Joint City-County Planning Commission of Nelson County

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Growing Smarter, Living Healthier: A Guide to Smart Growth and Active Aging

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1. Introduction

This guidebook is intended for older adults who are interested in how our communities work and how we might help them become more 'age-friendly.' Many of us have longed for the kind of age-friendly neighborhood that has different types of homes for people at different stages of life; walking paths and public transit to make it easy to get around without a car; and parks, shops, services, and homes that are closer together. Older adults are finding that by designing new neighborhoods differently — as well as redeveloping existing neighborhoods and roadways — we can make places that are healthier for ourselves, our neighbors, and the environment. Rather than let aging limit our options, we can actually become *more* independent by reducing our depen-dence on the auto, increasing our travel choices, and improv -ing our quality of life right when we've started to have time to enjoy it. We can enrich our own remaining decades, as well as hand off a more sustainable commu-nity to future generations. That is, if we decide to do something about it.

In this guide, we address the basic principles of neighborhood and town design. But it is also intended to help you understand ***why*** community design matters, and ***how*** becoming involved in your community's decisions about growth can make it a better place in which to grow old. You'll find suggestions for ideas to try, and links to resources to learn more about ***how*** to remake your neighborhoods to be easier to get around, whether you live in a city, suburb, or small town. We'll also give you a few ideas for ***getting involved*** and staying engaged, providing more housing options and gathering places, eating healthi-er, and making it easier to carry out your daily activities. After all, our age group spans decades, and some of us are very active, while others have limited mobility.

The first chapter, *Staying Active, Connected, and Engaged,* outlines why our

Age-friendly communities use Smart Growth principles (development that improves the community, environment, economy, and public health) to become healthier places to grow old in — and better places for people of all ages.

choices of where and how to live can have an impact on our health and well-being. The next three chapters — *Development and Housing, Transportation and Mobility,* and *Staying Healthy* — outline strategies and include project examples that address these key issues. Within each chapter, the *What You Can Do* section provides some ideas for what you can work on with your friends and neighbors. The *Conclusion: Next Steps* chapter summarizes additional follow-up ideas. In the *Resources* chapter, you'll find links to more detailed strategies, websites, and infor-mation about each of the ideas discussed in the guide. We included a community self-assessment checklist for you to identify what your community is already doing, and where you might want to focus your energy — so get together, and get moving!

Where and how we choose to live makes a difference. It matters even more as we get older. The neighborhood and housing we select can help keep us active, connected, and engaged — or make these critical needs difficult to

achieve.

- ***Staying active*** - walking, wheeling, and getting moderate regular exercise — helps with both our physical and mental well-being. The way our neighborhoods are designed and built can make carrying out our daily activities an easy task or a chore. Does our neighborhood have sidewalks and public transportation, or do we need to get in a car to run errands?

Active Aging concepts *(activities that increase endurance, strength, flexibility, balance, and the principles of injury prevention)* can also be built into community design and development to encourage walking, biking, and active use of parks, so that people of all ages get exercise in the course of daily life.

- ***Staying connected*** - with friends, family, and community is critical to remaining healthy, vital, and active, and is easier if our neigh-borhood is designed to support interactions. Staying active socially is good for us and good for the community. Connecting with friends and family and sharing our time, wisdom, and experience helps us maintain a sense of purpose, gets us out of the house, and keeps us engaged, focused, and learning.
- ***Staying engaged*** - also benefits the community at large. Many nonprofits, boards, and commissions would be unable to function without the time and dedication of older volunteers. Places of wor-ship depend on older members' wisdom and labor. Businesses know that mature workers are among their most productive, with strong work ethics, flexible schedules, can-do attitudes, and decades of experience.

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What we need from home and community changes over time.

Traditional downtown neighborhoods (pre -1950s) and rural small towns have a range of housing types that fit the needs of individuals, couples, friends, and families throughout each stage of life. As we age, we may choose to stay near friends and family in the same home *(ag-ing in place)* or neighborhood *(aging in community)* or choose to move to a smaller, easier-to-maintain home or new com-munity. That choice directly influences how we get around, how we stay connected, and how we get help when we need it. We may also discover that we want to be involved in how our com-munities grow and redevelop.

Age-friendly communities have gathering places that are within walking distance of homes, or a short bike ride, drive, or shuttle trip away. These critical neighborhood 'meet-ups' can include parks, libraries, community centers, places of worship, gyms, Internet cafes, ice cream stores, or neighborhood diners. Small neighborhood parks, town squares, and plazas are great places to sit and read, catch up on e-mail, talk with friends, or watch kids play. Larger parks and greenways can offer walk-ing trails, bike paths, and sports fields.

As we age in place, whether in the same house or the same community, these gathering places become even more important. Getting to these meeting places provides some of the physical activity that keeps us healthy. Being there in the company of friends provides the critical social interactions that keep us connected and engaged. Being part of a community also triggers an informal network of folks who might keep an eye out for each other. As a recent study of low-income Hispanic seniors found, traditional neighbor-hoods with 'eyes on the street' *(porches, stoops, windows, and buildings along sidewalks just above street level)* showed improved physical functioning for older residents over a three- year period; they also showed more social support and re-duced psychological distress.

Staying connected can be-come more difficult over time. Families and friends can move away, or we may downsize or move to another community. Many older adults find that maintaining a large house becomes a burden, physically and economically, especially with rising energy prices. Others choose to move for climate, economic, health, or quality of life reasons, or to be closer to a family member. Those who want to stay in the same house may find that their community lacks the accessible gathering places, or the non-driving ways to get there, which might be found in a traditional neighbor-hood. Those who want to move to a smaller home might find their choices lacking if they live in a more conventional neigh-borhood developed in the last 60 years. If they are fortunate enough to live in a more age-friendly neighborhood, it is like-ly there will be other options.

Having grocery stores, restaurants, and cafés with-in walking distance — along with sidewalks to walk on — is the best predictor of how much older adults will walk, according to a recent Seattle study led by Abby King. Fordie Ross, 93, goes on a three- to four-mile walk nearly every day around his Beacon Hill neighborhood, where every street has sidewalks. "Safe? Oh, yes. I've never had any safety problems," he said. Seattle's Comprehensive Plan identifies 25 urban villages to be built in areas that had old warehouses and empty lots. Residents of retirement communities in the redeveloped Northgate neigh-borhood will find them safer to walk. A new, 141-unit senior residence will be connected by pathways to retail shops and the transit center.

New growth and public services are directed into urban villages that include apartments, condomini-ums, or townhouses along with commercial uses, small parks, and schools.

New development must be designed to accommo-date pedestrians and include wider sidewalks, out-door seating, dining, and public plazas to ***encour-age*** activity.

Staying engaged and learning. Staying engaged is easier for people who live in an age-friendly community. In addi-tion to the interactions that are just 'part of daily life,' more organized opportunities are available. Communities are co-locating senior centers and housing near schools, libraries, or daycare centers, and find-ing that developers of senior housing and medical facilities want to locate nearby as well. In Burlington, VT, the McClure Multi-Generational Center houses the Champlain Senior Center, which provides meals, educational, health, social, and recreational programs for those 50 and older. Across the shared hallway is Burlington Children's Space, which runs early child care and preschool programs. This intergenera-tional shared space helps con-nect older adults with children both informally and in more structured tutoring, classes, and storytelling.

Colleges like Tompkins-Cortland Community College, in rural Dryden, NY, have established satellite campuses to make courses more acces-sible. Their downtown Ithaca campus is in an old department store on the Ithaca Commons, an active pedestrian mall in a historic downtown. A nearby elementary school on the town square was redeveloped into residential condos, with lower floors occupied by tenants like Moosewood (a well-known res-taurant) and the Ithaca Guitar Works, offering lessons on all kinds of instruments.

Universities, senior centers, and school districts are establishing learning initia-tives that older adults can access in their neighbor-hoods and churches, like the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, VA. Participation in learning ac -tivities in our neighborhoods provides double the benefits. Researchers have long known that physical activity keeps both our bodies and brains in shape, and that mental exercise helps keep our brains younger.

Participating in community activities doesn't just benefit us. It can be a rewarding op-portunity to give back, to share our hard-won wisdom, to pass on our skills and experience. Older adults are a tremendous resource, and we often have the time — and patience — to spare. When the elementary school is next to our homes, when the places where we pass time are next to the playing fields, when the lifelong learn-ing center is across the street from the library or co-located across the hall from a daycare center, it is much easier, more convenient, and more likely that we will spend some time mentoring, coaching, cheering, teaching, or just plain interacting with the community. Foster grandparent programs, pairing seniors with elementary and preschool students, have long been effective at making these intergenerational connections — but there is no organized substitute for just being around and available informally for the young people in our communities.

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What you can do. Use this guide to make connections.

- **Follow up on something that matters to you.** As you read the following sections, think about whether the issues raised would apply to your own neighborhood, your housing situation, the streets or parks you use, and the growth and development issues your com-munity faces. Look at both short-term and long-range plans for how and where you will live, the choices you prefer, and whether they are available — or whether it's time to roll up your sleeves and initiate or join a group working to make your community more age-friendly.
- **Look around you and talk with others about what you have discovered.** This guide is intended to spark your interest; the ***Next Steps*** and ***Resources*** chapters will lead you to more detailed information, programs, organizations, and guidebooks for the strategies you want to work on. You're not alone. Efforts like AARP's *Mobility Agenda,* The Project for Public Space's *Citizen's Guide to Better Streets* and *Placemaking Guidebook,* and others are listed for you to reference.

2. Development and Housing

Healthy neighborhoods offer diverse housing choices, gathering places, and ways to connect

Healthy neighborhoods offer plenty of housing choices, for us, our friends, and our relatives, so we don't have to leave behind the people and places we know and love. With a diverse housing mix (single-family homes of all sizes, duplexes, small and large apart-ments, studios above garages or shops, condo-miniums, and lofts), most traditional neighborhoods allow people to stay near friends, families, work, and worship as they move through life. While we like to maintain our independence, staying con-nected can greatly improve our lives as we age. Maintaining access to services, shop-ping, activities, work, and volunteer efforts will help keep us active, healthy, and engaged. Whether staying in the neighborhood or moving to another that has more housing options and a vital cen -ter, having access to a broad range of housing choices is one key to remaining independent.

Most residential neighborhoods built in the last 60 years do not provide this mix of nearby destinations and different kinds of housing. Developers built big groups of similar houses of the same size and price, separated from another group of larger or smaller houses by unusable open space. Housing was segregated by income and family size, mostly separated from commercial destinations. Some develop-ments included a large block of apartments, or a retirement commu-nity, or maybe a school or library. One positive result was that, in many new subdivisions, parents were similar in age, in career status, and in the ages of their children. This encouraged lots of group activities. However, as individual and family status changes, many people eventually move out of these more homogenous neighbor-hoods to find new housing that fits their new circumstances: an apartment for a newly single parent, a house with attached studio for an aging grandparent, or a smaller house or condo for the empty nester. Although these housing options are not usually available in conventional residential developments, Smart Growth activists are finding that such neighborhoods can be redeveloped over time to increase choice in housing, mobility, and activities.

Smart Growth development. Developers of new Smart Growth neighborhoods have learned that providing a wider range of housing choices within one community helps make it more attractive and interesting, provides community charac-ter, and holds value over time. Rather than build a few hun-dred of one house type here, and a different type over there, each with its own private 'ame-nity package,' Smart Growth neighborhoods mimic older, traditional places. They add amenities like parks, trails, and community centers that create places for generations to gather. Housing options vary accord-ing to where they are located in the community. Typically, more compact housing types like apartments, lofts, condos, and townhouses are built closer to the town center or on major streets to make it easy to walk to activities. Single-family homes and cottages are on quieter streets a few blocks away, but still within walking and wheeling distance.

Smart Growth principles can also be used to redevelop underused properties along roadways at the edge of exist -ing neighborhoods, replacing aging shopping centers and cleaning up neglected proper-ties. Redeveloped properties are a convenient destination for shopping, activities, and catch-ing an express bus to down-town. When the time comes to choose a smaller or more acces-sible home or apartment, the town centers provide a number of options — without having to leave the neighborhood. Since developers often prefer to devel-op in outlying 'greenfield' areas rather than to redevelop exist-ing places, helping to facilitate such redevelopment is a perfect volunteer activity for residents of surrounding neighborhoods, and an opportunity to make sure developers get it right.

Eyes on the street can make us safer. Traditional development concepts can actually make our neighborhoods safer and improve mobility. Architects use the term 'eyes on the street' to refer to buildings that have windows, doors, and porches overlooking streets and neighborhood parks. Communities like Norfolk, VA, have discov-ered significant decreases in crime in neighborhoods and public housing that redevelop using these principles. Many are starting to change develop-ment codes to require eyes on the street instead of blank walls in new buildings. Development with buildings that have eyes on the streets are not only safer for everyone to use, they also encourage a community to stay connected. There is no better crime deterrent than *you* sitting on your porch, or watching over your block or neighbor-hood park from the front window.

Housing options

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), which we used to call 'granny flats' or garage apart-ments, are a traditional housing option currently returning to favor. These are typically a converted or expanded garage, a basement apartment, or a newly built cottage. Accessory dwelling units actually provide homeowners housing flexibility on site, along with added in-come. Homeowners can rent them out while remaining in the larger house, or move into the smaller, easy-to-maintain, fully accessible unit when downsizing.

Whether the main house is occupied by other family members or rented for extra income, the homeowner is able to stay in the neighborhood and stay connected. Despite their many benefits, ADUs are usually prohibited by local zoning ordinances. Some communities are changing zoning codes to allow ADUs on any lot, as well as providing preapproved designs and other program support. Others, like rural Fluvanna and Louisa Counties in

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Virginia, are offering programs to help provide modular units or kits that can be quickly erected when the homeowner needs a fully accessible unit.

Each year, 40 to 50 homeowners in **Santa Cruz, CA,** take advantage of the city's award-winning Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Program to increase housing choice by making accessory units easier to build. The Program helps homeown-ers convert garages or build new structures they can either rent out or move into themselves — giving them extra income while creating more affordable housing. To make it easy for homeowners to implement, the city provides 7 preapproved, architect-designed plans for 500-square-foot units, as well as an ADU How-To Manual to guide homeowners through approvals, construction, making the unit neighbor-friendly, and being a good landlord. They also revised zoning to no longer require covered parking and to allow garage conversions.

Cohousing is collaborative housing; typically small-scale neighborhoods made up of indi-vidual houses and shared com-mon facilities, like open space, courtyards, gardens, play areas, and a common house. The com-mon house serves as the com-munity gathering space, with a large kitchen and dining room, a playroom, sometimes a library or lounge, and a shared laundry room and workshop. While individual homes have kitchens, residents typically eat together a few times a week, sharing cooking and cleanup. Individual units can be smaller, since the common house is available for parties, and often has a guest bedroom for visitors.

Silver Sage Village in Boulder, CO, is a 50+ cohousing community with 16 accessible homes around a common courtyard and an accessible two-story, common house with a guest bedroom for friends and family and a large great room for community meals and celebrations. Ten homes are market rate; six are permanently affordable. The project won Best of Senior Living from the National Association of Home

Residents are committed to living as a community, par-ticipating in its design and operations, and ensuring the neighborhood encour-ages social interaction while protecting individual private space. Generally 20 to 40 units of single-family or attached homes centered on a walkway or courtyard, cohousing projects have also been developed in downtown neighborhoods and commercial buildings. Although most cohousing is intergenerational, several newer projects are restricted to active seniors. Elder cohousing typically consists of attached, accessible units, often focused on wellness and staying active.

What you can do. Get involved in planning.

- **Get involved in planning projects, programs, and policies** — one of the best ways to help our communi-ties become more age-friendly. Older adults who have fewer family duties and a more flexible work schedule often have time to join committees, boards, and work-ing groups. Local planning and zoning boards, regional transportation committees, bicycle and pedestrian advisory groups, affordable housing task forces, etc., are all fueled by volunteer members. You can look for ads in the paper or on the web or call your local plan-ning department — the positions are rarely highly competitive. Since many strategies outlined in this guide-book are still not permitted by each locality's codes and zoning regulations, it will take time and patience to identify and correct the contradictions.
- **Participate in or initiate a community planning pro-cess** — an exciting way to make a difference. You can help create a broad regional vision, a neighbor-hood plan, or just work on a single intersection. Often conducted in day-long workshops, or in a week-long intensive series of design meetings called a charrette, these efforts require active, committed community participants to be effective. A well-designed process meshes the technical expertise of agency staff, the creativity and fresh ideas of outside consultants, and the in-depth local knowledge of residents and business people.

3. Transportation and Mobility

We can build choice back into our transportation system — and make it easier for people of all ages to get around

We all cherish our freedom to move around: from those early halt-ing steps to our first time behind the wheel, from running errands to a drive in the country. The freedom to move around feels like a fun-damental American right — to connect with our families, friends, and neighbors; to conduct business; to access work, shopping, and volunteer activities; to go to worship; and to vote. Both government and business have made significant investments to support that freedom since the country's birth — from our ports and fleets, to river barges and railroads, to the Interstate Highway System. For the last 60 years or so, that freedom has mostly depended on the automobile — and boy, have we loved the ride. Our favorite songs, restaurants, vacations, movies, and memories are still with us in the front seat as we start looking back along life's highway.

Most of us drive, and expect to continue driving as long as we are able. Overall, we're pretty safe drivers too: observant, ex-perienced, and cautious. Some of us have more flexible work or volunteer schedules. We can avoid the crowds at rush hour; stay off the bigger, faster roads if we are lucky enough to have an alternative; stay home during inclement weather; and, at some point, reduce or eliminate night-time driving. As much as we love our cars and our memories, maybe it's time for us to look ahead to how we will move around in the future. Conventional de-velopments of the last 60 years were a great place for many of us to grow up, go to school, and raise our own families. However, we probably didn't build enough options into them — for getting around by walking, biking, transit, or even for short car trips off the main highways. Increasing traffic congestion can lead to delays, frustration, and even road rage, limiting the times of day we are comfortable driving. The growing national conversation about energy costs and availability, coupled with awareness of the impacts of global climate change, have amplified the need for a long, hard look at how our daily lives and independence are affected by the way our neighborhoods developed. And maybe — for some of us — now is the time to start building some choice back into our communities. To paraphrase Robert Kennedy and Rabbi Hillel: When — if not now? Who — if not us?

Rather than let aging limit our options, we can actually become more independent. We can reduce our dependence on the car, increase our travel choices, and improve our quality of life. Right when

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we've started to have time to enjoy it. We can enrich our own remaining decades, and hand off a more sustainable community to future generations. That is, if we decide to do something about it.

Community design influences how we get around. **Elders and kids are the 'canaries in the coal mine' of walkability.** If we build places and streets that make it easier for our oldest and youngest to navigate, we all will benefit. Of course, the reverse is also true. Many communities built when gas was cheap and housing was booming followed a model of bigger lots and wider roads. They dumped drivers onto even wider, faster highways that were often the only way to get to work, shopping, or schools. As we grew farther out, all that new traffic required us to go back in and widen the roads through existing neighbor-hoods so that outlying drivers could get to work, while mak-ing it harder for downtown residents to get around.

Realizing that 40 percent of the population is adults over 60, local leaders in **Dunedin, FL,** decided to improve sidewalks and intersections to make them easier and safer to use. By widening side-walks, installing curb ramps and curb extensions to reduce crossing distance and slow traffic, and adding extra time to crossing signals, they made it safer and more pleasant for older adults — and people of all ages — to walk around the compact city. They also added a new senior center along the Pinellas Trail through downtown, making it easy for older adults and the center's walking club to access the trail.

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The good news is that this challenge — of redefining and rebuilding American neighbor-hoods and roadways — is realistic and achievable, and older adults are well-equipped for it. We understand how things work; how decisions are made at town meetings, city boards, and state agencies; and we have the patience and tenacity to attend meetings, conduct research, and take action. Activists, professionals, and elected officials have been working on solutions for a couple of decades. Called by many names, such as Smart Growth, New Urbanism, walk-able neighborhoods, livable communities, or sustainable development, one central theme has been making places that work for people, not just for cars. Our infrastructure invest-ments can benefit older adults: safer streets and intersections, expanded bus and rail, and more accessible parks and trail systems. It's not rocket science, either. There are many guide-books *(see Resources)* that help citizens remake their communi-ties by increasing transportation choices, offering greater housing options, and weaving a stronger social fabric, healthier environment, and more vital economy.

We can 'complete the streets'. It's not just about walking. Complete Streets work for everyone. We can restore an age-friendly network of smaller-scale streets as we reinvent sub-urbia and rebuild downtowns. Our youngest and oldest drivers then can safely move around the community instead of being forced onto those fast-moving five- and seven-lane roads. The same 'traffic-calming' strategies that communities have applied to reduce speed and improve safety in existing neighborhoods can be used to design street net-works that 'get it right the first time.' These new designs are called 'Complete Streets' since they work for all users: walkers, bikers, drivers, and transit users. With narrower lanes *(to slow traffic speeds and reduce run-off)*, safer intersection designs *(to re-duce crashes and encourage cross-ing in the right place),* curb ex-tensions and median crosswalks *(to shorten crossing distances and have a stopping place),* bike lanes *(to give bikes the same treatment as cars),* wider sidewalks and street trees *(to make walking a safe, pleasant option),* and a host of other details, we can build Complete Street networks that make it easier for *everyone* to get around: driving, walking, wheeling, or taking transit. A well-planned system of clear, easy-to-read signage will also help us to get where we're going, however we choose to travel.

Over 19,000 older residents in Kirkland, WA, can move around more safely after the Kirkland Senior Council and the Active Living Task Force got involved. They helped City staff design and implement innovative pro-grams and policies like the **Complete Streets Ordinance**, to design streets for walkers, bicyclists, and drivers, including wider side-walks, pedestrian-friendly medians, and in-street bike lanes. For more immediate impact, the **PedFlag Program** placed yellow flags at over 60 crosswalks that walkers pick up and carry across to remind drivers to yield to pedestrians, and then return flags to another holder after crossing. The **Flashing Crosswalk Program** incorporates flashing lights embedded into the pavement for 30 crosswalks at busier intersections.

Rebuilding along the highway corridors. Commercial highway cor-ridors running through our downtowns, small towns, and suburban strips are a great place to make better connections. Downtown commercial districts started to fade, fol-lowed by adjacent suburban shopping centers and mini-malls as development moved further out. These fading 'grey-field' properties — named for the acres of little-used asphalt parking surrounding shopping centers — are often bordered by residential neighborhoods concerned by the properties' condition. These neighbor-hood residents would likely support well-designed new uses for nearby greyfields. Many of these properties are being converted to new town cen-ters that are modeled on older traditional neighborhoods and downtowns. They usually pro-vide a range of housing choices and a gathering place that is easily accessible to surrounding neighborhoods, via a walkable network of smaller streets.

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Older residents, activists, and business own-ers along US 29 in Albemarle County and Charlottesville, VA, decided that the aging subur-ban strip needed an update. While they knew that the regional highway needed to carry lots of traffic, they also wanted a redesign that would provide an interconnected Complete Street network parallel to US 29 so local pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers had more choices for short trips. They enlisted the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC), the regional planning agency, to work with the county, city, and Virginia DOTto create **Places29,** a joint transportation and land use plan for the rapidly developing corridor. The solutions will reduce congestion and improve safety on US 29; guide development toward compact, mixed- use, walkable, transit-ready neighborhoods and centers; and support development of an enhanced regional transit system. The planning process included extensive community participation by residents, business owners, and the Jefferson Area Board for Aging and the Senior Center.

Creating a community plan can coordinate redevelopment of a string of similar aging properties, typically found along a commercial roadway. The resulting street network through the redeveloped prop-erties can provide complete streets for local travel paral-lel to the busy main highway. It can also connect existing neighborhoods to the newly de-veloped 'town centers,' as well as to each other, and support more efficient transit service. If the new centers are developed as compact transit targets *(focal points for improved bus or rail service)* with a mix of homes, stores, and workplaces, many roadway corridors would even-tually have the ridership need-ed for fast, frequent, depend-able transit. However, this kind of planning requires significant community involvement over a long period to make sure the plans meet community needs and that projects are actually built according to the original vision. Older adults are espe-cially capable of participating in, tracking, supporting ap-provals for, and watching over project implementation.

Providing travel choices can save money. Seniors have a well-deserved reputation for watching the bottom line. We learned the value of a buck, like to hang on to what we've saved, and expect our elected officials to use what we give them wisely.

With extreme fluctuations in gas prices and housing values, and transportation agency budgets dwindling, it seems worth trying a new approach. We can't afford to keep ex-panding and then maintaining the current publicly funded road system. One advantage of the corridor-based redevelop-ment approach outlined above is that many of the new roads, walkways, parks, and gathering places would be built by the private sector as development occurs. This would save signifi-cant public investment. If fuel costs are high, those on fixed incomes that live near or in the new neighborhood-scaled developments will have plenty of low-cost ways to get around, and easy access to community gathering places. Some of those travel choices might reduce our dependence on foreign oil, cut greenhouse gas emissions, and help mitigate the effects of cli-mate change. All while keeping us active and healthy.

The average annual cost of owning and operat-ing a car is $8,121 for fuel, maintenance, new tires, insurance, depreciation, and financing *(at $2.94/gal and 15,000 miles/yr, per AAA).* A compact costs over $6,000, and an SUVover $10,000. Although seniors drive fewer miles on average, car ownership might be one of the largest items in their household budget. **Maris Grove, an Erickson retirement community** near Philadelphia, has partnered with **PhillyCarShare** to give residents and staff an affordable, easy-to-use option — a shared Toyota Hybrid. Membership is free, and reservations can be made over the phone or online. According to resident Joe Peronace, "You don't have to buy a car, no maintenance, no insur-ance, you use their gas card and pay an hourly rate," Peronace said. "It's too good to be true. If you sit down with pencil and paper, it's a big sav-ings." PhillyCarShare estimates members save over $4,000/yr over owning a car.

Build choice back into the transportation network. Although many of us might say 'the bus is not for me' or 'I'd rather drive than walk,' it's really about providing ourselves with more choices than we currently have. More transportation options give us the chance to stay active and independent. More than one-third of Americans over 65 report no daily physical activity, while research shows that just a half-hour of activity three times a week can greatly improve our health and sense of well-being. By adding places we can walk or wheel to from nearby neighborhoods, and making streets pleasant and safe, the walk to the library, the store, or to meet friends in the park provides us with an opportunity to be active. Even the driving trips on neighbor-hood streets can be shorter and safer with the right community design. And though many of us don't see ourselves as bus riders right now, we might eventu-ally live in some of this newly developed housing — a down-town loft, a quiet townhouse, a charming cottage, or a well-located assisted living commu-nity. Having the *choice* to get to downtown shopping or cultural events on our own terms and schedule, rather than waiting for a friend or an on-call van can ensure independent living for much longer.

What you can do. Make it easier to get around.

- **Start a walking group with a sense of purpose** — at the park, on downtown streets, even at the mall. Read some of the resources outlined in this section and dis-cuss issues and strategies as you exercise together.
- **Join or start a car-sharing program.** If one is available in your region, call and try it out. Work with your local-ity, university, or transit agency to gauge local interest. Focus on specific walkable neighborhoods near transit stations.
- **Try transit.** Check out the bus (or train, if you're lucky). Get a schedule, grab a friend, and see where it goes. Ask if the agency provides 'travel training' for older adults. If it stops nearby but isn't easy to get to, do an informal walking audit to see what improvements would make you and your neighbors more likely to ride.
- **Make one street safer.** Older adults are often prime movers of such efforts, as demonstrated in Albemarle County, VA's Hillsdale Drive Safety project *(see Places29 sidebar).* The senior center and Jefferson Area Board for the Aging were concerned about speeding on the adjacent suburban road. When a slow-moving grand-mother was almost hit crossing the road, they asked the regional transportation agency, TJPDC, to come up with a solution. Gathering local and state agency staff, they conducted a **walking audit** and a series of **commu-nity workshops** with area

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Growing Smarter, Living Healthier (continued from page 5)

residents and businesses to develop a **safety improvement plan.** Solutions included safer median crosswalks (at places participants indi-cated they wanted to cross), sidewalks, lighting, narrower lanes, bike paths, and landscaping. Since it was their plan, area seniors have been strong supporters of the project as it worked its way through design, funding, and construction.

4. Staying Healthy

Finding healthy food, keeping active, and getting help when you need it can be easier in an age-friendly community

Eating healthy food. Finding, preparing, and eating healthy foods is critical to our well-being as we age. We tend not to eat as much, which makes it harder to get critical nutrients. Sometimes we just don't feel like eating, are tired of cooking, or are worried about the cost of fresh ingredients.

Meals-on-wheels programs, which deliver prepared meals to older adults, are finding it harder to absorb increasing food costs, and their volunteer drivers can be hit hard by higher fuel expenses for deliveries. Such programs are often the only link to healthy food available to low-income seniors as their personal mobility fades. In the long term, building more places with compact, walkable neighborhoods might make it easier for volunteers to deliver meals on three-wheeled bikes, or in small electric vehicles. However, we also need to address the 'supply side' by developing more local sources of fresh, healthy food.

Community gardens are located on public or donated land, with small plots assigned to individuals. The concept of taking individual and com-munity action in a crisis to grow our own food is not new. Remember the World War II Victory Gardens planted proudly in every front yard? Since many of us travel to visit friends, family, or far-off places, a new twist or two could update the Victory Gardens' success. Community gardens are often neighborhood-based and support social interaction, so a group of older adults could work the plots cooperatively, taking care of each other's weeds and harvests when they are traveling or under the weather. Since community gar-dens usually have long waiting lists, senior organizations could promote new sites, find loca-tions, and help operate them.

Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) is an up-date of the truck farm, which grows produce just outside the city to truck into weekly farm-ers' markets. The CSA business model is a way for community members to share farmers' business risk, while providing early capital for seeds, fertilizer, and equipment. Customers buy 'shares' of a season's produce, paying part or all up front, and then receive a weekly share of the grower's harvest. Some CSAs also encourage customers to spend a day or two help-ing to plant and harvest major crops in spring and fall. Senior centers make an ideal drop-off point for the weekly deliveries, and overall costs could be reduced if volunteers agreed to help bag and box the individual shares for pickup. Another way to help reduce food costs is to form buying clubs or food co-ops, which buy food in bulk (usually pre-ordered by individuals), then divide it up on delivery. This can also be a rewarding social activity.

Keeping active. Healthy neighborhoods have plenty of opportunities for older adults to remain active, whether informally as part of daily life, or in more organized activities. If our neighborhood has great places within walk-ing or biking distance, just going to meet a friend or pick up a few things can add up to regular activity. The doctor-recommended 30 minutes per day (or at least 3 times per week) can be broken into 10- or 15-minute segments and still add up to significant health benefits. The average transit user walks or bikes 20 minutes as part of his or her regular transit trip; a 5-minute walk to the park or café becomes a 10-minute round trip. Having nearby parks for tennis, swim-ming, jogging, or speedwalk-ing can also keep us active and connected. As we stay healthier and active longer, many older adults are remaining involved in organized sports like softball or swimming competitions.

In extreme heat and cold, we like to stay indoors, but that doesn't have to slow us down. Suburban shopping malls have long opened early so seniors could get their exercise in a group mallwalk. The communi-ty college in rural Dryden, NY, reserves its downstairs hallways for exercise walking during inclement weather. Many public facilities can find some time to set aside for indoor activities for older adults: an hour scheduled in the school pool or gym, or special daytime hours in the bowling alley. And, of course, there is the traditional senior center, with organized activities just for us.

A new approach to senior centers. Many active older adults don't yet see themselves as 'senior center types,' and a new model is emerging. These multipur-pose lifestyle centers fit with the kind of intergenerational, age-friendly neighborhoods we are choosing to live in. Designed to attract and retain active, 50+ older adults, they are typically located in urban or neighborhood settings, integrating them into the com-munity social life and making them more accessible to drop by as we make our way around downtown.

From the street, they could be a business-friendly coffeehouse (a 'Starbucks for Seniors'), a place to meet with clients or hang out with friends, surf the net, or catch up on e-mail. You might see groups discussing books, sports, art, or a concert, or a small group getting help on a new computer program. Larger places may also have gyms, yoga and dance work-shops, or educational classes in a learning center. As we try to integrate our own active aging fully into the place we live in, maybe creating a new kind of community center at the heart of it all isn't a bad way to start.

Getting help when we need it. We all want to remain inde-pendent for as long as possible. That's human nature, and most of us put off asking for help as long as we can, even when we might really need it.

There are basic tasks we have to do to live on our own — feeding ourselves, dressing, walking, getting out of bed, bathing and hygiene, drink-ing and taking medication — and more complicated tasks like preparing meals, doing housework, driving, shopping, and managing our money. Eldercare professionals can advise families when such help is required, and what kind, but that advice is not usually triggered unless someone — family, friend, or neighbor — notices the need.

The signs that people need help are usually obvious to those who know them well and see them often. In an age-friendly Smart Growth neighborhood or small town, regular interaction with people is more possible, more convenient, and more frequent. The people we interact with are more likely to be from the same neighborhood. Whether in a park down the street, a neighborhood diner or coffee shop, or library or place of wor-ship, odds are someone in the room lives a block or two away and is concerned about our well-being. We're used to hear-ing the phrase 'it takes a village' refer to raising children, but the same is true at our own end of the timeline. With a neighbor-hood structure that allows and encourages us to get out and about, and nearby places that are worth going to, we're more likely to be noticed, and our absence noted as well.

Once the need for help has been identified, actual assis-tance may be easier to obtain in an age-friendly neighbor- hood, where people of all income levels and ages live nearby. In rural and suburban neighborhoods, the econom-ics of driving around to several houses daily to provide low-wage assistance are even more difficult in an era of rising gas prices. Compact communities offer the potential for both paid assistants and volunteers to have low-cost, efficient access to multiple clients in a day, whether walking, taking a bus from another neighborhood, or a shorter drive.

Caregiving. In traditional neighborhoods, caregiving was primarily an extended family affair. There were usually enough brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandkids in the com-munity to help keep an eye out and take care of family elders. As we scattered across the country, and more house-hold members worked outside the home, a need emerged for organized networks of caregiv-ers, both paid and volunteer. Area Agencies on Aging and other senior-focused groups have developed programs to address caregiving needs, and private companies have found strong market demand for af-fordable home healthcare and personal services. The most successful programs have been community-based nonprofits that coordinate both paid pro-fessional and volunteer services of local residents to provide healthcare and nursing, social connections, and help with chores and maintenance to older neighbors.

This core idea of neighbor helping neighbor is key to making the community -based approach work. It works best in a real neighborhood or small town where people know and care about each other. The in-home health care and companionship help older adults stay in their homes and connected to their communities, avoiding both the extra cost and re-duced quality of life in a nurs-ing home. Where family and friends are available, their assis-tance can be coordinated by the community organization. This approach saves money for the aging adults and their fami-lies, enables families to share caregiver management tasks, and reduces costs compared to institutionalization. In tradi-tional mixed-use neighbor-hoods — with workplaces near homes — family members can arrange to drop by on a lunch break or before and after work, to help with meals, shopping, or medication, or just to visit.

Homesharing is another emerging option, where two or more unrelated people share a home, with their own private space and common living areas. It can work well in rural areas, where organized caregiv-ing can be harder and more expensive to deliver. Frequently coordinated by a local non-profit, the homeowner benefits by receiving 10 to 15 hours per week of household help, like cooking, shopping, or cleaning, and the roommate (often a stu-dent) receives free rent. Having someone in the home infor-mally helps keep an eye out for changes in the homeowner's condition, while the older adult gets to remain at home and independent longer, enjoy-ing the help and the informal companionship.

What you can do. Staying healthy.

- **Find healthy food.** Locate a Community-Supported Agriculture farm and join up, with your friends, neigh-bors, or a group like the senior center. If you can't find one, talk to neighbors and friends to see if there is suffi-cient interest to inspire an area farmer to start one. Join or start a community garden — there is always land available somewhere. You might try it on some of the leftover space at public buildings, apartments, senior centers, schools, churches — or in a park. Organize a food co-op (buying club). Make ordering, picking up, and dividing the food a social event, and even deliver it to those who can't get out.
- **Make a gathering place.** Talk with local senior organiza-tions, nonprofits, and housing developers about exploring the market for a new kind of lifestyle café. Take advantage of other gathering places — like your place of worship, the library, the courthouse steps, or wher-ever it is in your town — and test out some of these ideas with neighbors you don't yet know.
- **Look out for others.** Keep an eye out for someone who needs help — on your block or on your street. Connect them with some of the resources mentioned here. If they have a need that isn't available, see what you can do about it. Talk with your friends and com -munity organizations about whether a neighborhood caregiving and home-services group (1) is needed in your community, and (2) what it would take to get one started. Explore the home-sharing idea with local ser-vice organizations and housing nonprofits.

5. Conclusion: Next Steps

How you can get involved and act. At the end of each chapter, the *What You Can Do* sections list ideas to get you thinking about how your community influences your everyday decisions. Where to live. Where to go and meet friends, or if there is even a place to meet in your neighborhood. How to get there. Whether it is safe to cross the street. How to fit exercise into the day's activities. Where to find healthy food. How and where to get help when you can no longer do everything yourself. Altogether overwhelming, if you had to deal with all those issues at once. Fortunately, you don't have to.

Follow up on something that matters to you. Pick an easy item from the *What You Can Do* sections and get started today, while do-ing some more homework on longer-term strategies. Use the leads in the *Resources* section. Call your community's planning department and ask about openings on boards and commissions, or look on their website or the bulletin board in city hall. At the same time, ask if there are any upcoming planning workshops, and get your name on the mailing list. Use EPA's *Community Self-Assessment* checklist (see page 31) to understand what kinds of policies and programs your community has that support active aging, and identify missing ones you could work on.

Walk or bike around the neighborhood to explore these issues. Better yet, do it with a friend or group. You can learn a lot

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Zoning Compliance Permit Report
January—June 2012

	City		County		Total	
Permit Type	**#**	**$**	**#**	**$**	**#**	**$**
Agricultural						
Agricultural Structure	0	$0	37	$525,238	37	$525,238
Agricultural Structure Addition	0	$0	3	$13,000	3	$13,000
Agricultural Subtotal	***0***	***$0***	***40***	***$538,238***	***40***	***$538,238***
Residential						
Accessory Structure	41	$153,644	124	$1,324,206	165	$1,477,850
Accessory Structure Addition	0	$0	5	$8,600	5	$8,600
Accessory Structure Demolition	2	$0	1	$0	3	$0
Double-Wide Manufactured Home	0	$0	1	$70,000	1	$70,000
Modular Dwelling	0	$0	1	$121,000	1	$121,000
Multi-Family Structure Alteration	1	$7,000	0	$0	1	$7,000
Multi-Family Demolition	0	$0	2	$0	2	$0
Single-Family Dwelling Addition	18	$223,780	37	$582,197	55	$805,977
Single-Family Dwelling Alteration	7	$85,800	9	$181,250	21	$267,050
Single-Family Dwelling Demolition	0	$0	4	$0	4	$0
Single-Family Dwellings	12	$1,780,250	47	$7,983,463	59	$9,763,713
Single-Wide Manufactured Home Demolition	0	$0	1	$0	1	$0
Single-Wide Manufactured Home	0	$0	13	$229,000	13	$229,000
Single-Wide Manufactured Home - Park Replacement	1	$0	0	$0	1	$0
Two-Family Dwelling (2 units)	1	$135,000	0	$0	1	$135,000
Residential Subtotal	***88***	***$2.385,474***	***245***	***$10,499,716***	***333***	***$12,855,190***
Commercial						
Commercial Accessory Structure	2	$3,400	0	$0	2	$3,400
Commercial Structure Addition	3	$10,786	0	$0	3	$10,786
Commercial Structure	4	$464,950	1	$5,000	5	$469,950
Commercial Structure Alteration	15	$396,900	3	$138,000	18	$534,900
Commercial Temporary Structure	6	$2,000	2	$0	8	$2,000
Commercial Tenant Fit-Up	2	$0	0	$0	2	$0
Commercial Subtotal	***32***	***$878,036***	***6***	***$143,000***	***38***	***$1,021,036***
Industrial						
Industrial Addition	1	$62,000	0	$0	1	$62,000
Industrial Structure Alteration	1	$10,000	0	$0	1	$10,000
Industrial Structure	1	$1,499,000	4	$535,834	5	$2,034,834
Industrial Subtotal	***3***	***$1,571,000***	***4***	***$535,834***	***7***	***$2,106,834***
Public & Semi-Public						
Public Structure	0	$0	4	$373,330	4	$373,330
Public Structure Addition	0	$0	1	$30,000	1	$30,000
Public Structure Demolition	1	$0	0	$0	1	$0
Telecommunication Accessory Structure	0	$0	1	$54,800	1	$54,800
Public Subtotal	***1***	***$0***	***6***	***$458,130***	***7***	***$458,130***
Void Permits	1	$0	0	$0	1	$0
Total	***118***	***$4,834,510***	***301***	***$12,174,918***	***419***	***$17,009,428***

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Growing Smarter, Living Healthier
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about neighborhood planning and design just by walking around and com-paring places that feel comfortable with those that do not seem meant for walking. Many of the publications in *Resources* have checklists or forms you can use to rate your neighborhood or street, identify what you like, and uncover problems that need to be addressed. The Local Government Commission (**www.lgc.org**) has published several easy-to-use guides and videos on Smart Growth and streets.

To download the entire guide, resources, and community assessment, visit http://www.epa.gov/aging/bhc/guide/