



# Becoming an Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park

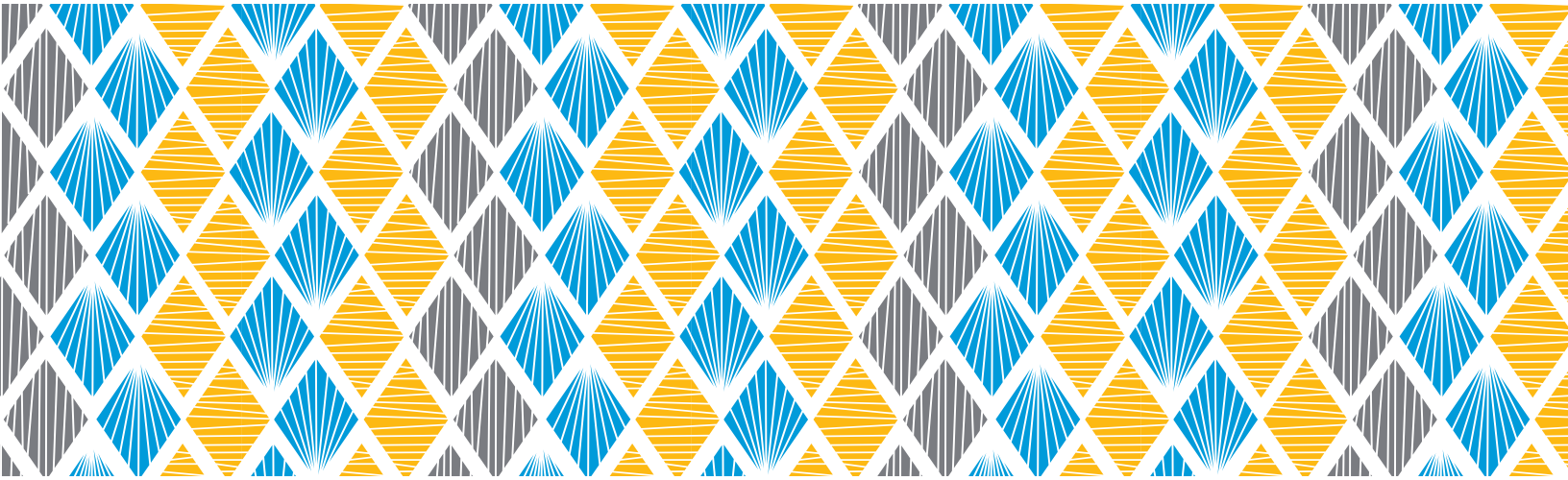
## Recommendations Report February 2019



Brooklyn Park 

# Becoming an Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park

## Recommendations Report



Prepared for the City of Brooklyn Park by Lydia Morken Consulting

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# Executive Summary

This report presents a case for making Brooklyn Park an age-friendly city and includes a set of recommendations for how the City can take formal and strategic steps to do so. Age-friendly cities are places that support and value older residents, recognize their enormous social and economic contributions to the community, and enable them to live with independence and dignity. More cities are undertaking this work in response to the aging population, but it is also about the fact that older adults, like everyone else, have a right to be able to participate in city life. Yet they are often excluded by default.

Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park builds on earlier City efforts: *Brooklyn Park 2025*, the City-led community planning effort conducted in 2016, and the work of the resident-led Task Force on Aging from 2014-15. Both highlight the fact that supporting and planning for older residents is a top community priority.

This recommendations report digs deeper into opportunities around more meaningful inclusion of older adults. It was developed based on findings from a two-fold engagement process undertaken over the course of 2018.

Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park looked both outward to the community and inward to City department operational practices to uncover baseline age-friendliness on both fronts. It sought answers to questions such as:

- What is working well, and where does more need to be done?
- What is important to residents?
- Where do City staff see opportunities to be more systematically inclusive of older adult concerns?

Importantly, the effort also aimed to capture voices from Brooklyn Park's older low-income residents, residents of color, and immigrants and refugees, whose input had not been specifically sought by local government before.

Below is a summary of select recommendations that emerged from this process. (Find more detail in the full report.) They are organized into four age-friendly domain areas similar to those used by the Task Force on Aging and based on the World Health Organization's Age-Friendly Cities program: Community and Civic Participation; Housing; Public Spaces and Transportation; and Community and Support Services. An additional section addresses policies and practices specific to City departments. Some are straightforward and could be accomplished quickly, while others are broader in scope and have longer time horizons.

This is an exciting opportunity for the City and community members to think about how together we can fulfill the potential of the aging population.

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# Summary: Recommendations for an Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park

## 1) Community & Civic Participation

- a) Bring information to people where they gather.
- b) Better utilize community organizations that can pass on information.
- c) Reach out to new senior housing residents who have relocated and know little about Brooklyn Park.
- d) Add an element of City support or partnership to an existing event in a community of color, immigrants, or refugees. The City can support rather than lead efforts to serve these diverse communities.

## 2) Public Spaces and Transportation

- a) Conduct a brief transportation audit as a means of better understanding current services and to highlight gaps and needs across various modes. Consider whether a circulator shuttle or other service would be appropriate to consider.
- b) Assess intersections known to be dangerous to pedestrians and develop a plan for safety improvements. Senior housing buildings are near problematic thoroughfares and intersections—such as Zane Avenue and Brooklyn Boulevard.

## 3) Housing

- a) Conduct a housing audit to assess current and planned housing stock, senior housing communities, current and anticipated need for affordable housing, etc. This information would help the City better understand its present circumstances and position it to create a more effective plan for appropriate and affordable housing options for older residents going forward.
- b) Develop an affordable housing plan related to older residents.

## 4) Community and Health Services

- a) Create a class on how to use local delivery services.
- b) Partner with/utilize existing organizations to better reach and support immigrant communities.
- c) Bring mini-versions of the annual resource fair to specific ethnic or cultural communities.
- d) Engage the business community in age-friendly business efforts through BP Business Forward, which has already expressed its interest in the work.

## Inside City Government

### **Administration:**

- 1) Consider pursuing a regional approach to age-friendly efforts. Maple Grove, Osseo and Hennepin County are all engaged in this work and opportunities may exist to collaborate on transportation, communication, and other areas.
- 2) Incorporate age-friendly training into staff training and new employee on-boarding.
- 3) Improve accessibility of City Hall. The front entrance is a long walk to where residents must go to pay bills or conduct other business.
- 4) Better address translation and interpretation needs that affect many older immigrants.
- 5) Develop a broader and more cohesive volunteer strategy.
- 6) Formalize practices for public meetings and similar events that ensure all attendees can hear and participate. E.g., require that all presenters and speakers—including attendees who comment or ask questions—use a microphone.
- 7) Consider age-friendly employment practices such as phased retirement, flexible schedules, and specific accommodations for working caregivers.

# Summary: Recommendations for an Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park

## **Communication:**

- 1) Be deliberate about messaging and communications related to older adults to ensure that negative stereotypes are not being perpetuated.
- 2) Ensure that City publications and the new website use age-friendly design practices in terms of font style and size, color contrast, etc.

## **Community Development:**

- 1) Develop a housing strategy for older residents that goes beyond “senior housing.”
- 2) Use Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park to help operationalize existing age-friendly aspects of the comprehensive plan, such as residential universal design.
- 3) Develop educational materials urging landlords to incorporate universal design features into routine building upgrades.
- 4) Engage the business community in age-friendly business efforts through BP Business Forward, which has already expressed its interest in the work.

## **Operations and Maintenance**

- 1) Invest in additional benches, lighting, and trail maintenance in key locations identified through Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park outreach and additional older resident input.

## **Police & Fire Departments**

- 1) Consider an emerging model that involves embedding a social worker into the City’s emergency response teams. The dual benefits of this approach include better serving residents and freeing up police and fire resources to respond to real emergencies in a busy city by reducing the volume of repeated and unnecessary 9-1-1 calls.

## **Recreation and Parks:**

- 1) Establish a policy to formalize giving space priority at the CAC to Senior Adult classes. This will help prevent the issue of those classes being cancelled when their rooms are rented for other events.
- 2) Increase older adult engagement in park bond reinvestment projects. The passing of the park bond referendum presents a well-timed opportunity to conduct older adult-specific engagement in major City projects.
- 3) Consider reduced-cost programming for low-income residents to allow their participation in Recreation and Parks programming.
- 4) Inclusion: Address the question of how people with physical limitations and/or cognitive decline can be accommodated in Recreation and Parks programming.



# Introduction

In 2018 the City of Brooklyn Park dug deeper than it had before into learning about needs and opportunities related to its older residents. Like many other places, its population is aging. More than 20 percent of the city's population was 55 or older in 2016, up from 12.5 percent in 2000.<sup>1</sup>

The health and wellbeing of older adults also emerged as a priority through *Brooklyn Park 2025*, a 2016 community planning process, reinforcing the work's importance for the community. A resident-led Task Force on Aging laid additional groundwork in 2014 and 2015, developing recommendations for how the City could better support older residents. (See Appendix E.)

This report is the culmination of the past year's work to better understand what older residents in Brooklyn Park want and need, and to help the City determine how best to respond to the findings. It is set in the framework of age-friendly cities. This rapidly spreading movement takes a community-wide approach to more deliberately including all ages to ensure that we can remain engaged and independent as long as possible as we grow older.

The report discusses the need for and value of age-friendly cities, and what was learned (and how) about older residents. It lingers on the findings from the city's older low-income residents and residents of color, including immigrants and refugees, as this is the City's first concerted effort of this degree to specifically explore the experiences of older adults in the many multicultural groups that reside in Brooklyn Park.

It closes with recommendations concerning how the City might choose to proceed given the needs and opportunities identified over the course of this process. This is primarily a strategy-level report to help the City understand the needs and determine how to approach this work in terms of time, funding, staff and other resources. It includes recommendations but is not an action plan laying out concrete steps and timelines to address specific issues. Instead it is an important step toward that stage.

## What is an age-friendly community?

In an age-friendly community, policies, services and structures related to the physical and social environment are designed to support and enable older people to "age actively" – that is, to live in security, enjoy good health and continue to participate fully in society.

Age-friendly service providers, public officials, community leaders, faith leaders and business people:

- Recognize the great diversity among older persons,
- Promote their inclusion and contribution in all areas of community life,
- Respect their decisions and lifestyle choices, and
- Anticipate and respond flexibly to aging-related needs and preferences.

— World Health Organization

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<sup>1</sup> This report does not use a single age threshold to define the start of older age. It can be useful to break down the data in various ways to illustrate different things.

## Age-Friendly: Important for All

Population aging is pushing cities and other municipalities to confront certain realities. Most are moved to act by simple demographics, and the numbers are indeed compelling. The absolute number of older adults is growing, and so is the proportion.

- In the United States, in 1900 only one in 25 people was 65 years old or older. By 2030, one in 5 people will be 65-plus, and many places already approach or exceed that figure, including Hennepin County and the State of Minnesota.
- In Minnesota, more people will turn 65 in this decade than in the past four decades combined. In 1960, 38 percent of the population was 18 or younger and 10 percent was 65 or older. By 2030, those groups will each comprise about 21 percent of population.

- In Brooklyn Park, 10.2 percent of residents were 65-plus in 2017, up from 7.6 percent in 2010. (See more in Table 1.)

However, wise and truly inclusive communities know it is more fundamental than a demographic shift. People of all ages deserve to be deliberately included in a city's plans, projects, and policies, and cities benefit from enabling their residents to live with independence and dignity. The changing demographics simply highlight the fact that most governments have failed to adequately do so.

Some researchers frame this as a “right to the city” issue: all residents have rights to participate in decision-making regarding their physical environment and access to resources. This pertains especially to older adults, as our “zones of activity” tend to shrink as we age, making our immediate environments and resources even more important.

**TABLE 1: Percent of Area Residents Aged 60+**

Municipality	2010 Residents Aged 60+	2017: Residents Aged 60+	Brooklyn Park’s proportion of older residents is less than its neighbors’ (Maple Grove, Osseo, and Brooklyn Center) and the county and State as a whole, and slightly more than that of Minneapolis. But the numbers are on track to rise, and 14.6 percent of the City’s approximately 80,000 residents aged 60+ amounts to more than 11,600 people—not insignificant.
Brooklyn Park	11.6	15.4	
Brooklyn Center	16.8	16.3	
Maple Grove	11.1	18.7	
Minneapolis	11.9	13.9	
Osseo	32.4	35.1	
Hennepin County	15.7	18.7	
State of Minnesota	17.5	20.7	
Sources: US Census Bureau 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates and 2013-2017 ACS 5-Year Estimates			

<sup>2</sup> Purcell, M. 2003. Citizenship and the right to the global city: Reimagining the capitalist world order. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27(3): 564–590.



## Age-Friendly: Important for All

Yet cities and counties simply weren't planned with current lifespans in mind, and we continue to plan for and include older adults only minimally and usually with an outdated, ageist paradigm. While operating within the realm of "senior" is critical—senior housing, senior centers, senior services, etc.—age-friendly communities are much broader than this.

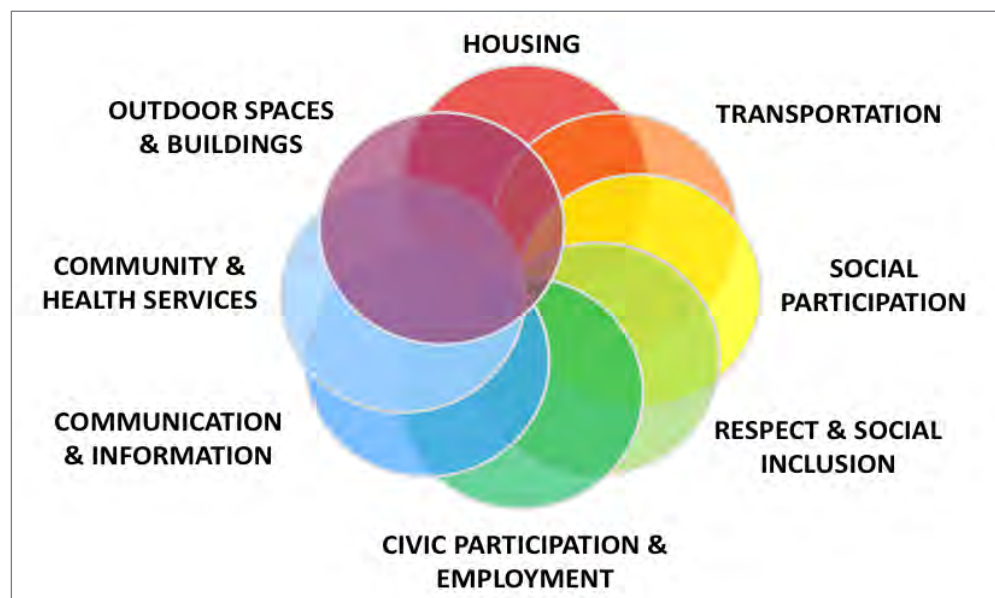
Instead of marginalizing older adults, we should recognize their value and help fulfill the potential of aging. After all, most of us will one day be a part of this group.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is the global leader of age-friendly cities work. It created the Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities around 2006, a program that provides a framework to guide member cities through steps to become better places for older people to live.

This work is spreading quickly, with more than 300 network members in the U.S., where it is now operated by AARP, and more than 700 worldwide. Many cities and counties are pursuing similar and substantial work outside of WHO's program, but the numbers are a helpful indicator of the interest in and uptake of this work. While Brooklyn Park has not (yet) joined the age-friendly network, it uses the program's framework as a guide. (See Appendix F for more on joining the network.)

The WHO/AARP program is organized into eight domains of livability, which identify key aspects of community life that should be explored and addressed through an age-friendly lens. Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park is using the below domains (Figure 1) to guide its work.

**FIGURE 1: World Health Organization/AARP Domains of Livability**



The WHO/AARP program is organized into eight domains of livability, which identify key aspects of community life that should be explored and addressed through an age-friendly lens.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Madrid Plan of Action for Ageing*, 2002.

# Attitude Adjustment: The Fundamentals

Engrained biases against aging can prevent us from effectively addressing the issues related to this inevitable phenomenon.

Whether or not we realize it, most of us carry negative views of aging, including our own aging, and this has real implications for our health, well-being, and even how long we live. People want to distance themselves from the idea of “old” because we tend to associate it only with loss, decline, and feeling invisible, devalued, and “other-ed.”

Our society and systems tend to support and perpetuate these negative views, doing us all a disservice. What if our communities were planned and funded in a manner that allowed us to move more seamlessly into older age, without having to give up the ability to get around, remain socially connected, and live independent lives as long as possible? Our dread of older age may be replaced with a sense of optimism and possibility. Not to mention that cities could reap the economic and social benefits of a more fully engaged and independent populace.

Raising awareness of these biases and working to shake them loose are important aspects of age-friendly communities because they truly do have concrete implications. Below are some key points and facts that must underlie this work.

- Older residents are as fundamentally important as all other community members who have a right to move around and take part in city life. In most places older adults are eventually excluded or discriminated against by default when they cease to drive or lose independence in other ways.
- Older adults significantly contribute to the local economy. The term “longevity economy” was coined for this reason. Older people:
  - Hold the majority of consumer purchasing power
  - Are a valuable and growing segment of the workforce
  - Play critical roles as caregivers to spouses, partners, grandchildren and others
  - Volunteer at high rates
  - Make significant philanthropic and charitable contributions.
- “Seniors” are often lumped into one broad category, which can span up to five decades. Older adults are not a single monolithic group and should not be regarded as such. Whether you believe that older adulthood begins at 50, 65, or 70, each decade presents different stages of life, opportunities, and needs. The experience of aging is universal, but as we reach older age we become more diverse. There is no such thing as a typical 75-year-old. The physical and cognitive capacities of older people vary greatly, unlike those of most 40-year-olds, for example.
- Age is part of diversity and inclusion. Brooklyn Park has worked hard to engage and include its racially, ethnically, culturally, economically, and otherwise diverse residents, and it must explicitly include older residents in this regard.
- Gender, earlier life experiences, and culture determine how people age. This is especially important in a city like Brooklyn Park where residents have widely divergent life experiences due to ethnicity, race, culture, immigration status, and income level.

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<sup>4</sup>World Health Organization. <http://www.who.int/ageing/features/faq-ageism/en/>

<sup>5</sup>American Society on Aging. *Generations*, Fall 2015.

## Aging in the Suburbs

Suburban populations are aging faster than those in cities.<sup>7</sup> The Minneapolis/Saint Paul region's five all-suburban counties will see their 65-plus populations more than double—and in Carver County, quadruple—in the next 30 years.<sup>8,9</sup>

Boomers raised their children in the suburbs and are staying put as they reach older adulthood.

Yet aging in suburbia poses challenges. As has been said, suburbs were designed to move cars, not people, and there are few other ways to get around. Low density and automobile-centric development made public transit impractical, expensive, and a low priority. Most of the suburban housing is single-family homes, often multi-level, with a yard to keep, and set apart from stores and services. Commercial areas have vast parking lots that are unfriendly to people on foot or bicycle, even if shops are relatively near each other.



Unlike pre-World War II eras, few people today walk to work, the store, or school. We've designed our suburban communities in a way that discourages physical activity and minimizes social interaction that was once part of everyday life. Today our daily routines rely almost completely on personal vehicles, which puts non-drivers of all ages in a particular difficult position.

This model doesn't work for most of us as we get older, yet more than half of the country's 75 million baby boomers live in suburbs.<sup>10</sup> And it's not just about accommodating boomers; many people are already old, and younger generations, of course, eventually will age, too. The shift to an older demographic will not be a temporary one as people continue to live longer and birth rates remain low.

More suburbs are working to retrofit themselves to respond to changing demographic trends. Fewer households have school-age children, more households have single occupants, and both boomers and millennials state preferences for walkable and mixed-use communities.<sup>11, 12</sup>

It takes time and resources to change or create new housing and transportation, and age-friendliness isn't about infrastructure alone.

The shift to an older demographic will not be a temporary one as people continue to live longer and birth rates remain low.

<sup>6</sup> World Health Organization, Active Ageing Policy. 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Frey, William. January 2003. Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, The Brookings Institution. "Boomers and Seniors in the Suburbs: Aging Patterns in Census 2000."

<sup>8</sup> Minnesota State Demographic Center. County population projections by age and sex. March 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Bergal, Jenni. "Can car-centric suburbs adjust to aging baby boomers?" June 20, 2016. Pew Charitable Trusts.

<sup>11</sup> US Census Bureau. 2016 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

<sup>12</sup> American Planning Association. Investing in Place for Economic Growth and Competitiveness: Two generations' view on the future of communities: millennials, boomers, and new directions for planning and economic development. 2014.

# The Role of Community

“Aging well” doesn’t happen only at the individual level. The term can imply that how we age is a function of factors all within our control—our choices and lifestyles. In fact, many variables and the interaction of those variables determine our health and well-being as we grow older.

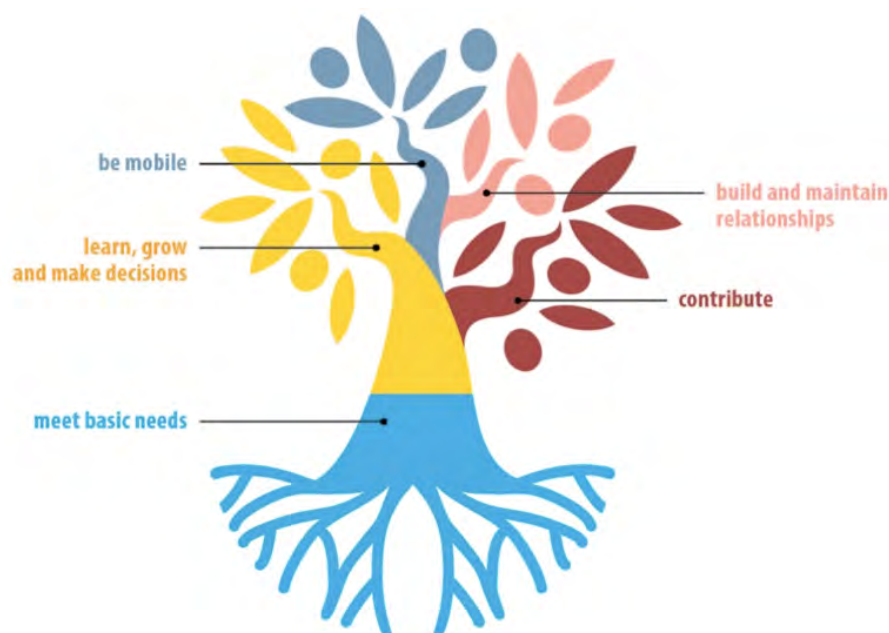
The World Health Organization defines healthy aging as “the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables well-being in older age.” Why functional ability? Because healthy aging is not just about our physical and mental—or intrinsic—capacity, but also about how well we can function in our environment given that capacity.

Figure 2 illustrates what WHO identifies as the five domains of functional ability: meet basic needs; be mobile; build and maintain relationships; learn, grow and make decisions; and contribute. Similar to the eight domains of livability that shape age-friendly communities (see page 9), the domains of functional ability are closely interconnected.

“These abilities are essential to enable older people to do the things that they value. Together they enable older people to age safely in a place that is right for them, to continue to develop personally, to be included and to contribute to their communities while retaining their autonomy and health.” –World Report on Ageing and Health, World Health Organization, 2015

We all want to be autonomous, connected to others, and able to enjoy life—that doesn’t change with age. Local governments and communities play a significant role in shaping how we experience older age.

Aging in community is an evolution of aging in place. In fact, the American Planning Association has developed a policy guide around this concept. Going far beyond simply being able to remain in one’s own home, which can be a lonely and isolating endeavor, aging in community refers to “building vital communities that engage people of all ages and abilities in a shared, ongoing effort to advance the common good.”<sup>13</sup>



The aging population will impact society and government in a myriad of complex ways, many of which are beyond the scope of Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park. But local and regional initiatives are critical to responding to the needs and opportunities tied to more of us being and becoming older adults. Important work is possible and necessary at the community level, which also informs, supports, and reinforces broader efforts.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas and Blanchard. 2009. “Moving Beyond Place: Aging in Community.” *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging*.



## Age-Friendly in Context: A Profile of Brooklyn Park

Brooklyn Park, Minnesota is a vibrant suburb northwest of Minneapolis in Hennepin County. Situated on the west bank of the Mississippi River, it is the state's sixth largest city, with a population of 80,800 people. It is also the 11<sup>th</sup> fastest growing city in Minnesota.

Once a traditionally Midwestern and mostly white suburb, the city's trademark over the past two decades has become its remarkable racial and cultural diversity. Brooklyn Park's present demographics reflect where the state of Minnesota's will be in 2040. Fifty-four percent of residents are people of color, 22 percent are foreign-born, and more than a quarter speaks a language other than English at home. It is home to large Asian (namely Hmong, Vietnamese, and Lao) and African (especially from Liberia, Kenya, Nigeria, and Ethiopia) populations, as well as many Hispanic/Latinx and African-American residents.

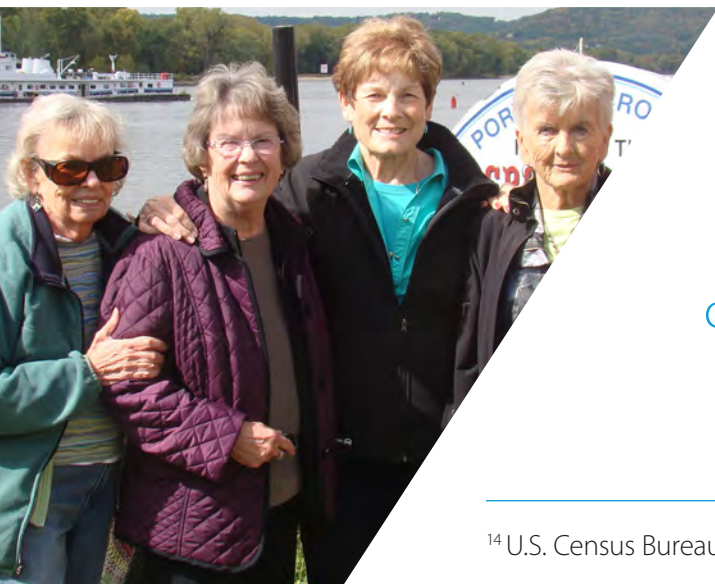
For this reason, the City has invested significant time and resources into community engagement to help ensure all residents feel welcome and included.

Brooklyn Park is unique in that it developed progressively, with homes in the south constructed largely in the 1960s and newer housing that spread north in later decades, with new developments still being constructed

in the northwestern neighborhoods. There is a \$90,557 difference in median household income between the highest and lowest median income census tracts. Therefore, as in other places with such income inequality, there are disparities in outcomes related to housing, employment, education and health.

This racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity provides a fascinating but complex context for Brooklyn Park's age-friendly work. Residents' experiences of growing older vary widely. We all become more diverse as we age, experiencing change or decline at different ages and rates. The demographic diversity in Brooklyn Park heightens this reality, and this will become increasingly true over time. Younger cohorts are more racially and ethnically diverse than older ones, though this will change as those younger generations grow older. In Minnesota, for example, people of color comprise only four percent of those aged 85 or older but 31 percent of children five and under.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps for this reason Brooklyn Park is collectively younger than its neighbors, the county, and state as a whole. But its overall older adult population is growing, too, and will continue to do so.



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<sup>14</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2015, via the Minnesota State Demographer's Office.



# The City's Foundation for Age-Friendly Work

Brooklyn Park's city government has a strong foundation for this work in terms of organizational culture and active support for the community's older adults. Leaders already invest in the growth and evolution of the city as an organization, establishing a culture of continuous improvement and actively seeking ways to function at a higher level in service to residents. The following information and observations support the notion that the City as an organization is prepared to undertake a new way of thinking and operating. It also presents some of the key ways it has invested in its older residents to date.

- The City led a year-long community planning process called **Brooklyn Park 2025**, which used extensive resident input to develop six overarching goals (see page 21) in support of the its mission to be "a thriving community inspiring pride where opportunities exist for all." *Brooklyn Park 2025* demonstrates the City's commitment to better understanding and acting on residents' desires, concerns, and priorities for a better community.
- The Community Long-Range Improvement Commission (CLIC) was the sponsoring Commission within the City that guided the **Task Force on Aging**, which developed a substantial foundation for age-friendly work in 2014 and 2015. Its recommendations (summarized at right) reinforce much of what was learned through

this year's Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park efforts. They are organized into priority areas similar to the WHO domains of livability. Read more about the Task Force's conclusions in Appendix E.

- Brooklyn Park has developed a reputation for having an **exceptional senior center**, housed within the Community Activity Center (CAC). The

Recreation and Parks' Senior Adult programs are incredibly valued by and meaningful to participants and highly regarded by professionals in the community. This is due to the welcoming and caring culture established by key staff, popular classes, and the sense of community and lasting bonds that form between participants. One fitness instructor with extensive training

## Brooklyn Park's Task Force on Aging's Recommendations (2015)



# The City's Foundation for Age-Friendly Work

and education has helped many participants reduce chronic pain issues through a musculoskeletal approach. Other classes, such as watercolor painting, were also noted as having had profound impacts on participants.

- **The Dynamic Aging Resource Fair** is an important annual event that draws more than 350 attendees and 50 vendors, providing valuable opportunities for older adults and their families to learn about resources that are available within the community and to connect with key businesses and organizations. It includes quality speakers and workshops on a variety of topics, all free to the public. This event also provides an important chance for the City to share information with and gather input from older residents, most of which are in a “sharing and learning mode” at the event and ready to engage.
- City staff have a **learning mindset**, and the culture of continuous improvement encourages **ongoing professional development** opportunities—such as education sessions on various topics, access to consultants who share knowledge and expertise, and cross-departmental trainings. These include department-specific topics and cross-department topics—including age-friendliness—that help the City function as a single enterprise focused on the same goals and how to achieve them.
- Key leaders use **strategic approaches** to apply various lenses to the breadth of its work. Similar to age-friendly, race and equity lenses are being used to strengthen the City’s work in those realms across the board. The City also created a position in the City Manager’s office charged with ensuring that the City’s strategic initiatives—such as Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park—make sense and align with larger goals and activities.
- The City established a **Community Engagement division**, now with a staff of three, to more effectively engage the city’s increasingly diverse population in plans and projects. The City also has an internal racial equity initiative through which staff is trained in intercultural competence and how to apply a racial equity lens to policies, procedures and programs.
- Staff in key departments bring a **high-touch approach to service** to residents. Those extra efforts are especially important to older residents.
- Residents and professionals during the engagement process complimented the City’s **exemplary police and fire departments**, noting that they are well-trained, progressive, professional, and respectful.



City staff have a learning mindset, and the culture of continuous improvement encourages ongoing professional development opportunities—such as education sessions on various topics, access to consultants who share knowledge and expertise, and cross-departmental trainings.

## Brooklyn Park 2025: Strong Alignment with Age-Friendly

The following six goals were identified through *Brooklyn Park 2025*, each with several guiding strategies to support them. Many of these guiding strategies align with age-friendly goals, findings related to the age-friendly community engagement, or recommendations that emerged from the age-friendly process so far. Those strategies, all original parts of *BP 2025*, are noted below each goal. This further reinforces that age-friendly efforts are a natural part and extension of priorities already identified by the community, and that working to advance *BP 2025* goals will simultaneously support age-friendliness.

### **1) A united and welcoming community, strengthened by our diversity**

- Our community's activities, events and services are inclusive, multi-cultural, and accessible.
- We have places and spaces for diverse communities to gather.
- Residents of every age contribute to our community.

### **2) Beautiful spaces and quality infrastructure make Brooklyn Park a unique destination**

- Modern transportation options (drive, ride, walk, bike) connect people to education, jobs, and recreation.
- Quality recreation and park amenities inspire activity for all ages and interests.
- People of all ages and backgrounds enjoy financial stability.

This further reinforces that age-friendly efforts are a natural part and extension of priorities already identified by the community, and that working to advance *BP 2025* goals will simultaneously support age-friendliness.

### **3) A balanced economic environment that empowers businesses and people to thrive.**

- Aging adults have services and amenities to thrive and age in place.
- Everyone has access to quality healthy food options.
- People have access to quality medical and emergency care.

### **4) People of all ages have what they need to feel healthy and safe.**

- The community provides necessary supports and services for community members to overcome life challenges such as hunger, mental illness, and homelessness.

### **5) Partnerships that increase racial and economic equity empower residents and neighborhoods to prosper.**

- The community provides necessary supports and services for community members to overcome life challenges such as hunger, mental illness, and homelessness.

### **6) Effective and engaging government recognized as a leader.**

- The City provides quality services at a reasonable cost.
- Elected officials, commissions, and city staff reflect the diversity of the community and are culturally competent.
- City information is clear, accessible, and delivered in ways that meet the community's needs.

## On the Horizon: Regional Collaboration?

Future opportunities for a regional-level approach may exist. Maple Grove and Osseo, two immediate neighbors of Brooklyn Park, are pursuing similar age-friendly work. Maple Grove joined the WHO/AARP Global Network for Age-Friendly Cities and Communities in 2016; it launched and began implementing its three-year action plan in mid-2018. Osseo has been working with Hennepin County Public Health (HCPH) on a more “8 80” approach, which holds that if you build a city that works for an 8-year-old and an 80-year-old, it will be a great city for all.

Brooklyn Park could explore with these cities and others, perhaps in conjunction with Hennepin County, which has helped fund Osseo’s work and recently hired its first healthy aging coordinator, possible avenues of coordination and/or shared resources. This type of partnership would be new terrain but could ultimately save costs for all cities and acknowledges the reality that residents regularly traverse municipal boundaries for shopping, services, and recreation. It could also encourage support from state and federal government by demonstrating city and county commitment to and leadership around age-friendly efforts at a significant scale.

### Potential avenues to explore:

**Transportation:** Several Twin Cities’ suburbs (including West St. Paul, Edina, White Bear Lake, and others) have launched circulator bus services aimed mostly at older residents. The shuttles run regular routes to key retail and other destinations, usually operating one day a week and charging only a small fare. Many Brooklyn Park residents raised the idea of creating a similar local service to address the issue of transportation as crucial to social connection and autonomy and as a means to staying active and contributing to the local economy. Because these types of services have been recently created and tested in the region, good models and experienced partners exist, though developing a municipally collaborative service would require some additional effort.

**Communication and Information:** Another issue frequently raised by residents was the need for a central information resource on issues related to aging. This could include health and medical needs, city services and programs, senior housing, public library information, county health and social services, transportation, recreation, and more. Existing services like Senior Linkage Line can be confusing and usually require callers to navigate through automated menus and wait on hold before speaking to a person. An information hub concentrated on resources and services in Brooklyn Park, Maple Grove, and Osseo—or perhaps northwest Hennepin County at large—could help residents easily find information about local or nearby services. This type of resource hub would involve partnership with relevant agencies and likely necessitate a dedicated part-time staff person. (The Northwest Hennepin Human Services Council, a Joint Powers Agreement of several area cities that included Brooklyn Park, formerly filled this role to some degree but was dissolved in early 2017.)

**Economic development and local business:** Local businesses are a very important part of community life. Regardless of our age and stage of life, we all need food, services, recreation, medication, and many household items. Businesses can work to understand and accommodate older customers’ needs concerning products, services, and physical design. Collectively, older adults wield enormous purchasing power, which should be additional motivation for businesses to actively cater to this growing group. The concept also includes local businesses as being age-friendly employers: how can they attract and support older workers?

Osseo created an age-friendly business guide, and Maple Grove is developing an age-friendly business program. In Brooklyn Park, BP Business Forward, a City-staffed initiative of local business owners, has stated interest in pursuing this work, and there may be value in exploring whether a regional approach to this topic holds possibility.



## Methodology

This recommendations report was developed based on findings from a two-fold engagement process undertaken over the course of 2018. The process built on earlier work inside the City: *Brooklyn Park 2025*, the City-led community planning effort conducted in 2017, and the work of the resident-led Task Force on Aging from 2014-15.

Through *Brooklyn Park 2025* the community identified six goals, and the needs and well-being of older residents are woven throughout several of those goals and strategies. However, City leaders felt they needed to explore older adult needs more specifically. The Task Force on Aging, an effort of the Community Long-Range Improvement Commission, produced a set of recommendations, but it did not have the capacity to conduct more extensive engagement that would reflect varying needs of the city's diverse communities. Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park sought to capture those voices as well as to dig deeper into older adult concerns and opportunities community-wide.

This work involved looking both outward into the community and inward to city government to uncover baseline age-friendliness on both fronts.

- What is working well, and where does more need to be done?
- What is important to residents?
- Where do City staff see opportunities to be more systematically inclusive of older adult concerns?

### Coordination with Hennepin County

It so happened that Brooklyn Park's Recreation and Park's Department Program, in partnership with Hennepin County Public Health, was undertaking a related project around the same time that Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park was getting under way. This partnership's focus was more targeted: gather input from older residents (50+) in Brooklyn Park related to needs, desires, gaps, challenges and barriers to accessing and/or participating in the City's Recreation and Parks Adult & Senior Adult programs. There was a specific focus on Brooklyn Park's low-income residents and/or residents of color, many but not all being immigrants or refugees.

This work included leading five focus groups for its project, and Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park participated in those sessions to gather insights for this report. The two projects were coordinated as needed throughout. While the Recreation and Parks Senior Program's report was written independently, the conclusions are consistent with those in this report. (See page 41 for more information about the conclusions; see Appendix G for the report.)

This work involved looking both outward into the community and inward to city government to uncover baseline age-friendliness on both fronts.





# Methodology

## External Engagement

The external community engagement for Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park involved 1) city residents, and 2) key community stakeholders, primarily professionals across various sectors whose work touches older adults.

### **City Residents**

Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park followed the World Health Organization's principle of hearing directly from residents, understanding that the lived experiences of older adults are the core of the work. In Brooklyn Park this meant connecting with a cross-section of residents who reflect the community's ethnic and racial diversity. Ten focus groups and listening sessions were held, including five led by HCPH. This also included a presentation and discussion at a Brooklyn Park Community Assembly (regularly held forums for residents to learn about and discuss important community issues) and an interactive table at the Dynamic Aging Resource Fair, where input was gathered from many of the 350 attendees at that event. A handful of individual or small-group interviews with residents were also conducted. (See Appendix B for more details about resident engagement activities.)

### **Key Stakeholders/Community Partners**

It was also critical to hear from professionals who work with older adults in various capacities to capture their perspectives and expertise. Meetings or interviews were held with 21 organizations and agencies across a range of sectors—including healthcare, senior housing communities, nonprofit service organizations, community education, churches and more. (See Appendix C for more details about stakeholder engagement activities.)

## Internal Engagement

### **City Departments and Key Staff**

Brooklyn Park also wanted to conduct a self-assessment of its own work as a local government to uncover opportunities to better serve and support older residents. The consultant presented to and led an interactive discussion with a large group of cross-departmental manager-level staff, and later met with small groups from individual departments. Both were opportunities to learn more about what staff observe and recommend from their varying roles and perspectives. (See Appendices A and C for more details about City department engagement activities.)

In Brooklyn Park this meant connecting with a cross-section of residents who reflect the community's ethnic and racial diversity.



## Findings: Resident and Key Stakeholder Engagement

This section presents what was learned through many conversations with residents, key stakeholders, and professionals from different sectors whose work relates to the lives of older adults.

As previously noted, resident experiences vary widely in some regards. Defining factors tend to be race or ethnicity and socioeconomic status. These findings and subsequent discussion provide greater detail about the city's older low-income residents, residents of color, and immigrants and refugees due to associated complexities and the fact that there has been less exploration by government entities of their needs and circumstances. This summary reflects themes and notable responses; it is not exhaustive. Full results from any engagement session or interview are available upon request.

While the findings are roughly organized according to the WHO/AARP livability domains, keep in mind that all are interconnected. Improvements in one domain are likely to stimulate changes in another. For example, more transportation options will help address social isolation.

The findings are critical but not equivalent to a list of immediate action items for the City. Using this recommendations report, the City and community partners will develop a plan of action that identifies priorities, timelines, and resources.

*(Note that some of the findings also function as recommendations; those have been pulled out and are included in the later Recommendations section.)*

### Outdoor Spaces & Buildings

- People want walkability.
- They appreciate the trail system, but trails designed for use by both cyclists and pedestrians can feel treacherous and unsafe for walking.
- Residents enjoy trails but often must drive to reach them.
- The availability of benches—or lack thereof—can determine whether older adults use trails. (Some are currently lacking near SummerCrest Condominiums.)
- Certain streets/intersections were noted as dangerous for pedestrians, e.g., Zane Avenue and Brooklyn Boulevard. And in fact, two separate pedestrian fatalities—both older residents—occurred on Brooklyn Boulevard near Zane Avenue in fall 2018.

### Housing

- Affordable senior housing is a fundamental issue. This came from residents and professionals alike. If more senior housing is constructed, it must be affordable. There is also a shortage of affordable rental housing.
- Many homeowners (mostly white) are concerned about being priced out of the community when trying to downsize to one-level homes/townhomes. New homes, even if smaller, cost more than their current homes and are unaffordable.

**“My split-level house won’t age with me.”**

– Resident



**“When you’re in the apartment and lock the door, you’re safe. But coming in and out, [you] don’t feel safe.”**

– Resident

## Findings: Resident and Key Stakeholder Engagement

- Property taxes can get high for older residents on fixed incomes. As the housing market and other factors beyond their control change, taxes can increase significantly even if no improvements have been made to the property.
- Some lower-income residents of apartment buildings have basic safety concerns. Leaving their apartment or the building can expose them to unsafe situations. This can perpetuate greater isolation.
- Older immigrants can be put in vulnerable positions concerning housing. They may be reluctant to complain to a landlord for fear of eviction, may not know their rights, and may not have an advocate to help them navigate such situations.

### Transportation

- Transportation is likely the most significant and unifying challenge for older residents.
- Most non-drivers depend on friends and family to provide rides. Older adults may rely on adult children for transportation, but many of those children work and are available on a limited basis or only on weekends. Some residents described missing medical appointments or rescheduling surgeries because of their family's inability to give rides at needed times.
- A small percentage of residents use Metro Mobility, which requires a doctor's certification to ride. While it can be time-consuming and inconvenient, they still value it greatly because it provides a safe and affordable option.
- While most residents don't use public transit—in this case, the bus—some older Liberians take it regularly, and a handful of others rely on it. Of those who do not ride, reasons given include:
  - Play critical roles as caregivers to spouses, partners, grandchildren and others
  - No need for it because they drive
  - Don't know how to use the system
  - Safety concerns
  - Bus routes don't go to desired locations
  - Accessibility—concerns about being able to safely board and exit the bus without assistance
  - Fear of the unknown
- Many residents support the Bottineau light rail coming into the city and said they would ride it, though some said education on how to ride would be important. Those who drive also expressed concern about the need for convenient parking around the stations.
- A small number of residents, generally younger-older ones who still drive, have used ridesharing services like Uber and Lyft on occasion. For others there are concerns about cost, trust, and the ability of drivers to help riders in need of

**"Let us participate in the economy."**

– *Tradition senior housing resident on the need for transportation services*



**"I think of not being able to drive and it scares me to death."**

– *Recreation & Parks Senior Adult Program participant*



**"Over time we have seen many of our neighbors stop driving, and that tends to isolate people. And then once they're isolated, the downhill spiral begins."**

– *Homeowners' association resident*

## Findings: Resident and Key Stakeholder Engagement

extra assistance. So, while those services do provide important transportation options that allow spontaneity and autonomy, they are not being well utilized at this point for various reasons.

- Immigrants are most likely to walk as a means of transportation. This is mostly out of necessity, as they often do not have vehicles or licenses to drive.
- Many suggested the idea of a regular circulator shuttle service that would travel to grocery stores, pharmacies, restaurants, and other key destinations.
- Residents of senior housing tend to learn from each other about transportation options beyond driving a personal vehicle. Someone suggested a service that would help prepare people to transition to non-driving.
- Some senior housing communities have busses or vans, but the service is limited and does not allow for spontaneity.
- Some residents travel on scooters year-round as weather and sidewalk conditions allow. This provides an important means of getting around but can be treacherous in the winter.
- Some older immigrants may not drive or get licensed to drive because of concerns related to their immigration status. Many of these residents do or are willing to ride public transportation and would greatly benefit from additional options.

### Civic Engagement & Employment

- Volunteering:
  - People would like a readily available, comprehensive source of local volunteer opportunity listings.
  - Others expressed the desire for more meaningful volunteer opportunities within the city—to help immigrants, school kids, the libraries, etc. in Brooklyn Park.
  - There is also desire for more sporadic opportunities rather than regular ongoing commitments.
  - Older adults are important to Recreation and Parks and other City departments as sources of volunteers and seasonal employees.
- Community groups and service clubs like the Brooklyn Park Lions contribute immensely through extensive volunteering throughout the community as well as by providing a source of purposeful social connection and support for its members. Membership in such organizations—Kiwanis and Rotary are other examples—is waning nationally, but these groups have served as important sources of social capital for years.

**“It is hard to connect people to resources. You need that person-to-person help, and that’s what people want.”**

*– Senior Housing Administrator*





# Findings: Resident and Key Stakeholder Engagement

## Communication & Information

- Communication is a complicated issue. People find, seek, and disregard information in their own ways.
- Numerous people noted a lack of easy-to-find information on topics related to aging and requested an information clearinghouse or resource hub. Existing services like the Senior Linkage Line can be confusing and overwhelming.
- Many residents, primarily white ones, value City publications and report reading them regularly—such as *Park Pages* (City newsletter), *Get Up & Go* (Recreation and Parks activity brochure), and *Adults on the Move* (Recreation and Parks Adult and Senior Adult brochure). Residents of color and immigrants were less likely to read these publications. Some aren't able to read English, some find the amount of information too overwhelming, and some are simply



disconnected from the world of City/CAC programming and don't consider the information applicable or of interest to them. Some suggested a more summarized flyer targeting older residents.

- Reaching older residents across the city's ethnic and multicultural communities can be especially difficult. For example, no one at the Lao focus group had heard about or attended the recent annual Tater Daze event, despite widespread marketing. However, they did attend the Brooklyn Park Lions Club smelt fry and said they learned about the event from posters around the city.
- Spanish-speaking residents said the lack of Spanish language marketing or informational materials feels exclusionary. Even though they know they can attend events or participate in certain activities, they still feel like guests and not truly part of it. Some of this is tied to immigration status or concerns.
- New residents of senior housing communities need more information about the city and local resources. Many move from out of town and are unfamiliar with the community but would like to become more connected.
- Some requested a class on how to use local delivery services. Who offers what and how do you use it?

**"The more isolated you are the more vulnerable you are. That's known in the neighborhood."**

– Resident





# Findings: Resident and Key Stakeholder Engagement

## Social Participation

- We heard from residents themselves as well as from others who work with them that social isolation and loneliness are real and pervasive issues.
- Lack of transportation underlies a good deal of social isolation.
- Living in senior housing can provide important social connections and sense of community for some.
- Identifying isolated older people in the community can be a challenge (though there are some individuals who prefer to be isolated).
- Preventing isolation and loneliness by providing opportunities for social connection earlier is helpful.
- Isolation leads to greater vulnerability and a host of other issues.
- Social isolation exists within immigrant communities as well. Even older immigrants who live with extended family can be isolated from their friends and peers. Family support is critical but does not replace peer connection.
- Senior Adult Programs at the CAC are profoundly important to many participants as a forum for forming and building close friendships and supportive relationships. Many even remarked on the lack of Friday fitness classes in summer months because even the loss of one day a week is missed.

**"I love this community center. It is extraordinarily important. It is so easy to become isolated. I have grown as a person because your door was open."**

*– CAC Senior Adult Program participant*



## Findings: Resident and Key Stakeholder Engagement

### Community & Health Services

- Caregiving takes a toll on an increasing number of residents. When asked about the mental health of older patients, one healthcare provider noted that it is caregivers who need the most support in assuring their own emotional and physical well-being.
- There is a need for broader understanding of and engagement with dementia.
- Grocery and pharmacy delivery services provide a lifeline to people who cannot easily get out. Hy-Vee and Walgreens were noted.
- Access to fresh and healthy food is an issue.
- There is a desire for more sit-down restaurants and less fast food.
- People would like more activities for grandparents and grandkids.
- Many residents—especially immigrants—are not aware of available resources, such as reserving rooms for free at City Hall or the library. Language differences also make it difficult for them to use the reservation systems.
- Many older immigrants from Liberia and Sierra Leone have limited health literacy, which contributes to high rates of hypertension, diabetes, high cholesterol, heart disease and stroke.
- One healthcare provider said that available resources don't really fit the community's older low-income residents of color, many of who are immigrants or refugees.
- Residents of SummerCrest Condominiums noted the City's thorough and well-trained fire department, and the mindful and respectful police department. Key stakeholders from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and Hennepin Health Care noted Brooklyn Park's progressive, well-trained and helpful police department.
- Some businesses that may not typically considered notable are valuable to some older residents. It is important to remember that people use business and services in ways that work for their circumstances, and that those choices are not always obvious or predictable. The list should not be considered exhaustive but was developed based on what was learned from residents and others involved in this effort.
  - ALDI is favored by older residents of Creekside Gables and Brooks Landing (affordable senior housing buildings) because they are able to walk to it and prices are low.
  - Convenience stores: Small markets like Kwik Trip, which sells fresh foods, and Speedy (formerly SuperAmerica) can become important sources of food and small necessities because of their proximity to some older residents' homes and the ease of going in and out of a smaller-scale business.
  - Wal-Mart is a preferred shopping destination due its low prices.
- Numerous Southeast Asian residents noted Dragon Star Supermarket (including its farmers market) and Sun Foods as important to them.
- The City's Farmers Market in Zane Sports Park is also valued by Southeast Asian and other residents.

Many residents—especially immigrants—are not aware of available resources, such as reserving rooms for free at City Hall or the library. Language differences also make it difficult for them to use the reservation systems.

## Key Observations from Immigrant Communities

This section supplements the above findings by presenting some observations specific to the experiences of aging residents across varying cultural communities. They are, of course, to some extent generalizations, but were definite themes that ran through the course of the engagement for Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park.

### Language is a barrier.

Many older immigrants do not speak or read English well enough to feel comfortable participating in existing community activities. They often aren't aware of community events and services in the first place for various reasons—including but not limited to language—but, moreover, attending English-based events is not appealing. Language has the power to make you feel seen, known, appreciated, and understood.

### Integration is not a priority.

Generally, older immigrants expressed—sometimes via their family members—little interest in joining existing classes or programs. In addition to language, noted above, there are cultural differences. Hmong residents, for example, stated the need for purpose in their activities.

It is important to be learning or contributing. Activities just for fun, like Bingo, are of no interest. Further, fitness classes may include physical movements considered inappropriate in more conservative cultures. Even in cases where residents across cultural communities expressed interest in the same topics—such as learning to sew or use a computer—they prefer to do so within their own group.

But this sentiment extends beyond programs and activities. In general, older immigrants prefer to remain within their cultural communities. Connecting with the broader community for its own sake holds little value. While Brooklyn Park has one of the most active National Night Out events in the country, for instance, one Hmong focus group participant pointed to that event as the type that does not resonate with the Hmong community, particularly elders. They don't connect with the purpose.

In some cases, such as with many West African elders, residents continue to deal with trauma related to immigration and to live with significant daily stress due to health issues, food insecurity, financial concerns, and the ongoing demands of navigating a culture that may still be unfamiliar.

For older adults it is often even more important to connect with peers with common language, shared history, and a sense of familiarity and comfort. Integrating into the broader community was not a priority for multicultural residents, who preferred to stick to their own cultural groups. (In fact, white residents were the only ones to raise and encourage the idea of greater mixing of racial and ethnic groups.) Of course, this may change over time in immigrant communities as younger generations who were raised in the U.S. grow older.

### “Alone Together”

Social isolation is common among older people from all backgrounds, but refugees and immigrants can experience it uniquely. Many live with their children and grandchildren but seldom leave the house or connect with friends in person. The care and support provided by family is critical, but people of all ages need connection with their peers, perhaps even more so for refugees and immigrants with difficult histories that continue to affect them. Providing or facilitating opportunities for social connection among isolated immigrants and elders would be of great value to them as well as to their families.

## CASE STUDY: Fitness Class Pilot for Older Liberians

Following an Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park listening session with a group of Liberian elders, the City created a pilot fitness program for this community that ran between April and December 2018. Lessons from the pilot may help the City as it considers how to more effectively engage older residents of various ethnicities.

The listening session, held in partnership with the Organization of Liberians in Minnesota (OLM), involved mostly refugees who came to Minnesota due to civil war in Liberia. They have lived in Brooklyn Park anywhere from three years to two decades. Most had no formal education, and American English is their second language.

Although no participants had taken part in classes or programs at the Community Activity Center (CAC), many expressed interest in fitness or walking programs, among other things. Yet transportation challenges, cost, language barriers, and a general lack of interest in joining CAC classes meant existing programs weren't an option.

As a result, the City arranged to pilot a Walk With Ease class onsite at OLM, a known and trusted organization in Brooklyn Park's Liberian community. Walk With Ease is a program of The Arthritis Foundation and is regularly held at the CAC. The class was offered free of charge and taught by a highly trained and experienced instructor who teaches at the CAC and is a white woman native to Minnesota.

Between April and December 2018, the instructor taught Walk With Ease once a week at OLM to 10-12 participants—all but a few from Brooklyn Park—although participation decreased over time. The program duration was not pre-determined, and participants were not asked to commit to a nine-month session. (The City's Recreation and Parks fitness classes typically run on about three-month sessions.) Transportation and lunch were provided by OLM and/or participants. The class involved walking outdoors and inside and various other exercises provided by the instructor based on participants' interests and abilities.

### Successes:

- Participants appreciated that the City came to them at a familiar and trusted location instead of asking them to travel to somewhere new or different, and they were more likely to participate as a result.
- Offering the class for free made it possible for people to participate in something that would typically be out of reach for them to access.
- A trusting and affectionate relationship formed between the instructor and participants, and participants appreciated the instructor's willingness to be flexible according to what they felt they were able to do on a given day.
- Participants engaged in movement and exercise for an hour each week when they otherwise would likely have just been sitting. They were also given exercise "homework," which, if completed, would increase their daily physical activity.
- The instructor's experience with biomechanics allowed her to help participants with immediate issues, such as knee pain while getting up from a chair, and participants greatly valued that type of help.





## CASE STUDY: Fitness Class Pilot for Older Liberians

### Challenges:

- Language differences made it hard to communicate details of physical movements and caused the instructor some concern about preventing injury. Nuances can be lost between Liberian English and American English.
- It was not uncommon to start late, end early, or have short-notice class cancellations. Cultural concepts of time and schedules did not always align.



### Lessons:

- Success might look different for such a program. The City would need to rethink and define its desired outcomes at the start.
- Such a class requires an experienced and culturally competent instructor who can be flexible moment to moment and improvise as needed based on participants' needs, abilities, and interests.
- Holding the class every other week, instead of weekly, may be preferable for participants.
- A supportive and responsive partner organization is needed to help recruit participants, help with logistics, troubleshoot as needed, and generally serve as a trusted intermediary between the cultural group and city government.
- The City generally cannot afford to offer classes at no cost. Funding or budgets would need to be adjusted to accommodate participants who are unable to pay.
- There can be culturally driven misperceptions or lack of understanding about the availability of City funds to offer such programs. Additional education and communication on this topic could help.
- More time than usual may be needed to plan and teach a similar class in the future as City staff learn and evolve their processes and expectations to work across diverse cultures. Building relationships alone will take time in some cases.

A trusting and affectionate relationship formed between the instructor and participants, and participants appreciated the instructor's willingness to be flexible according to what they felt they were able to do on a given day.



## FINDINGS: City Departments

Age-friendliness should permeate organization-wide. It involves all departments and staff at every level, though people often think of “seniors” in a more limited way.

The City engages with residents in many different capacities. Frontline staff such as members of the Police and Fire departments help residents in their homes every day, and front desk staff assist people visiting City Hall and the CAC. Others develop budgets and create plans, policies, and projects. Age-friendliness pertains to them all.

This section includes key observations and informal recommendations made by staff—or developed based on discussions with them—during meetings between June and October 2018. While important insights and information were shared at these meetings, a true action plan would require additional meetings and input, as well as engagement from community partners, to set priorities and determine strategies and timelines.

The following reflects a general assessment of each group or department based on input of staff that attended the meetings. Note that while the meetings were very productive, not all key staff were able to attend, and the information below should not be considered exhaustive. More details from meetings with each department can be found in Appendices A and D.

*Note: Recommendations specific to each department can be found on page 34.*

Age-friendliness should permeate organization-wide. It involves all departments and staff at every level, though people often think of “seniors” in a more limited way.

### Administration and Finance (Public-facing staff)

This group included staff that perform a wide range of functions and interface with the public related to budget, community engagement, human resources, residential appraisals, utility billing, communications, and guest services via the front desk at City Hall. Several staff members were quite attuned to specific issues concerning older residents, especially those who had worked at the City for many years and observed shifts over time, due to an increasing number of older residents as well as changes in their attitudes, engagement, and expectations tied to generational shifts.

General readiness seemed to vary given that this discussion spanned a cross-section of departments that perform a variety of functions. Some had knowledgeable suggestions for improvements based on their experience and observations, while others were considering the issue for the first time.

### Community Development

Community development touches a range of critical areas related to age-friendliness—planning for land use, housing, and transit; environmental and public health; building inspections and rental properties; and more. Because of the scope and importance of their work, additional meetings would need to be held, ideally with subsets of staff, to develop specific recommendations for this department.

Overall readiness appears to vary. This is a large department with many facets important to age-friendliness. Additional education or training for some would be helpful to increase understanding and better position staff to uncover opportunities for where older adults’ concerns could be integrated into their work. There is willingness and curiosity that with additional support and structure could translate into meaningful changes.

## FINDINGS: City Departments

Here especially there would be both short-term and long-term approaches. For example, a short-term effort could be developing educational materials urging landlords to incorporate universal design features into routine building upgrades. A long-term effort could be developing a housing strategy for older residents that goes beyond senior housing buildings.

Because so much planning happens in this department, it is also a critical place for building age-friendly considerations into practices for City projects large and small. For example, one suggestion raised at the meeting was to make the incoming Bottineau Line light rail project age-friendly. This represents a great (and rare) opportunity on several fronts: ensure that older residents can easily use this important new infrastructure into which so much is being invested; gain experience and education for staff on how to make public transit maximally inclusive; and provide age-friendly leadership with other levels of government involved in the project.

While the light rail represents a special opportunity, more standard and routine projects are equally important as they, too, have direct impact on residents' lives and reflect the City's values and priorities on an ongoing basis.

### Operations & Maintenance

Operations and Maintenance is a unified, well-organized department that is strongly positioned to take on age-friendly efforts. With an established ethos of high-touch customer service, Operations and Maintenance is attuned and responsive to older residents' needs. Because of the nature of its work and its existing department-wide culture of providing high-level service, there are fewer systems-level recommendations for this department, but a few items are noted in the recommendations section.

### *Worth noting:*

One of the most distinctive things about this department is that it manages a unique relationship between the City and homeowner associations (HOAs) that greatly benefits HOA residents, many of whom are older adults. Instead of hiring and paying a contractor directly, an HOA can tag onto an existing City project—such as a street improvement—and pay the City instead. This saves HOA residents a good deal of money, although it does involve extra staff hours to plan and oversee the HOA dimension of these shared projects. As many HOA residents are older adults, this arrangement, which predates any formal age-friendliness efforts, is a good example of how a city can adopt a system-level approach to an aspect of its work and benefit a great number of older residents over time.

### Police and Fire Departments

Leadership from the Police and Fire departments is primed to act to advance age-friendliness in their departments. All clearly identified and concurred about priority needs and gaps—namely, an inability to provide follow-up to residents after emergency calls that would connect them with appropriate resources and prevent future unnecessary calls. With older adults this usually means calls from people who have fallen, need assistance related to a chronic health condition, or simply need some human connection. The number of calls received and amount of time spent at the city's many group homes—a significant number of which house older adults—was also noted.

Department leaders hold visions for systems-level change that would bring more strategic and effective responses to what they see as the true issues that need to be addressed.

## FINDINGS: City Departments

### Recreation & Parks Department

Recreation and Parks holds possibility on several fronts but requires more exploration. Readiness seems to vary given the spectrum of roles and different levels of familiarity with the topic. Additional education and discussion would help some staff better understand how their roles connect with age-friendliness and where opportunity lies to integrate older adults.

This department plays a major and very visible role with older adults through its popular Adult and Senior Adult Programs—including numerous fitness classes, book and cards clubs, knitting groups, educational classes, trips, special events, and more. Recreation and Parks dedicates a full-time staff person to Senior Adult (50+) programming, and the department is well known for its varied and well-run programs that cater to older adults across a spectrum of programs and services for all ages, interests, and ability levels.

Less obvious but also very important is the fact that older residents are highly valued seasonal employees of the Recreation and Parks Department, and many older adults take advantage of Edinburgh USA, a public golf course owned and operated by the City of Brooklyn Park. Older residents also serve as volunteers in various capacities through Recreation and Parks, including at Historic Eidem Farm and for Senior Adult Programs.

Some youth-focused parks programming indirectly relates to older residents due to the fact that many grandparents provide regular care for grandchildren who are involved in the Recreation and Parks programs. Particularly through Recreation on the Go, which brings programming to youth on-site at apartment buildings and complexes (among other locations), there may be opportunities to connect with and support the grandparents who also are present because they serve as full- or part-time caregivers to the children who participate. Those residents may also benefit from Recreation and Parks programming but may be unlikely to otherwise seek it out.

### *Community Activity Center (CAC) Customer Services and Maintenance Team*

Many staff at the CAC have been in their roles a long time and have had the opportunity to observe changes over the years—related to the culture of aging as well as changes to the CAC facility itself.

The CAC front desk often functions like a concierge service. People ask all manner of questions—from simple information about a trip to recommendations for which class suits them best. There is a strong element of customer service involved in these roles, including maintenance staff, who themselves frequently interact with residents and program participants. Staff at all levels seem to strive for high-level customer service and work to “get a yes” for people as much as possible.

While the CAC’s front desk and lobby areas need improvement in their physical design and accessibility, staff are attentive and welcoming and provide a positive first point of contact for participants, which can be especially important for some older adults who make a point of stopping to visit on their way into the building.

Because they deal with older residents very frequently, overall readiness to undertake age-friendly work is quite high.

These are all important facets of Recreation and Parks’ interface with older adults, yet they are all largely disconnected at present. A more unified strategy, framed by age-friendliness, would be helpful.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

**The recommendations are organized into three categories:**

**1) Recommendations by Age-Friendly Domain**

**2) Integration into City Government, including:**

- Department-specific recommendations
- Recommendations for how to better serve and support older low-income residents and residents of color, including immigrants and refugees.

**3) Beyond City Hall: Partnering to lead change in the broader community.**

## Recommendations by Age-Friendly Domain

The following set of recommendations is organized according to the four priority areas identified by Brooklyn Park's Task Force on Aging in 2015 and slightly modified here. Many are pulled from earlier sections of the report and are compiled here for easy reference. Some represent general tactics the City could employ to advance age-friendliness, and some could be translated to an action plan by adding partners, timelines, progress indicators, etc.

These should be considered a starting point; recommendations on topics like housing and transportation, especially, would need more in-depth analysis and input from City departments and community partners who have more intimate knowledge of current issues and efforts and the local and regional landscape in their respective areas.

### 1) Community Information and Participation

a) **Create a central information resource** for a range of topics related to aging and community services and programs. Subsections of this hub could target key ethnic or cultural groups. This could also include information about current volunteer opportunities, or that could be a separate effort. Dedicated staff, or perhaps a volunteer coordinator, would be

needed to keep this current and useful and ideally to be available to speak or meet with people who have questions.

b) **Bring information to people where they gather.**

Finding residents at their familiar and trusted locations will likely be an effective way to supplement existing communication tactics. It would require more staff time, but that in-person outreach will also help cultivate connection to the City.

c) **Partner with community organizations to pass on information.**

Organizations like CEAP, for example, could help disseminate information through its channels, such as Meals on Wheels, and the Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota could help reach Lao residents of Brooklyn Park. This may involve developing new partnerships—or new facets of existing partnerships—of which funding would be an appropriate part.

d) **Better address translation and interpretation needs in the City.**

Older immigrants rely on their family members to take care of bill payment, phone calls, transportation, and many other things—in part because of the language barrier. As the City considers its Inclusion Plan, developing a process and plan for interpretive services will be important.



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e) **Reach out to new senior housing residents.** Many residents of senior housing buildings have relocated from other cities or states and know little about Brooklyn Park. It is easy for them to remain somewhat disconnected from the local community as many needs are often met within the facility, even for those still relatively independent. The City could work with senior housing administrators to:

- i. Develop materials from the City that would be included in new residents' welcome packets. They could include a city profile, information about elected officials, Recreation & Parks adult programs, a city map, etc.
- ii. Organize guided tours of the city to acquaint new residents with their new home and show them where key destinations are located. In addition to making new residents feel valued and included, this could also encourage them to patronize local businesses rather than leaving the community for shopping and other outings, and be a chance to inform them of volunteer opportunities within the City.

f) **Add an element of City support or partnership to an existing event in a community of color, immigrants, or refugees.** The City can support rather than lead efforts to serve these diverse communities.

### 2) Public Spaces & Transportation

- a) **Conduct a brief transportation audit** as a means of better understanding current services and modes of transit in Brooklyn Park and to highlight gaps and needs across various modes. Include exploration of a municipally collaborative approach.
- b) **Use findings from the audit to determine whether a circulator shuttle or other service would be appropriate to consider.**  
The audit could also help make the case for the need.

c) **Assess intersections known to be dangerous to pedestrians** and develop a plan for safety improvements. Senior housing buildings are near problematic thoroughfares and intersections—such as Zane Avenue and Brooklyn Boulevard—and older residents frequently cross those streets on foot. Hennepin County's Public Health and Public Works departments worked with Creekside Gables to improve safety at Zane Avenue and Brooklyn Boulevard intersection, which resulted in a new crosswalk sign.

Additional safety improvements in this area would be beneficial, partnering with the County as needed.

d) **Add benches for resting** at key locations along trails.

e) **Adapt current venues or provide space** for what cultural communities have said is important to them—e.g., Hmong residents would like running water and basic kitchen facilities at local park shelters.

### 3) Housing

- a) **Conduct a housing audit** to assess current and planned housing stock, senior housing communities, current and anticipated need for affordable housing, etc. This information would help the City better understand its present circumstances and position it to create a more effective plan for appropriate and affordable housing options for older residents going forward.
- b) **Develop an affordable housing plan related to older residents.**
- c) **Consider how partnerships with senior housing communities** could mutually benefit residents and the City. For example, classes could be held on-site at facilities where space allows, administrators could help share information with residents; or facilities could partner in a future transportation service program.

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## 4) Community and Support Services

### a) **Create a class on how to use local delivery services.**

Who offers what and how do you use it? This could also be a way to engage the business community.

### b) **Partner with/utilize existing organizations**—such as the Liberian Health Initiative and Sierra Leone Nurses Association—to better reach immigrant communities.

### c) **Bring mini-versions of the resource fair to specific ethnic or cultural communities.** This would help reach residents who would benefit from the resources but would not attend the larger resource fair held annually at the CAC.

### d) **Develop or support more activities aimed at grandparents and grandchildren.** The growing number of grandparents who spend time caring for grandchildren is creating greater need for such programs. This could include adapting Recreation and Parks' Recreation on the Go program for older adults, either separately or in conjunction with youth.

## Integration into City Government

This portion of the recommendations deals with how exactly the City could embed age-friendliness into its own inner workings. The recommendations are not, for the most part, mutually exclusive.

### ***The City should work to ensure that:***

- There is broad-based awareness and understanding of the work among City employees.
- It develops an action plan that is included as part of its annual work plan.
- There are known, understood, and routinely followed procedures for integrating age-friendly considerations into the work of each department.

- The City's interface with older adults is not limited—in perception or reality—to Recreation & Parks Older Adult programs, although this remains a critical dimension of the work.

## Department-Specific Recommendations

These recommendations were developed as a result of meetings with—and in some cases specifically suggested by—key staff in various departments. They are a strong basis for this work but should not be considered the final word. Additional discussion would be needed in all departments to identify and vet additional strategies and priorities. For more context see assessment on page 29 and Appendix A.

### ***Administration Department***

- 1) **On-boarding:** Add age-friendly training to onboarding for all new employees. This could include written materials as well as discussion of age-friendliness with designated staff (to include conceptual framework, how it is operationalized across the City, how it would apply to the given employee's role/department, etc.).
- 2) **Staff trainings:** Perception and understanding of aging should be addressed as a critical foundation of this work.
  - a. Frameworks Institute's "Reframing Aging" offers social science-based toolkits and presentations that address appropriate language and communications to use when promoting positive aging and related policies. This would help dismantle ageist beliefs we all carry and be important to establishing an informed organizational culture.
  - b. Dementia Friends or other dementia education training improves understanding of, compassion toward, and respect for people with dementia and their caregivers. Such trainings are around one hour in length and available from various trainers in the area. All staff could

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benefit from this work, especially those who regularly interact with the public.

### 3) **Improve physical spaces in City Hall** to

accommodate residents with mobility limitations. Handicapped parking is close to the front door, but the front door is far from the area inside where people must go to pay bills or conduct other business.

- Some residents have requested that wheelchairs be made available for in-building use, but liability concerns have been reported as an impediment. Revisit this possibility as a potentially simple way to help accommodate people with mobility challenges.
- The DMV counters have one wheelchair accessible counter, but the walk-up counters do not allow for walkers or similar devices.

### 4) **Better address translation and interpretation needs.**

Older immigrants rely on their family members to take care of bill payment, phone calls, transportation, and many other things—in part because of the language barrier. (Note: this issue will be addressed as part of other City efforts related to inclusion and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).)

### 5) **Formalize practices for public meetings and similar events that ensure all attendees can hear and participate.**

- a. Audio: Require that all presenters and speakers—including attendees who comment or ask questions—use a microphone to ensure that everyone present can hear what is being said.
- b. Visual: Ensure that City presentations use large, sans-serif fonts to improve readability by attendees with poorer vision.

### 6) **Be an age-friendly employer.**

- a. Explore the possibility of arrangements such as phased retirement, flexible schedules, or similar programs that allow a more gradual transition from full-time work to retirement. These programs could also benefit the City by preventing abrupt loss of institutional knowledge that many older workers carry with them.
- b. Ensure employees know that Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) policies include paid time off for caregiving of aging family members. And, as the number of working caregivers is increasing, consider going above and beyond FMLA by expanding such policies to allow for accommodations such as flexible schedules, paid or unpaid time off specifically for caregiving, HR staff trained in eldercare resources, and ensuring a workplace culture supportive of caregiving. In addition to more satisfied and productive employees, recent research also shows that employers get a positive return on investment on such policies.<sup>1</sup>

- 7) **Educate residents about assessments:** Provide additional information on and/or hold community meetings to educate property owners about the process used to appraise homes to determine property tax increases. Some find it confusing and frustrating to receive a property tax increase following an appraisal, even if they haven't made any improvements to their homes.

- 8) **Volunteerism: Develop a broader and more cohesive volunteer strategy** to evaluate the nature and effectiveness of the current approach and determine where needs and opportunities exist. Meaningful and well-organized volunteer opportunities are mutually

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<sup>1</sup> AARP and ReACT. "Determining the Return on Investment: Supportive Policies for Employee Caregivers." (2016).

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beneficial for the City and residents, but the City must be realistic about the fact that managing volunteers is a time-consuming and delicate business that must be done well in order to attract and retain volunteers. Older adults already provide a great deal of volunteer capital to the City, but the work could be made more effective with a more thoughtful and strategic approach. (Note: While this recommendation is currently noted under Administration, the City will want to determine exactly how this should be approached and whether key departments, such as Community Engagement and Recreation and Parks, should develop their own strategies or whether it should be City-wide.)

- 9) Overall, formalize the application of an **age-friendly lens to all routine upgrades** made across the City—to buildings, intersections, parks, etc.
- 10) Consider pursuing a **regional approach** to age-friendly work. Maple Grove, Osseo, and Hennepin County have been working on age-friendly initiatives in various ways, and opportunities may exist to collaborate around transportation, communication, economic development, and/or other areas.

### Communication

- 1) **Be deliberate about messaging and communications.** Develop key messages and communications for this work in keeping with research-based language and framing recommendations that promote updated thinking and don't perpetuate ageist stereotypes. Key staff could be trained for this (at no cost).

Recommended resource: FrameWorks Institute's Reframing Aging project

- 2) Ensure that **City publications and online information sources/publications use age-friendly practices** in terms of font style and size, color contrast, etc.

- 3) **Ensure new City website is designed using age-friendly practices.** As the City develops and prepares to launch a new website, it should adhere to best practices for age-friendly website design, which are readily available online. (This is separate from accessible web design).

### Community Development Department

- 1) **Hold additional meetings with staff**, or subsets of staff according to their functions, to uncover more opportunities to integrate inclusion of older residents into planning and processes.
- 2) Develop a **housing plan for older adults** that addresses different types of senior housing buildings; single-level townhomes, condominiums and similar units; the size and design of new single-family homes; and home modifications that could help older adults live at home longer.
- 3) **Use Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park to help operationalize existing age-friendly aspects of the Comprehensive Plan**, such as residential universal design, life-cycle housing, and affordability. Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park could be used as a driver and a resource to help this department accomplish goals it has already set out.
- 4) Integrate age-friendly design elements in the incoming **Bottineau light rail project**. Ensure that older residents can easily use this important new infrastructure into which so much is being invested, particularly given the shortage of transportation options.
- 5) **Develop educational materials** urging landlords to incorporate universal design features into routine building upgrades.



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### 6) **Engage the business community.** BP Business

Forward, an initiative led by local business owners and staffed by the City, would be a ready vehicle for leading age-friendly business efforts. This group works to ensure a strong business climate in Brooklyn Park and serves as an organized voice of the business community. Its Advisory Board actively supports the City's age-friendly work and is interested in spearheading efforts to make age-friendly local businesses part of that effort. This could include:

- Educating local businesses on age-friendly practices, both general and industry-specific
- Developing age-friendly standards which, when met, could result in a certification
- Creating marketing strategies that help promote local businesses as age-friendly

### **Operations & Maintenance Department**

#### 1) **Invest in additional benches, lighting, and trail maintenance** in key places determined through Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park outreach and additional older resident input. (Note: the Park Bond Reinvestment Plan should help support such efforts.)

Trails in good repair with adequate seating and lighting can determine whether an older resident is able to take advantage of trails that the City and County have invested a great deal in creating. Residents from SummerCrest, for example, noted that although they have trails near their building, a lack of benches means that some residents are unable to use them.

#### 2) **Continue to deliver the high-level service** that helps define this department. If additional resources are needed to uphold this service, they should be provided.

### **Police & Fire Departments**

#### 1) **Consider an emerging model that involves embedding a social worker into the City's emergency response teams.** The dual benefits of this approach include better serving residents and freeing up police and fire resources to respond to real emergencies in a busy city by reducing the volume of unnecessary 9-1-1 calls.

As mentioned earlier in the report, residents and professionals alike throughout the engagement process praised Brooklyn Park's police and fire departments for being well-trained, progressive, and respectful. The City should take fuller advantage of the department leaders' readiness to bring more meaningful assistance to residents who need help.

A promising model that some cities have adopted is embedding a social worker in their emergency response teams. In fact, Brooklyn Park will soon launch such a program, joining other cities like Saint Paul and Rochester in testing this approach. All three cities are focusing on mental health.

The social worker fills a critical gap by being able to connect residents with the resources they need, thereby providing long-term solutions in addition to simply resolving the immediate issue that triggered the emergency call. This not only benefits residents by connecting them to the appropriate services, but also relieves demand on City resources by reducing the number of unnecessary or preventable 9-1-1 calls.

Brooklyn Park is partnering with Hennepin County to launch and fund the effort. In Saint Paul, a nonprofit called People Incorporated, the Twin Cities' largest provider of mental health services, is paying for the social worker's position. In Rochester, the city is funding the position itself, being convinced of its value after a four-month pilot period.

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The City should consider taking a similar approach to address additional issues that face its Police, Fire, and Community Development departments. An embedded social worker with a broader focus could help older residents who call frequently for lift assist after taking a fall, for medical situations related to chronic health conditions, and even to assuage loneliness. While City Council may be reluctant to take on what historically has been the county's domain, Hennepin County caseworkers are overloaded and unable to attend to more than the most urgent cases.

Environmental health staff from Brooklyn Park's Community Development department articulated the same need: the ability to provide follow-up for residents with complex issues that can't be addressed in a single visit.

The current default approach involves City staff responding to repeated preventable 9-1-1 calls to address problems they can't solve. This serves neither staff nor residents well.

### **Recreation & Parks Department**

- 1) **Establish a policy that formalizes space priority for Senior Adult classes.** This would address the issue of those classes being cancelled in favor of space rentals for other events and demonstrate that the City recognizes and values the classes' importance to participants. Establishing a dedicated space could also be explored.
- 2) **Increase older adult engagement in Park Bond Reinvestment Plan projects.**
  - a) Brooklyn Park voters passed a \$26 million park and natural resource bond referendum in November 2018. The City will soon begin work to implement this multi-faceted project, which presents a well-timed opportunity to conduct older adult-specific engagement in major City projects. Older residents' input and ideas are needed not only related to expanding the senior center, but also on improvements to the trail system, park reinvestments, and new ball- and other athletic fields. (Many grandparents attend grandchildren's sporting events!) A well-conceived engagement plan should be created to meaningfully capture the input of older residents for facilities that will directly impact them.
  - b) **Consider reduced-cost programming or scholarships for low-income residents to allow their participation in Recreation & Parks programming.** Budgets and funding would need to be structured accordingly.
  - c) **Inclusion: Address the question of how people with physical limitations and/or cognitive decline can be accommodated in Recreation & Parks programming.** As it stands, an individual who needs special assistance cannot safely participate in most BP Recreation and Parks standard programming, as current staffing does not allow for providing that assistance while also overseeing the other participants and activity. However, this situation can and does arise.



Currently, Recreation and Parks does offer adaptive

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recreation and inclusion services to accommodate people with varying physical and cognitive abilities. The City is aware of the need to more directly confront the issue of serving older residents with limited mobility and dementia.

- a) **Create an inclusion policy** (if none exists) and ensure it includes people with mobility challenges and those living with dementia.
- b) **Develop a plan** for how Recreation & Parks can put this into practice in its programs. Among other questions, address the following: What kind of staffing would be required? What kind of training would they need? How would participants who need extra assistance be identified? Are specific programs offered for people with dementia (and their caregivers) or mobility challenges, or would accommodations be added to existing classes or events to allow them to safely participate?
- c) When an **Inclusion Specialist** is hired, utilize that person to flesh out these strategies and policies.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS: How to better serve and support older low-income residents and residents of color, including immigrants and refugees**

Community engagement efforts conducted among some of the city's various racial and ethnic groups were important and revealing. This was the first time that an effort targeting the experience of low-income residents and older residents of color—many of whom were immigrants or refugees—had been undertaken. Yet it became clear during that process these initial learnings are only a starting point. Deeper digging is needed to uncover enough about the needs and desires of various groups in order to really begin to respond effectively.

### ***However, a few general lessons emerged:***

This work will take time. Plan accordingly. In addition to seeking input from older residents of color and low-income residents for Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park over the course of 2018, Recreation & Parks also ramped up efforts to bring City programming and events to various cultural groups during this period. They included a series of fitness classes for older Liberians (see case study on page 31 for more details) as well as one-time events at Brooks Landing, an affordable senior high-rise with many black residents, and Eden Park Apartments, a market-rate apartment complex with many Hispanic/Latinx residents.

The experiences of planning and holding these activities, as well as the focus groups, provide “food for thought” concerning how to approach engaging multicultural communities. Considerably more time and effort than staff were used to were required to connect with appropriate contacts, get responses, gather participants, etc. There are likely various reasons for this and it is not objectively problematic, but it does mean that staff may need more time than is typically allocated to do this work. The experience is common enough that it should be factored in to planning and apportioning resources. This may change over time as relationships and routines are developed, but at present there is often more than meets the eye when it comes to engaging the city's various cultural groups.

Historically, most local government systems, processes, and organizational culture have been developed by and for white residents. As the population diversifies, the City of Brooklyn Park is working to become a more informed and culturally competent institution that both understands and can effectively respond to residents' needs and desires. This is and will continue to be a process during which City leaders and staff will both unlearn and relearn ways of engaging with and responding to its changing populace.

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**Don't create; facilitate.** Residents drew an important distinction. In some cases, they don't want, need, or expect the City to provide them with specific services, programs, or activities. Many needs are already met within the cultural community, so the City's role could be approached as one that complements or strengthens what's already happening inside the communities. For example:

- Add an element of City support or partnership to an existing event in a cultural community.
- Consider adapting current venues or providing spaces for what cultural communities have said is important to them. For example, catering policies at the CAC have required using one of three approved caterers. This has been a barrier for cultural groups who consider food a centerpiece of family gatherings and would otherwise like to rent space at the CAC for special events. Among residents specifically mentioned wanting park shelters with kitchen facilities; they currently leave the city to gather at venues in other communities. (Note: Since this input was gathered, the City has moved to change its catering policy, and park shelters with kitchen facilities may be constructed with funding from the park bond referendum approved by residents in November 2018.)

Better support and utilize partner organizations. Community organizations created by and for members of various cultural communities are vital links to better understanding and supporting diverse older residents. These organizations serve as bridges between residents and the City and the community at large and provide firsthand knowledge of needs and challenges. Partnership opportunities exist with larger more established organizations like CEAP; smaller and newer efforts like the Liberian Health Initiative; and several others.

**Bring it to the people.** The CAC is beloved by current participants, but many older residents who would benefit from its programs don't attend for a range of reasons including transportation, language, culture, and cost, among others.

### **Programs**

The concept behind Recreation & Parks' successful Recreation on the Go program for youth could be adapted to bring older residents quality programming at sites that they prefer, such as senior housing communities, churches, or community partner organizations. Each class or activity would be developed collaboratively with a partner organization and residents. There also may be opportunity to engage grandparents of grandchildren who participate in Recreation on the Go.

### **Resource Fair**

Mini-versions of the annual resource fair could be brought offsite to expand its reach. Working harder to broaden attendance at the existing resource fair is likely not the answer for immigrants who have language and cultural differences or other residents with no connection to the CAC. Instead, mini-resource fairs could be organized for specific cultural communities and held at familiar and convenient locations with resources and services customized to each group. Again, all content would be planned jointly with representatives from that community to ensure the resources and services are relevant and that residents are brought in to the effort.

(These efforts should be approached with the knowledge that organizing events with multicultural groups can require more staff time and effort, as discussed above.)



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**Make translation official.** Given the role of language as a major barrier to communication, participation, and inclusion, a recommendation was made to formalize and deepen how the City approaches translation. It is possible to provide impromptu translation services, but a translator could be more effective if s/he were acquainted with the context of whatever work was being discussed and understood the City's goals. This could be pursued in tandem with related efforts to further engage older residents from the city's varied cultural communities and could be brought in under broader inclusion efforts.

### *Hennepin County: On the Same Page*

As noted in the Methodology section, the City's Recreation and Parks Senior Adult Programs and Hennepin County Public Health conducted a related and complementary effort over the course of 2018 while the City of Brooklyn Park undertook engagement for Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park. (See Methodology for more detail.) The resulting report, while developed independently from this one, reached many of the same conclusions concerning what was learned about older residents of color, low-income residents, and immigrant and refugee communities.

Notably, both reports conclude that:

- Transportation and communication are priority concerns that cut across all backgrounds, cultural groups, and income levels.
- The City's role can be facilitative in supporting older residents of color and from immigrant and refugee groups. It need not always lead the charge.
- Programs should be brought into the community at trusted locations where people already gather.
- Partnering with community organizations can help reach multicultural residents with important information about programs, services, and events.

- Consider offering reduced-cost Recreation and Parks programming for low-income participants.
- More conversation is needed to build relationships, understand needs, and determine the best ways to move forward.

This overlap reinforces the takeaways from both reports and can help guide both the City and County as they determine strategies and next steps for more effectively engaging residents of varying cultures, ethnicities, and income levels.

### **Beyond City Hall**

A true age-friendly community requires action, commitment, and intellectual contributions from many community partners beyond local government. As City leaders consider how to advance age-friendliness in areas beyond its direct purview, they can opt for several approaches.

### *Strategic Partnerships: We Don't Do This Alone*

Key organizations in Brooklyn Park provide critical services to many older residents, each offering its own expertise. More established partnerships with other community organizations, which may in some cases include funding, could be important to reaching various cultural communities with information about events and services. These partnerships could also help the City learn about needs and opportunities within various ethnic communities.

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The organizations listed below would be valuable partners in helping the City connect with and support older immigrants, refugees, and residents of color.

- **ACER (African Career, Education, and Resource Inc.)** is based in Brooklyn Park and supports, advocates for, and empowers African immigrants in north and northwest suburbs of Minneapolis. It could help the City understand and communicate with older Africans and their families in the community.
- **CAPI USA** is an immigrant-led nonprofit focused on helping the state's newest immigrants and refugees and could be an important link to those groups in Brooklyn Park.
- **Lao Association of Minnesota** is based in Minneapolis but serves many Lao residents of Brooklyn Park. It organized a group of Lao residents of Brooklyn Park to participate in a focus group related to Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park (see page 18 for more information). They could help the City better understand the needs of Lao elders, a culture distinct from Hmong, and connect older Lao residents to information and services.
- **Liberian Health Initiative** and **Sierra Leone Nurses Association:** These organizations are providing critical services to elders in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean communities by addressing social isolation and health literacy. Both organizations were begun out of passion for the work and have grown into small but significant organizations. Leaders bring firsthand knowledge of the culture and language and can effectively connect elders with health education and resources and opportunities to socialize with their peers. They are also important conduits of information to the City concerning the reality of elders' needs in their respective communities.

- **Organization for Liberians of Minnesota (OLM)** is an important organization in Brooklyn Park's Liberian community. It already provides some elder services and partnered with the City to pilot a fitness class to a group of older Liberian immigrants during 2018. The City has partnered with OLM in other ways, including a presentation from OLM to City staff related to the City's racial equity work.

These additional partners would also be important or helpful in becoming an age-friendly community more broadly. The list is not exhaustive.

- **Community Emergency Assistance Programs (CEAP)** is a critical service provider in the community. This forward-thinking organization is well equipped to do more on several fronts—including basic services, nutrition, and transportation—given more resources.
- **Community Education** is offered through the four school districts that cover Brooklyn Park. A partnership is currently being explored through Recreation and Parks and Anoka-Hennepin Community Education to share resources and coordinate planning.
- **Hennepin County Public Health; Hennepin County Active Living**  
Hennepin County could provide technical or potentially financial assistance in some age-friendly efforts. It recently hired a healthy aging coordinator within the Public Health Department to help advance this type of work throughout the county, and Active Living could support the City's work to increase opportunities for greater walkability and health equity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ***Convene and Facilitate***

One proven model for achieving large-scale change is collective action, on which much has been written, but in short involves a group of people or organizations working together toward a common goal that cannot be accomplished individually.

Many organizations expressed interest in participating in this work, yet most lack the time, resources, or expertise needed to initiate and lead an effort. The City, though it has its own time and resource constraints, is well-positioned to convene partners and facilitate work. It has laid the groundwork for this role by investing considerable resources into Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park, and it can take advantage of momentum built and relationships developed during work to date.

The City would optimally hire a consultant due to the time and expertise necessary to launch such an effort. The City

would function as the “backbone” organization, meaning it would serve as the convener and project manager. It would also involve recruiting community partners, by getting them to come to the table and committing to actively participating in a process to achieve change a new scale in a new way, together.

To keep the project at a targeted and more manageable scope, it could involve one issue within the realm of age-friendly—such as housing, communication, or establishing greater connections between organizations that serve older adults to create a pipeline of information flow and referrals. It could also be a way to approach the possibility of a municipally collaborative transportation service.

This would likely be a multi-year effort to help develop and implement community-wide strategies involving multiple partners.

# Possible Approaches

This section lays out broad strategies for tackling work in the first few years.

## OPTION A

### Phase 1:

#### 1) Determine the *structure* of the first year's work: who will lead, and how will the work be formalized across the City?

- To advance the work to a meaningful level with real outcomes, someone must be officially charged with doing so. To this end, the City should continue its work with its age-friendly consultant. The work generally happens on two levels: higher-level strategy and project management. The consultant could lead strategy and implementation (in partnership with key staff when relevant), while staff could lead project management, especially with internal work. (Given recent staffing changes, the team may need to determine what arrangement would work best.)
- In addition to these day-to-day leads, an internal team should meet regularly to track and guide the work. This could be a continuation of the current team or an expansion thereof.

**2) Develop an *action plan* to determine strategies for moving the work forward.** The plan could span 2-3 years and include work both inside city government as well as out in the community. It would include or reflect recommendations from this report but differ in that specific goals and action items would be created, and each action item would be tied to partners, a timeline and indicators for progress. The plan could be organized by the Task Force on Aging's four priority areas, or a variation on those domains, and written by the consultant.

#### • **City Government:**

- Building on this report, the consultant could take City department work to the next level by conducting further work with staff to educate, identify opportunities, set priorities, formalize strategies, and establish timelines for internal integration of age-friendliness.

#### • **Community:**

- Use community engagement findings and this report as a basis for creating an action plan.
- Community partners should play a role in developing the action plan and would need to be engaged accordingly. Partners could be identified by City staff and the consultant.
- Partners must also help implement the plan. Their role in that stage should be addressed at this point, too, by getting their buy-in and commitment. Ideally a community-based age-friendly team or several smaller teams focused on specific domains would be developed as part of this process to help create the plan and prepare to implement it.

#### • **Consultant role:**

In addition to work with City departments, the consultant could help lead the work on various fronts, most importantly engaging community partners and writing the action plan. This should also include staying connected to Hennepin County's work in the age-friendly arena as they invest more resources in this work and identifying opportunities for partnership with the County as well as individual cities related to a possible regional approach.



## Possible Approaches

- 3) Quick Wins!** Based on this report, identify a few quick wins, get them done, and spread the word. This will help demonstrate the City's commitment, build excitement, and help balance out the longer-term horizons of much of the other work. Some candidates for "quick wins" are:
- Establish a policy that formalizes space priority for Senior Adult classes.
  - Reach out to new residents at senior housing communities with a tour of the city. (A tour was conducted with Tradition residents in October; St Therese also expressed interest in this and could be an early partner.)
  - Add benches in needed locations along trails near SummerCrest Condominiums.
  - Organize a community engagement session with older immigrants related to the park bond. (No one in our Lao focus group, for example, had heard about the aquatic facility proposal but all were supportive of the idea.)

### Phase 2:

- 1) Implement action plan.** The nature of implementation will be determined by the structures set up and partners engaged during Phase I.
- a. City government:** Departments will be doing internal work related to embedding age-friendliness into their own areas and engaged in the external aspects of the plan where it makes sense.
  - b. Community:** Ideally, representatives from partner organizations will be actively engaged in implementing the plan they helped to develop.
  - c. Consultant:** The consultant could continue to guide the work at this stage, though Phase I would also inform that role. It may include the following: ongoing work with City departments; leading or supporting implementation of action plan items; working with community partners engaged in the effort.

- 2) Create a progress report after year one** to evaluate and share updates with the community and stakeholders.

- 3) Reevaluate the structure of the work and adjust** according to City resources, successes and challenges to date, and partner engagement.

- 4) Determine the long-term structure of the work in terms of staff and work routines.** Formalize the approach and commitment with a written document describing how age-friendly considerations have been incorporated in the City's ongoing work.

### Costs:

- Many recommendations from this report can be implemented at little to no cost beyond staff time. Specific projects, if pursued, could carry price tags—such as installing additional benches along trails.
- Consultant costs would vary depending on the scope of the work undertaken but could range from \$15,000 to \$30,000 for Phase I and \$15,000-\$25,000 for Phase II. This is a rough estimate.

## Possible Approaches

### OPTION B

This would be a scaled-back version of Option 1 in that Phase 1 would focus strictly on implementing recommendations related to embedding age-friendliness in City government (although that work would also, of course, involve and benefit residents). Only in Phase 2 would the City begin active engagement of community partners to create and implement a broader action plan. One advantage would be cost savings due to work being spread out. Another might be having fewer moving pieces at once.

Costs: This range would be less, closer to \$8,000 to \$15,000 in Phase I and \$15,000 to \$25,000 in Phase II.

### Possible Funding Sources

The below list provides some potential sources of funding for various aspects of Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park. These could be applied to either Option A or B above. While the City would need to continue to invest its own resources, funding through these or similar channels would make additional or expanded work possible as well as help legitimize and energize the initiative by having been chosen to receive competitive grant funds.

#### 1) Bush Foundation Community Innovation Grants

are awarded in amounts between \$10,000 and \$200,000. They fund initiatives that identify a need and work to create a solution, ideally engaging the community and working collaboratively with partners along the way. There are no deadlines.

#### 2) AARP Livability Community Challenge Grants

are quick-action grants. The entire process—from application to implementation to reporting—lasts about nine months. Grants range from several hundred to several thousand dollars. They support quick changes that lead to long-term improvement in four key areas: transportation and mobility; creating vibrant public places; availability of housing; and other community improvements. The 2019 process opens on February 20, with more information available soon thereafter.

#### 3) Allina Neighborhood Connection grants

support communities in building social connections, among the same group of adults, through healthy eating and physical activity. They must include at least six events for the same group of people, with priority given to people more likely to experience health inequities. The application period runs from November 2018 to February 14, 2019 and will likely be similar next year.

#### 4) State of Minnesota SHIP grants

(through Hennepin County). Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) grants fund several areas each year, such as Active Living, Healthy Eating, Tobacco Prevention and Control, and others. Most relevant to Age-Friendly Brooklyn Park would be efforts related to dementia. Brooklyn Park could also work with the County to advance the idea of a regional-level age-friendly effort, particularly related to the possibility forming of a regional Age-Friendly Community Leadership Team (CLT).

## APPENDICES: Appendix A

### *Notes from City Department Meetings*

#### **APPENDIX A: Notes from City Department Meetings**

The following section summarizes notes from meetings between the initiative's age-friendly consultant and key staff from several departments. They are intended to provide a sense of issues, concerns, opportunities, and questions related to age-friendliness from the perspective of these staff, and to share what helped inform recommendations concerning City departments earlier in the report. The notes are summaries and not exhaustive. See Appendix A for more detail about meeting attendees and dates.

#### **Administration and Finance (Public-facing staff)**

##### **• Physical design/infrastructure:**

- Physical spaces in City Hall should be improved to accommodate residents with mobility challenges who need to conduct business at City Hall. Handicapped parking is near the front door, but the front door is far from the ultimate destination inside the building.
- a. Residents have requested wheelchair availability in the building to help them travel this distance, but it is apparently not permitted due to liability concerns.
- b. Counter setups at the motor vehicle service desk are not conducive to people with walkers. There is one ADA compliant station to accommodate wheelchairs.

##### **• Customer service:**

- There is a need to be able to step up customer service to assist older residents requesting additional services; they advocate for themselves more than they used to.
- Some older residents seek general help almost like concierge services. Staff get requests to help arrange rides through Uber or similar or to track down various pieces of information, such as the address for and directions to the nearest Social Security office.
- Finance is considering creating budget briefs for residents to provide more easily understandable information about how the city is spending taxpayers' money. This would benefit all residents, including older ones.

##### **• Utilities:**

- Older residents have trouble getting to their basements to check their water meters. The City sends out personnel free of charge to help.
- People want many options for paying their utility bills: in-person, over the phone, through the City's website, and through apps. There are a wide range of preferences and expectations, driven in part by age.
- Utility rate increases are problematic for older adults on fixed incomes.

##### **• Human Resources:**

- Not all job applicants have computer skills needed to apply for jobs, yet that is the only way to apply. Support systems are available over the phone and in-person, but sometimes HR staff will simply create and complete a simple application for someone for a straightforward seasonal position to simplify the process and as a service to the resident.
- People dislike forced use of technology. They want to be able to reserve a room over the phone, but that service is no longer available. Staff get asked to find workarounds for using technology. "Can't you just...?"

## APPENDICES: Appendix A

### *Notes from City Department Meetings*

#### • **Assessing:**

- Older residents on fixed incomes can find it confusing and frustrating to receive a property tax increase. Even if they haven't made any improvements, their home can increase in value. The Assessing Department has recently started leaving information for people not home during appraisals, but more could be done to help communicate on this issue to resident homeowners, especially older ones.

#### • **Inclusion/Language:**

- Older immigrants rely on their family members to take care of bill payments, phone calls, and other business that may involve the City—in part because of the language barrier. There are translation needs for many residents.

### **Community Development**

#### • **Housing:**

- There is a gap in senior affordable housing.
- The city needs lifecycle housing.
- There are few multi-unit options, though apartments are viewed negatively.
- Universal design:
  - Community Development does trainings for landlords related to keeping things up to code. This could be an opportunity to include recommendations promoting age-friendly and/or universal design features. It could be part of an inspection report as a recommendation, not an actual code issue. For example, what kind of doorknobs are being used? Accessible hardware comes up on commercial buildings but not yet on residential ones. The City could engage people in how these codes affect them.

- Residential universal design is a recommendation in the comp plan, but there are no details. The City could help educate developers or contractors about why it is important.

- Transit: What would age-friendliness look like for LRT? The City should consider this.
- Environmental and public health staff observe a strong need to provide more resources to residents who need help. "We need tools to connect people to. Who can we tell people to call?"

#### • **Staff Training/Engagement:**

- The City/Community Development could use more attention to staff training and behavior. For example, it would help to make microphone use in public meetings mandatory to ensure that hearing impaired attendees can hear. This has been an issue in the past.
- Would it be possible for staff to help residents on staff time? Perhaps 8-16 hours per year could be dedicated to volunteering in that way. This could be brought before Council.

### **Fire and Police Departments**

- Overall themes from department leaders:
  - They believe they have an opportunity to be more strategic instead of just reactive and response-driven
  - They would like to shift to a community risk reduction approach and away from public education.
- The Police Department sees its role in age-friendliness as being able to make appropriate referrals to older people who need assistance.
  - An easy majority of fire department calls are medical and preventable. Many calls from older adults are related to lift assist, chronic illness, or simply loneliness. Responders can deal with the immediate situation but have very little capacity to connect residents to resources that would help them address



## APPENDICES: Appendix A

### *Notes from City Department Meetings*

the root problem (and prevent additional 9-1-1 calls). On an emergency call, responders don't have anywhere to refer or send people who need further help. Residents are sometimes brought to the hospital for lack of a more fitting next step.

- o The City has a regular referral program with North Memorial's Community Paramedic program, which can be used with residents who have made emergency calls more than twice. This program is effective in dealing with people who need additional help.
- o Many police departments are embedding social workers or mental health specialists in the department/on response teams, and that person takes charge of the follow up. While this is typically the county's domain, Adult Protection Services through Hennepin County can often do what is needed in terms of case management due to their own resource constraints.
- Council may not realize the degree to which group homes, of which there are many in Brooklyn Park, drain police resources. Minimal licensing requirements can mean that some homes are operated poorly, and police are at these places all the time. They estimate that about half of the city's group homes house older adults with cognitive or medical issues.
- Has the City come up with policies to allow city employees time deal with aging parents? This is needed and would be valued.

#### **Operations & Maintenance Department**

- Older property owners need help with snow shoveling/removal, and there are few community resources to help them. (Staff will sometimes go out and clear snow themselves!)
- This department has heavy contact with the public. They answer calls all day (two full-time staff answer phones) and are also out in people's homes and yards.

- Since 2003 they offer a unique arrangement with homeowner associations (HOAs) to the benefit of residents, many of whom are older. HOAs sometimes get to tag onto existing projects, such as a street improvement, and they greatly appreciate that because it is much cheaper than hiring their own contractors directly. (It does cost the City in terms of staff time.)
- They believe it is important to be able to be a resource for people, but "high-touch services stretch us."
- There are opportunities related to trails, such as wayfinding, benches, and lighting, but these cost money.

#### **Recreation & Parks Department**

- People in seasonal positions are increasingly older adults, and they are highly valued employees. City staff appreciate their attention to detail and their maturity that allows them to deal with a range of situations that might arise.
- There is the question of a volunteer coordinator, but this is delicate business given the way volunteering is currently structured throughout city departments right now. Volunteering can be tricky business. People seem to think a volunteer coordinator could be housed in Community Engagement, but there is not consensus on the issue.
- There may be opportunities to use Recreation on the Go aimed at children to engage older adults who are grandparents and frequently care for grandchildren. Rec on the Go can help build trust through whole families, not just kids. There may be opportunities to be more active right on site at places such as Huntington Apartments.
- Integration and Inclusion Services: What does this look like for older adults? The department needs to address this question.

## **APPENDICES: Appendix A**

### *Notes from City Department Meetings*

#### **CAC Front Desk and Maintenance Staff**

- The front desk almost functions like a concierge service, fielding requests and questions on a wide variety of issues.
- There is definite growth in number of older people using the CAC.
- There is a strong customer service dimension to this work.
- Staff try hard to “get a yes” for people or at least move in that direction.
- Participants are required to check in at the front desk for their classes. The City purposely does it that way because they value the personal contact with people.
- Brooklyn Park offers a lot compared to other community centers, and the staff are a big part of what make it special.

## APPENDICES: Appendix B

### Resident Engagement Details

#### APPENDIX B: Resident Engagement Details

TYPE OF ENGAGEMENT	PRIMARY DEMOGRAPHIC	EVENT/PARTNER ORGANIZATION	DATE
Listening session (about 20 people)	Liberian	Organization for Liberians of MN	3/28/18
Table at Dynamic Aging Resource Fair with interactive engagement	Primarily white, many were Senior Adult program participants	City: Recreation & Parks	4/11/18
Focus group—range of ages (10 people)	SE Asian, mostly Hmong and Lao	City: organized by Community Engagement and CM Susan Pha	4/24/18
Presentation and group discussion	Variety	City: Community Assembly event	4/26/18
Listening session/open house	Senior Adult program participants, primarily white	City: Recreation & Parks	4/30/18
Listening session/open house	Senior Adult program participants, primarily white	City: Recreation & Parks	5/10/18
Focus group with Meals on Wheels volunteer drivers through CEAP (9 people)	White	CEAP	5/11/18
Interview with two individuals (Pat)	Black	N/A	6/18/18
Focus group in partnership with Hennepin County Public Health (about 13)	Lao	Lao Assistance Center of MN	7/19/18
Focus group (10 people)	White senior housing residents	Tradition (rental senior housing)	8/1/18
Focus group (10-15 people)	Black senior housing residents (most not Liberian or other W African immigrants)	Brooks Landing (rental senior housing)	9/11/18
Focus group (8-10 people) in partnership with Hennepin County Public Health	Hispanic/Latinx residents of varying ages	Eden Park Apartments	9/18/18
Focus group (8 people)	White	SummerCrest Condominiums	10/9/18

## APPENDICES: Appendix C

### Key Stakeholder Engagement

#### APPENDIX C: Key Stakeholder Engagement

NAME	ORGANIZATION	SECTOR	DATE
Kay King	Older Adults Program Coordinator and Community Educator, NAMI MN	Mental health	4/3/18
Clare Brumback	Executive Director, CEAP	Nonprofit/social services	4/3/18
Brad Kerschner	Director of Programs, CEAP	Nonprofit/social services	4/3/18
Lyla Pagels	Coordinator, Faith Community Nurse Program, Mercy Hospital/Allina	Healthcare	5/8/18
Noella Fath-Cutter	Adult Learning Coordinator, Anoka-Hennepin Community Ed	Community Education	5/17/18
Anne-Marie Bartlett	Quality in Living Specialist, Saint Therese at Oxbow Lake	Senior housing	6/8/18
Mary Synsteliën	Member of parish council, St Alphonsus Catholic Church	Faith community	6/13/18
Sunny Chanthanouvong (and other LACM staff)	Executive Director, Lao Assistance Center of MN	Non-profit/immigrant services	6/25/18
Arthur Biah	President & CEO, Liberian Health Initiative; Special Investigator/ Nurse Evaluator, MN Department of Health	Non-profit/immigrant health services	6/30/18
Renee Cardarelle	Associate Executive Director, Lao Assistance Center of MN	Non-profit/social services	7/8/18
Kumba Kanu	Founder, Sierra Leone Nurses Association; Certified Nurse Practitioner, Park Nicollet	Non-profit/immigrant health services	7/20/18
Emily O'Connor	Coordinating Librarian, Adult Services, Hennepin County Library	Library	7/20/18
Melissa Henderson	Marketing and Enrichment Coordinator, Osseo Area Schools	Community Education	7/23/18
Brenda Kennelly	Clinic Manager, Brooklyn Park, Hennepin Healthcare	Healthcare	7/24/18
Emilia Jackson	Community Health Worker, Brooklyn Park, Hennepin Healthcare	Healthcare	7/24/18
Paula	Community Health Worker, Brooklyn Park, Hennepin Healthcare	Healthcare	7/24/18
Candice Bartelle	Admissions Representative, North Hennepin Community College	Education	7/29/18
Jennifer Olson	Director of Community Relations, Tradition	Senior housing	8/1/18
Zenobia Carson	Office Administrator & Event Planner, Creekside Gables	Senior housing	8/8/18
Beth Lelonek	Director of Sales and Marketing, Waterford Living	Senior housing	9/17/18
Mary Rooney	Director of Community Relations, Waterford Living	Senior housing	9/17/18
Paul Metzler	Executive Director, Saint Therese at Oxbow Lake	Senior housing	9/24/18
Diane Dickmeyer	Robbinsdale Area Schools	Community Education	10/3/18
Advisory Board	BP Business Forward	Business association	11/9/18
Kylie Ryan	Registered dietician, Hy-Vee	Retail/grocer	12/4/2018
Brooklyn Park Lions Club	Community/Lions members	Community group	11/5/18



## APPENDICES: Appendix D

### City Department Engagement

#### APPENDIX D: City Department Engagement

EVENT / GROUP / DEPARTMENT	DATE
<b>Kickoff Meeting</b> – cross-departmental: Kaela Dickens, Kathy Fraser (CLIC), Cory Funk, Gretchen Garman (Hennepin County Public Health), Gina Magstadt, Todd Seitz, Josie Shardlow, Jay Stroebel, Jody Yungers, Dan Zelazny	2/15/18
<b>Community Long-range Improvement Commission (CLIC) meeting</b>	7/12/18
<b>Manager-level staff meeting</b> (large group, cross-departmental)	6/19/18
<b>Joint Commissions and Council meeting</b>	8/6/18
<b>Rec and Parks:</b> Don Berry, Eve Burlingame, Pat Busch, Greg Hoag, Jen Gillard, Pat Milton, Steve Gulenchyn, Michelle Margo, Pam McBride, Marc Ofsthun, Mark Palm, Brad Tullberg, Jody Yungers	8/7/18
<b>Community Development:</b> Bruce Bloxham, Kim Berggren, Erik Hanson, Keith Jullie, Jason Newby, Al Peterson, Gail Trenholm	8/10/18
<b>Police and Fire departments:</b> John Cunningham, Craig Enevoldsen, Jeff St. Martin, Todd Seitz	8/14/18
<b>Operations and Maintenance:</b> Dan Ruiz, Steve Nauer, Greg Hoag, Jon Watson	10/17/18
<b>CAC Front Desk and Maintenance Staff:</b> Pam Neuman, Mike Oravez, Mark Palm, Wayne Roehrich, Randi Schmidt	10/25/18
<b>Administration and Finance:</b> Jeanette Boit-Kania, Claudia Diggs, Chris Kuecker, Janis Lajon, Xp Lee, Linda Mozis, Josie Shardlow, Xai Vue, Joe Wulfing	10/29/18

## APPENDICES: Appendix E

### *Task Force on Aging Recommendations*

#### **APPENDIX E: Task Force on Aging Recommendations**

An effort of the Community Long-Range Improvement Commission (CLIC)<sup>14</sup>, the citizen-led Task Force on Aging developed the following conclusions and recommendations to the City of Brooklyn Park in 2015. The Task Force's work is an important foundation for the current age-friendly efforts and is referenced earlier in this report.

##### **Becoming an Age-Friendly City** **August 2015**

The Task Force on Aging was charged by the CLIC (Citizens Long-Range Improvement Committee ) to review issues, assess resources, identify gaps and offer to assist the city when addressing the changing and aging demographics within Brooklyn Park.

Four themes kept resurfacing throughout the study:

1. It is difficult to define who is "senior." The Task Force defined seniors as persons over 50 years of age. The terms seniors, aging and 50+ are used intermittently throughout this report.
2. Many communities have already accomplished similar studies, developed policies and programs addressing the aging population in their areas. The Task Force utilized existing data and tools to help us locally.
3. Brooklyn Park has many good things going for seniors yet the areas needing improvement will require long term commitment and vision. Services need to be able to adapt with the diverse cultures and needs of seniors. Existing services such as those available through the Senior Center, Parks and Rec, and CAC will need to expand or enhance their capacity as this population increases.
4. The Task Force adopted the philosophy that when a community enhances and respects the lives of its youth and seniors the lives of all other age groups are more enhanced and respected.

The Task Force feels that a best practice way for Brooklyn Park to address concerns for seniors is to use the vision, tools and policies that already exist with the Age Friendly City initiative. By adopting these best practices, the lives of all age groups in Brooklyn Park will be enhanced and respected.

An Age Friendly City initiative is a comprehensive effort to prepare the world's urban centers for an increasingly older adult population. Age friendly cities optimize opportunities for health, participation, and security in order to enhance quality of life as people grow older.

The City of Brooklyn Park does currently have many strengths, as outlined below:

##### **Community and Civic Participation**

- Many opportunities for involvement through volunteer groups, city commissions/committees and Recreation and Parks Department
- Community Cafes hosting by city on important or trending issues
- Community Engagement Initiative
- City website, Get Up and Go brochure and Park Pages provided information on current activities and volunteer opportunities
- Nextdoor.com the Neighborhood Initiative, and National Night Out offer community building opportunities and connections

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<sup>16</sup>CLIC has since been renamed the Community Long-range Improvement Commission.

## APPENDICES: Appendix E

### Task Force on Aging Recommendations

#### Housing

- City offers a variety of housing options in independent living, assisted living and subsidized housing.
- Range of housing prices and types are available, however limited in supply.

#### Public Spaces and Transportation

- Many existing parks in the city park system, as well as Three Rivers Parks
- New library to open in 2016
- Existing Senior Center, CAC, and Recreation and Parks Department
- Some transportation options in Metro Mobility, local bus system and taxi

#### Health and Social Services

- Hennepin County Service Center is on the border of Brooklyn Park
- City currently has medical clinics within city limits that offer general/basic medical care
- Four hospitals near the City of Brooklyn Park
- Recreation and Parks/CAC offer a fitness center
- Many of the existing private health clubs within the city offer senior fitness options
- Community offers some free meal services

The committee is making recommendations to the city to ensure effective planning for the dramatic demographic changes that are happening within the senior community.

#### The initiatives of an Age-Friendly City address:

- Transportation
- Outdoor spaces and building
- Community support and health services
- Communication and information
- Civic participation and employment
- Respect and social inclusion
- Social participation
- Housing
- Healthcare

#### Goals of an Age-Friendly City:

- Empower individuals as they age to live independently and vibrantly.
- Support communities as they foster quality of life and community connectedness in a manner that meets the wide-ranging needs and preferences of older individuals and their families.
- Ensure that city planning and city funded programs are responsive to the needs and preferences of older residents and are designed to support their lifestyles and choices.

The Task Force identified that many established services and resources are available for Brooklyn Park's aging population to utilize or participate in. The Task Force did identify three major areas for improvement where gaps currently have a negative impact on the lives of our 50+ population:

1. Seniors of all ages have limited awareness of their resources and have an extremely difficult time understanding, navigating and accessing departments, services and their policies.
2. Existing and new development needs to implement more age friendly standards when trying to accommodate growing needs and desires of the changing and aging population.
3. Seniors have great difficulty accessing transportation when it becomes desirable for them to reduce dependence on their automobiles.

## APPENDICES: Appendix E

### *Task Force on Aging Recommendations*

#### **The Task Force is recommending the following:**

##### **1. Appoint a staff member and an advisory group to ensure a commitment to the citizens in regard to communication, programming, resource development and accessibility.**

Ensure the group is reflective of our culturally diverse community. A City appointed staff member with the support of the advisory group would manage the vision and goals of the Age Friendly initiative on an on-going basis. This position would be a point of contact to:

- Conduct on-going community assessment to determine age friendliness and cultural responsiveness.
- Ensure coordination of existing and new services with the community. This would include transportation, housing, health, recreation, volunteerism and social services.
- Identify opportunities in future programs or development to include age friendly initiatives (i.e. transportation options, healthcare services, design elements, business development, housing types, and recreational programs).

##### **2. Establish a resource center (HUB).**

This would be a one stop shop resource for ease in disseminating information.

##### **3. Review all housing and business development and redevelopment for opportunities to be age friendly.**

Future development/redevelopment planning is critical. City and staff need to be keenly aware of how future development will impact the residents. This is an opportunity for them to build into the new and redevelopment projects age friendly initiatives. This will be most important when reviewing upcoming transportation initiatives and future housing, healthcare and business development.

##### **4. Address lack of and/or difficulty accessing transportation options for the short term as well as plan for the long term.**

Lack of convenient, accessible and affordable transportation is a key issue facing the city today. While the possibility of the LRT coming through Brooklyn Park is on the horizon there is a direct need for immediate increased transportation options such as more frequent buses, more convenient routes, and alternative forms of transportation in cabs and ride sharing.

The 50+ population is a vibrant, talented, engaged demographic. The Task Force reviewed and suggested goals and recommendations in the following areas:

- Community and Civic Participation
- Housing
- Public Space and Transportation
- Health and Social Services

This is an approach used by the Age Friendly Initiative and is outlined in the attached power point. This information can be used as a guide and resource for the proposed Advisory Committee or identified staff to understand and address the needs and desires of the changing and aging population of Brooklyn Park.

In addition to the PowerPoint presentation, attached is a checklist for essential features in an age friendly city. City staff, the planning commission and developers should review the checklist to ensure whenever possible key features are being incorporated into all future development and redevelopment as appropriate.



## APPENDICES: Appendix F

### WHO/AARP Age-Friendly Network

#### APPENDIX F: WHO/AARP Age-Friendly Network: To join or not to join?

As a result of the Task Force on Aging's work, CLIC recommended that the City of Brooklyn Park become a certified age-friendly city by 2020. This referred to the WHO/AARP Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities. To clarify, there is only membership in the network; there is no certification or designation of age-friendliness (a common misperception). A city that joins the network commits to a process and to be accountable for taking steps and demonstrating work through that process.

Joining the network involves the following steps over the course of five years:

Step 1: Complete an application and provide a mayoral letter of commitment.

Step 2: Conduct a community assessment of older adult needs.

Step 3: Create a three-year action plan.

Step 4: Implement the plan and evaluate progress.

Step 5: Refine as needed and continue the work. (Ongoing work makes this a cycle of continuous improvement.)

Brooklyn Park has already completed Step 2, which is significant, and would be poised to begin Step 3 of creating an action plan.

As the City decides whether to make this commitment, here are some considerations:

##### **Benefits:**

- Network membership can lend legitimacy or cachet to the work and officially put Brooklyn Park on the map of age-friendly communities. It could also help recruit community partners to participate, although cities can demonstrate their commitment and seriousness in other ways.
- There is no financial commitment involved in joining. Cities can undertake this work as they are able, and in many places' grassroots teams of community members and organizations lead the work. While cities do often invest some funds in the work—which certainly makes more possible—part of the idea is that many changes or improvements can be made at low cost.

##### **Possible drawbacks:**

- Committing to the process attaches set timelines and deliverables to the work. This structure can help keeping the work focused and moving and ensure that a thorough process is being followed. Some communities and initiative leaders find this beneficial or even necessary. However, if a city's work has enough substance, momentum, and leadership commitment already, the network structure and requirements may not be needed to drive the effort and can become another aspect of the work that needs to be managed. Many communities are doing this type of work—and doing it well—without joining the network.

##### **Additional points:**

- There is no funding support tied to membership. AARP offers occasional grant opportunities for such work, but any community is eligible to apply for and be awarded grant funding, not only network members.
- Resources on age-friendly communities through WHO and AARP are available to any community, not only network members.

## **APPENDIX G**

### **Voice from the City's Diverse Senior Population: A Report on Brooklyn Park's Recreation and Parks Adult & Senior Adult Programs**

**CITY OF BROOKLYN PARK'S RECREATION AND PARKS  
ADULT & SENIOR ADULT PROGRAMS**

**VOICES FROM THE CITY'S DIVERSE SENIOR POPULATION**  
*A PROJECT WITH HENNEPIN COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH*



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## INTRODUCTION

In 2017, Brooklyn Park's Park and Recreation Adult & Senior Adult Programs began a partnership with Hennepin County Public Health (HCPH) through a Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP), Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) contract. Through collaboration with local public health and city and community-led improvements, SHIP is working to create healthier communities across Minnesota by expanding opportunities for active living, healthy eating and tobacco-free living.

The goal of this partnership was to gather input from the 50+ community in Brooklyn Park on their needs, desires, gaps, challenges and barriers to accessing and/or participating in physical activity opportunities through Brooklyn Park's Recreation and Parks Adult & Senior Adult Programs. There was a specific focus on Brooklyn Park's diverse racial and ethnic populations.

Located in the suburban northwest outer ring of Hennepin County, the City of Brooklyn Park is a diverse community with populations of color being 54% of the population.<sup>17</sup> The 50+ community makes up almost one third, or 27% of the city's population.<sup>18</sup>

Below is physical activity and social connectedness data from Hennepin County's 2014 Survey of the Health of All the Population and Environment (SHAPE) results for the Northwest outer ring suburbs 50+ population.

SHAPE is a series of surveys collecting information on the health of residents in Hennepin County and the factors that affect their health across a broad range of topics. It is administered every four years and helps in understanding how healthy residents are, examine differences in health among different communities, and understand how social factors such as income, education, and employment affect health.

Knowing that zip code and social factors are indicators of population's health, it is important to consider this data while examining the health of the 50+ population in Brooklyn Park, with a close look at residents' physical activity and social connectedness.

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<sup>17</sup> Metropolitan Council, Community Profiles. Population by Race and Ethnicity in Brooklyn Park. ACS 2012-2016. Available at [https://stats.metc.state.mn.us/profile/detail.aspx?c=R11000#POP\\_RACE\\_ETH](https://stats.metc.state.mn.us/profile/detail.aspx?c=R11000#POP_RACE_ETH). (Accessed 11/7/18).

<sup>18</sup> Metropolitan Council, Community Profiles. Population by Age and Gender in Brooklyn Park. ACS 2012-2016. Available at [https://stats.metc.state.mn.us/profile/detail.aspx?c=R11000#POP\\_AGE\\_GENDER](https://stats.metc.state.mn.us/profile/detail.aspx?c=R11000#POP_AGE_GENDER). (Accessed 11/7/18).

*Physical activity among residents 50 and older\**

	<b># of participants that responded Yes</b>	<b>Percentage that responded Yes</b>
<i>Any leisure time physical activity</i>	432	86%
<i>Sufficiently active, moderate/vigorous</i>	387	79%

*Social Connectedness\**

***How often are you involved in school,  
community, or neighborhood activities?***

	<b>Among 50-64</b>		<b>Among 65 and older</b>	
	<b># of participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b># of participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Weekly</i>	75	27%	71	33%
<i>Monthly</i>	33	11%	25	11%
<i>Several times a year</i>	67	27%	34	14%
<i>About once a year</i>	39	12%	31	12%
<i>Less often than yearly</i>	23	6%	22	9%
<i>Never</i>	54	17%	52	21%

***How often do you get together or talk with  
friends or neighbors?***

	<b>Among 50-64</b>		<b>Among 65 and older</b>	
	<b># of participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b># of participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Daily</i>	104	33%	109	46%
<i>Weekly</i>	128	44%	90	40%
<i>Monthly</i>	32	12%	11	3%
<i>Less often than monthly</i>	25	10%	24	10%
<i>Never</i>	2	1%	2	0.4%

***People in this neighborhood are willing to  
help one another.***

	<b>Among 50-64</b>		<b>Among 65 and older</b>	
	<b># of participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b># of participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Strongly agree</i>	137	52%	110	48%
<i>Somewhat agree</i>	126	40%	112	48%
<i>Somewhat disagree</i>	22	7%	11	4%
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	5	1%	3	1%

*\*Includes: Brooklyn Park, Champlin, Corcoran, Dayton, Hanover, Hassan Township, Maple Grove, Medicine Lake, Osseo, Plymouth, Rogers*



## OVERVIEW OF FOCUS GROUPS

Below are the locations where focus groups were held in Brooklyn Park, as well as a complete overview of the focus group participants, results from participant survey questions, highlights of focus groups' key findings, recommendations, and a summary of key findings from the focus groups and listening sessions.

<b>Focus Group Sites</b>	<b>Date of Focus Group</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity of Participants</b>	<b># of Participants</b>
<i>Creekside Gables Apartments</i>	5/23/18	African American (1), Hispanic (1)	2
<i>Lao Assistance Center of MN (LACM)</i>	7/19/18	Laotian (15)	15
<i>Organization of Liberians in MN (OLM)</i>	7/18/18	Liberian (9)	9
<i>Brook's Landing Apartments</i>	9/11/18	African American (8), Liberian (2), Indian & Nigerian (1), White (1)	12
<i>Eden Park Apartments</i>	9/18/18	Hispanic/Latinx (7), Black or African American (1)	8

- Number of participants who completed the survey: 46
  - Female participants: 34 or 74%
  - Male participants: 12 or 26%
- Age range: 40-86
  - Average age: 64
- City of residence: 91% of participants live in Brooklyn Park
- Range of years living in Brooklyn Park: 1.5-26 years
  - Average length of time living in Brooklyn Park: 12 years

## FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT SURVEY QUESTIONS

### Physical Activity

<i><b>In an average week, how many days do you walk or engage in other physical activity?</b></i>	<b># of Participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>0 days per week</i>	4	9%
<i>1-2 days per week</i>	5	11%
<i>3-4 days per week</i>	10	22%
<i>5-6 days per week</i>	8	17%
<i>7 days per week</i>	19	41%

### Social Connectedness

<i><b>How often do you feel isolated from others?</b></i>	<b># of Participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Hardly ever</i>	22	48%
<i>Some of the time</i>	19	41%
<i>Often</i>	4	9%
<i>Never</i>	1	2%

<i><b>How often do you get the social and emotional support you need?</b></i>	<b># of Participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Always</i>	19	41%
<i>Usually</i>	5	11%
<i>Sometimes</i>	18	39%
<i>Rarely</i>	0	0%
<i>Never</i>	4	9%

<i><b>How often do you get together or talk with friends or neighbors?</b></i>	<b># of Participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Daily</i>	26	57%
<i>Weekly</i>	15	33%
<i>Monthly</i>	1	2%
<i>Less often than monthly</i>	3	7%
<i>Never</i>	1	2%

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS AND LISTENING SESSIONS

Notes: For detailed results from each individual focus group, please see Appendix A: Summary of Key Findings from the Focus Groups and Listening Session, starting on page 11.

### *Activities:*

- Aging looks different for people of different ages. What a 50-year-old is interested in and able to do might be similar or different from a 70-year-old.
- Being an active, older adult is a combination of being physically and socially active, maintaining independence and being connected to one's cultural and faith activities.
- The majority of participants are not aware of Brooklyn Park's Park & Recreation Adult & Senior Adult Programs or the Get Up & Go magazine.
  - Participants who are aware of the magazine either cannot read it because English is not their first language or are overwhelmed by it and discard it.
- Activities participants wished the City of Brooklyn Park would offer include: walking; swimming; Zumba/dance; English classes; computer classes; cooking and baking classes; CPR classes; volunteer opportunities; and crocheting, knitting, sewing, embroidering classes.
  - Participants want activities that include the whole family and that are held at their apartment, cultural organization they are members of and/or neighborhood based.

### *Social participation:*

- Socializing and connecting through one's place of faith (church or temple) is important.
- Participants who are members of an organization such as LACM or OLM rely on these groups for their social connectivity and learning about what is going on in their immediate community and the city.
- More than one focus group expressed a need for a community gathering space in Brooklyn Park in order to host culturally relevant activities and/or events, as well as to just gather and socialize.
  - The community gathering space needs to be a trusted, multi-generational place.
  - Participants are not aware of community gathering spaces already available in Brooklyn Park or how to use/reserve those spaces.

### *Access:*

- All participants expressed that transportation is the number one barrier for participating in activities.
- The majority of participants from all cultural groups are dependent on their family and friends for transportation.
- Some participants walk or use their scooters to move around their neighborhood but that is often dependent on their health status, distance of activity and weather.

- A minority of participants use Metro Transit. Laotian seniors were less likely to use Metro Transit than any of the other participants groups.
- Challenges the participants experience in accessing activities include: cost, not understanding how to register and participate due to language differences, the location/distance of the activity, providing weekday childcare for grandchildren and the activities are not family-focused.

*Communication and awareness:*

- Participants, who are members of an organization such as LACM or OLM, learn about activities through word-of-mouth, phone calls, text alerts and the organizations' staff.
- Participants want to learn about activities through senior friendly flyers that can be shared through their place of faith, apartment building, and community leaders.

*What will improve the quality of life for the aging in Brooklyn Park?*

- Convenient, reliable transportation.
- Communication about activities is available in their language, as well as make sure the activities have staff and/or volunteers who can speak their language.

*Additional information:*

- The Minnesota Laotian interpretation of 'senior' is different from the Western interpretation. They do not identify with '50+'. An 'elder' is considered a first-generation immigrant who might be as young as 40 years old but is more connected to the Laotian culture and language.
- Elder isolation in the Lao community is a big issue. Adult daycare centers are becoming more common, but they are private, therefore expensive and you must have qualified insurance to cover the participant.
- Lao elders are aging in place with their adult children and their children's families. They experience mental health issues that stem from depression, their children not being successful, future finances, and trauma from immigration.
- Throughout all the cultural groups, there are residents who, daily, do not leave their apartment or apartment building and are very isolated.
- Many seniors rely on their adult children and grandchildren to help them understand, participate in and access neighborhood and city activities.
- When planning for inclusivity in activities, there is not a one-size fits all approach to including the diverse senior populations in Brooklyn Park.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

1. **Continued conversation and exploration.** Build off the relationships that have been developed through this project with the Lao, African-born, African-American and Hispanic/Latinx communities. Develop a 2019 plan to:
  - Share this report with the four cultural communities and community partners.
  - Explore further unanswered questions and/or next step ideas.
2. **Adult & Senior Adult Programming.** Take programming out into the neighborhoods.
  - Facilitate programs that different cultural groups are interested in and that the whole family can participate in.
  - Provide opportunities outside of physical activities. Opportunities where seniors can connect socially, as well as provide a learning/educational opportunity.
  - Hold programs at apartment buildings, trusted community gathering spaces, parks, etc.
3. **Transportation.** Explore further the transportation barriers seniors in Brooklyn Park experience.
  - Look at all modes of transportation – Metro Transit, walking, biking, using scooters, shared rides, etc.
  - Consider cost, accessibility, language of information, reliability, etc.
  - Provide educational opportunities on how to use the various modes of transportation to move around Brooklyn Park, accessing activities and services specific to the diverse senior populations.
  - Partner with local community-based organizations, cultural organizations, places of faith, etc. to identify possible solutions.
4. **Cultural expertise.** The city does not have to be the expert. The city can also play a facilitative role.
  - Provide physical space and opportunities in neighborhoods and the city where cultural groups can gather and hold activities and/or events.
5. **Marketing and communication.** Research and develop new communication tools and channels to reach the diverse senior populations in Brooklyn Park.
  - Always keep in mind age, language, reading ability, and where residents reside.
  - Utilize current groups to help communicate, such as established cultural organizations, places of faith, CEAP/Meals on Wheels, clinics, etc.
  - Consider culturally specific social media, radio, TV or newspaper as communication options.



## ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Adult & Senior Adult Program budget.** Consider budgetary options and opportunities to provide free and/or reduced cost programming for disparate populations who cannot participate due to financial constraints.
2. **Resource Fair.** Host an annual resource fair intended for the diverse senior cultural groups in Brooklyn Park.
  - Organize a planning committee with leaders and volunteers from each of the cultural groups to identify the resources, classes, and activities that would form the resource fair.
3. **Health-in-All Policies approach.** As the City of Brooklyn Park considers its broader age-friendly strategy, including how that will be reflected in city policy and implemented, participate in a Health-in-All-Policies presentation and resources from Hennepin County Public Health.
4. **Measurement and evaluation.** Develop goals and tools to assess, measure and evaluate the impact and reach of any improvements or changes that are made.
  - Identify and include qualitative measures, such as participant impact stories and photos.

## **APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS & LISTENING SESSIONS**

### **Creekside Gables Apartments**

#### *Activities:*

- Aging looks different for different people of different ages. What a 50-year-old is interested in and able to do might be similar or different from a 70-year-old.
- Activities of interest: quilting, crocheting, using computers, vegetable canning, field trips, apartment activities
- Activities they wished the City of Brooklyn Park would offer: walks to nearby parks, sit and relax in

#### *Social participation:*

- Participants mentioned that when they are identifying places for their family to gather, they look outside the City of Brooklyn Park.
- Stay connected through their job.

#### *Access:*

- Transportation is the number one barrier for participating in activities.
- Roads and intersections are busy and unsafe for seniors.

#### *Communication and awareness:*

- Participants want to learn about activities/opportunities in Brooklyn Park through flyers and their apartment's monthly resident calendar.

#### *What will improve the quality of life for the aging in Brooklyn Park?*

- When asked where they see themselves in 5-10 years, neither participant indicated they see themselves living in Brooklyn Park.
- Participants expressed concerns about not being able to stay busy or engaged, leaving their home.
- Participants also express concerns about feeling unsafe and observing crime near the shopping plaza on Brooklyn Boulevard (that includes Aldi, Family Dollar, a pizza restaurant and other establishments).
- Participants value services offered through the Community Emergency Assistance Program (CEAP).

### **Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota (LACM)**

#### *Activities:*

- Physical activities: men play tennis (at Noble Sports Park, Park Center High School, and Central Park); golf; kawtwara; perform traditional dances at the Temple, Festival of

Nations, and LACM events; exercise at LA Fitness; walk and bike outdoors in the summer; exercise inside during winter.

- Other activities: women enjoy socializing (talking and sharing), fishing, gardening, going to Temple, volunteering at Lao Advance, picnicking by lakes or backyard
- Everyone grocery shops at the farmers market on Zane and 92nd, as well as Dragon Star and Sun Food. The Zane farmers market is bigger, and they like it better.
- Activities they wished the City of Brooklyn Park would offer: walking, Tai Chi, swimming programs, Lao water aerobics

#### *Social participation:*

- Participants connect with family and friends via email, Facebook, letters, in person conversations, phone calls and through being involved at LACM.
- On separate occasions, the director of LACM and a participant expressed a need for a community gathering space in Brooklyn Park to hold culturally relevant activities/events and to just gather and socialize.
  - Space needs to be a trusted place for people to gather and multi-generational
  - Seniors do not know how to reserve rooms via the library or city hall.

#### *Access:*

- Many participants receive rides from family members.
- If the activity/event/appointment is close, they walk.
- Some drive or call for a car service.
- No one takes bus or taxis because they do not understand how to catch the bus or how to read the schedule. If they understood, they would go. There was an interest in participating in a Metro Transit class.
- Challenges for participating in activities/events: money/no job, taking care of grandkids, language barriers, and location/distance.

#### *Communication and awareness:*

- Awareness of Brooklyn Park's Park & Recreation Adult & Senior Adult Programs: most participants said they have no awareness of this department or programs. Some do see the Get Up and Go magazine but discard it away because they cannot read it.
- Participants communicate through Facebook, word-of-mouth, phone calls, staff from LACM – one-on-one and via alert texts (but they do not text back and forth, just receive the texts).

#### *What will improve the quality of life for the aging in Brooklyn Park?*

- More security – more patrols near Brooklyn Boulevard, behind Bowlero.
- Gym or exercise space, swimming pool and classes.
- Lao language classes, especially for the youth.

- Participants enjoy going to LACM to learn about resources, programming and volunteering.
- They would like to be able to go to the Temple and fundraising parties and festivals more easily. The Temple is also a place where elders can receive information/learn what is happening in Brooklyn Park.

*Additional information:*

- The Minnesota Laotian interpretation of 'senior' is different from the Western interpretation. They do not identify with '50+'. 'Elder' is considered first generation immigrants who might be as young as 40 years old but are more tied to the Lao language and culture.
- Elder isolation in the Lao community is a big issue. There is adult day care, but it is private, and you have to qualify for it.
- Elders are aging in place with their adult children and their children's families.
- They have mental health issues that stem from depression, children not being successful, future finances, trauma from immigration.
- Core services are missing them.
- Middle-aged Lao people also experience stress. Many are immigrants and caring for their elderly parents with no support.

**Organization of Liberians in Minnesota (OLM)**

*Activities:*

- Being an active adult means: moving around, jogging, going to church, not being dependent on anybody, swimming, Walk With Ease class, visiting with their sister, walking their grandson to the park.
- Other activities: sewing, jogging, walking to the library.
- Activities they wished the City of Brooklyn Park would offer: small gym at Brook's Landing with an instructor providing classes, social activities such as cooking and baking classes' senior yoga, movie nights, singing together, English classes, knitting and sewing, organized field trip to the Mall of America.

*Social participation:*

- Residents want to connect and socialize in a non-living environment.

*Access:*

- Residents move around by city bus, their church provides bus services to and from church only, walk to the library for using the computer.

- Do not feel transportation is reliable. Metro Mobility does not bring them to places they want to go to. In general, they know how the city bus system works.
- Mentioned that there are many people who live in different places and want to socialize but are limited by transportation.
- Stressed that their number one challenge for participating in any type of activity is transportation.

*Communication and awareness:*

- Awareness of Brooklyn Park's Park & Recreation Adult & Senior Adult Programs: nobody was aware of programs except for the Walk With Ease program that Brooklyn Park's Park and Recreation, Department Adult & Senior Adult Programs is piloting with OLM.
- Learn about Brooklyn Park activities/events through church, friends, their community leaders, television, computer at the library.
- Participants would like to learn about Brooklyn Park activities/events through their leaders, newspapers/Star Tribune, younger community members (for elders who cannot read), and OLM.

*What will improve the quality of life for the aging in Brooklyn Park?*

- More computer knowledge, social activities, having a representative from the Liberian community at the Hennepin County Northwest Human Service Center, and accessible and affordable housing.

*Additional information:*

This additional information was learned from another listening session with OLM in May 2018 -

- Activities participants are interested in: cooking classes; learning how to knit, sew, embroidery; basic computer classes; read, write and speak American English.
- Transportation: some participants walk, most received rides from family and friends.
- What would improve their quality of life in Brooklyn Park? Better transportation - more buses, more convenient bus stops.

**Brook's Landing Apartments**

*Activities:*

- Being an active adult means: independence, being alive, being able to get things done, your part of civic community, moving around, jogging, going to church, not just sitting at home.
- Physical activities: fishing, making coffee for the community room, cooking and cleaning in the kitchen.
- Other activities: socializing with neighbors and friends, bingo, crocheting, playing cards, going to adult daycare. As a grandfather, go to the school for grandkids activities.



- Awareness of Brooklyn Park's Park & Recreation Adult & Senior Adult Programs: nobody was aware
- Activities they wished the City of Brooklyn Park would offer: how to use a computer, cooking and baking classes, physical activity instructor for seniors, sewing activities. Participants also expressed they would like these activities offered in their apartment building.

*Social participation:*

- Participants expressed that a big part of how they identify with their cultural community is through their church.

*Access:*

- Transportation is a barrier because it is not reliable, especially in the winter. Not everyone has access to Metro Mobility and public transportation is not a solution for most elderly people. Some participants do ride the local bus.
- Participants shared that some residents in the building use scooters and they even go to activities or run errands using their scooter when the weather is nice. Some participants walk. People would like a shuttle for Walmart, Cub, Walgreens, etc.

*Communication and awareness:*

- Participants learn about activities through flyers and booklets. Some do see the Get Up and Go magazine, but it is too much information, they do not read, throw away it away.
- Participants want senior friendly flyers. They do look at notices. See some updates on their building's community bulletin board.
- There is limited use of social media.

*Additional information:*

- Participants shared that most elderly residents do not often leave the apartment building. They hang out with friends and neighbors all day. Participants want more activities that are organized.

## **Eden Park Apartments**

*Activities:*

- Being an active adult: gardening (Eden Park garden), having [community] space to go to and talk (many participants agreed), cooking classes, attending English classes (many participants agreed), helping in their neighborhood, volunteering.
- Physical activities: walking to and around the park, gardening, weight lifting. Participating in activities with a group were liked more, noting the importance of socializing.

- Other activities: church, volunteering, caring for grandchildren. Many [households] rely on one car per family and the person who works uses the car. Participants shared that many people from their community hold 2-3 jobs. Older adults depend on their kids to drive them places.
- Awareness of Brooklyn Park's Park & Recreation Adult & Senior Adult Programs: four participants said they have seen the catalog but do not understand it or what is in it because they do not speak English.
- Activities they wished the City of Brooklyn Park would offer: walking with a group, Zumba, dance, knitting and embroidering, CPR class, cooking classes, English classes, volunteer opportunities. Participants want activities that connect parents with kids, family activities.

*Social participation:*

- Activities: going to church, social activities, volunteering in their neighborhood.
- What do you need to be able to be connected socially in Brooklyn Park? Transportation, soccer games for men (comment by one male participant).

*Access:*

- Participants get to activities by bus, walking, depend on their children, their husband drives them.
- Challenges they have participating in activities: they depend on their daughter to go out (said one of the oldest participants), not speaking English is a barrier, cost, transportation, not knowing what is available, need activities for the whole family/neighborhood to socialize and connect.

*Communication and awareness:*

- Participants shared that they do not know what is happening in the city or where to find information.
- They want to learn about activities through a flyer, word-of-mouth, text message and invitation in Spanish. The activity or event needs to have staff/volunteers who speak Spanish.

*What will improve the quality of life for the aging in Brooklyn Park?*

- Decreasing barriers, such as language and transportation. Send invitations in Spanish. If information about city activities/events is in English, participants think it is only for the "Anglo" community.

*Additional information:*

This additional information was learned from an interview with a Latina staff member at Zanewood Teen Center. She was asked to provide her perspective on seniors in her Hispanic/Latinx community.

- Most grandparents do not work and are taken care of by their children and family.
- Grandchildren often translate conversations and written documents for their parents and grandparents.
- The staff member did not know about the concept of a retirement home. She thinks this is a cultural thing and would not place her parents or grandparents in a retirement home.
- Seniors socialize among family; family gatherings are at parks, near water.
- Immigrant families tend to live more collectively than individually.
- Seniors move around the community through their children or grandchildren driving them, walking or the entire family uses Metro Transit.
- Seniors grocery shop with the family, not individually.
- The best way to communicate city activities or events is through senior friendly flyers.





City of Brooklyn Park  
5200 85th Ave., N.  
Brooklyn Park, MN 55443  
763-424-8000  
[www.brooklynpark.org](http://www.brooklynpark.org)

February 13, 2019 9:03 PM