



Becoming Age Friendly Berkshires: A Municipal Checklist

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A SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR MUNICIPALITIES

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What is Age Friendly?

Age Friendly communities are *livable* - providing appropriate housing, good transportation, work and volunteer opportunities, plus a range of leisure activities for all residents - across their lifespans.

Age Friendly communities enable people to actively participate in civic and social life and treat everyone with respect, regardless of their age or ability. They are places that makes it easy for older people to stay safe, and connected to the people that are important to them. Age Friendly communities help people stay healthy and active -- even at the oldest ages and provide appropriate support to those who can no longer look after themselves.

An Age Friendly Berkshire County is a great place to grow up and a great place to grow old!

This Checklist is intended to be used to “start the conversation” in your city or town, around becoming age-friendly. Chances are, you’re doing alot already! No need to start from scratch – just put on your age-friendly lenses, review your current housing stock, home-support programs, or other housing-related practices to keep your residents safe at home. Then identify ways to expand or adapt your Actions from the suggestions on the Checklist - or create some yourselves. Don’t forget to share best practices or what you’ve discovered, with other Berkshire County communities, via www.agefriendlyberkshires.com. For additional assistance with using the Checklists call Age Friendly Berkshires at 413-442-1521 x16.

BECOMING AGE FRIENDLY BERKSHIRES: A MUNICIPAL CHECKLIST



HOUSING



Most adults in Berkshire County want to stay in their own homes and communities for as long as possible, but sometimes living independently becomes more difficult with age, due to changing health, physical abilities, or incomes. Age Friendly communities provide a range of housing options for residents at different life stages, income levels, and abilities. Municipalities should encourage development of a range of housing types, designed and built using age- and-dementia friendly “universal” design standards. For existing properties, encourage and provide assistance to owners or landlords who wish to adapt their properties to be safer and more comfortable for older adults. The cost of living (upkeep, taxes, and utilities) also influences where older adults live. Higher prices and lack of affordable alternatives may prevent older adults from moving to more age friendly housing. Exploring alternative housing arrangements, such as home-sharing, congregate housing, intentional communities, Villages, NORC’s (naturally occurring retirement communities), tiny houses and granny pods, etc., should be explored and adapted as appropriate across the County.

REGIONAL HOUSING GOALS

- Develop capacity to address Age-Friendly housing needs throughout the County, by forming a network of all those working on housing issues, in both the public and private sectors.
- Inventory and map existing housing resources and collect municipal and state regulations related to housing, to identify resources and gaps.
- Make information and assistance available to consumers about how to adapt their properties for aging-in-place, including guidebooks, loan programs, home assessments, workshops and other. Post on AFB and municipal websites.
- Assist municipalities in addressing local housing issues.
- Help expand the range of housing types or arrangements that are available and affordable for seniors at varying income levels, including multi-generational neighborhoods, shared living arrangements, intentional communities, tiny houses and other alternatives, as desired.
- Encourage solutions to ease the transition to alternative housing arrangements, including the use of a centralized application for publicly-supported housing.
- Expand senior tax deferral and work-off programs, and/or consider creating a tax relief fund to help the neediest low-income or disabled seniors to reduce burden of real estate taxes on a primary residence.

Housing Checklist

- Determine municipal housing needs by taking inventory of existing housing stock in your community.
- Develop a list of what technical and funding assistance will be needed to meet municipal housing goals, including zoning or programmatic creation/changes
- Identify available Federal, State and Regional housing resources to increase affordable housing supply in Berkshire County
- Improve the ability to age-in-place in community by creating a greater range of safe, affordable, and accessible single and multi-unit housing options
- Expand housing choices through research and adoption of innovative housing models, zoning and financing options
- Make information and assistance available to consumers about aging-in-place on municipal and Age Friendly Berkshires websites
- Participate in Consumer Housing Education workgroup that develops/disseminates consumer educational material for new home development, home modification or rehabilitation
- Identify licensed contractors who can do home assessments specific to aging-in-place
- Encourage the development of Villages and NORCs (Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities) to provide assistance to elders who wish to remain in the home and community
- Insure that sufficient and affordable home maintenance and adaptive support services are available to homeowners
- Encourage housing development close to village centers, public transportation and major community services
- Encourage private sector property owners/landlords in supplying more age-friendly housing, close to village centers and public transportation