

RIVER FOREST

Proud Heritage • Bright Future



Age-Friendly River Forest

Village leaders want to ensure River Forest is a community that is welcoming, inclusive, and supportive for people of all ages, including our aging population. While many steps have been taken to ensure the community is age-friendly, there is room for improvement to build upon River Forest's Age-Friendly Community designation from the American Association of Retired People (AARP), received in 2015.

To this end, the Village Board of Trustees created an Age-Friendly Advisory ad hoc Committee (AFC) in February of 2020, made up of seven community members ranging in age from 45 to 80.

The AFC began meeting monthly in August of

2020 with a goal to gather information from AARP and other age-friendly experts and sources. The overarching objective was to garner input and feedback from River Forest residents who were 55 years of age and older with the following goals in mind.

1. Assess the age-friendliness of River Forest through a community-wide survey.
2. Research and discuss best practices in other communities.
3. Evaluate options and prepare a draft Age Friendly Plan.
4. Review/present the draft Plan to the Board of Trustees for evaluation and consideration.
5. Create a final Plan for adoption by the Board of Trustees.



Areas of Focus

The eight major domains of the AARP Age-Friendly model were the core focus of survey questions. Survey respondents were a random sample of residents 55 years of age and older, and the survey response rate was 60%. Based on the survey results, the AFC determined there were several areas where improvements could be made, and provided the following challenges and recommendations:



Social Participation: Older residents want more variety and additional events and activities for social involvement.

Recommendations: Create free events that provide opportunities for older residents to engage with and make connections with other community members to reduce social isolation. These events could be developed through partnerships between the Village, Township, Library and Park District.



Respect and Social Inclusion: Roughly 50% of respondents state they feel valued as a member of the community.

Recommendations: Involve the Village's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Group to assess older population needs and invite older residents to provide recommendations on decision making and policy matters.



Outdoor Spaces & Buildings: While a large percentage of respondents stated River Forest is a walkable community, more than 27% said there are not enough places to sit and rest in the Village.

Recommendations: Make outdoor areas safer by providing brighter lighting on streets and sidewalks, create a sidewalk snow removal program, and add more benches to public areas.



Housing: 87% of respondents believe their home is accessible to themselves and visitors. More than 57% want to stay in their homes for at least the next decade.

Recommendations: Providing older adult housing options ranging from rental to homes for purchase so that they can stay in the community. Develop a fast track permit approval process so that these individuals can also choose to stay in their homes by making structural modifications.



Civic Participation & Employment: Respondents stated they were generally satisfied with opportunities for civic engagement and social participation.

Recommendations: Provide volunteer and employment opportunities by partnering with the Chamber of Commerce and all taxing bodies to match older adults with ways to be more involved. Create an Older Adult Advisory Committee to provide important perspectives on aging. Increase promotion of home care and assisted living options and create a registry of licensed providers that serve the older population.



Transportation: 90% of older adults stated they drive themselves and do not utilize outside transportation services available to them.

Recommendations: Ensure that transportation options for older adults are highly publicized and ensure traffic signals provide enough time for mobility-limited individuals to get across the street safely. Review roadway design and sign visibility to ensure they address the changing competencies of older adults who are still driving.



Communication and Information: Respondents stated they would like to receive Village communications in both print and digital media.

Recommendations: Provide communications that can reach older adults, such as flyers, signs and postcards that are mailed to residences, or that are located at group residences such as assisted living facilities and other locations where older adults communally live so they are made aware of available resources.



Health Services & Community Supports: Approximately 60% of respondents stated they know of older adult services and can access them. A significant number expressed interest in the Village supporting people and families dealing with dementia.

Recommendations: Provide information for older adults on how to age in place in their homes. Create a speaker's bureau that provides educational speakers on older adults issues and needs. Add areas within the Village's monthly communications to share information on age-related issues, including information and resources.



Survey Results Overview

Overall recommendations were that the Village prioritize increasing access to affordable housing, improving transportation options, expanding social and volunteer activities and increasing communications about services and resources available to our older adult population.

In Summary

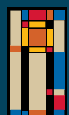
Age-Friendly River Forest is about investing in services, support and communications with older adults so that they can live healthier and more fulfilling lives as they age in place. The Village seeks to ensure that River Forest

is an optimal place for all residents to grow up and to grow old, and our aging population feels respected and included throughout their lifecycle.

What's next?

The AFC has completed a preliminary report which the Village Board of Trustees reviewed and adopted, that will shape recommendations for an Age-Friendly Action, Implementation, and Evaluation Plan for the Village of River Forest. Once this Plan is approved by the Village Board of Trustees, it will then be submitted to AARP for approval.

To view the full report, visit vrf.us.



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