

# How Age-Friendly Are We?

## Survey and Listening Session Results REGION

**Age-Friendly Communities of the Lower Kennebec** is a regional grassroots volunteer coalition in the municipalities of Arrowsic, Bath, Georgetown, Phippsburg, West Bath and Woolwich. Our mission is to help our communities become the best possible home for people of all ages, by ensuring that public spaces, homes, programs, civic events, and social gatherings are set up to meet people's changing wants and needs across the lifespan.

### Method

- Between October of 2018 and February of 2019, the group conducted a survey among residents of all six communities to learn what is working in our area to support healthy, active, engaged aging and identify areas for improvement.
- Identical surveys were distributed in five of the towns electronically and in print, available at libraries, town offices, polling stations, the Bath YMCA, beauty salons, churches and some special events with collections boxes in place for completed questionnaires. Several cities/towns put links on their website. In Woolwich and Arrowsic, surveys were mailed with tax bills. Georgetown had mailed an independent but similar survey previously to all property owners. Those results are not included in the regional report, but available in Georgetown's individual report sheet.
- In addition, Listening Sessions were held in which members of the Emergency Services and residents of Arrowsic, Bath, Phippsburg and Woolwich met to describe and share their personal challenges and thoughts about aging in their community.

### Key Findings Across the Region

**Social Connections.** The lack of social connections and loneliness pose a great risk for physical illness, decline, depression and death. Feeling "isolated" is a common theme in survey comments.

- 25% of survey respondents say they live alone.
- 31% of respondents – almost 1 in 3 – say they see family, friends, or neighbors in their community only "occasionally", "rarely" or "once every few weeks."
- When asked, "Do you have family, friends, or neighbors nearby, whom you could ask for help?" 20% say no.
- 29% say that a disability or chronic illness keeps them and/or their spouse or partner from being as active in the community as they want to be.
- 85-89% say the following aspects of community are important or very important to them: Social and volunteer opportunities, accessible and inclusive community activities and events and opportunities to interact with people of all ages. Yet only 9-13% say they participate in these activities; many are not sure they exist. 27% report using the library – the most of any service listed.

**Homes.** One key finding is that the homes\* people are living in may not fit their future. (\*Homes refers to all types of places people live like condos, houses and apartments.) People want both, more choices and more information on resources that will help them stay in their homes.

- Almost half of respondents (48%) expect they will have to move to another home as they grow older, 30% to a different home in the area and 18% to a home outside the area.
- The statement, "I will need to modify my home to continue living here", prompt 60% to say yes.
- 91% say that a resource list of home repair and chore resources is important to them, but that information is lacking.
- In response to the question, "Is your home warm enough in the winter?" 84% say yes; but an alarming 16% say no. Reasons cited are, the home not being well insulated for 62%, difficulty paying for fuel for 45% and the challenge of moving wood/pellets for 6%.
- People also commented about the need for more choices: housing at a variety of price points including the middle class, in smaller one-level configurations, with a mix of ages, within walking distance of places they would like or need to go and provisions for accessory dwelling units.

## Age-Friendly Communities of the Lower Kennebec



Arrowsic  
Bath  
Georgetown  
Phippsburg  
West Bath  
Woolwich

**Mobility.** The inability to get around safely greatly limits people's lives and opportunities. The fear of losing the ability to drive and therefore losing independence is a common concern in Listening Sessions and survey comments.

- To get around 91% of survey respondents drive themselves. Other modes of transportation include walking (16%) and riding with a spouse/partner (14%) or with family and friends (7%).
- 38% say, "It would not easy to find a ride if an older person needed one for medical appointments, etc."
- When asked, "If it is hard to get to the places you need to go, why?" 15% answered the question. 44% of these participants choose as the reason lack of transportation, 35% say lack of money, 32% reply that they can't walk well, 22% say they dislike asking for a ride, 12% cite poor vision or hearing, and 11% say they don't like going out alone. For those 60+ in the region, not being able to walk well is the largest barrier (41%).
- 35% are concerned about falling but only 4% have participated in a fall reduction class.
- Mobility-related comments focus on community infrastructure: having enough benches, handicapped parking, public restrooms and winter snow clearance on sidewalks.
- Affordable and convenient transportation options, well-lit safe roads for walkers, bikers and drivers, and sidewalks or wide shoulders that encourage walking are important to 91-94% of survey participants.

**Community Strengths.** Most respondents – 81% - agree that their community is a great place for older people to live. Residents feel safe in their neighborhoods and communities, in part due to the strength of emergency services. Many respondents value the beauty of the region's natural surroundings. Library Services especially are highly appreciated and frequently used.

- 78% note that they can ask family, friends and neighbors for help.
- 58% talk with their friends to find out what's happening.

### **Communications.**

- 85% state that information about community events is easy to find. 12% disagree.
- 91% use the Internet. For communication 89% use the phone, 77% use email and 45% use Facebook.
- To find out what's happening residents check the Internet (78%), read the newspaper (61%), talk with friends (58%) and listen to the radio (34%). Participants look at flyers (27%), watch public access TV (24%) and hear about events at church (15%).
- The most popular places to look for information concerning services for older people are the Internet (68%), family and friends (59%), City Hall and Town Offices (53%), the Bath Senior Center (44%) and medical providers (36%), followed by newspapers (31%), Spectrum Generations (15%) and faith-based organizations (14%).

**Demographics.** 17004 residents lived in our six towns in 2016. 3403 were over the age of 65 years. (Source: American Community Survey, U.S. Censusdata <https://factfinder.census.gov>) 977 survey responses from five towns are presented in this report. The Committee for Age-Friendly Georgetown received an additional 259 responses from their residents, presented in the town specific report.

- The median age of respondents at the time of the survey was 65 and two thirds were 60 years or older.
- 94% of respondents live in the region year-round and 82% are planning to stay in the area.
- 55% of regional survey participants are Bath residents, followed by 19% from Woolwich, 10% from Arrowsic, 8% from West Bath and 7% from Phippsburg.

### **Personal Comments of Survey Respondents.**

"Need someone to call if the smoke alarm goes off and I can't reach it to stop it and change the battery. Who to call?"

"Summer has music events in the park which is wonderful, but I feel isolated in the winter and due to disability can not be out in cold much."

"If I can't drive, I have no options."

**Please join us.** Our "Plan of Action" is based on the information we received and will provide many opportunities to become engaged to make our region more livable!

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