

Age-Friendly Durham Municipal Roundtable Summary Report



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What can the Region of Durham and local area municipalities do to ensure an age-friendly community?

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On Friday, June 24, 2016, the Region of Durham hosted a Municipal Roundtable on Age-Friendly Community Planning. The purpose of this half-day discussion was to engage local municipal leaders and policy makers to create alignment between local and regional efforts. Mayors, City Managers, Chief Administrative Officers, Accessibility Advisors and Co-ordinators, Directors and /or Managers of Recreation and Community Services, Chairs of Seniors Advisory Committees, and Regional representatives from Durham Region Transit, Durham Regional Police Service, Social Services, Health, Planning, Finance, and the Office of the CAO were all invited to attend. In total, there were 63 participants.

The event enabled representatives of all eight of Durham Region's municipalities¹ to engage in a forum specific to age-friendly planning. It was an opportunity to identify parallels within our communities, explore the potential for collaboration and co-operation, and avoid potential duplication. It provided a forum to showcase age-friendly planning at the municipal level, and to share local intelligence and lessons learned through individual consultation processes. In addition to a keynote speaker, Regional and local municipal presentations, roundtable discussions were incorporated to generate input in response to one key question:

What can the Region of Durham and local area municipalities do to ensure an age-friendly community?

¹ Durham Region includes: Ajax, Brock, Clarington, Oshawa, Pickering, Scugog, Uxbridge, and Whitby.

Below is a summary of the input received, categorized by the World Health Organization's (WHO's) eight key dimensions of age-friendly communities.

1. Outdoor spaces and buildings

The WHO identifies outdoor spaces as having a major impact on mobility, independence, and the quality of life of older people, affecting their ability to age in place. Municipal Roundtable participants spoke of the preservation and protection of greenspace as vital to active aging. Recent improvements to Uxbridge's downtown Elgin Park, including a paved trail, benches, lighting and walking markers, were offered as a notable example of an age-friendly space. The Township of Uxbridge received funding as part of the Canada 150 Community Infrastructure Program to pave pathways, install new lighting, and include other accessible features.

Other references included the unintended consequences of converting street lights to light emitting diode (LED). While LEDs are energy efficient and reduce maintenance costs, some residents find that visibility is diminished as a result of light distribution.

The idea of "SUber", ("Uber for Seniors"), was offered as a potential partnership idea that could ensure older adults' ability to access trails and other outdoor spaces.

Specific feedback regarding outdoor spaces and buildings included:

- LED [street] lights produce too small a footprint for safety.
- Winter sidewalks need to be clear all year round; suggest starting with a few.
- Make available indoor walking trails in the winter (in high schools or recreation centres, for example).
- Partnership to get seniors to trails – idea of SUBER (Uber for Seniors).
- Protection of public spaces (such as Canterbury Common golf course conversion); consideration of who controls the development of greenspace that is approved in the Regional Official Plan.
- Consider connectivity to facilities.
- New developments need to have walkways connected.
- Availability of trekking poles to assist walkers.

- Example of an Uxbridge downtown park that includes a paved trail, benches, lighting, walking markers. A part-time trail co-ordinator was hired and volunteers maintain the space. In this instance, change was the result of the community being surveyed regarding the importance of trails.
- Public transportation must be considered as people require a means to access these facilities.
- Pick a consistent age threshold for seniors – such as 55, 60 or 65 – and use it everywhere.

2. Transportation

The WHO identifies transportation, including accessible and affordable public transportation, as a key factor that influences active aging. Throughout the roundtable discussion, a number of participants noted the need for better co-ordination of snow clearing at transit stops, as well as shelter and general accessibility to public transit. Where transit is available, increased public education and communication is warranted. In general, there is believed to be an opportunity to better co-ordinate transit and transportation across a number of public, private and non-profit service providers, including Durham Region Transit, GO Transit, service organizations, and charitable organizations (such as Community Care Durham).

Specific suggestions for improvement included:

- Better promotion of active transportation requires a cultural shift away from our car-oriented communities.
- More enclosed shelters with benches.
- More [greater number of] accessible bus stops.
- Better co-ordination for snow-clearing of stops/windrow clearing.
- Continued training of bus drivers for people with disabilities/aging customers
- More public education about transportation (such as riding the bus, schedules and different types of seating).
- Better communication between municipal and Regional works on road construction and repair.

- Better co-ordination of signage – clear connections for wayfinding and standardized road signs – mixed case (rather than all capitals), large print, and clear of obstructions.
- Better parking in downtown areas, easier access to sidewalks, designated drop-off areas to allow seniors better access to businesses.
- Better co-ordination in transportation services – transit, taxis and non-profit services (Community Care, March of Dimes, etc.) to generate an enhanced understanding of who is responsible for what.
- Investigate pooling of non-profit services to provide a better co-ordinated service for community members.
- Better connections between advisory committees – workshops, sharing best practices, co-ordination of services, advertising about what is available.
- Creation of a Region-wide seniors' advisory committee with chairs of each local committee to make more valuable connections.
- Physically go to where the seniors are to provide information rather than holding Public Information Centres.
- Development of a common transportation website.
- Sidewalks on both sides of the street.
- The Region should take ownership of sidewalks, pathways and multi-use trail infrastructure on Regional roads.
- Develop a municipal policy for paved shoulders to benefit transit, cyclists, mobility device users, agricultural vehicles, and lower maintenance costs for municipalities.
- More focus on active transportation.
- Municipal leadership on intersection crossings rather than relying on the Ministry of Transportation (MTO).
- Remember that older pedestrians were once drivers. Consider how to safely navigate sidewalks and crossings, including slower light changing to allow more time for crossing.

- Investigate the impact of disruptive technologies on older adults – e-bikes and autonomous vehicles as they relate to reduced accidents, less recovery time and lower health care costs.
- Location of seniors centres may be difficult to service through Durham Region Transit; consider repurposing existing local buildings.
- Rural transportation needs.
- Education and awareness among motorists.

3. Housing

The WHO identifies a link between appropriate housing and the independence and quality of life of people as they age. Session participants spoke of the need to embrace “alternative” ideas for housing, beyond traditional development models, to ensure a mix of community housing options is available as people age. By preparing for and accommodating various family types and structures (including students, singles, families, empty nesters and seniors), communities can better support residents and begin to address issues with affordability and accessibility. In some cases, incentives or funding programs would be the overall responsibility of the federal or provincial government for local implementation.

Inclusionary zoning was discussed as a means to create inclusive, complete communities. It should be noted that proposed updates to the provincial Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy would allow municipalities to require developers to include affordable housing units in their development proposals. Success of this model requires co-operation among governments, as well as the private and non-profit sectors. Detailed input on housing considerations included:

- Change begins with preparing for and accommodating “pre-seniors”.
- Appropriate housing for downsizing – smaller, one level.
- Support to allow people to age in place/design and build so housing can be adapted as older adults age in place.
- Embracing alternative ideas for housing.

- [Acknowledge and address] problems with vertical housing from a fire and emergency perspective.
- Care facilities / home care / independent living.
- Emergency housing is not appropriate for seniors.
- Each municipal planning department needs to work towards an age-friendly community.
- Non-profits could be given tax incentives to build age-friendly homes.
- Provide incentives and develop partnerships with private developers/consider incentive programs for new developments that include accessible/affordable housing [this would require negotiation with the federal and provincial governments].
- Inclusionary zoning.
- Work with developers and municipal planning to intensify housing to create more availability.
- Support plan for developers to get up-front costs.
- Affordability, practicality, accessibility considerations.
- Must raise awareness of age-friendly needs with private and public sector.
- Encourage second suites.
- Increased help with supportive housing.
- Consider providing accessible shelters in Durham.
- Municipalities need more of a voice to the province.
- Need housing stock that is more conducive to an aging population.
- Allow existing housing stock to adapt into rental units or second units to create more affordable housing options.
- Encourage condo communities that provide independent units for singles with property maintenance and support services.
- The province is mandating intensification and communities are still objecting. We need a better variety of housing choices within one community.
- Build partnerships with the private sector to incorporate more affordable units or create social housing units in new developments.
- Make new units accessible from the beginning (day one).

- Seniors' safety should be a priority – lack of resources – could fall under housing providers' responsibility.
- Each area municipality should be investigating the World Health Organization guide and how they can address age-friendliness.
- Region can do more to lobby the Province / Communicate to the Province the Region's greater need for long-term care homes as wait lists are increasing.
- Canadian Institute of Planners programs – local and Regional – to encourage age-friendly developments.
- Region can do more to lobby the province/communicate to the province that the Region's greater need for long-term care homes as wait lists are increasing.
- Creation of community hubs to integrate school and seniors programs in our communities.
- Provide a structure and resources (including trained staff) to help seniors navigate the system.
- When new funding becomes available for housing stock, consider opportunities to create a village with a variety of progressively supportive housing options long-term care, retirement, assisted living, independent with services.

4. Social participation

The WHO identifies a connection between social participation and social support with good health and well-being throughout life. Generally speaking, the discussion focused on the need to better co-ordinate and communicate the existing network of supports that are available to support participation. Participants discussed the importance of building and strengthening working relationships between orders of government and non-profit service providers. Economic development opportunities associated with addressing the needs of older adults was also discussed within the context of maximizing the involvement of seniors. Comments offered during the discussion period include:

- Lower-tier municipalities often encounter people who are marginalized, displaced or living with special needs, but are unaware of supports that are available such as transit, housing, etc.

- Solutions include better and more frequent communications; more opportunities to provide feedback to service providers about emerging needs; better and more information about transit training; investigate how the network of service providers is advised of services.
- The Region has a role to play as an information broker, providing training, data, and creating information pathways including municipalities and service providers.
- When profiling the seniors population, understand the diversity of seniors and address accordingly.
- Recognize lower-tier municipalities and service providers as equal partners;
- Information needs to be consistent and reliable.
- A seamless approach is key.
- Create a shared vision.
- Creation of hubs/consider whether municipalities can provide incentives for this type of development.
- Consider how to engage the service sector.
- Provide funding for non-profits [this could include advocating for federal and provincial funding].
- Identify all areas of overlap and duplication.
- Create formal cultural, recreational, library and seniors networks with common policies, language, services, definitions and approaches to fees.
- Better interaction between transit and programming/strategies, as well as overall transportation.
- Ensure that the business community is educated on the buying power of the aging demographic/develop more communications around the business case for meeting the needs of seniors.
- Need to take a strong advocacy role with funders to make grants less difficult to obtain.
- [Province to] separate municipalities from service providers and acknowledge them as orders of government.

5. Respect and social inclusion

The WHO identifies a connection between participation in social, civic and economic life of their community and a person's experience of feeling respected, valued and included. The Region of Durham was encouraged to continue to engage in consultations with lower-tier municipalities to ensure that unique needs are taken into consideration. Similar to other dimensions, participants highlighted the importance of education and communication in sharing opportunities for greater social inclusion. The impacts of meeting community needs in other dimensions – particularly housing and transportation – will serve multiple purposes by simultaneously fostering a sense of belonging, acceptance and recognition of older adults.

The notion of developing an “Age-Friendly Communities Business Certification” and working with local business networks to promote and encourage participation was cited as an economic development opportunity that would recognize businesses that actively welcome the patronage of seniors. Inter-generational programming was also suggested. Recommendations for regional and local governments include:

- Ensuring there are emergency beds for seniors that are safe and age-appropriate.
- Use rent supplement program for retirement homes.
- More housing where seniors can age in place.
- Diversity of housing options.
- Re-visit Regional subsidies for housing adaptations to age in place.
- Engage in consultations with lower-tier municipalities as needs across the region will vary.
- Public awareness and education campaigns to help dispel myths and concerns regarding serving seniors and the benefits of community inclusion.
- Establish champions on Regional Council to support age-friendly communities and liaise between the Region and municipalities.
- Establish an Age-Friendly Communities Business Certification; work with local business networks to promote and encourage participation.

- Regional Age-Friendly Community Awards (like Accessibility Awards).
- Emergency Preparedness promotion and support.
- Lobby the province for changes to legislation that supports resources and funding for municipalities.
- Demand that the province pass seniors' safety/care services legislation as there is currently no legislation in place to protect seniors and incidents of fraud have increased.
- Establish a Regional Seniors' Advisory Committee to be a voice at the table and influence decision making.
- Implement mandatory training on ageism, age-friendly, elder abuse for Durham Regional Police Service, emergency responders, and make available to Boards of Trade.
- A geographic information system (GIS) registry of seniors who have emergency response needs for fire and emergency services.
- Income-based subsidies for water billing and Regional taxes.
- Increased resources to address senior safety and abuse.
- Public Health and Social Service delivery in the community – go to the older adult populations rather than waiting for them to come to the Region – more face-to-face communication.
- More assistance for direct transportation of seniors – volunteer drivers to take seniors to appointments, grocery shopping, etc.
- Work with the local seniors population to understand community diversity and cultural inclusion.
- Age-friendly training for municipal staff.
- Accessible age-friendly features incorporated into trails, parks and public spaces (signage, grading, widths, materials and amenities).
- Variety of catalogue material and formats in libraries.
- Volunteer opportunities working with and for seniors.
- Establish local Seniors Advisory Committees.
- Communication and information to greater community in a variety of formats.
- Municipal property tax rebates geared to income.

- Senior programming through the public libraries that engages interacting with youth.
- Adapt the municipal election process and methodology – visiting polls, photos on ballots, telephone voting.
- Building permit subsidies and/or grants for accessibility improvements to homes.
- Recreation and leisure programming that is integrated and inclusive.
- Capturing local seniors’ stories in a heritage project (Seniors in the Spotlight).
- Pedestrian-friendly planning – sidewalks and store connectivity.
- Adopt-a-Senior program (like Big Brothers, Big Sisters).



A mind map of recommendations relating to respect and social inclusion, for use by the Region and its local area municipalities.

6. Civic participation and employment

The WHO identifies opportunities for paid or volunteer work and to participate in civic life as an important aspect of age-friendly communities. Participants spoke of the

need to address ageism and stereotypes that prevent full the participation of seniors, while also placing an emphasis on the common theme of education and communication. If seniors were more aware of volunteer opportunities, then they may be more likely to undertake a new role in the community. Specific input from roundtable participants included:

- Bring the demographic “to the table” [include seniors in the process].
- Break down stereotypes.
- Active adults are part of the local business.
- Create a volunteer registry at the municipal level to be used by local businesses; tap into Chamber of Commerce and local businesses.
- Teach, mentor, and establish partnerships, engage.
- Recognize a wide spectrum of media approaches.
- Develop a communications strategy for business.
- Recognize the wealth of knowledge / expertise of this demographic and determine what volunteer or employment opportunities are available to seniors.
- Partnership with Regional Economic Development and various other stakeholders.
- Messages need input from local municipalities.
- Co-ordination - region and local champions should meet regularly.

7. Communication and information

The WHO identifies staying connected with events and people, and getting timely, practical information to manage life and meet personal needs as vital for active aging. Throughout the session, participants discussed the importance of clearly communicating community services available to seniors, including transportation, housing and social opportunities. However, governments (and businesses) are encouraged to ensure that the modes and manner in which they communicate information is also accessible to older adults. This can be achieved by using a variety of traditional and non-traditional communication channels, and by coordinating information whenever possible. Commentary from roundtable participants included:

- Facilitate the navigation and co-ordination of information.
- Co-ordination among regional, municipal, provincial and non-profit responsibilities.
- Enhance information sharing between the Region and the local area municipalities.
- Engage target audience to communicate key services that impact them.
- Explore avenues to reach diverse older populations.
- Develop a network of volunteer services for seniors.
- Improve terminology when referring to seniors, such as “boomers and beyond”, “older adults”, “seniors”.
- Education of the private sector – consider Regional Economic Development programs for senior entrepreneurs.
- Education to businesses on how to communicate better to senior population.
- Engage the media to incorporate more positive coverage about older adults, age-friendly recognition, etc..
- Communicating through service clubs to encourage peer to peer connections.
- Intergenerational learning and relationship building – engage schools.
- Community agency education – public education on elder abuse.
- Newsletters.
- Educate seniors in technology, computer skills and navigation.

8. Community and health services

The WHO identifies the availability of sufficient, good quality, appropriate and accessible care as vital to maintaining health and independence in the community. Emphasis was placed on health promotion, including education regarding screening, physical activity and nutrition, as well as the co-ordination of community health services and paramedicine. Once again, co-ordination, and the communication of information factored prominently in suggestions for strengthening this dimension of an age-friendly community. The considerable opportunity for municipalities to continue to collaborate with non-profit organizations was referenced, as well as the importance of intergenerational programming – including high school students

working with seniors for community involvement credit, as well as opportunities for seniors to volunteer in schools. Particular suggestions for improving community and health services for seniors included:

- Accessible facilities – increase the number of public accessible washrooms, ramps, raised toilets, etc..
- Ramps accessible to parking.
- Easier access to increased home support to age in place.
- Home visiting physicians.
- Community paramedicine.
- Increased nurse practitioners in the home and work with community paramedicine.
- Co-ordination of health services and more effective use of resources using healthcare professionals to the full scope of practice.
- Increase awareness, education and training of working with diverse communities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning), two-spirited (LGBTQ2).
- Aging services – health promotion, screening, physical activity, education and nutrition.
- What services are available in our community – expand seniors’ centre services to libraries, reach out to isolated seniors.
- Use senior apartment space for healthy aging / health promotion.
- Co-ordinate services available for seniors into a one-stop guide – print and electronic, including library, health, volunteer, seniors centres, tax information and housing.
- [Communicate] what is local.
- Guide to healthy aging in Durham.
- High school students to use volunteer hours to support seniors, which helps to develop respect.
- Co-ordinate with schools to have space available for seniors activities – use schools in the summer months.
- Integrate seniors volunteering in schools.

- All municipalities should be part of the Regional Age-Friendly Committee and meet quarterly.
- Get information out about age-friendly and aging well.
- Service resource guide for each municipality's website.
- Welcome Wagon for seniors.
- Integration of municipal recreation and culture guides / programs.
- Regional age-friendly co-ordinator.
- Seniors organizations better co-ordinated to form one large organization.
- Continue external steering committee to involve non-profits, voluntary sector.
- Educate seniors on social networking, how to get involved, etc. with an emphasis on health and safety.

Conclusion and next steps

The Age-Friendly Durham project team gratefully acknowledges the input and contributions of participants of the Municipal Roundtable. The eight dimensions align closely with areas of municipal responsibility, both at the local and regional level, including:

- Outdoor spaces and public buildings that are pleasant, clean, secure and physically accessible.
- Public transportation that is accessible and affordable.
- Housing that is affordable, appropriately located, well built, well designed and secure.
- Opportunities for seniors to participate in leisure, social, cultural and spiritual activities with people of all ages and cultures.
- Older people are treated with respect and are included in civic life.
- Opportunities for employment and volunteerism that cater to older persons' interests and abilities.
- Age-friendly communication and information is available.
- Community support and health tailored to older persons' needs.

In the coming months, the suggestions captured in this report will be reviewed and analyzed. Input will continue to be gathered from a series of focus groups and key informant interviews held throughout the region, in addition to a fall community forum and findings from a region-wide age-friendly community survey. Together, these will form the basis of the Age-Friendly Durham Community Strategy and Action Plan. The final report is scheduled to be presented for Regional Council consideration in March 2017.

Keynote speaker Dominic Ventresca discusses the age-friendly community development experience in Niagara Region.



For more information about the development of the Region of Durham’s Age-Friendly Community Strategy and Action Plan, visit www.durham.ca/AgeFriendly or call 905-668-7711, extension 2049.