AGING IN PLACE

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MUNICIPAL
IMPLEMENTATION
TOOL #12

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Delaware Valley
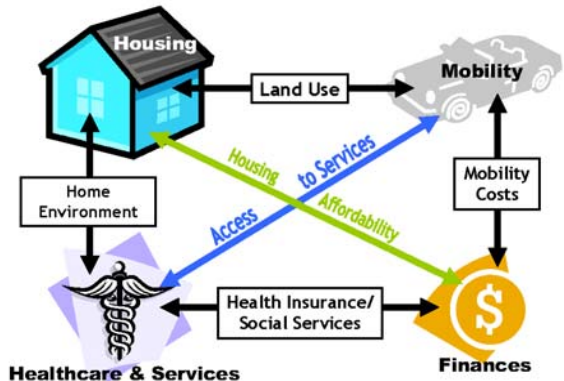Regional Planning
Commission

WHAT IS AGING IN PLACE?

In 2011, the first of the 83 million baby boomers born between 1946 and 1964 will reach retirement age. As they approach their "golden years," the nation's baby boomers are different from previous generations of elderly. Not only are there more of them than ever before, but they also are more diverse and mobile and expect a range of options that will keep them independent and out of nursing homes for as long as possible. Most of these new and future retirees expect to remain where they have spent most of their life: in the suburbs.

"Aging in Place" refers to the process of staying in one's own home for as long as possible while growing older and facing changing personal and physical needs. Successful aging in place requires improving both the delivery of health care and other necessary services and facilitating housing and transportation options that allows people to remain independent as they age.

Without homes and communities that can properly accommodate the needs of older residents, taxpayers face the higher costs associated with providing necessary

Aging in place involves the coordination of housing, mobility, service and financial resources.
Source: DVRPC

services, while senior citizens face an unnecessary or premature loss of independence. Successful aging in place involves both personal financial planning and public infrastructure planning. A successful strategy requires the coordination of finance, health care, housing and mobility.

These seemingly disparate issues are actually intricately inter-related. The development pattern of a community dictates the physical housing environment, and impacts a senior's access to services, mobility costs, and ultimately the cost of these services to taxpayers and local municipalities.

According to the AARP, nine in ten baby boomers want to stay in their homes near friends and family as long as possible. However, most suburban development patterns are not accommodating to the needs of seniors. Challenges to successfully aging in place in a typical suburban community include:

- Lack of alternatives to large lot, single-family homes;

- Inability of elderly homeowners to keep up with home repair and maintenance;

- Limited accessibility within the home;

- Limited accessibility within the community;

- Safety and security;

- Transportation and mobility; and

- Economics, as property taxes and the cost of essentials such as transportation and health care skyrocket.

Properly addressing the needs of an escalating senior population requires foresight and coordination. What happens when a senior can not or no longer wants to drive? What happens when household maintenance becomes too challenging? What happens when a homeowner's finances remain fixed while property taxes increase?

Municipal officials can guide development to accommodate the needs of all residents, and enable them to live independently as long as possible. Municipalities committed to ensuring that seniors can age in place should consider several initiatives, including: providing transit options for non-drivers; allowing for adaptable, accessible and affordable housing; and encouraging new developments and dwelling units to be thoughtfully designed, so that living environments do not become barriers to aging in place.

Traditional suburbs can present many challenges to seniors, including poor accessibility and a lack of businesses within walking distance of residential areas. Source: DVRPC

Municipalities can prepare for the senior boom by modifying several of the planning tools currently used to accomplish other municipal land use goals. The following examples illustrate just a few of the numerous and varied land use and zoning solutions that can help municipalities accommodate their growing elderly populations.

In addition to these land use techniques, any strategy to facilitate aging in place must also consider the potential for property tax reform. For seniors living on fixed incomes, skyrocketing local property tax payments will negatively impact their quality of life.

Goal: Expand and preserve the stock of accessible, affordable housing units for seniors.

1) Revise local planning and zoning ordinances to allow:
   o a variety of housing types and increased densities
   o integration of land uses
   o unrelated older adults to share homes in single-family residential zones.

Higher densities of both single family homes (Above: Collingswood, NJ) and apartment buildings (Below: Wayne, PA) can be tastefully integrated into any community.
Source: DVRPC

2) Consider adopting inclusionary zoning, to encourage developers to provide affordable units in exchange for density bonuses.

3) Incorporate accessibility and / or universal design standards into new construction designs and building codes.

4) Provide assistance for elderly homeowners to finance necessary modifications to their homes to make them more accessible.

Goal: Create "elder-friendly" communities.

1) Expand and improve transit options, including specialized opportunities for seniors.

2) Create safer pedestrian environments, with wider sidewalks, benches for resting and appropriate lighting.

3) Reconsider the timing of traffic lights at crossroads regularly used by the elderly to give them enough time to cross safely.

4) Incorporate public parks and open spaces into neighborhoods so seniors can easily access them.

5) Encourage integration of land uses as well as housing types to make it easier for the elderly to shop and access services.

Kings Highway in Haddonfield, NJ is an example of a safe pedestrian environment with wide sidewalks, benches, and ample lighting.
Source: DVRPC

Goal: Promote policies geared toward protecting the rights and enhancing the quality of life of the region's elderly.

1) Expand funding to organizations that provide services that support aging in place, including home-delivered meals, personal care, housekeeping, transportation and adult day care.

2) Coordinate healthcare and supportive services with housing.

3) Involve the private sector in developing options for meeting the needs of the community's elderly. Employers with employee shuttle vans, for example, might be willing to provide transportation for seniors during off-peak hours.

4) Identify concentrations of elderly and near-elderly and target resources to those areas.

Action: Revise local plans and zoning ordinances to allow housing options such as shared housing, accessory dwelling units and elder cottages.

Accessory dwelling units (ADU's) are secondary residences on single-family lots, developed as apartments within existing units (sometimes referred to as "granny flats") or as small separate units on the same lot ("elder cottages"). ADUs can play an increasingly important role for communities as their populations' age, both by reducing housing costs for seniors and by providing them with an informal support network.

By common definition, ADUs are smaller than the primary residence (typically smaller than 1,000 square feet), and have their own bathrooms, cooking facilities and private entrances. Because of their small size and placement on existing lots, they provide smaller affordable homes for fixed-income households (including seniors), close to family, friends, or other potential caregivers.

ADUs can be added to a community with little or no public expense by simply amending the zoning code.

This single family home also has an ADU above the garage. The garage and ADU are built to the rear of the site making them less conspicuous from the street.
Source: City of Santa Cruz, CA

Municipalities should also consider redefining the term "family," if necessary, to allow unrelated older adults to share a single-family residence.

Accessory Dwelling Units can be integrated into a variety of architectural styles.
Source: Massachusetts Smart Growth Tool Kit (www.mass.gov)

Action: Encourage Transit-Oriented Development or New Urbanist Communities

As people age, one of the greatest barriers to independence is mobility. Over time the ability to drive safely decreases, making it difficult to access goods and services, especially in suburban and rural areas where land uses are segregated and sprawling. Seniors become increasingly reliant on friends, family and public and private services to help them accomplish everyday tasks. Locating commercial areas near dense residential neighborhoods or transit stops can make necessary services more accessible for all residents. Strategies that municipalities can implement to bring residents and services together include:

Transit Oriented Development (TOD): TOD zoning encourages a denser mix of residential and commercial uses near transit nodes, ultimately making the community more accessible via transit. Developing areas within a quarter mile of transit stations (roughly a 5 to 10 minute walk) as dense, mixed-use districts gives people who are unable to drive better access to the goods and services they need by increasing both neighborhood and regional accessibility.

New Urbanism: New Urbanism expands on TOD by encouraging other elements, such as front porches, sidewalks and narrow streets to make communities safer and more accessible for pedestrians. New Urbanist developments also incorporate a range of housing types that are integrated throughout the community, including apartments, townhouses, duplexes, single-family homes and even ADUs. Seniors benefit from a robust choice in housing, increased interaction with their neighbors and proximity to commercial areas. Zoning code revisions that allow mixed-use or form-based zoning are often required to accommodate New Urbanist developments.

A New Urbanist site plan mixes uses and contains narrow, connected streets that encourage walking.
Source: Congress for New Urbanism, Florida Chapter

Action: Encourage Universal Design

Under universal design, a relatively recent concept, products and environments are designed to be usable by all people regardless of physical ability. Universal design is different from barrier-free or accessible design in that it strives to help people of all ability levels.

In the home, universal design takes on many forms, from limiting the number of steps needed to enter the house, to placing a bedroom on the ground floor, to providing wider hallways and doorways, to placing lever handles throughout the house instead of knobs. In short, a universally designed home is usable at all stages of life and allows one to remain independent within their own home for a longer period of time.

Some local governments are beginning to realize the need for universal design and are including provisions for it in their building codes. The state of California passed a model Universal Design Ordinance that can be amended and adopted by municipalities on a voluntary basis. Municipalities that adopt the model ordinance require universal design options to be available in all new construction, subject to practical site limitations and the willingness of buyers to pay reasonable costs.

View of a universally designed home with both a stepped entrance and stepless entrance (sidewalk ramp located on the left side of the frontage, masked by shrubs). Source: Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University

Additionally, municipalities can exercise universal design principles when designing and developing public infrastructure, including bus stops, crosswalks, public buildings, parks and recreation areas. For more information on universal design, see California's Model Universal Design Local Ordinance, available at:
http://housing.hcd.ca.gov/codes/shl/3-Text-Universal_Design_Model_Ordinance.pdf

Action: Zone and Plan for Active Adult Communities

Active Adult Communities, sometimes referred to as Retirement or Age-Restricted Communities, require at least one permanent occupant to be 55 years or older per unit. These increasingly popular communities usually contain covenants that prevent anyone under the age of 19 from permanently living in the development.

Municipalities often encourage age-restricted housing developments because they bring in tax revenues without increasing school enrollment. Seniors benefit by living in a community where many of the services can be tailored to their needs and their neighbors provide an instant social network. Municipalities can further enhance the benefits of age-restricted communities by providing an accessible network of public transit options.

Rendering of the Plaza Grande active adult community in Cherry Hill, New Jersey.
Source: Cherry Hill Township

Developers are currently marketing these communities primarily to 'Active Adults,' targeting younger seniors (age 55 and up). Younger senior residents require fewer public services than the true elderly (age 65 and up) while still contributing to the municipal tax base, with many of the residents still in the work force. As these communities have only recently gained popularity, the long-term impacts of these concentrations of older adults on communities is yet to be determined.

One caveat regarding these communities is that, considering their unique nature, they are often constructed in areas that are not easily accessible to primary services without a personal car and that are not serviced by accessible public transit. The integration of these communities into the larger neighborhood is a key component of a successful age-restricted development.

Supporting seniors who intend to remain in their suburban homes as they age in place is a multi-dimensional challenge requiring a multi-faceted solution. By planning and preparing for the future before the baby boomers reach retirement age, municipalities can work towards making their communities more attractive, livable and affordable places for both young and old alike.

Adopting comprehensive plans that connect and integrate housing, services and transportation can keep various land uses accessible to all. Flexible zoning codes that include provisions for ADUs, TODs and New Urbanist developments can encourage the development of flexible housing options that increase affordable housing units and allow for better transit and increased mobility. "Active Adult" age-restricted communities can also be attractive solutions for municipalities that wish to enhance senior amenities and raise tax revenue, but they may lead to future increases in service costs.   Finally, incorporating Universal Design standards, particularly in new construction, can eliminate costly retrofits later while making homes usable and attractive to those of all ages.

TOOL	BENEFITS
Zoning Code Revisions: Allow shared housing and/or secondary independent residences on existing single-family lots	• Provides flexible independent living space • Provides affordable units for tenants and extra income for property owners • Limited public investment
Transit Oriented Development and New Urbanism: Land use models that link transportation, goods, services, and people in ways that are not auto-dependent	•Seamlessly connects residents, commerce, and transit •Makes transit more viable and accessible •Creates or reinforces neighborhood community identity and centers of activity
Universal Design: Guidelines for the built environment that emphasize accessibility, ease of use, and attractiveness for all abilities	•Eliminates obstacles on a proactive basis •Allows individuals to remain independent longer •Fits abilities of everyone
'Active Adult' Communities in Appropriate Locations: Developments that require at least one permanent resident to be 55 years old or older	• Does not increase school enrollment • Enables municipality to better serve concentrations of elderly with services, programs and transit

Source: DVRPC

New Jersey Future

"New Jersey Future is a statewide research and policy group advocating a smarter way to grow: One that protects our open lands and natural resources, revitalizes neighborhoods, keeps housing affordable and provides more transportation choices." www.njfuture.org

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) Housing Choice

The AARP is the nation's premier non-profit, non-partisan membership group dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for people aged 50 and older. Their "Housing Choices" web site is a comprehensive gateway to the living arrangement options available to people as they age. See AARP's "Accessory Dwelling Units: Model State Act and Local Ordinance." www.aarp.org/families/housing_choices

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (N4A) Aging in Place Initiative

The N4A is the umbrella organization of the nation's 655 area agencies on aging. Their "Aging in Place" Initiative seeks "to assist communities to improve their livability for older persons and, in turn, increase livability for all people." http://aipi.n4a.org

The Center for Universal Design

Located at North Carolina State University, the Center for Universal Design is a national research, information, and technical assistance center that evaluates, develops, and promotes universal design in housing, public and commercial facilities and related products. www.design.ncsu.edu/cud

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

DVRPC's Municipal Implementation Tools series provides additional information on municipal land use tools that can help support aging in place. Additional information pertaining to the region's aging population can be found in DVRPC's report *The Aging of the Baby Boomers: Housing Seniors in the Delaware Valley*, and in *Analytical Data Report #13,The Aging of the Baby Boomers: Elderly and Near-Elderly Population Characteristics*. www.dvrpc.org

Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington

MRSC is a non-profit, independent organization in Washington, that assists local governments by providing consultation, research and information services.
http://www.mrsc.org/Publications/textadu.aspx

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