

Towards an Age Friendly Belmont

April 3, 2021



A Plan to Enhance Living And
Aging Well in Belmont

Produced by the Belmont Age Friendly Advisory Council

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Executive Summary

The Town of Belmont was honored with becoming an Age Friendly Community in March of 2018. This designation was bestowed by the AARP because Belmont had made a commitment to create long term actionable goals that would make the community an even better place to live as residents grow older. In October of 2019 the Select Board appointed the Age Friendly Advisory Council whose mission was to create an action plan that would be implemented within five years. The Select Board appointed members chosen as leaders representing a variety of backgrounds and areas of expertise. This diverse, dedicated group of members met twice monthly and developed a plan that is deeply informed about the needs and possibilities within the Town. The Council used the Age Friendly Belmont Report of March 2018, prepared by The Gerontology Institute @UMass Boston, as a basis of its work, The AFAC used other written sources cited in this report's bibliography as well as the collective experiences and wisdom from living and working in the Town.

The following action plan is divided into four parts, representing the four specific areas that the Council identified as urgent priorities. The areas, otherwise called domains,

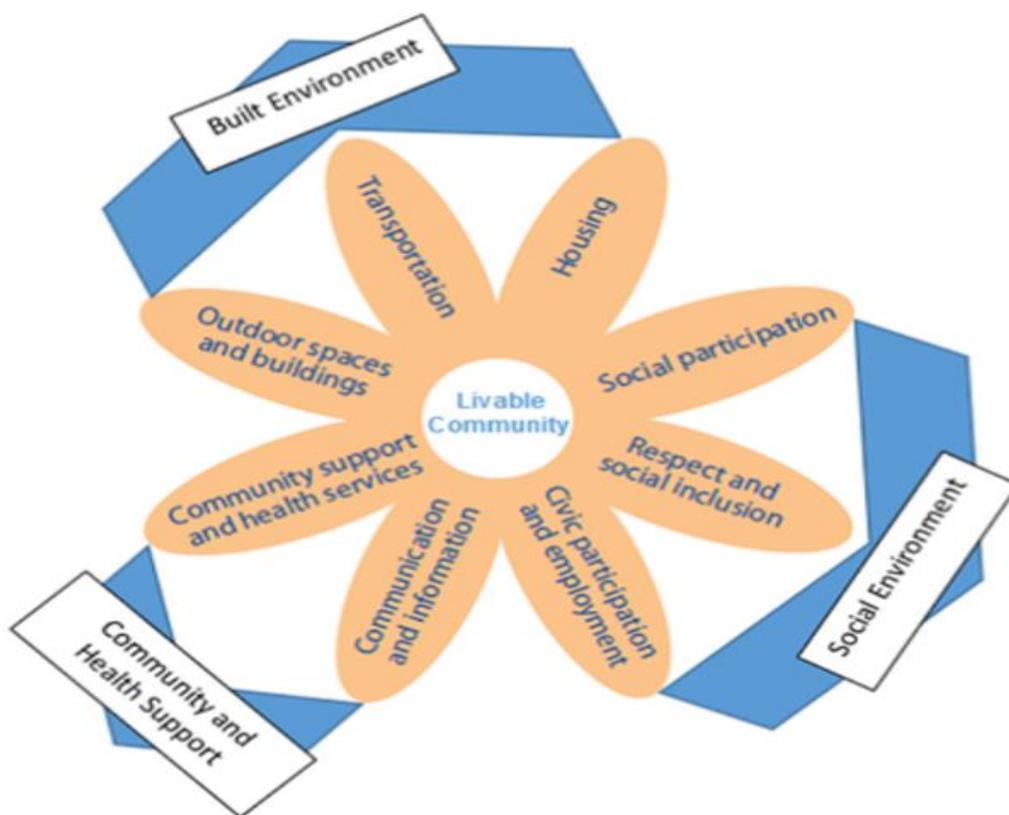


Figure 1-AARP Age Friendly Framework

were chosen from the eight specified by the AARP Age Friendly framework shown below. The plan contains goals, short term actions to be completed by the summer of 2022 and long-term goals to be attained within five years from the date of this report. In some cases, systematic evaluations of the outcomes of each action plan are included. The preview of the plans is as follows:

Name of Plan	Goal #1	Goal #2
Housing	Develop guide for homeowners wishing to make age friendly home modifications	Allow Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)
Transportation/ Walkability	Create safe walkways, free of tripping hazards and snow/ice impediments, for older adults.	Create transportation options
Outdoor Spaces	Expand number of age friendly recreational spaces	All planned outdoor space designs will incorporate age friendly features
Communications	Expand avenues for communications among various groups and media forums with older adult community	Acquire communications consultant to develop new and improved avenues of communications

In development of the plan, the Council was mindful of scarce resources, and the search for outside funding is vital for some of the goals to be met. The Council utilized the research and guides provided by Livable Communities and AARP. Such research and guides will continue to be used in the implementation phase of the plans. For example, the AARP Home Fit Guide will be included in the development of the local homeowners' guide in the Housing Action Plan.

With completion of this report there will be a campaign to publicize it and create support for it with Town leaders and the community at large. At that point the Council's work will be completed. The implementation of the plan will be accomplished by a committee to be appointed by the Town's Select Board and to be named the Age Friendly Action Committee. That committee will establish goal posts to evaluate progress and make deadlines for completion of the action steps for the plan.

The work of this plan would not be possible without the dedication of the Council members. They are:

Heidi Barberio, Programs Coordinator, Recreation Department

Wesley Chin, Director, Health Department

Lt. Kristin Daley, Community Resource Office, Police Department

Tim Flood, Special Education and Disabilities Advocate, Community Member/Chair Belmont SEPAC

Bev Freeman, Council Secretary and Member of the League of Women's Voters

Wayne Haley, Assistant Chief, Fire Department

Alice Melnikoff, Community Service Coordinator, High School

Nava Niv-Vogel, Facilitator, Liaison for the Council and Director, Council on Aging (COA)

Susan Polit, Social Worker and Specialist on Aging

Judy Singler, Member, Housing Trust

Peter Struzziero, Director, Library

Eileen J. Tell, CEO, ET Consulting (Resident-at-large member)

Housing Sub-Committee included COA liaison member Ellen Sullivan

Technical Assistance was provided with help from Mackenzie Kewley, COA Social Work Intern

Housing Action Plan

The Belmont Age Friendly Advisory Council (BAFAC) identified the need for more housing options so that seniors can age in place in the Town. The need was based on findings of the original Planning for an Age Friendly Belmont, the profile of the Town in the most recent Livable Communities report, and collective experiences and expertise provided by members of the Council.



The Long-Term housing goals are as follows:

- Develop guide for homeowners wishing to make age friendly home modifications.
- Allow Accessible Dwelling Units (ADUs)



Accessible homes for increased mobility

Short Term Action Plan

Action Items:	Description:
1. Assess extent of community interest in aging in place using ADUs and/or home modification.	This will be done through resident surveys, focus groups and/or “drop box” at Town locations. This will assist in community support for these efforts.
2. Develop guide to home modification processes	<p>In conjunction with the Town’s Community Development Department, the Police Department and other experts, develop and distribute to residents a step-by-step guide to the home modification process. The guide will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● safety tips on hiring contractors. ● the step-by-step process of making home modifications. ● safety considerations in design choices and ● a guide to the permitting and inspection process in the Town.
3. Locate grants and other funding sources to distribute guide and assess effectiveness	Such a guide is an innovative project to assist seniors to age in place at home and may be helpful for duplication to other communities. Therefore, grants will be sought to support funding for the production, dissemination and evaluation of the potential impact that such a guide may have on hazards to independent living resulting from falls and constriction of movement and exercise. If feasible it may be possible to partner with U. Mass. Gerontology Institute on research program to study the effects of using such a guide.
4. Promote the guide	A publicity campaign will be active to promote the guide throughout the community
5. Support Zoning changes to allow ADUs in Belmont	Monitor interest voiced by Town’s Planning Board for authorization of ADUS in Belmont. Extent of advocacy by the Age Friendly Action Committee depends on the extent to which ADUs becomes a priority (or not) by Planning Board. The resident survey cited above will help inform this issue.

Long Term Action Plan

Action Items:	Description:
1. Advocate for support of ADUs	In the event that Town’s Planning Board does not take a lead in ADUS <i>and</i> if assessment reveals significant interest among the population for ADUs, then bring stakeholders and interested parties together to advocate for ADUS among public officials.
2. Support Town processes to enact zoning changes.	Use assessment and public voices to move the political process along to eventual adoption of ADUS in the Town. Steps in that process would be to first conduct open hearings, then obtain a favorable vote by Planning and Select Boards, with an eventual and final vote on the matter by Town Meeting.
3. Assess impact of ADU zoning changes	Two years after adoption of ADUs in the Town, an evaluation of the program will be conducted. It should include assessing the number of applications, possible impediments, and satisfaction with the program. The goal would be to identify needed changes (if any) to enhance future success of the program.

Transportation and Walkability Action Plan

The Belmont Age Friendly Advisory Council (BAFAC) identified two important unmet needs in the community, walkability and internal transportation. Although the Town



covers just four-square miles and is densely populated in many neighborhoods, the condition of the sidewalks and passable routes for walking have long been known to be problematic. There are parts of the Town where walking is difficult or hazardous. The Police Department has reported numerous fatalities among pedestrians over the years, many of whom were seniors. Therefore, efforts to improve walkability for seniors and residents of all ages would greatly impact safety for seniors and residents of all ages and improve the ability to provide a healthy and no-cost form of exercise. The Council recognized that walking as a form exercise is of particular importance and value in the age of covid-19.

Belmont has significant vehicle traffic, much of it pass-through in nature. The Town benefits from access to commuter rail and bus lines into Boston and beyond. Senior

transportation within Belmont, however, is quite limited, with the predominant options through the use of COA's vehicles and a recently developed volunteer driver program. Creation of cross-town options for all ages has been suggested multiple times in the past and should be reconsidered, particularly with the development of new housing in the Town. Transportation linking Belmont Center, Cushing Square and Waverley Square should be explored as a starting point. Additionally, existing options should be expanded.



redesigned Cushing Square

Transportation

The Long-Term Transportation goals are as follows:

- Development of parking options for older residents.
- Promotion of safe bikeway use
- Development of an internal transit system which connects the Town’s commercial districts.
- Expansion of COA based volunteer driver program.

Short Term Action Plan

Action Items:	Description:
1. Institute parking permit program for older residents.	The COA sponsored initiative for parking permits for older adults in Town parking lots and at meters has been adopted on a trial basis until end of 2021. This program will assist older residents with access to Town commercial areas, particularly important during inclement weather and icy conditions. The permit replaces the ticket from the parking machines.
2. Advocate for safe bikeway use with Transportation Advisory Committee and community at large.	As bikeways and bike lanes are becoming more common in Town, implementation of safe use should be promoted. Bike paths are often also used by pedestrians and safe use for all is necessary.

Long Term Action Plan

Action Items:	Description:
1. Explore intra-Belmont transit program.	Partner with other civic and community groups to examine possibilities for internal transportation, including assessing transportation needs of residents and reviewing systems in neighboring towns. Explore funding options, including grants and fees, as well as coordination with shuttles provided by housing developments within the Town. Compile report for Town Administration and residents.
2. Promote ridesharing and volunteer transportation options.	Expand current COA volunteer driver program through increased recruitment and publicity.

Walkable Belmont

The Long-Term Goals for Walkable Belmont are as follows:

- To create paths for walking to minimize walking hazards throughout the Town.
- Ensure that there are enough long and accessible paths available that older adults can sustain a robust and healthy workout; and
- Improve and maintain physical safety of pavement and paths, including snow and ice removal on sidewalks.

Short Term Action Plan

Action Items:	Description:
1. Create programs to promote walking and other exercise.	COA to organize walking groups, using safe paths that are currently available.
2. Coordinate town-wide safe walking routes.	Coordinate with the school community and Police Department on the development of their "Safe Routes to School" grant application. The purpose of the grant application would be expanded to include the needs of the elderly and disabled
3. Assure safe and adequate ice and snow removal on sidewalks and intersections.	Work with Department of Public Works and Town Administration to increase awareness of snow removal bylaw. Identify Town and property owner responsibilities and timelines for clearing of walkways. Promote annual information update throughout the Town. Continue volunteer support for residents unable to clear walks themselves.

Long Term Action Plan

Action Items:	Description:
1. Increase walkable pathways.	Pursue any grant, in cooperation with other sectors of the community, to physically increase the number of walkable pathways. Engage various community groups to identify routes. The Public Works Department would manage the repairs and renovations involved.
2. Establish method to expedite sidewalk and walkway repairs and renovations.	Appoint a member of the long-term Age Friendly Action Committee to communicate regularly with the Town's Community Development Office and Department of Public Works, to ensure and support the Town's efforts to expedite sidewalks and walkway renovations. Communicate closely with the departments on the currently used "Sidewalk Management Plan".
3. Explore options for sidewalk repairs by property owners.	Collaborate with the Office of Community Development and Town Administration Office to develop a method for property owners to repair sidewalks posing a hazard to their personal property safety in exchange for tax credits. This could expedite sidewalk repairs and promote safety.
4. Conduct periodic audits of walkable routes for residents.	Using AARP audit guides for assessing routes, or other similar tools, create maps of routes available to residents, perhaps through School Department or local service organization, e.g., scouts. Coordinate with Belmont organizations to include historic features and age-friendly features.
5. Increase installation of seating areas along sidewalks.	Advocate for additional benches throughout the Town using walk audit and input from the community as a resource in determining sites. Engage various community groups to assist with identification of seating sites and procurement of seating.
6. Ensure age friendly features continue:	Advocate to ensure that age friendly features remain intact in Town infrastructure, including completion of the Community Path. Develop and include language in Town processes to assure age friendly accommodations, including ADA compliant surfaces, such as pavers and ramps, adequate surface width, etc.

Outdoor Spaces Improvement Action Plan

Outdoor spaces are a prized asset in Belmont. Residents identify recreational outdoor opportunities as an important reason that Belmont is an attractive place to live. Over the past 10 years, a number of renovations to walking and biking paths and playgrounds were made or are being made around the Town. Belmont Center, the main commercial center of the Town, was also redesigned to increase outdoor recreational space. Traditional Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) features were included in these projects, but a broader age friendly perspective has not been applied on all these projects. The Belmont Age Friendly Advisory Council identified the need to advocate for incorporating age friendly features into any designs for outdoor space renovation and in the creation of new spaces and paths.

The long-term outdoor spaces improvement goals are as follows:

- Expand number of age friendly recreational spaces.
- All planned outdoor space designs will incorporate age friendly features.



Bocce Court – Senior Center



Grove Street Park

Short Term Action Plan

Action Items:	Description:
1. Define age friendly components of outdoor spaces.	<p>The steps needed to achieve this goal are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Define more specifically, what is meant by age friendly features in the context of outdoor spaces. ● Identify the steps needed to take this goal from idea to legislation. ● Oversee implementation of age friendly features in outdoor space projects by <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. coordinating with Town’s Department of Public Works and Recreation Commission 2. having a member of Age Friendly Action Committee assigned to any Town committees that oversee such projects.
2. Advocate for age friendly features in outdoor space development in Belmont.	As spaces are developed for recreational and other uses within Belmont, advocate for Age Friendly features.
3. Implement liaison on various committees.	Have a liaison on committees in Town responsible for the development of projects, such as the Planning Board, Conservation Committee, etc.
4. Seek grant funding to promote age friendly features.	Seek and apply for available grants to fund age friendly features to playgrounds, parks and other projects. The BAFAC applied for a Community Improvement grant through AARP to incorporate socialization opportunities for older adults in a park renovation project. Although that grant was not selected, it is an example of the commitment that BAFAC is making to advance age friendly features in outdoor spaces.

Long Term Action Plan

Action Items:	Description:
1. Institutionalize age friendly features in outdoor space development	Include age friendly features into any outdoor space deign and project in the Town. To that end, develop a bylaw requiring age friendly features in these projects.

Communications Improvement Plan

The BAFAC identified the need for improved communication across sectors of the community as this is vital both to the visibility of older adults in the Town and to



countering their vulnerability to social isolation. Improved communication will also foster improvement in other domains deemed vital to the Age Friendly movement, namely those of civic involvement and social isolation. Because the Town of Belmont's residential tax rate is high relative to most communities in the Commonwealth and is facing a structural shortfall in its FY'22 budget, this segment of the action plan (as is the case for the action plan as a whole) does not include any steps involving use of municipal funding. The long-term goal of the action plan is to have improve the communications infrastructure already in place.

The Communication Improvement goals are as follows:

- Expand avenues for communications among various groups and media forums with older adult community.
- Acquire communications consultant to develop new and improved avenues of communications.



Short Term Action Plan

Action Items:	Description:
<p>1. The expected appointed committee to implement the representation on relevant Town communication committees, named here Belmont Age Friendly Action Committee, will be represented in a variety of key decision-making bodies of the Town.</p>	<p>Member of the current BAFAC has been nominated for appointment to the Town’s Website Renewal Committee, which has been charged with revamping the Town’s website. The website is an enormously valuable tool for disseminating important information across departments, committees and other stakeholders that can be used to enhance age friendly efforts. The revamped website would:</p> <p>Improve coordination of school and older community joint projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enhance visibility and build a base of support for older adults and age friendly initiatives. ● Fulfill long term request, as recorded in the local 2016 age friendly assessment plan, to create an online volunteer clearinghouse whereby residents who are interested in volunteering (be they older adults, younger adults or adolescents) are matched with Town departments or other community focused groups who have need for their skills and time.
<p>2. Develop communication process for age friendly initiatives</p>	<p>Current BAFAC meetings offer an invaluable venue for communications across disciplines and sectors of the community. Future Age Friendly Action Committee will similarly be constituted from a diverse group and will serve as a hub for communications regarding age friendly goals throughout the community.</p>
<p>3. Support COA communication initiatives to assist seniors in acquiring information available through electronic sources, or, when that is not feasible, provide traditional options to communications important to their lives.</p>	<p>The COA is widening online options to communicate with the public, through such means as robocalls from its database called “MySeniorCenter”. It continues to expand its social media and online presence while assisting seniors in accessing them. Tutoring seniors on electronic communications and providing them with functional, donated devices can be expanded.</p>

Long Term Action Plan

Action Items:	Description:
1. Secure funding for a communications consultant for age friendly initiatives	Find non-municipal sources of funding to retain a consultant who would develop a communications infrastructure plan that can be feasibly implemented based on the time and funding available to support it. The plan would evaluate existing communication channels and improve and create more avenues for communication among all age friendly stakeholders, with sensitivity to audiences on both sides of the digital divide.
2. Review and implement new communication plan	Once funding is secured, the future Age Friendly Action Committee will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Specify the parameters for the communications consultant. ● Vet and choose consultant. ● Review consultant’s plan as it is being developed. ● Work to implement that plan. This will be done in coordination with Town wide systems to ensure that there is integration within the network.



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