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Age Friendly Brookline - 2013 Results

First Annual Progress Report of Brookline Age Friendly Cities Initiative

M. Weiss

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Late in 2012, Brookline became the first municipality in New England to be admitted to the World Health Organization's Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities. Brookline based its application on a broad assessment of its age-friendly features. In joining the network, Brookline committed itself to a comprehensive, multi-year effort to strengthen its age-friendly features. Age-Friendly Brookline is a collaboration of the Town of Brookline, the Council on Aging, and BrooklineCAN formed to respond to the needs of Brookline's senior population.

In January 2103, the Board of Selectmen appointed an Age-Friendly City committee to coordinate Brookline's age-friendly cites initiative.

The Committee's duties include:

1. Keeping the Board of Selectmen informed and making recommendations to the Board on related policy issues
2. Working through subcommittees concerned with specific initiatives related to Age-Friendly Brookline
3. Seeking cooperation of various Town departments and informing Town departments, boards and commissions, and the general public about Age-Friendly Brookline activities
4. Encouraging more effective communication among Town departments on matters involving older residents.

This document provides the first annual progress report on the initiative. Age Friendly Brookline initiatives fall under the following categories:

Housing
Transportation
Public Safety
Design Modifications for Low-Vision Elders
Property Tax Relief
Health and Human Services
Library
Community Participation
Employment and Volunteering
Parks
Recreation
Information Dissemination

Committee Members

Co-Chair	Nancy Daly	Board of Selectmen
Co-Chair	Ruthann Dobek	Council on Aging
Co-Chair	Frank Caro	BrooklineCAN
	Alberta Lipson	
	Lloyd Gellineau	
	Shari Gershenfeld	
	Roberta Winitzer	
	Matthew Weiss	

Overview of Initiatives

The work of this year was possible due to the work of the individuals on the committee, BrooklineCAN, the Senior Center and the Council on Aging as well as the support of many Town of Brookline departments (Health and Human Services, Planning and Community Development, Public Works, Police, Library, Recreation and Leisure Services, Assessors).

Some highlights of 2013:

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Housing

Initiative: Expand public awareness of need for increased supply of senior housing

Achievements:

We were successful in gaining recognition for the needed for expansion in the supply of housing for seniors in Brookline. We launched the public discussion of senior housing needs by writing a commentary that was published in the Brookline Tab. With strong staff support from the Department of Planning and Community Development, we conducted a public forum in April 2013 on need for additional senior housing. Sponsors included the Board of Selectmen, the Housing Advisory Board, the Council on Aging, and the Brookline Community Aging Network. The forum included a panel of experienced nonprofit and for profit developers. The forum was attended by 130 people. A follow up public meeting attracted 30 residents. Further follow up meetings were held with the Brookline Board of Selectmen and the Housing Advisory Board. We have engaged in discussions about potential sites for new senior housing. (The options include air rights above some of the town-owned parking lots.)

Plans:

We will continue general public education efforts on senior housing needs and encourage discussions about potential sites for new housing for seniors. We will support zoning changes that will facilitate construction of new housing for seniors in the Beacon Street corridor and Brookline Village.

Initiative: Expand home sharing options for seniors in single family homes

Achievements:

Staff of the Department of Planning and Community Development, the Building Department, and the Health Department collaborated in creating a document outlining the home sharing options permitted by Brookline's zoning code. The Council on Aging and the Building Department have agreed to offer a Home Sharing Advisory Service through which the two units will advise older residents and their families about home sharing options. In a separate development, Town Meeting adopted a zoning code change that effectively permits detached accessory dwelling units on a special permit basis.

Plans:

The Council on Aging and Building departments will announce the new home sharing advisory service. Older residents who are interested in home sharing options will be encouraged to make use of the advisory service.

Initiative: Support older residents who are considering downsizing by providing information about single-level housing options in elevator buildings.

Achievements:

BrooklineCAN has published an on-line guide to residential buildings with elevators in Brookline. The guide is limited to buildings with 20 or more units.

Plans:

Encourage BrooklineCAN to expand its guide by adding information on buildings with elevators with 8 or more units.

Transportation

Initiative: Provide improved pedestrian access and safety in areas with large concentrations of older people.

Achievements

A concept paper has been prepared and circulated proposing that a district with enhanced pedestrian-friendly features be established in North Brookline. The proposed district includes the Town’s major commercial areas and the major multifamily residential buildings near the commercial areas. Many of Brookline’s seniors live in the proposed district. The aim is to encourage walking as a form of transportation and as a form of healthy exercise within the district. The focus is on access to commercial areas, public transportation, and to parks in or near the district. BrooklineCAN has gained public visibility and attention from the Town’s Transportation Board for its advocacy for pedestrian safety from the dangers posed to pedestrians by bicycles operated on sidewalks.

Plans

We will advocate for formal creation of the zone for enhanced pedestrian-friendly features in North Brookline. We will advance a multifaceted agenda to improve pedestrian experiences within the district.

Initiative: Improved Specialized Transportation options for those who do not drive

We are seeking more secure funding for Brookline’s subsidized taxi service (BETS). We have gathered background information about the service. We seek to establish policy study committee to examine options to strengthen financing and are looking for volunteers willing to serve on the committee.

A subcommittee was formed to discuss and develop proposals to meet the specialized transportation needs of seniors in Brookline. Three major concepts were brainstormed: 1) a counseling and guidance program that would train volunteers to provide seniors and their families with transportation alternatives; 2) enhancement of the Brookline Senior Center’s Elderbus to extend beyond its fixed route, fixed schedule service to provide a mobility-on-demand service; and 3) an integrated mobility-on-demand app to provide users with an efficient way to make an informed mode choice for a given trip – and book the transportation service. Initial concept descriptions have been developed for these three concepts.

Initiative: Persuade the Town to establish a standing pedestrian committee.

Although no action has been taken on forming a Town pedestrian committee, BrooklineCAN’s Livable Community Advocacy committee has been very active with the Transportation Board in advocating for regulation of operation bicycles on sidewalks. Informally, the Transportation Board treats the committee as its consumer voice on pedestrian issues.

Initiative: Safer Street Crossings for older people with mobility disabilities

1. We have obtained information on the manner in which Singapore has developed technology that enables those with walking limitations to request more time to cross streets at intersection with traffic signals.
2. We will seek collaboration with the Planning department and the Transportation department in developing the proposal for establishing a district for enhanced pedestrian-friendly features. We will explore the

merits of asking Town Meeting to act formally (or informally) in establishing the district.

3. We will explore collaboration with the Town's Public Transportation Advisory Committee on specialized transportation. We have requested inclusion on the committee's agenda at a future meeting.
4. We will look for an opportunity to launch the policy study of improved financing options for the BETS program.
5. We will develop more specific proposals with draft implementation plans and resource needs for the other specialized transportation concepts. We plan to pilot test the Elderbus enhancement concept by allocating a small portion of the existing capacity to provide some version of mobility on demand. Our specific goals for the counseling program and mobility-on-demand app will be developed following a more detailed scoping of requirements and resources.
6. We will encourage the Transportation Board to draw upon technology used in Singapore for a demonstration of a system to allow those with walking limitations to obtain extra time for street crossing a heavily-travelled intersection in a commercial area.

Public Safety

Initiative:

The Brookline Police Department tries to provide excellent service and a rapid response to all residents of the Town. Because of its sensitivity to the special vulnerabilities of many senior citizens, the Police Department is trained to pay particular attention to their needs. Through the Age-Friendly City initiative, the Department seeks to make information about police services more widely available.

Achievements

1. The police department in cooperation with the COA and Senior Center conducted a Policy Academy for seniors in 2013 as part of the Age Friendly initiative. The program was well attended and well received.

2. The Department continued its efforts to inform seniors about scams directed to seniors. While the Department assisted seniors who are victims of scams, the Department's emphasis is on public education to prevent seniors from being victimized by scams.
3. The Department encourages isolated seniors to participate in the RUOK (telephone reassurance) program offered by the Norfolk County Sheriff. Eleven Brookline seniors participate. When residents do not pick up the phone, Brookline Police officers come to their homes to assure their safety.
4. In collaboration with the Senior Center, the Department offers the Home Safe program which uses GPS technology to locate residents with dementia who are at risk of getting lost. Since the program's inception in 2013, eight residents have enrolled.
5. Over the last year, the Brookline Police Department and the Brookline Health Department have introduced an Emergency Preparedness Buddies program for elders with access and functional needs. The program is being conducted through two volunteer programs: the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), Collaborating community organizations include the Brookline Council on Aging, This program, currently in the pilot stage, is matching volunteers with elders to assist in identifying preparedness needs, setting up communications plans, preparing supplies for evacuation or sheltering in place, so the elders will be more resilient in an emergency.

Plans

The Police Department will work with BrooklineCAN to disseminate information more effectively about services that are offered to seniors.

Design Modifications for Low-Vision Elders

Initiative: To better accommodate older people with low vision, we will encourage feasible modifications of public and commercial buildings in Brookline.

Achievements

A team of Boston University occupational therapy students directed by Professor Jennifer Kaldenberg conducted environmental scans of the main library, the Coolidge Corner branch library, and the Senior Center. The team identified multiple environmental obstacles in each facility and recommended remedial measures. The team prepared a slide show that summarized its findings. Their methodology could be replicated for environmental scans of other buildings in Brookline.

The libraries and Senior Center were asked to take on feasible projects to remedy at least one of the environmental obstacles identified through the study. Both the libraries and the Senior Center agreed to undertake pilot projects to improve signage.

Plans

We will encourage environmental scans in other public buildings and in the streetscape to identify barriers for those with low vision. We will seek remedies for the barriers that are identified.

Property Tax Relief

Initiative:

Further efforts to inform residents about tax exemption and tax deferral programs appear warranted. The information-dissemination action agenda of the Brookline Age-Friendly Cities program will include reinforcement of the Board of Assessors efforts to inform older homeowners about these tax exemption and tax deferral programs.

Achievements

The Board of Assessors has explored options to strengthen property tax relief to seniors. The possibility of waiving assets in determining eligibility for

property tax relief was judged to be politically unacceptable. Eligibility for property tax relief will continue to be based on income and age.

Information on a Circuit Breaker program tax relief program administered by the State Department of Revenue is being disseminated to Brookline residents.

The Board of Assessors is supporting the introduction of a stipended volunteer program for renters. The program for renters would parallel the successful property tax work-off program for low income home owners. The program would be financed from the Town's general revenues. Participating low-income renters would receive part-time job assignments in Town departments and be paid at the minimum wage.

Health and Human Services

Initiative: The Age Friendly City Human Services Subcommittee (AFCHSS) has collaborated on numerous projects that are senior focus and involve seniors in the development of these projects.

Achievements

1. To gain an understanding of the possible under-served senior communities within the Town, the AFCHSS, in conjunction with the Health Department and the Town's Information Technology Department conducted a GIS study that used US Census Data to determine areas where seniors live within Brookline. The map generated useful information regarding small pockets of seniors that may not be aware of services available to them or seniors who have limited access to town services due to lack of transportation. The next phase is to assess the needs of the seniors that live within the targeted areas of town.
2. In conjunction with the Senior Center and Brookline Public Health Department, the AFCHSS created a Fall Prevention Display that was exhibited at the Senior Fair held this year (See section on Participation below). As part of the exhibit, fair participants were given information

about eye care and ways to prevent falls in their homes. In addition, participants were invited to test their knowledge of fall prevention by taking a quiz. The Sub-committee will continue to promote awareness of fall prevention strategies and to encourage better collection of fall-related data within the Town of Brookline.

3. The AFCSS again collaborated with the Senior Center and the Health Department to raise awareness of Concussions. This collaboration resulted in having a well-attended Presentation on "Concussion and Seniors" at the Senior Center. The Sub-Committee will continue to sponsor and assist in the preparation of Town events to ensure that they are inclusive of seniors. The AFCSS has worked with the Health Department in becoming familiar with the Affordable Care Act in order to assist those who are affected by the new healthcare law. It should be noted two of the Health Department staff are now designated as Certified Application Counselors. This designation allows these individuals to assist individuals apply for Federal and State level insurance programs through the HealthCare Connector.
4. The AFCSS has also collaborated with the Town's Economic Planning and Development Department regarding two initiatives. The first initiative involved determining the feasibility of allowing seniors and others to use SNAP benefits at the Town Farmer's Market. The working group for this initiative has gained valuable insight into how other communities have implemented their SNAP programs and now have the task of finding a solution that works for Brookline. Although not directly related to Health Services, the second initiative involves the development of a program that awards businesses that demonstrate their investment to the needs of our senior community. Called the Age-Friendly City Seal of Approval, it will be given to businesses that meet several criteria that again meet the needs of seniors.
5. Other collaborations with the Health Department that are related to the needs of seniors include:
 - Providing Blood Pressure screening at the Town's Food Pantry.
 - Maintaining an active role in the BI-monthly Interagency Agency meeting where concerns about specific cases that involve various Town entities are addressed.

- Providing a consultative role at the Hoarding Task Force meetings to order to assist seniors who have clutter management concerns.
 - Various programs that provide information on healthy eating habits.
6. The AFCHSS has been active, at various Town Commissions, to promote senior causes. Specifically, it has been active in encouraging the Commission for the Disabled to address the use of bicycles on sidewalks as they are a significant danger to seniors. It also has been promoting better monitoring and expeditious snow removal to allow those with limited mobility to safely use the sidewalks.

Library

Initiative:

Identify and implement programs through the Brookline Libraries of particular interest to seniors.

Ensure the Brookline Libraries are welcoming places for seniors.

Achievements

1. Low vision issues: The Main library and Coolidge Corner branch library cooperated with the low-vision environmental scan of public buildings.
2. The library subcommittee proposed new programs of particular interest for seniors jointly sponsored by the Library and the Senior Center.
3. The subcommittee proposed methods of outreach to attract more seniors to the Putterham branch library.
4. The subcommittee suggested ways in which shelved books could be placed so that they would be more accessible to seniors.

Plans

1. Encourage improved exterior maintenance to assure better access to the Coolidge Corner branch for patrons with mobility limitations.

2. Encourage better publicity for introductory computer classes.
3. Investigate use of Creative Aging Toolkit for Public Libraries (www.creativeagingtoolkit.org)

Community Participation

Initiative:

There are myriad opportunities for senior citizens in Brookline to engage in social and educational interactions. One of our challenges is to make sure our seniors can easily get to and from these activities. Another challenge is ensuring that our seniors are aware of the many opportunities available. In the future, the Council on Aging hopes to continue to improve both the transportation options as well as disseminating information about activities, programs and services.

Achievements

1. A health fair was conducted in May 2013 involving collaboration between the Brookline Senior Center, Center Communities of Brookline, the Age-Friendly Cities committee, and other organizations. The event was well attended and offered extensive information to participants.
2. An exposition was offered in conjunction with the BrooklineCAN annual meeting in September. Service providers who are members of the BrooklineCAN Professional Service group provided information to over 100 attendees. Information was provided on services including service-supported housing, home health, and hearing aids.
3. Both the Council on Aging and BrooklineCAN participated in Brookline Day at Lars Anderson Park. Through this well-attended event, they called general public attention to seniors as a constituency that participates in the life of the Town and is served by the Town. Brookline Day was organized by the Town's Recreation Department.
4. In September, the Council on Aging mailed its News and Events to every household with a member over the age of 60. This monthly

publication reaches 3,000 elders each month as well as found on the web page.

5. BrooklineCAN produced a monthly newsletter that was distributed electronically and in print informing residents of activities and programs.
6. The Council on Aging printed and distributed over 1,000 copies of its Elder Resource Guide, in addition this important resource was featured on the Town website.

Plans

1. We will continue to plan, coordinate and participate in special events that provide information to seniors and strengthen the connections among residents of all ages.
2. We will continue to collaborate with the BrooklineCAN communications committee to assure that timely information is included in its monthly newsletter and on its website.
3. We will explore possible use of the Town's web site (Brookonline) to disseminate information about the Town's age-friendly features.

Employment and Volunteering

Initiative:

We seek to maximize opportunities for older people to be productively engaged through paid employment or community service volunteering. We are focused particularly on the role that Brookline's government can play in informing older residents of opportunities and in providing employment and volunteering opportunities for the Town's seniors.

Achievements

1. The Brookline Senior Center introduced the Retirement Engagement Alternatives Program (R.E.A.P.) in 2013. The program assists seniors in finding either part-time employment or meaningful community service volunteer assignments. The program builds on the successful

JOB program that assists seniors in finding part-time paid employment. For over 20 years, J.O.B.S. has been an attractive job search and placement option for Brookline elders.

2. In pursuit of its efforts to support volunteering, R.E.A.P. is exploring the creation of an on-line volunteer clearinghouse that would serve all adults and a wide range of nonprofit organizations. The Clearinghouse would like organizations that seek volunteers with adults who are looking for a meaningful volunteer opportunity. The R.E.A.P. program administers the Towns Property Tax Work Off program. In 2013, the program placed [number] seniors in assignments in various departments of Brookline Town government.

Plans

1. The R.E.A.P. program will continue to offer educational programs for seniors to encourage them to develop aims for productive engagements.
2. R.E.A.P. also seeks to strengthen its capacity to provide information on employment opportunities.
3. R.E.A.P. also hopes to administer the proposed stipended volunteer program for renters.

Parks

Initiative:

The Brookline Parks and Open Space Division is committed to supporting the interests and needs of all users, including seniors and elderly residents of the community. They work to ensure that each of 50 properties under their control, which includes many parks, several sanctuary or conservation areas, a golf course, and a historic cemetery, is safe, handicapped accessible, and well maintained for both passive and active recreational use. The Parks Department recognizes that healthy activity among older residents contributes significantly to their health and well-being.

Achievements

1. Through a survey sent by the Brookline Senior Center to all Brookline households with at least one senior, we learned that park features particularly appreciated by seniors are good walking paths, benches, and restrooms.
2. The Parks and Open Space Division finalized plans for three parks. The plans include important benefits for seniors. Two existing parks, Waldstein playground and Eliot Playground/Warren Field, will be revitalized. Features of particular interest to seniors at Waldstein playground are a walking path around the park, enhanced seating in both sun and shade, accessible picnic areas and improved accessible entrances. The Waldstein playground is already an important walking destination for residents of the neighborhood. The walking paths will bring more seniors to the park to walk for exercise. The comfort station at Waldstein Playground is undergoing renovation to improve accessibility both into and within the restroom area.
3. Brookline has begun construction of the Fisher Hill Reservoir Park at a historically important site that was once part of the Boston water supply system. The 10-acre park will include a promenade that will offer a level walking surface that will be attractive to seniors, accessible paths at the top of the berm, in the woodlands and through the meadow; an accessible picnic area and field/open space and many opportunities for sitting. The park will include restrooms.
4. Clark and Billy Ward Playground renovations were completed this year and both included improvements for accessible entrances and circulation through the park, seating areas in both quiet and more active portions of the park and accessible picnic tables.
5. A bench was added to the exterior of the Putterham Library by the Parks and Open Space Division that helps with pick-ups and drop offs, waiting and resting for seniors and other patrons to the library.
6. The Town's capital improvement plan includes plans for the addition of restroom at Brookline Reservoir Park, a popular destination for walkers.

7. BrooklineCAN advocated for a bus stop for the northbound Route 51 bus at the Dudley Triangle to provide improved access for South Brookline residents to the Brookline Reservoir Park, a popular walking destination. We have also advocated for a restroom at the Brookline Reservoir Park.

Plans

1. Carry out the inventory of parks to determine age-friendly features.
2. Identify barriers to access to parks within the area of high concentration of seniors.
3. Plan improvements to an open space at the intersection of Green and John Streets to make it more attractive to seniors. The open space is in the area of high density senior residence.

Recreation

Initiative:

The Town of Brookline Recreation offers a vast variety of facilities and services that create an extensive menu of recreation opportunities that are both inviting and accessible to people of all ages and abilities. Brookline has a long history of providing safe, healthy and year round services to the community that build and strengthen the mission of the town.

Recreation is a vital resource to the Town of Brookline, in particular for our older residents. Our older community member interests vary greatly, as does the wide range of ability age levels. Our services are created to be inclusive to all abilities, ages and income levels. Brookline Recreation provides program opportunities from basic, introductory levels to advanced, more specialized offerings. Leisure trips and special events, volunteer, employment and social opportunities are also offered throughout the year.

Achievements

In 2013, Brookline Recreation embarked on several new initiatives and enhanced existing services.

1. In 2013, Brookline Recreation launched a new Point of Sale fee structure. This provides residents a reduced rate option at the facilities and health & wellness classes. The reduced rates apply to four

populations; student, disabled, veteran and senior. The option for reduced rates provides opportunities for seniors to swim, skate and register for health & wellness activities at a 35% discount from the advertised fee. The aquatics center has experienced a 30% increase in the sales of passes with the 2013 rates for seniors, boasting a total of 118 seasonal passes and 21 annual passes sold in that year alone. This is in large part to the affordability and accessibility.

2. The aquatics center also installed an accessible lift at each of the three pools at the facility, which assists a disabled swimmer to have an independent experience entering and exiting the water, with assistance available when necessary. The Health & Wellness aquatic classes had over 215 participants in 2013, of which 65% were seniors. The Recreation Therapy services have experienced a growth in participation with the senior population. Seniors join us year-round to participate in Special Olympics teams and the popular bi-monthly dinner groups. Both opportunities provide great access to social and wellness experiences for some of Brookline's most vulnerable community members.
3. Community outreach continued in 2013 with Recreation sponsoring a BBQ and info session for the South Brookline Neighborhood Senior Association at the Putterham Library. The day trips have grown in popularity with the largest trip of 2013 hosting 55 seniors to Kennebunkport, ME.
4. The 3rd annual Passport to Fitness initiative continues to have a large percentage of seniors enrolled in the program. This is an affordable and flexible fitness opportunity to sample classes within Brookline. Those who purchase the modestly priced passports are able to take a class session at a number of the many commercial fitness programs that operate in Brookline.

Plans

Employment and volunteer opportunities continue to be available to seniors at our facilities. The Robert T Lynch golf course in will have many seniors as part of their seasonal team, both in paid and volunteer positions.

Information Dissemination

More Effective Dissemination of Information

We are proposing an action agenda to disseminate information about Brookline's age-friendly features. Brookline already has remarkable age-friendly features.

Achievements

1. Improved communication among Town departments
2. Improved dissemination to the public through BrooklineCAN and other resources

Plans

1. Extend contacts to all departments and relevant organizations within the Brookline town government
2. File Age Friendly Cities Committee meeting minutes and formal documents and reports produced by the committee on BrookOnline
3. Publicize information on Brookline's age-friendly features through BrooklineCAN.
4. Design and implement a public information campaign.