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Age Friendly River Forest

Creating a Livable Community for All

Prepared by:
The Village of River Forest (“Village”)
Age-Friendly Advisory Ad Hoc Committee (“AFC”)

Year Two Report and Action Plan

April 2023

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Letter to the Board of Trustees

To: Village of River Forest Board of Trustees
From: The Age-Friendly Advisory Ad Hoc Committee (“AFC”)
Subject: Proposed Action, Implementation, and Evaluation Plan for AARPP Age-Friendliness
Date: XXXXXXXX

The AFC was tasked with assessing the age-friendliness of the Village of River Forest (“Village”) and creating a list of recommendation and an action plan for the Village to approve and adopt. The charge from the President of the Village reads:

"The COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened the importance and need for this ad hoc committee. Given the virus' effect on our older adult population and the need to rethink how we build an age-friendly community, the timeliness of this committee couldn't be better.

The goals remain the same and below are some direction for the committee to consider but certainly not limited to these 5.

1. Conduct a baseline assessment of age-friendliness of the Village
2. Research and Discuss the new normal for age friendly communities amid COVID-19 and other factors stemming from this pandemic.
3. Evaluate and Prepare a plan based on the American Association of Retired Persons and other organizations approaches to an age friendly community.
4. Review and Present the Plan to the Village Board and Village President for endorsement and consideration
5. Present the Final Plan to the Village Board and Village President to adopt by majority vote an Age Friendly Plan that will integrate with our municipal code for implementation of the Plan."

The goal is to support the Village in being a designated age-friendly community which joined the AARP Age-Friendly national directory in 2015.

The AFC has evaluated findings from a community-wide survey and has prepared a report of those findings and a subsequent Age-Friendly Action Plan, following [AARP guidelines](#). This work details the community assessment that the AFC conducted; its outcomes; and resulting recommendations and actions that the AFC proposes to advance age-friendliness in the Village.

After the Trustees review findings from the Community Assessment and the Action Plan, the AFC recommends that the Trustees consider the value and benefit in preparing a complete Age-Friendly Action, Implement, and Evaluation Plan to AARP for eventual approval.

The recommendations and action plan presented here will enable stakeholders in the Village to pursue the next steps needed for achieving greater age-friendliness in the years to come.

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AGE-FRIENDLY RIVER FOREST YEAR TWO REPORT AND ACTION PLAN

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The AFC was tasked with assessing the age-friendliness of the Village and creating an Action Plan for the Village to approve and then eventually submit to AARP. The goal is to support the Village of River Forest in being a designated age-friendly community which joined the AARP Age-Friendly national directory in 2015.

The AFC evaluated findings from a community-wide survey and prepared an Age-Friendly list of recommendations and action plan. Once approved by the Village, this plan that will be submitted to the AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) for review and endorsement.

This report has a two-fold purpose: (1) To detail the community assessment and its outcomes; and (2) to propose – based on the Village’s current situation - an Action and Evaluation Plan for the Village consider adopting and submitting to AARP.

Vison, Mission, and Values

The **vision** is to have a community that is livable and sustainable, is safe and secure, has affordable and appropriate housing and transportation options, and supportive community features and services. These resources will enhance personal independence; allow residents to thrive as they age in place; foster residents’ engagement in the community’s civic, economic, and social life; and support individuals and families when a loved one needs additional care.

The **mission** is to create and sustain a more livable Village for older adults who choose to age in place in their current home or in this community and to create a community where people of all ages and backgrounds can thrive with a good quality of life as they grow older.

Our **values** include:

- **respecting** older adults as experienced, vital contributors to the social, economic, civic and life of the community;
- **inclusion** of voices and needs of ALL older adults in our planning, programs, and policies;
- having a **shared vision** and **common agenda** for quality of life in the Village;
- **collaboration** with local, regional, and national stakeholders doing related work;
- **use of current data and information** to guide the work;
- **promotion of existing** programs and services;
- **piloting of best practices** from other Age-Friendly communities;
- **ensuring** that individuals have access to existing and new **technology**; and
- promoting **inter-generational solutions** and community improvements which benefit multiple generations.

Members*:

James Flanagan
Deborah Frederick
Helen Kwan
Daniel Lauber
Lydia Manning
Barbara Mirel
Respicio Vazquez, Trustee & Chair

**All members (ages range between 45 and 80) worked on the assessment and creation of this report as well as action and implementation plan*

Description of the AFC

The AFC was comprised of a group of River Forest residents who worked together to make this community more accessible and supportive for people of all ages. We have identified and offered suggestions for addressing barriers to participation and inclusion, such as lack of transportation or insufficient housing options for older adults and other factors to improve the quality of life for older adults in River Forest.

Members of the AFC include representatives from local government, community organizations, community members, as well as older adults themselves. The goal of the AFC is to create a community that is welcoming, inclusive, and supportive for people of all ages.

SECTION 2: RATIONALE FOR AGE FRIENDLY RIVER FOREST

An age-friendly community engages older people and understands that to be age-friendly, the community must consider the social, economic, environmental, and lifestyle factors that influence wellness, quality of life, and aging. Age-friendliness means making the Village a community where people of all ages and backgrounds can thrive with a good quality of life as they grow older.

In November, 2019, the Village became a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. Network members are expected to create and implement an Action Plan to further achieve the qualities of age-friendliness found in [AARP's Livability standards](#). Accordingly, in February 2020, the Village President constituted a seven-member Age-Friendly Advisory Ad Hoc Committee with the following two charges:

- (1) To conduct a baseline assessment of existing age-friendliness in River Forest by surveying residents aged 55 and over; and
- (2) from results, to develop an Action Plan for the Board of Trustees to adopt and submit to AARP. After being in the AARP Network for five years, River Forest will evaluate the outcomes of the Action Plan and, based on outcomes will create a new set of goals and corresponding Action Plan to renew its membership for another five years.

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The AFC and the Village staff member on the AFC comprise substantial knowledge and experience in aging in-place, gerontology, and city and community planning. The AFC met monthly from July 2020 to present, devoting ourselves to the following tasks:

- Educating ourselves about the tenets of age-friendliness developed by AARP and the World Health Organization; programs implemented in other AARP designated age-friendly cities and communities, public testimony, expert testimony and initiatives in our own Village.
- Reviewing other survey examples, considering options and choosing the effective survey questions for the community to assess age-friendliness in River Forest.
- Creating, pilot testing and disseminating the survey to a representative random sample of 335 residents 55 years old and older and achieving a 63.2 percent response rate after accounting for undeliverable surveys (201 responses).
- Analyzing and interpreting responses to identify positive aspects of age-friendliness currently found in River Forest, aspects in need of improvement, and aspects that are high priorities.
- Relating survey results to River Forest's 2022 score on AARP Livability and to other salient research related to communities taking steps to anticipate and support aging populations.
- Composing a comprehensive Action Plan accompanied by Evaluation methods and finalizing this report.

Throughout these processes the AFC tied the assessment and the Action Plan to the vision, mission, and values of the Village, as detailed in the Community Profile above. To do so, the AFC identified ways in which the vision, mission, and values relate to AARP's domains of and criteria for Livability in Age-Friendly communities. We then focused the survey instrument and the sections of the Action Plan roughly on the following domains and criteria set forth by AARP.

AARP's "Age-Friendly" communities initiative is designed to help communities become more livable for people of all ages, including older adults.

AARP's Age-Friendly Domains:

1. Outdoor spaces and buildings
2. Transportation
3. Housing
4. Social participation
5. Respect and social inclusion
6. Civic participation and employment
7. Communication and information
8. Community support and health services
9. Education and lifelong learning

Additionally, AARP's indicators of livability are factors that contribute to the overall livability of a community. These indicators can include the availability of public transportation, the quality of local schools, the crime rate, and the availability of healthcare.

AARP indicators of livability:

- Housing* - affordability and access
- Neighborhood* - proximity and security
- Transportation* - safety and convenience
- Environment* - clean air and water
- Engagement* - civic and social involvement
- Health* - prevention, access, and quality
- Opportunity* - inclusion and possibilities

Indicators of livability are likely to overlap with AARP's age-friendly domains, as both are concerned with making communities more livable for all residents. However, the age-friendly domains focus specifically on the needs of older adults, while indicators of livability may be more broadly applicable to people of all ages.


This list of recommendations to the Village has been created using survey input from older people and captures older people's priorities and concerns in the Village. This summary document is intended to provide leaders and decision-makers with the necessary information to construct, implement and evaluate an Age-Friendly Action Plan for the Village.

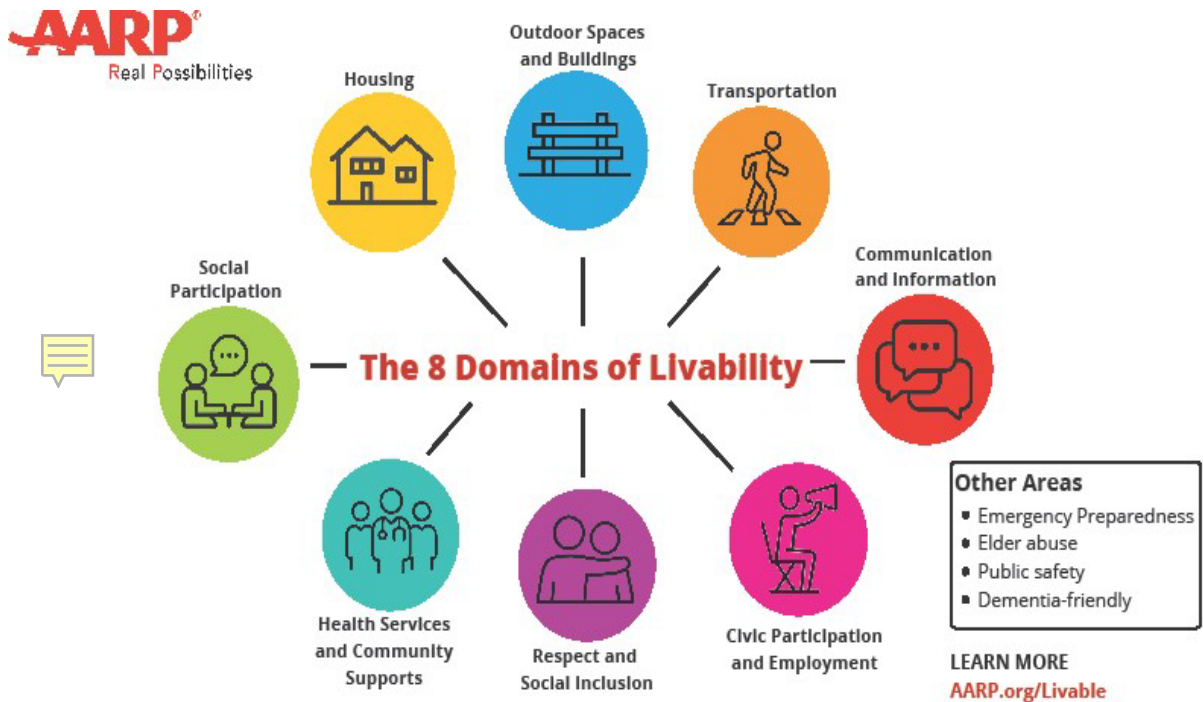
SECTION 3: OVERVIEW OF AGE FRIENDLY (AARP and WHO)

In 2006 the World Health Organization (WHO) created a network, the Age-Friendly Cities and Communities, to prepare the world for the rapidly aging society. Its framework includes eight domains of livability that impact older adults and can be used to help a community gauge, organize, and prioritize how to become a livable community. Continuing the effort by WHO,

AARP created the Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities in the United States. The AARP network is affiliated with the WHO's Age-Friendly Cities and Communities initiative.

The Domains of Livability

The Domains of Livability framework is used by many of the towns, cities, counties, and states enrolled in the AARP Network of the Age-Friendly States and Communities to plan their work to be more livable for people of all ages. Learn more at <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/info-2016/8-domains-of-livability-introduction.html> 



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Figure 1 Graphic with a circle for each area - outdoor spaces, transportation, communication, civic participation, respect, health services, social participation, and housing. Plus, areas of emergency preparedness, elder abuse, public safety, dementia-friendly, and **technology**.

1. Social Participation: To combat isolation (i.e., older adults who are lonely or socially isolated), there will be opportunities for older adults to engage in the life of their community with accessible and affordable activities that are meaningful, engaging, and safe.
2. Respect and Social Inclusion: Everyone feels valued. The wisdom and experience of older adults are considered with intergenerational and multicultural options to eliminate ageism (i.e., prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of a person's age).
3. Civic Participation and Employment: Older adults in River Forest will continue to work for pay, volunteer their skills, and actively engage in community life.
4. Communication and Information: Communities support the dissemination of and access to information in various ways.
5. Community and Health Services: All people have access to affordable health care and community services that help them live safely and with dignity
6. Outdoor Spaces and Buildings: Green spaces, safe streets, sidewalks, outdoor seating, and accessible buildings are used and enjoyed by people of all ages.

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7. Transportation: Recognizing the geographic needs of the state, transportation in River Forest will be safe, reliable, and easy to use, including accessible and affordable public transit.

8. Housing: Housing is accessible, designed, or modified to age in the community with affordable housing options for varying life stages.

9. Technology: The AFC agreed to include technology as a 9th domain of Age-Friendly for the purposes of the community assessment.

The table below shows the differences between the AARP domains and the sections of the River Forest survey. The AFC decided to include a section dedicated to Technology, and used the Community Support Services for Older Adults to cover multiple AARP domains.

Comparison of AARP Domains and River Forest Survey Sections

AARP Domains	River Forest AF Survey Sections	AARP Livability Indicators
Social Participation	Social Participation	Engagement
Respect and Social Inclusion	Respect and Social Inclusion	Opportunity
Civic Participation and Employment	Civic/Social Involvement and Volunteer Opportunities	Opportunity
Communication and Information	Communication and Information	Engagement
Community and Health Services	Community Support Services for Older Adults	Health
Outdoor Spaces and Buildings	Outdoor Spaces and Buildings	Environment
Transportation	Access to Transportation	Transportation
Housing	Housing and Finances	Housing
	Technology	


WHO/AARP Framework, Process, and Key Principles

The WHO and AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities is a worldwide movement with over 40 countries participating across the globe. AARP is the U.S. affiliate and currently has over 400 communities in its membership network (The Network supports members through research, materials, and tools on best practices, professional development opportunities, technical assistance, and mini grants (AARP, 2019).

In a recent blog post, AARP provided guidance to assist communities as they strive to create livable communities by developing and implementing age-friendly policies and practices (AARP, 2019):

1. Leverage the current and potential contributions of older adults in your community. Look for opportunities to engage older adults as volunteers, entrepreneurs, or contributors to the local arts scene.

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2. Recognize the value of retaining older adults' connections to both people and place. These associations are valuable to both the individual and the community and cannot be quickly or easily replicated in a new environment.
3. Ensure access to the built environment. Poor design of our homes, parks, streets, walkways, and transit infrastructure prevents access and engagement.
4. Support housing affordability and choice. Housing options should be available and affordable to people at all income levels.
5. Invest in a range of transportation options. One in every five persons age 65+ does not drive. Many need to use public transportation; others will need the additional support of paratransit, reduced fare taxis, or volunteer driver programs.
6. Improve health. Communities benefit when residents have access to healthy food options, opportunities for walking, biking and exercising, and access to health facilities.
7. Foster safety and personal security. Community safety and security initiatives prevent injuries, promote neighborhood cohesion, and maximize opportunities for residents to be active and engaged.
8. Support older adults and their family caregivers through long-term supports and services (LTSS). LTSS programs enable residents to stay in their homes as they age.
9. Coordinate planning processes. Community land use, housing, transportation, supportive services, and community health care planning should be interconnected.
-  10. Engage residents of all ages in community planning. Decisions regarding land use, housing, transportation, and services have broad effects on the lives of residents. The entire community must be represented in the process and costs and benefits must be shared across the entire community.

The AFC recommends that the Village incorporate these practices into the development and implementation of Village function and related business.

SECTION 4: AGE-FRIENDLY RIVER FOREST NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Joining the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities in 2019 and developing the AFC in 2020 represents the completion of stage one of the Age-Friendly process. The second stage of the Age-Friendly process—conducting a community needs assessment—began in August of 2020. The needs assessment was designed and conducted by the AFC.

Community Profile

Introduction to River Forest

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River Forest was incorporated as a Village on October 30, 1880. Prior to that, it was considered part of a larger community called Harlem, which included parts of Oak Park and Forest Park. Fearing the possibility of alcohol-related problems if Harlem incorporated, River Forest residents banded together to incorporate a smaller and initially "dry" community. Forest Park and Oak Park followed suit and were incorporated in 1884 and 1901, respectively.

Ten miles west of the Loop on the eastern bank of the Des Plaines River, River Forest grew from a settlement established near a sawmill in 1831 into one of the Chicago area's most picturesque suburbs. Like its sister village of Oak Park, the community experienced growth after the Chicago fire of 1871, when displaced city residents moved west looking for a new place to settle. After the village made infrastructure improvements in the late 19th century, the population grew quickly and became known for significant residential architecture such as Frank Lloyd Wright's Winslow House.

River Forest has a strong base of residents who are committed to keeping the community vibrant and providing support to those who need it. For example, through grants and philanthropic fund management, the Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation supports local nonprofits and social-service organizations.

The Village provides a variety of services aimed at its older adult residents. Such programs and services include the: Senior Handyperson Program, Senior Basement Protection Program, Senior Citizen and Persons with Disabilities Snow Removal Program and older adult discounts on fees such as the purchase of the Village's vehicle stickers. Furthermore, the Village works collaboratively with the Townships of Oak Park and River Forest ("Townships"). Townships continue to provide a full array of services such as meals, transportation, care management, information/referral, as well as various support programs. Additionally, the River Forest Library and the River Forest Community Center provide enhanced programming for older adults (i.e., Celebrating Seniors Week in May during the Administration on Community Living's Older Americans Month, Coffee Mondays and Celebrating Seniors All Year Long).

Demographic and Diversity of River Forest

River Forest is an affluent community of 11,717 with an average household income of \$221,504. Over three-quarters of all adults age 25 or older have a college degree. Persons 55 and older constitute 29.6 percent of the city; 65 and older make up 17.5 percent of the population, and 94 percent of homes report having a computer and a broadband internet subscription.

- Population – 11,717
- Median Age – 41.6 years
- Per Capita Income in the Past 12 months– \$81,053
- Median Value of owner-occupied housing– \$601,300
- Median Monthly Owner Costs With a Mortgage - \$3,459
- Median Monthly Owner Costs Without a Mortgage - \$1,500
- Median Gross Rent - \$1,375
- Median Family Income – \$158,929

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- Mean Family Income – \$251,095
- Median Household Income – \$129,263
- Mean Household Income – \$221,504

A bit more than 91 percent of village residents identified themselves in the 2000 Decennial Census as being of one race while 8.7 percent identified themselves as “two or more races.” The village’s population of one race is 72.9 percent white, 7.5 percent Black or African American, 8 percent Asian. Among the River Forest respondents to the 2022 American Community Survey 5-year estimates 2017-2021, 6.4 percent identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino (of any race). These figures reflect the relatively high cost of housing in River Forest and the lower median household incomes among Black and Hispanic households in the Chicago metropolitan region as well as the nation. However, as a community the Village is diverse in other ways, including in ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, and a range of other factors. The Village has committed itself to diversity and inclusion by establishing its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Group and joining diversity and inclusion partnerships with the racially, ethnically, and economically diverse adjacent communities of Maywood and Melrose Park, IL.

¹ Sources: All data are from the 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021 except “Population” which was reported in the 2020 Decennial Census, Table P1.

Description of Age-Friendly Features

Age-friendliness is an important part of any community, and the Village is no exception. From the services and amenities that it provides, to the activities and programs it offers, River Forest works hard to ensure that it is a place that is welcoming and accommodating to all ages.

River Forest has an available, excellent public transportation system that is accessible and safe for older adults, making it easier for them to get around. Additionally, the community has sidewalks and pathways that are wheelchair-friendly, allowing older adults and those with mobility issues to safely navigate the neighborhood. River Forest also offers a number of activities and programs to keep older adults engaged and active. These include classes and social events that are designed to bring older adults together and give them the opportunity to socialize and make new friends.

Additionally, there are health and mobility resources that are available to help older adults stay independent and remain in their homes. Finally, the Village is committed to providing services and support that are tailored to meet the unique needs of older adults. This includes access to health care, physical therapy, and nutrition services, as well as financial and legal assistance. Overall, River Forest is an age-friendly place that meets the needs of most all individuals.

What Did We Do?

Beginning in August 2020, the Village’s AFC met virtually at monthly meetings to gather information and develop recommendations outlined in this report. The breadth of the meetings ranged from an overview by AARP about the tenets of an age-friendly state, presentations by AARP designated age-friendly cities and communities, public testimony, and expert testimony.

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Additionally, the committee created, disseminated, and analyzed the results from a community-wide survey with a representative random sample size of adults aged 55 years and older in the Village (see Appendix A for survey questions, responses, and description of the sample). The survey response rate was 60%. Through each meeting, the committee understood current efforts being made with older adults in River Forest. The committee drafted essential recommendations for the Village through each meeting and working session. Following the needs assessment, we created an action plan and strategy for implementation.

How Did We Do It?

The AFC conducted an age-friendly needs assessment for the Village. Using a survey from a randomly selected sample of River Forest residents age 55 and older, we captured valuable information about various elements of age-friendliness in River Forest. We assessed what older residents need and want from their perspectives to age safely and securely in the place in River Forest. Furthermore, the needs assessment provided needed information regarding the Village’s aging-friendly initiative to build on existing community strengths to address gaps in services.

To assess community needs and aspirations for experiencing age-friendliness we developed a 64-item, Likert Scale survey with questions grouped in the following categories:

Social Participation
Technology
Respect and Social Inclusion
Civic/Social Involvement and Volunteer Opportunities
Communication and Information
Community Support and Services for Older Adults
Outdoor Spaces and Buildings
Access to Transportation
Housing and Finances

Demographics of Respondents

A random selection was used to recruit respondents for a community survey. We used the then-current voter registration rolls to capture a representative sample of 335 River Forest residents aged 55 and over in the Village of River Forest. Seventeen of the surveys were returned as undeliverable, leaving a sample size of 318. 201 surveys were completed and returned, generating a highly reliable establishing a response rate of 63.2 percent.



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Demographic Characteristic	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents	<u>Village-Wide Demographic</u>¹
Age			
55 - 59	33	17.2%	19.0%
60 - 64	31	16.2%	21.9%
65 - 74	91	47.4%	34.2%
75 - 84	26	13.5%	17.5%
85+	11	5.7%	7.4%
Gender (55 and older)			
Female	113	60%	58.9%
Male	77	40%	41.4%
Non-binary	0	0%	Not Available—
Race (All ages, population of one race)²			
Asian	7	3.8%	8.0%
Black African America	5	2.7%	7.5%
White	171	93.4%	72.9%



Inclusion of Older Adults and Diverse Populations

A randomized sampling technique was used to gather these data. The committee did not over sample for diversity. The committee does however in the listing of recommendations, advocate for policies and practices that support the inclusion of older adults and diverse populations at the Village and community level.

AARP Livability Score

The Village of River Forest, IL has an AARP Livability Score of 55. By AARP’s metrics, any score above 50 is good. River Forest had points deducted for lack of home affordability.



What Lessons Did We Learn?

Results from the River Forest Age-Friendly Survey (see Appendix A) indicated several critical areas of focus for age friendly efforts to create an action plan. Overwhelming, residents in the Village reported wanting to age in their community. These seven domains are: housing, outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, social participation, communication and information, civic participation, and respect and human inclusion.

¹ Sources of “Village Demographics.” Age and Gender: U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates*, Table SO101. .Race: U.S. Census Bureau, *2020 Decennial Census*, Table P1.

² The village-wide data on race is, not surprisingly, noticeably different than that for the surveyed sample of individuals 55 and older. Unfortunately, the 2020 Census data on race by age had not been released as of this writing. In the 2020 Census, 91.3 percent of River Forest residents identified themselves as being of one race while 8.7 percent identified themselves as being of two or more races. The River Forest survey, however, did not offer an option to report more than one race.

Key Findings from Community Age-Friendly Assessment

Note: Only items of significance emerging from survey results (concerns – less than 20 percent no concern, 20 to 30 is low concern, 30 to 40 moderate concern and anything greater than 40 percent is of high concern) as agreed upon by committee in previous discussion.

1. Social Participation

- Some concern about learning about social events.
- Some concern about the lack of range of events and activities sufficiently varied.

2. Technology

- No major concerns with technology for villagers.
- Findings demonstrate the 96 percent of households have Internet and large number of people have and do comfortably use technology.

3. Respect and Social Inclusion

- No major concerns with age discrimination and very few getting negative remarks related to age.

4. Civic/Social Involvement and Volunteer Opportunities

- Appear to be adequate for civic involvement and volunteer opportunities, however people expressed interest in having more opportunities for social involvement.

5. Communication and Information

- No major concerns other than the Village trying to understand whether to use regular mail and/or digital communication.

6. Community Support and Services for Older Adults

- It is important to River Forest is supportive of people living with dementia.
- Need to do a better job helping people understand what services for OA are available and how to access services.

7. Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

- Existing concerns for improved seating and streetlighting.

8. Access to Transportation

- No major concerns with access to transportation other than better communication from the Village about transport services for older adults.

9. Housing and Finances

- Most important thing is that people have options in different settings to age in River Forest.
- Caveat: we uncovered that people would entertain modifying existing space to accommodate a care situation.
- Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) – 23 percent would consider modifying their home to accommodate an ADU or live in one.

The findings from this needs assessment were used to establish priorities, set goals, and decide action steps for the Age-Friendly River Forest Action Plan.

SECTION 5: AGE-FRIENDLY RIVER FOREST ACTION PLAN

Using findings from the community assessment and its outcomes, this proposed action plan is based on the Village's current situation. The AFC recommends that the Village adopt this Action and Implementation Plan then subsequently submit the plan to AARP. The Action and Evaluation Plan will lead to the subsequent steps needed for achieving greater age-friendliness in the years to come. These steps include implementing the plan; sharing solutions, best practices and progress reports with AARP; and evaluating outcomes and impacts to guide the development of new goals.

Management of Implementation Plan

The needs of residents in all the Domains of Livability are important. Based on the findings of the Age-Friendly River Forest Community Needs Assessment, the AFC identified the following area as important domains to address social participation, respect and social inclusion, communication and information, community support and services for older adults, outdoor spaces and buildings, access to transportation, housing and finances, and technology.

1. SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Social participation, inclusion, and educational opportunities are important dimensions of age-friendly communities. With the age friendly framework, AARP intends for communities to combat isolation while providing opportunities for older adults to engage in the life of their community with accessible and affordable activities that are meaningful, engaging and safe.

Findings

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While information obtained from research participants shows the majority are aware that there are community level activities to be engaged in, a significant minority of respondents feel there are not enough opportunities to meet people in River Forest. River Forest residents see a strong alignment between the importance and availability of social opportunities such as continuing education, cultural activities, activities for older adults specifically, and activities for people of all ages. Some concerns were expressed about the availability of information about social activities. Respondents indicated their desire for more occasions to meet people in River Forest, more variety in event and activity programming, and more opportunities for social involvement in the Village.

Basis

- 65 percent strongly agree that activities and events in River Forest are organized in places that are accessible to me. (Survey Question 3)
- 20 percent of respondents feel there are not enough opportunities to meet people in River Forest. (Survey Question 2)
- Only 23% of older adults in River Forest have difficulty learning about local social events. (Survey Question 4)

Challenges

There was a range in responses on social participation and engagement. A solid one-third of the responses are “Neutral” about issues of inclusion, belonging, valued, and participation. This percentage suggests something may be missing in the Village to keep responders from feeling inclined to answer positively. Or it could be that they do not care about inclusion, belonging *et al*; but that also suggests a disengagement of sorts from the Village. The disengagement is not negative if it comes from residents finding a sense of “community” elsewhere (personally made friendships, Chicago-wide groups and places). Finding out reasons for the Neutrals is important for determining whether actions of various types by the Village would be worthwhile.

Recommendations

The Village needs to provide opportunities for older adults to engage in the life of their community with accessible and affordable activities that are meaningful, engaging and safe. It is important to recognize the age friendly activities that the Village does support. For example, The River Forest Library and the River Forest Community Center provide enhanced programming for older adults (i.e., Celebrating Seniors Week in May during the Administration on Community Living’s Older Americans Month, Coffee Mondays and Celebrating Seniors All Year Long).

1. Create opportunities for more expansive community engagement for older adults in River Forest, such as providing more opportunities for social activities and no-cost-to-older adults events and improve communication about the events.
2. Expand intergenerational social opportunities, such as working with relevant Village departments to expand intergenerational programming in settings such as parks, libraries and

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other nonprofit arts organizations, community and older adult centers, and other facilities in River Forest and Oak Park.

3. Encourage the Village to collaborate with the Township's Senior Services to create programming to decrease social isolation among older adults, such as creating a daily call program (i.e., every day a phone call will be placed to a participant older adult to check on their wellbeing) or work with animal shelters, pet adoption, or friendly visitor campaign as well as additional programming by the library, park district and RF Senior Services.

2. TECHNOLOGY

Findings

There are no major concerns with technology for Village residents. Findings demonstrate the 96 percent of households have Internet and a large number of people have and comfortably use technology.

Basis

Residents have adequate access to the internet, and are comfortable using their smart phones and computers. (Survey Question/s 6 - 8)

Challenges

Small number of residents still lack the resources and/or do not feel comfortable using electronic devices.

Recommendations

1. Promoting and working with other public institutions such as the River Forest Library who provide activities and programs relating to the use of technology.

3. RESPECT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

In an age friendly community, everyone feels valued. The wisdom and experience of older adults is considered with intergenerational and multicultural options, with a goal to eliminate ageism.

Findings

A large number of respondents reported feeling valued as a community member in the Village. Age discrimination against River Forest older adults is not widespread. Respondents expressed there to be a low level of ageism in River Forest.

Basis

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- Only about 50 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt like a valued member of the River Forest community. Almost 37 percent responded neutral. (Survey Question 15)
- A large majority does not feel discriminated against based on age; nor have they experienced ageist comments. (Survey Question 10)
- Fifty percent of respondents feel valued as members of the community, but half do not. Thirty-seven percent are neutral, but 11 percent explicitly do not feel valued and two percent abstained. Of the respondents who do not feel valued, 86 percent have lived 11+ years in River Forest but this longevity cannot assume age as an explanatory factor. Twenty-nine percent of these 21 respondents are in the youngest bracket in the survey, 55 to 59 years old. All of them have lived in River Forest 11+ years. Notably, this percentage of 55- to 59-year-olds feeling unvalued is disproportionately higher than the representation of this age group in the survey (18 percent of all survey respondents). Moreover, they are unlike other respondents who feel unvalued. The other respondents almost all hope to stay in River Forest for 11 or more years. But in this younger group who do not feel valued, their intentions about staying vary across the options, from less than a year to 11 or more years. (Survey Question 15)
- Eleven percent of respondents reported that they sometime feel discriminated against due to their age. (Survey Question/s 10)
- Fewer than seven percent of River Forest older adults report hearing annoying or negative remarks due to their perceived age. (Survey Question/s 9)

Challenges

Non-white residents are underrepresented in the survey. It's important to know if non-whites and whites have the same experience of feeling valued or not. Economic brackets may not all be represented adequately either.

If responses about feeling valued had overwhelmingly shown a positive response, the small 11 percent of respondents who do not feel valued would not seem very dramatic. However, the large percentage of neutrals combined with these negatives raises some questions. How much does feeling valued matter to retaining older adults as residents of River Forest? If it matters, what can we do to help assure that feeling of being valued among neutral as well as negative responses. By including the younger bracket of older adults in our survey, responses also raise the question of what is needed to help residents 55 to 59 years old perceive themselves as valued members of the community now and into the future? For example, one issue responses reveal is that 30 percent of 55- to 59-year-olds do not find it easy to learn about social events, constituting 23 percent of respondents who felt this way, disproportionately larger than their representation in the survey.

Recommendations

The Village needs to value the wisdom and experience of older adults is considered with intergenerational and multicultural options in the Village. As part of being an Age-Friendly community, the Village needs to address ageism as a public health issue.

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1. Create an Anti-Ageism campaign and work to have River Forest be a Village Without Ageism, such as adopting the core principles of anti-ageism from Dr. Becca Levy’s ABC framework to bolster positive age beliefs.
2. To adequately represent all interests in River Forest, gather more data from underrepresented groups, such as partnering with the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Advisory Group to understand the intersection of diversity and aging with respect to initiatives on inclusion and equity.
3. The Village should incorporate intergenerational and multicultural factors and options into its governmental activities to include the wisdom and experience of its older residents, such as actively listening to and considering the perspectives of those from different backgrounds or engage in meaningful dialogue with people from different backgrounds and ages and considering their perspectives when making decisions.

4. CIVIC/SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT AND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Civic engagement is characterized as having older adults continue to work for pay, volunteer their skills, and be actively engaged in community life.

Findings:

Survey results suggested that older adults in the Village were satisfied with opportunities for civic engagement and social participation.

Basis

- Most River Forest older adults with an opinion report that they are satisfied with opportunities for civic involvement here. (Survey Question 12)
- Most River Forest older adults with an opinion are satisfied with opportunities to volunteer in the village. (Survey Question 14)

Challenges

Not all respondents expressed a lack of civic engagement as a concern.

Recommendations

The Village needs to provide opportunities for older adults continue to work for pay, volunteer their skills, and be actively engaged in community life.

1. Create and maintain opportunity directory for those interested in volunteering or employment. The Village Database could include current volunteer and employment opportunities and profiles of interested participants. The Village, Chamber of Commerce and River Forest Township (“Township”) should explore matching older adults with fitting opportunities.

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2. Create an older adult advisory committee for Village activities and new initiatives, such as establishing an appointed group of older adults to serve on an advisory committee for new initiatives and developments that the Village oversees and supports.
3. Actively involve older adults in the Village’s legislative and planning processes. The Village should actively seek to involve older adults to engage the “aging perspective” into the Village’s legislative and planning processes through mechanisms to regularly consult with older adults on specific codes, plans, policies, and ordinances, including regular review from an “aging perspective” of Village codes, policies, plans, and ordinances.
4. Communications about opportunities for engagement, the range of activities, and other efforts to enhance involvement of older adults should be developed for and addressed to residents in their mid- to late-fifties as well as to those 60 years and older.

5. COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

Age Friendly communities support the dissemination of and access to information in a variety of ways.

Findings

Respondents indicated the need to receive information from the Village in various media forms (print and electronic).

Basis

- Nearly 60 percent of River Forest older adults report that they prefer to get information via electronic means. are comfortable using electronic communication devices. (Survey Question 21)
- River Forest older adults understand digital and printed communications from the Village. (Survey Question 2)
- While most River Forest older adults prefer to receive Village communications electronically, a significant percentage prefer to receive Village communications by mail. (Survey Question 22)
- Nearly nine in ten River Forest older adults report they are comfortable using the Internet, smart phones, and other electronic devices. (Survey Question/s 6-8)
- More than three quarters of River Forest older adults report that the digital information the Village sends them is easy to read in terms of type face and size. (Survey Question/s 18)
- More than 92 percent of River Forest older adults report that they can understand printed information from the Village (Item19) while 86 percent say the same about digital information. (Survey Question 20)

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- While 60 percent prefer to receive Village information via electronic means (Survey Question 21), nearly 29 percent prefer to receive Village information in print via the U.S. mail.

Challenges

The biggest challenge for social services serving older adults face is getting the public to understand what services are available for older adults, especially when consumers are not in immediate need. The Village and Township need to better communicate and promote offerings to older adults and their families.

Recommendations

The Village needs to better support a variety of options for the dissemination of and access to information.

1. Refine the Village's methods of communication for sharing information about community events and services, such as working to eliminate the digital divide by providing more information in the form of mailings or public posting sites.
2. Create an Age Friendly Checklist that is incorporated in all Village work/decision-making and planning. The development of such a checklist could include input from aging experts to help the Village maintain an inclusive age-friendly perspective when developing programs, policies, procedures, and protocol that the Village governs and oversees.
3. The Village should increase awareness of existing resources that support older adults as they age in place in their home or this community, such as focusing on promotion of current service and offerings in Village communications.

6. COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND SERVICES FOR OLDER ADULTS

Findings

Older adults in River Forest reported the need for better communication about services among community organizations, government agencies, and health care providers aimed at meeting the needs of older adults. Furthermore, there was considerable concern regarding the lack of information on the available services for older adults and the ability to access those services when needed. Approximately, 60 percent of participants indicated they know about older adult services and can access them. This suggests that there is a considerable percentage of the population of older adults in the Village that do not know what services exist. Respondents also expressed a significant interest in having the Village be a place that is supportive for people living with dementia.

Basis

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- Three quarters of older adults believe it is important that the Village supports people living with dementia. (Survey Question 27)
- Village institutions need to do a better job helping people understand what services for older adults are available and how to access services. (Survey Question 24)
- Just 30 percent of River Forest older adults report that social services in River Forest meet their needs. Under eight percent reported that these services meet their needs. Sixty-two percent were neutral or chose “not applicable.” (Survey Question 23)
- About one in four River Forest older adults knows what services for older adults are available in River Forest (Survey Question/s 24) while 26 percent know how to access these services. (Survey Question 25)
- Fewer than six percent of River Forest older adults use services for older adults in the Village. (Survey Question/s 26)

Challenges

The biggest challenge social services serving older adults face is getting the public to understand what services are available for older adults, especially when consumers are not in immediate need. The Village acknowledges that adults may not know about available services until they are in need themselves.

Recommendation

1. Increase awareness of existing resources that support older adults as they age in place in their home or this community, such as creating a speakers’ bureau to provide information about older adult services, create materials that can be shared with existing Village mailers, and have a special e-newsletter series dedicated to aging-related issues.

7. OUTDOOR SPACES AND BUILDINGS

AARP suggests that outdoor spaces and buildings as well as green spaces, safe streets, sidewalks, outdoor seating and accessible buildings be used and enjoyed by people of all ages.

Findings

Respondents identified less issues related to the Village of River Forest’s outdoor spaces and buildings. Most respondents considered the Village to value and provide availability of well-maintained and safe parks and opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Survey respondents did express an interest in making River Forest more walkable, expressing the desire for sidewalk improvements, adequate streetlighting and additional benches for sitting and resting be placed throughout the Village. There is a need to upgrade River Forest’s street lighting to promote nighttime pedestrian and driver safety. Additionally, with more than a third of River

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Forest older adults expressing that there are not enough places to sit and rest in the Village, more benches are needed.

Basis

Walking

- The majority of respondents considered River Forest to be a walkable community. (Survey Question 29)
- 19 percent of respondents indicated the need for safer sidewalks. (Survey Question 29)
- 81 percent indicated adequate lighting for walking and driving. (Survey Questions 32 & 33)
- 14 percent disagreed with the statement that “sidewalks in my neighborhood are safe for me to use.” (Survey Question 29)
- Nearly 90 percent agreed with the statement that they usually have enough time to across streets safely in River Forest while only 10.6 percent disagreed with the statement. (Survey Question 30)

Seating

- 27 percent of respondents do not think seating is adequate and 22 percent are neutral. (Survey Question 31)
- More than one in four respondents reported that there are not enough places to sit or rest throughout the Village. (Survey Question 31)
- 30 percent of respondents who were neutral or felt the question was not applicable, 27 percent reported that there are not enough places to rest or sit within River Forest. (Survey Question 31)

Lighting

- 19 percent of respondents finding inadequate lighting for driving and walking present. (Survey Question 32)
- 31 percent disagreed with the survey statement “Street lights in River Forest are bright enough for me to safely walk at night.” (Survey Question 32)

Challenges

It will take a coordinated effort by the Village, park district, and other entities to meet needs related to lighting, sidewalk-related safety improvements as well as providing benches and providing places to sit and rest throughout the Village.

Recommendations

River Forest needs to ensure that the Village has green spaces, safe streets, sidewalks, outdoor seating, and accessible buildings are used and enjoyed by people of all ages.

1. Provide brighter lighting that is confined to the streets and sidewalks through the use of light shields and directed lighting to keep light from bleeding onto front lawns and into living rooms and front porches. The Village Board could refer the topic to the Traffic and Safety

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Commission, and can consider implementing a lighting initiative to purchase and install more lighting throughout the Village.

2. Continue to improve sidewalk conditions to ensure accessibility and safety, such as improving routine maintenance on existing sidewalks and walkways; consider a sidewalk snow removal program for all walkways in the Village. The Village should continue to incorporate into its capital improvements program sidewalk and curb repair to ensure pedestrian safety and accessibility for those whose mobility is limited.
3. Implement a bench-installation program and related map for resting throughout the Village. The Village can create a bench purchasing campaign, where Villagers can purchase and dedicate a bench on the parkway nearest to their residence or in other designated locations in the Village. Proceeds can go toward aging-related efforts and services in the Village. Also, the Village should develop a plan to strategically locate resting places for older pedestrians and cyclists and incorporate this plan into the Village's capital improvements program. Further, the Village should produce and widely circulate online and in print a map showing resting places throughout the Village.

8. ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION

ARPR encourages that towns, cities, and villages recognize the geographic needs in their communities, and provide transportation options that are safe, reliable, and easy-to-use, including accessible and affordable public transit. Transportation was identified by respondents as being accessible, however survey results indication that the majority of residents drive themselves places. In general, the Village should have accessible, convenient, reliable, and affordable public transportation.

Findings

While River Forest older adults have easy access to public transportation, they overwhelmingly continue to drive themselves to get where they need to go. The vast majority of River Forest older adults continue to be independent in their transportation choices. Relatively few depend on others for their transportation. In general, older adults in River Forest are largely unaware of the transportation services that the Township provides.

Basis

- Nearly 70 percent of River Forest older adults report they have easy access to public transportation such as Metra, buses, and the Elevated. Fewer than seven percent do not. However, fewer than eight percent usually take public transportation. (Survey Question 34)
- 90 percent of River Forest older adults report that they usually drive themselves where they need to go. (Survey Question 36)
- Relatively few depend on others for their transportation with fewer than seven percent usually taking a taxi or rideshare, and less than five percent reporting they depend on others to get to where they need to go. (Survey Question 38)

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- Fewer than four percent need assistance to get from their home to their ride. (Survey Question 39)
- Only 19 percent of respondents are aware of the transportation services the Township furnishes. (Survey Question 40)

Challenges

While 90 percent of respondents drive themselves to get around, there remains a proportion of older adults in River Forest who are dependent on others for transportation. The challenge is to provide and effectively inform residents about the local transportation services.

Recommendations

River Forest needs to have transportation options that are safe, reliable, and easy to use, including accessible and affordable public transit.

1. Maximize awareness and use of existing transportation and mobility options for residents in River Forest, such as communicating availability and cost of buses and cars: CTA fixed routes, on-demand, travel train, and private and small-organization vans and cars, and other transports serving the Village. Ensure transportation platforms are accessible.
2. The Village should ensure that traffic signals allow enough time for mobility-limited people to cross the street.
3. The Village should acknowledge the reality of older adult drivers and support their evolving competencies and needs through enhanced roadway design and appropriate visibility and nonglare lighting standards.

9. HOUSING AND FINANCES

In an age friendly framework, AARP has determined that housing needs to be accessible and designed or modified to support people desiring to age in the community.

Findings

The average home in River Forest is nearly 100 years old in a Village with a footprint of 2.2 square miles. There is very little open space and limited existing space for redevelopment. Most residents believe their home is accessible and visitable. The vast majority of respondents feel safe in their home and in their neighborhood. A majority of respondents report that their home could accommodate another person living with them. The vast majority of respondents reported income adequate to cover basic housing costs including property taxes. Nearly 25 percent of respondents would consider modifying their home to accommodate another adult, caregiver or parent. Furthermore, 25 percent would consider building and living in an “in-law suite” or accessory dwelling unit (ADU).

Basis

Survey data indicated that:

- 87 percent of respondents believe their home is accessible to them and those that visit. (Survey Question 42)
- 80 percent of respondents report their home will allow another to live with them. (Survey Question 44)
- 95 percent of Villagers feel safe in their homes. (Survey Question 45)
- 9 percent strongly agreed and 18 percent agreed they would consider modifying their homes or building an ADU to accommodate future needs. (Survey Question 49)
- Nearly a quarter of River Forest older adults would consider modifying their property to add an accessory dwelling unit and would consider living in an accessory dwelling unit. More than 23 percent of those surveyed reported that they would consider modifying their property to create an accessory dwelling unit and nearly 24 percent would consider living in one. (Survey Questions 50 & 51)
- Nearly 24 percent would consider modifying their property to create a separate living space for a caretaker, boarder, or parent. (Survey Question/s 49)
- 90 percent of older adults in River Forest report that their current home would allow them to have another person live with them. (Survey Question/s 45)
- Close to one in five River Forest older adults report that they cannot easily meet their monthly housing costs including property tax. (Survey Question/s 42)
- 57 percent of respondents desire to live in their home for 11+ years and 18 percent of respondents desire to live in their home for 6-10 years. (Survey Question 59)

Challenges

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) are an increasingly popular housing option for communities looking to support an aging population. ADUs are typically smaller, self-contained living spaces attached to or near a primary residence. While ADUs can be an excellent way to provide older adult housing and allow people to maintain independence and remain in their own homes, age-friendly communities often face challenges regarding ADUs. These include zoning and permitting restrictions, lack of access to services and amenities, and affordability. Additionally, some older adults may require specialized housing accommodations, which can add to the complexity of building and managing ADUs. To overcome these issues, the Village could entertain creating policies that support building new housing and modifying existing housing for age-friendly design while meeting the needs of people wishing to age in place.

Recommendations

River Forest needs to encourage housing that is accessible and conducive to aging in place. Create a streamlined process for modifications to accommodate needs of older adults. Encourage the development of a moderately priced older adult living facility. Explore the possibility of accessory dwelling units. Furthermore, the Village needs to work to ensure access

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to the built environment while promoting quality design of homes and housing infrastructure to bolster access, affordability, and ability to age in place.

1. Explore, facilitate, create and sustain a continuum of housing options (i.e., the range of housing types available in a community) to rent or own affordably to River Forest older adults to enable them to age in community for as long as they wish to live here, such as:
 - a. Create a fast-track system for home modifications specifically for older adults and people with disabilities.
 - b. Development of a River Forest Age Friendly housing vision statement.
 - c. Explore the future need for accessory dwelling units, assisted living facilities, mutual housing associations, low equity cooperatives, group homes for older adults with disabilities and other options for affordable housing.
2. Examine and revise the Village's existing building and zoning codes and administrative processes through an age-friendly lens and framework for existing home modifications and new construction to create and support the development of an age-friendly framework for the Zoning Board of Appeals in the Village to ensure opportunities for older adults to modify housing accordingly, such as:
 - a. Train Village staff and volunteer commission members in age friendly planning and zoning practices.
 - b. The Village should consider retaining an expert in age friendly building and zoning practices and consider the use of the National Aging in Place Council's list of best practices.
3. The Village and Township should consider working together to:
 - a. Publicize, educate, and support, including working with private entities, best practice home-sharing programs and options for older adults living in River Forest particularly educating residents about options available for home modification that will enable older adults to remain in their homes, such as publishing and widely distributing in print as well as online a directory of age-friendly contractors, builders, consultants, products, and funding sources for home modifications to enable older adults to age in place.
 - b. Expand opportunities for home care and assisted living type services, such as educating the public about available services and establish a local registry of licensed/certified providers. Further, the Village could participate in a regional registry of these services and publicize the registry to River Forest residents.

CONCLUSIONS

This preliminary report serves to inform the Village Board on the data gathered and how that shaped the recommendations. Further exploration may be needed on various recommendations to develop an action plan. The AFC conducted this work in an unprecedented pandemic and that provided a unique lens to inform this work.

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Age-Friendly River Forest is about making critical investments that will help older adults live healthier and more fulfilling lives as they age in place and continue to contribute in myriad ways to making River Forest a better place to grow up and grow old. An Age-Friendly River Forest strives to be a community where people can live in place where they are respected and included, that are free of barriers based on a person's age, and where they are recognized for what they have done and added to our state. People of all ages should feel they and their families can live good lives as they grow old.

The AFC developed recommendations during the COVID-19 pandemic. This experience suggests there may be a need for emergency preparedness as a unique and 9th domain of livability.

APPENDICES AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

- Appendix A – Survey
- Appendix B – Village Ordinance/Resolution
- Appendix C – Survey Summary Responses

REFERENCES

AARP (2019). AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities: The member list. Retrieved from <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/info-2014/member-list.html>

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