demographic trend, the Town of Okotoks highlighted its commitment and priority to ensuring that the community is resourced and equipped to identify and meet residents’ needs as they age.^{xl}

Asset Mapping

Currently, there are a number of programs and services in Okotoks and surrounding communities that already support Okotoks to be age-friendly. A complete inventory of these programs and services was developed during the community asset mapping process. This information was obtained from an on-line review of existing resources and listings including the Town of Okotoks Community Services Directory, 211 Directory, general internet search, and information collected through the community engagement process. The complete Okotoks Age-Friendly Inventory is a working Excel document that continues to be updated.

The inventory identified programs and services that support one or more of the eight WHO dimensions of community life. Some organizations in the inventory were counted more than once as the inventory is based on program/service and not by organization. Included in the detailed count were accessible and supportive services located outside of Okotoks, yet still available to older adult and persons with disabilities who reside in town. Additional helplines and websites providing information on numerous older adult topics and issues were included. Access to these surrounding services and online supports depends on transportation, access to internet and user knowledge which, if not available or known, may create barriers for some older adults.

The table below provides a summary of the asset inventory. It only identifies those on-line, in-person or by phone programs and services that are provided within Okotoks. It does not include the vast number of programs or services, included in the detailed inventory that residents of Okotoks are eligible to access by going out of town to nearby communities if they have access to transportation. While many programs and services overlap in multiple categories, where possible for this report, programs and services were only counted once in the summary table.

Figure 2: Summary of Age-Friendly Services and Programs Available to Okotoks Residents

Age-friendly Dimension	# Program & Services
Outdoor Spaces & Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 municipal service supports • 1 provincial registry service • At least 72 parks with public washrooms in 12 locations • 8 identified walking trails • 6 recreational buildings with scheduled programs and activities
Social Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 arts & culture groups • 12 community churches • At least 11 service clubs • 2 intergenerational support groups • 5 diversity and inclusion groups that support and include social participation of immigrants, refugees, new to Okotoks and people with disabilities • Various recreational programs for residents of all ages including older adults • At least 15 sports groups that include social participation for older adults • 3 special hobby groups • Numerous special events hosted by the Town and community for people of all ages.
Respect & Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 groups/services supporting community immigrants, refugees and new to Okotoks • 3 programs supporting people who are physically or intellectually disabled • 1 program supporting people of diverse gender identification • Various recreational programs for all residents • Town of Okotoks events that support Seniors Week Celebrations and World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

Age-friendly Dimension	# Program & Services
Civic Participation & Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial programs for employment and immigration (accessible by phone) • 6 education and employment opportunities and programs that support further training or inclusion in the workplace • 6 programs that support volunteer participation opportunities
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 programs that support transportation within Okotoks and to/from neighboring communities • 6 electric vehicle charging stations • Parking Placards for Persons with Disabilities program
Communication & Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Phone enquiry lines • 24/7 Emergency Help lines • Numerous provincial support lines for older adults • 3 municipal/provincial support programs • 10 access points to obtain information about Okotoks, its local news and support services programs • 2 in-person access points (Okotoks Family Resource Centre and Okotoks Seniors Centre) where older adults can find information and connection to various topics such as financial, health, safety and legal. • Various service discounts for Seniors • Over 90 Facebook group sites relating to Okotoks
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 privately funded assisted living/long term care housing • 1 cooperative housing (Skotoko) • 1 55+ independent living condo complex • 2 subsidized seniors residences – Sandstone Lodge and Sheep River House • 2 home relocations assistance for seniors • At least 6 housecleaning services • 2 home maintenance services • NOTE: There is no emergency housing available in Okotoks.
Community Support & Health Services	<p>Clothing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 clothing support programs <p>Food</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 food assistance programs • Food delivery assistance <p>Healthcare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 nursing care assistance support programs • 11 personal care support programs • 2 addiction supports <p>Mental Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 emergency mental health support programs • 12 seniors mental health support programs <p>Dental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 dental supports <p>Extended Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 foot care supports • 4 hearing supports • 1 optical financial program for seniors • 5 mobility aid supports <p>Personal Alerts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 personal alert supports <p>Pharmacies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 pharmacies in Okotoks, that may provide free delivery of medications, bubble packs or a senior discount on certain days

Community Engagement

The community engagement findings resulted in identifying a baseline of current strengths and highlighted some strategies to improve and advance the vision of an Okotoks age-friendly community. Focus groups and conversations with service providers, health care professionals, and residents took place from August 2021 to March 2022. During this time, six focus group sessions were held with 48 total participants representing approximately 25 service organizations. Additional conversations with the Age-Friendly Okotoks Sub-Committee (AFOSC), Alberta Health Services and Town of Okotoks administration took place. Throughout the engagement process, residents, key stakeholders, and staff explored each of the eight WHO dimensions of an age-friendly community.

Discussions drew on professional and personal experiences, observations and knowledge of the community around three main questions:

- How age-friendly is Okotoks right now?
- In what ways could Okotoks improve its age-friendliness?
- What are the key priorities Okotoks could focus on to improve age-friendliness?

The feedback findings were compiled and reported on in the *Age-Friendly Okotoks Community Engagement: What We Heard* document. This report was validated and shared with community stakeholders who participated in the engagement and/or action planning sessions and conversations. The following provides a summary of the key messages and community priorities. The full *Age-friendly Okotoks Community Engagement: What We Heard Report* can be found in Appendix II of this report, and a summary of the action planning braining storming can be found in Appendix III.

Key Messages Heard

The following synopsis highlights key messages heard across engagement activities.

Okotoks offers a range of municipal, community and health services for older adults. Greater awareness and communication is needed in knowing what is available and how to access the many programs and services. This was a common theme expressed by stakeholders across many of the eight World Health Organization (WHO) dimensions of an age-friendly community that were explored in the engagement activities. Generally, stakeholders agreed that Okotoks offers a wide and diverse range of community supports, program and services. However, many stakeholders expressed concerns about lack of awareness and knowing how to access existing programs and services such as housing, health, and social supports, especially when new to Okotoks.

Okotoks is a great place to live. There was general agreement among stakeholders that Okotoks is a great place to live, work, play and learn, providing a good quality of life for its residents with a range of program and services, outdoor spaces and opportunities that support age-friendliness. However, many stakeholders expressed strong affordability and accessibility concerns around housing and housing options, transportation to and from communities in and around Okotoks including Calgary, as well as in home and yard maintenance services. Furthermore, some noted that recreation and local transportation services are too expensive, even with fee subsidies.

Social inclusion and feeling connected is an important consideration. Generally participants agreed that the Okotoks community provides many opportunities for older adults to connect and participate in community life. However, stakeholders emphasized that for some older adults, particularly newcomers and individuals living alone, social isolation and loneliness are areas of concern.

There are many age-friendly partners. Many of the service providers who participated in the focus groups knew each other and identified both current and future ways they could work together to support older adults and their families. The engagement process highlighted how age-friendliness impacts older adults and their families, community, municipal business units, social and health support service providers, recreational, and service club organizations and groups. The importance of the local businesses as partners was also highlighted.

There are new ways to improve age-friendliness in Okotoks. Community engagement participants highlighted many thoughtful ideas on how to improve the current age-friendliness of Okotoks (e.g. seniors' expo, on-line/in-person central communication hubs, increase time for crossing at traffic lights, increase intergenerational opportunities, etc.).

Keep the conversation going. Diverse community voices and experiences are important to ensure the accuracy of the data in assessing how well people are aging in Okotoks. While participants in focus groups and conversations were happy to provide input about the current level of age-friendliness in the town, only a limited amount of statistically significant data was able to be collected from older adults and persons with disabilities of various gender and socio-economic backgrounds for this report. Hearing from older adults with diverse lived experiences is key to understanding how different people engage and want to participate in community life.

Age-Friendly Okotoks Action Plan

The Action Plan can be found outlined in Appendix IV. This plan has been developed with a focus on the short and mid term strategies. Many of these can be implemented utilizing existing resources. This action plan was developed so as to not duplicate the work of other plans or pre-existing initiatives. Town of Okotoks administration will facilitate conversations that support and encourage the implementation and monitoring of these strategies.

Goal I - Respect and Inclusion

Develop a plan and engage older adults who have lived experience with inequity to contribute their unique experience and needs in making Okotoks more age-friendly.

Strategy 1

Establish a process to be used to support community engagement. Meet people where they are at. Administer surveys and host focus groups at the places where older adults and people with potential barriers are already going.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Potential Partners

- Okotoks and District Seniors Club
- Seniors Interagency
- Condo buildings
- Foothills Community Immigrant Services
- Okotoks Family Resource Centre
- Foothills Advocacy in Motion
- Inclusion Foothills
- Wildrose Community Connections
- Home Care

Timeline

Short-term. Summer 2023.

Strategy 2

Offer information sessions for families of older adults to help them better understand the aging process and the changing needs of their aging family member. This could include information sessions related to dementia and memory loss.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Potential Partners

- Okotoks Public Library
- Homecare
- Okotoks and District Seniors Club
- Primary Care Network
- The Brenda Strafford Foundation

Timeline

Short-term. Fall 2024.

Strategy 3

Provide awareness and community-based learning opportunities. Continue to deliver "Its Not Right" (elder abuse awareness) and provide education on ageism through presentations, workshops and events.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Potential Partners

- Okotoks Public Library
- Okotoks and District Seniors Club
- Elder Abuse Coordinated Community Response Team

Timeline

Short term. Fall 2024

Strategy 4

Ensure that in person program delivery options are available and prioritized. During the pandemic many programs transitioned to virtual delivery. While this was beneficial, there are proven benefits from in-person connections for social engagement and emotional well-being.

Lead Organization

Recommended for all older adult serving organizations

Timeline

Ongoing.

Goal II - Social Participation and Social Connection

Enhance engagement initiatives focusing on older adults who are socially isolated and underserved; intergenerational opportunities; neighbors connecting with neighbors and expanding coordinated outreach services to new residents, persons living alone or in care facilities and from a range of cultural and economic backgrounds.

Strategy 1

Ensure the provision of opportunities and space for social gathering after older adult recreational programs.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Timeline

Short-term. Spring 2023.

Strategy 2

Review the membership of the Seniors Interagency to ensure there is representation from a diverse range of older adult serving organizations, for example representatives from churches and Primary Care Network.

Lead Organization

Seniors Interagency

Timeline

Short term. Spring 2023.

Strategy 3

Increase communication and advertising about supports that are available to support low-income older adults access recreational program (Fee Assistance Subsidy).

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Timeline

Short-term. Fall 2023.

Strategy 4

Increase variety and availability of educational and winter recreational activities for older adults and persons with disabilities.

Lead Organization

- Town of Okotoks
- Okotoks & District Seniors Club
- Okotoks Public Library

Timeline

Short-term. Winter 2023/24.

Strategy 5

Create opportunities for older adults to share their skills and experiences and for attendees to “learn from a pro”. These could be structured in a similar way to Repair Cafes and have different topics such as knitting, fishing, meal prep, and more.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Potential Partners

- Okotoks Public Library
- Okotoks & District Seniors Club

Timeline

Mid-term. Fall 2024.

Strategy 6

Facilitate opportunities for more community-based options for social connection and groups that align with individual interests. Example: Men’s Shed program.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Potential Partners

- Okotoks & District Seniors Club
- Community Gardens
- Service Clubs
- Churches

Timeline

Mid-term. Winter 2024/25.

Strategy 7

Explore neighbourhood-based programs that help to build the natural supports of residents. Block parties, adaptations of the Community Champion Program and Community Gardens are examples of initiatives that can support this. Integrate elements that encourage intergenerational relationships.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Potential Partners

- Okotoks Public Library
- Okotoks & District Seniors Club

Timeline

Long-term. Spring 2025

Goal III - Civic Participation and Employment

Find ways to formally recognize older adult's strengths and meaningful contributions; increase awareness of volunteer and employment opportunities.

Strategy 1

Provide education and information to volunteer managers on recruitment, recognition and retention methods specific to older adult volunteers.

Lead Organization

Volunteer Mangers Partnership

Timeline

Short-term. Fall 2023.

Strategy 2

Provide a drop in, help desk style of option for older adults to access in person support with computers and technology.

Potential Lead Organization

Okotoks Seniors Club

Potential Partners

- Okotoks Public Library
- Bow Valley College
- Literacy for Life

Timeline

Mid-term. Spring 2024.

Strategy 3

Provide education and awareness for employers on how to become an inclusive employer. Include training on how to engage with older adults and people with disabilities and programs on aging

Potential Lead Organization

Inclusion Foothills

Potential Partners

- Okotoks & District Chamber of Commerce
- MCG Careers
- Town of Okotoks
- Okotoks Public Library
- Bow Valley College
- Foothills Advocacy in Motion

Timeline

Mid-term. Winter 2024.

Goal IV - Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Continue improvements to accessibility of buildings, mainly older downtown buildings and outdoor spaces including parks and trails.

Strategy 1

Ensure timely snow removal from curb, pathways and in parking stalls to increase safety when getting in and out of vehicles.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Potential Partners

Chamber of Commerce

Snow removal contractors

Timeline

Short-term. Winter 2023/24.

Strategy 2

Create an age-friendly and public safety focused communication strategy around the importance of private snow removal that also promotes available snow removal programs.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Timeline

Short-term. Winter 2023/24.

Strategy 3

Ensure Town of Okotoks trail maps capture current location of benches and public washrooms.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks.

Timeline

Mid-term. Summer 2024.

Strategy 4

Enhance safety education through signage on pathways with multiple user types. Reminders can include the use of bells, keeping to the right etc.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Timeline

Mid-term. Summer 2024.

Strategy 5

Create an accessibility audit program that engages older adults and persons with disabilities. Recommendations are to be provided following audits and include simple, low cost solutions to common barriers.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Potential Partners

- Inclusion Foothills
- Foothills Advocacy in Motion
- Chamber of Commerce

Timeline

Mid-term. Fall 2024.

Goal V - Communication and Information

Improve awareness of existing programs and services and ensure information is easily accessible

Strategy 1

Increase the profile and awareness of the Okotoks Family Resource Centre as a central hub for information, referral, and help with documents and forms, and connection to supports.

Lead Organization

Okotoks Family Resource Centre

Timeline

Ongoing

Strategy 2

Continue to have community information available in a printed version, such as community resource guides and recreation information. These should be available in Town facilities and distributed throughout the community. Review all language used in program descriptions to ensure clarity.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Potential Partners

- Seniors Interagency
- Homecare
- Condo Boards

Timeline

Ongoing

Strategy 3

Provide in person community-based information sessions and overviews on benefits and supports available for older adults. These should be interactive and allow for questions.

Lead Organization

Okotoks Family Resource Centre

Potential Partners

- Seniors Interagency
- Condo boards
- Okotoks Public Library
- Okotoks and District Seniors Club
- Alberta Seniors
- Canada Revenue Agency

Timeline

Short-term. Fall 2023.

Strategy 4

Utilize local advertising avenues to highlight services, programs and events of interest to older adults and persons with disabilities. Include stories, interviews and editorials as well as advertising.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Potential Partners

- Okotoks Western Wheel
- Eagle 100.9
- Okotoks and District Seniors Club

Timeline

Short-term. Fall 2023.

Goal VI - Community Supports and Health Services

Improve navigation of existing programs and services and expand and create new partnerships

Strategy 1

Communicate and promote the availability of existing resources that offer system navigation support for older adults. For example, Okotoks Family Resource Centre, the Okotoks Health and Wellness Centre, Primary Care Network staff.

Lead Organization

Seniors Interagency

Potential Partners

- Okotoks Family Resource Centre
- Okotoks Health and Wellness Centre
- Primary Care Network

Timeline

Ongoing.

Strategy 2

Expand Seniors Interagency to include an organized community collaborative strategy for reaching out to isolated older adults.

Lead Organization

Seniors Interagency

Potential Partners

- Homecare
- Churches
- Primary Care Network

Timeline

Long-term. Start working on the strategy in 2023/24 to implement in 2025.

Goal VII - Housing

Continue improvements to affordable, accessible and range of housing options available to older adults

Strategy 1

Encourage the addition, development and use of shared spaces and amenities in condominium buildings.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Potential Partners

- Developers
- Condo Boards

Timeline

Ongoing.

Strategy 2

Consider feedback and suggestions received for different housing models and align them with the existing recommendations of the Town of Okotoks 2020 Affordable Housing Strategy & Action Plan.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Timeline

Ongoing.

Strategy 3

Create a volunteer program to help older adults with small repairs, changing lightbulbs and other household maintenance projects.

Potential Lead Organizations

- Wildrose Community Connections
- Okotoks and District Seniors Club

Timeline

Long term. Spring 2025.

Goal VIII - Transportation

Continue improvements to transportation related infrastructure, focusing on transportation to programs and services located in Calgary and surrounding areas of Okotoks.

Strategy 1

Create and distribute a wallet card with key contact information to access Town of Okotoks Transit, Volunteer Driver Program and Community Access Program.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Timeline

Short-term. Summer 2023

Strategy 2

Regularly review service levels of programs that offer transport for adults to ensure accessibility and affordability of services, that considers the needs of low-income individuals.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Timeline

Ongoing

Strategy 3

Ensure that crosswalk crossings are accessible with audible prompts, longer crossing times on main roads and priority snow removal.

Lead Organization

Town of Okotoks

Timeline

Mid-term. Summer 2024.

Strategy 4

Provide public information sessions on the Alberta driver fitness and monitoring program for older adults.

Lead Organization

Seniors Interagency

Potential Partners

- Okotoks and District Seniors Club
- Okotoks Public Library
- Primary Care Network

Timeline

Short-term. Fall 2023.

An Age-Friendly Future

The successful implementation of the Age-Friendly Okotoks Action Plan will be reliant on continued collaboration and conversations between all stakeholders. The Town of Okotoks will need to play a lead role in convening partners and ensuring that progress is made on the Action Plan.

It is recommended that the Family and Community Support Services Committee receive quarterly updates from administration, with a full progress report in April 2025.

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