

How Age-Friendly Are We? Survey Results WEST BATH

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 collection 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 in West Bath

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.

- 19% of West Bath survey respondents say they live alone.
- 35% of total respondents – 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?" 15% say no.
- 31% 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.
- 77-80% 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 5-12% say they participate in these activities; many are not sure they exist. 23% 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.

- 44% of West Bath respondents expect they will have to move to another home as they grow older, 32% to a different home in the area and 12% to a home outside the area.
- The statement, "I will need to modify my home to continue living here", prompt 59% to say yes.
- 85% 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?" 90% say yes; but 10% say no. Reasons cited are, the home not being well insulated and difficulty paying for fuel, at 57% each.
- People also comment about the need for more choices in housing, including affordable housing with yard work and shoveling provided, and smaller one-level configurations.

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, 93% of West Bath respondents drive themselves. Other modes of transportation include riding with a spouse/partner (17%) or with family and friends (3%) and walking (2%).
- 49% 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?" 9 residents answered the question. Four reply they can't walk well, three each choose as a reason lack of transportation and lack of money and one cites poor vision or hearing. For those 60+ in the region, not being able to walk well is the largest barrier (41%).
- 31% are concerned about falling but none say they have participated in a fall reduction class.
- Better community infrastructure to support mobility was raised by many people in the general comments section: sidewalks, walking trails, more bike paths -paved and not- next to highways, wider road shoulders to make walking and bike riding much safer, places to walk ice free in winter, plowed walking sidewalks in a pleasant walking area, better snow removal in public parking and more sanding on icy parts especially handicapped ramps and parking spaces.
- 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 90-92% of survey participants.

Community Strengths. Most respondents – 77% - agree that their community is a great place for older people to live. Region wide residents feel safe in their neighborhoods, 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.

- 79% note that they can ask family, friends and neighbors for help.
- 60% talk with their friends to find out what's happening.

Communications.

- 78% state that information about community events is easy to find. 15% disagree.
- 88% use the Internet. For communication 83% use the phone, 79% use email and 43% use Facebook.
- To find out what's happening, residents check the Internet (82%), read the newspaper (65%), talk with friends (60%) and listen to the radio (35%). Participants look at flyers (15%), watch public access TV and hear about events at church (13%).
- The most popular places to look for information concerning services for older people are the Internet (63%), West Bath Town Office (59%), family and friends (43%), newspapers (38%), the Bath Senior Center (34%) and medical providers (29%), followed by Spectrum Generation (15%) and faith-based organizations (11%).

Demographics. 17004 residents lived in our six towns in 2016. Of 3403 over the age of 65 years in the region 448 lived in West Bath. (Source: American Community Survey, U.S. Censusdata <https://factfinder.census.gov>) We received 977 survey responses from the five towns. 77 of them were from West Bath.

- The median age of respondents at the time of the survey was 65 and 72% were 60 years or older.
- 97% of respondents live in West Bath year-round and 90% are planning to stay in the area.
- 55% of survey respondents are Bath residents, followed by 19% from Woolwich, 10% from Arrowsic, 8% from West Bath and 7% from Phippsburg. The Committee for Age-Friendly Georgetown received an additional 259 responses from their residents.

Personal Comments of Survey Respondents.

"It would be wonderful to have help finding places to work after retirement."

"We need more units of affordable housing for which yard care, mowing, plowing, shoveling, is provided."

"My mom is older, mobility impaired, and I really believe transportation for non-driving seniors could use improvement. The bus is great, but she honestly needs door-side service."

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!

Contact agefriendlylowerkennebec@gmail.com 443-1573 and Like us on [Facebook](#). 