# Action Plan for an Age-friendly Portland



**Summer 2013**


**Prepared by:**

**Portland's Age-friendly Advisory Council**

# Action Area: Housing

**Background:** Housing is considered to be a universal human right[1] and has been identified in local research and planning activities as a critical need if we are to make Portland friendly to people of all ages and abilities. In order to house our aging population, it is important to assure a full range of housing options that are planned and built to be accessible, affordable, healthy, secure, located near amenities and services, and to facilitate social interaction.

***Action Item 1 – Provide Education to Consumers, Planners and Developers*:** Age-friendly housing must be better understood on both the supply and demand sides. Residents who are looking for housing and those who desire to stay in their existing homes will be provided education concerning the options and costs so that they can find the best fit with their current and, ideally, their future needs, whether they are looking for affordable or market-rate housing and whether they are seeking long-term care services and supports. Planners and developers will be offered streamlined guidance regarding best practices for age-friendly housing and technical assistance for completing age- and ability-appropriate housing (e.g., zoning and building codes, resources for answering questions).

***Action Item 2 – Improve Accessibility*:** Policy efforts that lead to inclusive and accessible housing are critical for our city as we all continue to age. Policy to enhance aspects of age-friendly policies and programs will be included in the City's Comprehensive and Consolidated Plans. Policies that pertain to tax abatements, local and statewide structural code, fair housing, green building, urban renewal, visitability, and affordable housing will be reviewed and improved to increase the availability of accessible housing. Suggestions for home modifications to increase accessibility will be offered.

***Action Item 3 – Encourage Innovative Approaches to Housing Older Adults*:** Because of Portland's reputation as a leader in urban planning and smart growth, the City has a unique opportunity to advance the planning and development of sustainable housing and communities for residents of all ages. Demonstration projects, design competitions, and innovative approaches to shared housing (e.g., accessible accessory dwelling units, shared single-family homes) will be encouraged.

***Action Item 4 – Advance Opportunities for Aging in Community*:** Portland is a city of neighborhoods, each with their own geographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Efforts to facilitate aging in place (or in neighborhood) (e.g., Village PDX, neighborhood-led initiatives) will be encouraged to meet the needs of community-residing older adults as well as foster healthy, connected neighborhoods.

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[1] Source: United Nations, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: https://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/.

# Action Area: Transportation

**Background:** Transportation is vital to older adults' mobility and independence. It takes many forms, including private automobiles, public transit and paratransit services, bicycling, walking, and other emerging modes (e.g., small electric vehicles, Segways). Historical development patterns affect one's mobility choices and various areas of Portland hold various challenges and opportunities. Transportation planning is critically important to creating an age-friendly system, including the need to locate transportation infrastructure in close proximity to housing that meets the need of a range of citizens, as well as services that are critical to accomplishing daily activities.

*Action Item 1 – System Planning***:** Coordinated transportation planning efforts are required in our city and region and the need to provide specific transportation options for older adults and people with disabilities has been detailed. Agencies at the local (e.g., Bureaus of Transportation, Environmental Services, Maintenance) and regional levels (e.g., TriMet, Metro, Ride Connection) must work together to detail, explicitly, the aging of Portland and the region. This is particularly important during a time when a marked increase in demands is expected, while resources are dwindling.

*Action Item 2 – Active Transportation***:** Active transportation[2] promotes active aging and is a fundamental aspect of an age-friendly city. Policies must be developed and implemented that result in environments are not automobile-centric, but rather, are developed in a manner that facilitates physical activity and convenient local access. Transportation infrastructure must be built to human scale, developed with universal design principles (above and beyond required minimum accessibility standards), and must ultimately lead to safe, healthy, efficient, and well-maintained systems.

*Action Item 3 – Community-based Solutions***:** Current transportation systems are dominated by two elements: public transit and private automobiles; both elements are growing more costly and constraints regarding system capacity and environmental sustainability abound. Portland must foster alternative that are community oriented, such as car-share programs and neighborhood cooperatives. Cost and liability issues are paramount in creating a viable, reliable, safe, equitable, and affordable system.

*Action Item 4 – Education***:** People of all ages can benefit from learning about transportation options, whether they are using them or not. Older adults – who are still driving or not – should learn about transit and paratransit while all Portlanders would be well served to learn about the rights, responsibilities, and tendencies of users of all modes of transportation, including pedestrians, cyclists, and older drivers. Additionally, families, friends, and caregivers need to learn how and when to intervene when someone is driving beyond their ability to be safe to themselves and others on the road.

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[2] Source: Metro: http://www.oregonmetro.gov/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=30078. Active transportation refers to non-motorized transportation modes, such as bicycling and walking, that are well integrated with public transportation. People are more active when they ride a bike, walk or take public transportation.

# Action Area: Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

**Background:** Portland's physical environments contain some of the most and least age-friendly aspects of the city. Natural features and green spaces represent some of the most important and valuable aspects of Portland; however, older buildings and sidewalks – particularly in certain areas of the city – create barriers to functioning and achieving one's daily needs. In addition to housing and transportation, outdoor spaces and buildings are the places where we spend the most time and therefore require considerable attention.

*Action Item 1 – Natural Features and Green Spaces***:** Identified as one of Portland's top age-friendly features Portland's base age-friendly assessment, natural features and green spaces represent amenities that are truly unique to our city, state, and region. However, accessibility is still lacking in older and underdeveloped parks, and the distribution of these amenities is not equitably distributed. Improved accessibility is needed, as well as information of and transportation to these places.

*Action Item 2 – Gardening and Local Food Production***:** Gardening spaces are limited – especially for those in multifamily housing – even though gardening contributes to physical and social well-being. In additional to education about how to garden and produce one's own food, access to gardening space is needed in homes (e.g., balcony gardens) and in neighborhoods (e.g., community gardening plots). Increasing gardening positively contributes to  one's well being social, physically, and perhaps, financially.

*Action Item 3 – Creating Accessible Social Spaces***:** Besides work and home life, Portlanders of all ages and abilities use public spaces, whether they and indoors or outdoors. To date, many of these spaces meet accessibility requirements but still have barriers to use. A list of best practices for designing and constructing social spaces is needed that pays attention to details such as the types of flooring (e.g., no tripping hazards), lighting (e.g., no glare), and amenities (e.g., benches with arms) are preferable. On a related note, building addresses and signage, in general, should be present and legible to those with limited vision (e.g., larger font size, non-glare surfaces).

*Action Item 4 – Age-Friendly Businesses***:** Currently, Elders in Action coordinates an Age-Friendly Business Certification Program© that educates and assists businesses in better serving their customers. The resulting businesses are improved in their ability to meet the needs of older adults and people with disabilities, as well as others, no matter their age or ability. Public, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations will be well served in improving their age friendliness and, overall, improved businesses and organizations can contribute to benefits for organizations, as well as society at large.

*Action Item 5 –Portland's Transition Plan***:** The City of Portland is required to identify needed accessibility improvements that are needed to ring the city into compliance with federal regulations; resources must be set aside to ensure that projects can move from being identified to being improved.

# Action Area: Respect and Social Inclusion

**Background:** Aging and older adults are not generally looked upon favorably in the United States and Portland is no exception. At a time when our city – and the rest of the world – is aging, it is critical that we look beyond the needs of older adults and identify real opportunities that to foster the resources that are prevalent in older citizens. Finding ways to include aging Portlanders into activities and communities is critically important, as is stemming social isolation that has many deleterious effects.

*Action Item 1 – Reduce Social Isolation among Older Adults***:** Social isolation and disengagement from social interaction can be harmful to people of any age, but older adults and people with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to the effects of isolation. Housing policies, services provisions, and community-generated approaches are needed to ensure that those of all ages and abilities remain connected and thriving in their communities.

*Action Item 2 – Improving the Language that Pertains to Aging and Older Adults***:** Language matters! In the field of gerontology there has been a move away from terms such as "senior citizen" and "the elderly." Terms like "older adults" and "elders" are more politically correct, but there is a need to expand how we speak (and think) about the aging process and older individuals. TriMet uses the term "honored citizens" which has been embraced by some, and there have been suggestions to change the term "long term care" to "long term living." Equally important is the pressing need to move away from need-based and deficit-laden approaches to aging and to think the opportunities, existing abilities, and possibilities that can emerge from aging of Portland's population.

*Action Item 3 – Advance Civil Rights, Equity, and Social Sustainability for Older Adults***:** There are numerous efforts in Portland that aim to increase opportunities across classes and groups of people in a sustainable and equitable manner. Portland's Title VI (Civil Rights) Program Plan aims to remove barriers and conditions that prevent minority, low-income, limited English proficiency and other disadvantaged groups from receiving access, participation, and benefits from City programs, services, and activities. One example of an improvement that needs to be made is the accommodations for various people with disabilities at public meetings (e.g., captioning); best practices should be developed and shared, as well as a list of vendors/service providers capable of improving access during such meetings. Additionally, Portland's Office of Equity and Human Rights is a new agency charged with providing education and technical support to City staff and elected officials, as well as recognizing and removing systemic barriers to fair and just distribution of resources, access, and opportunity, starting with issues of race and disability. Older adults are not explicitly detailed in either effort and should be addresses. Equity and sustainability must consider the aging of the population as population aging may be the biggest demographic shift over the next several decades.

# Action Area: Civic Participation and Employment

**Background:** In order for Portland to achieve its goal to be a healthy, thriving city, it is necessary for citizens to engage in volunteer and civic activities, as well as find quality, gainful employment. Older adults represent one of the few natural resources that are increasing and it is important to both consult elders during citywide processes, as well as encouraging older and younger people to work together toward the end of improving the health and sustainability of Portland. Opportunities for volunteer activities and paid employment will also be an area of great importance if Portland is to continue to be a place that fosters a high quality of life, livability, and economic viability.

*Action Item 1 – Foster Meaning Involvement of Older Adults in Citywide Processes*: Citizen participation is required in urban planning processes in Oregon, yet meaningful involvement has proved to be much harder to facilitate. Even rarer is engagement of older adults in a manner that utilizes their skills, experience, and wisdom, especially those who come from a range of socioeconomic and education backgrounds. Although aging advocates have been pushing for an age-friendly Portland and local researchers have tapped into older adults' and caregivers' day-to-day experiences, an increase in direct participation from older adults is still needed in order to improve Portland's age friendliness.

*Action Item 2 – Educate Individuals on Ways to Advocate for Issues and Shape Policy*: Being an agent of change requires insight and knowledge of policies, systems, and ways to enact change. Older adults who have first-hand experience and knowledge of issues in the system should be educated on ways that they can affect policies and approaches that are taken in Portland. Although our city is considered by some to have an inclusive and participatory system, it is important that additional opportunities are created for advocacy, including individuals who have been historically underrepresented and unheard.

*Action Item 3 – Improve Access to Employment Opportunities and Reduce Ageism*: Being older does not mean that one does not have a need for work. In fact, there is evidence that ageism exists in work environments in Portland and that older adults have a great need for earning wages that can help support the daily needs. Additionally, older adults as a group have emerged as a leader in entrepreneurial activities in the United States and have the ability to contribute substantially to businesses and organizations. The City of Portland is considered a model employer and is improving its hiring practices for people with disabilities. What is also needed is an approach to fostering employment for older adults with existing companies, as well as providing paths to entrepreneurial activities and the ability to contributor to innovative activities.

# Action Area: Social Participation

**Background:** Older adults are not homogeneous in their interests and activities outside of the home. Therefore, a range of social participation strategies and approaches are needed for this growing population that facilitates opportunities for activities in the community and with institutions. Currently, opportunities exist for social participation in a variety of settings – e.g., faith-based organizations, higher education – but activities are not readily available to older adults and/or they are not designed to support the specific requirements of older adults who are frail or have special needs.

***Action Item 1 – Create a Directory of Age-friendly Activities*:** Older adults who live in Portland as well as those visiting from within or outside the region should have directory where they can find the various age-friendly activities that exist in Portland. This would range from cultural activities (e.g., museums, theater) to health-related programs (e.g., food preparation, fitness) to education (e.g., free classes, presentations) to faith-based organizations (e.g., churches, synagogues). This directory should detail the accessibility of the venues hosting the events, as well as information for how to request accommodations. This type of directly should be useful to people of all ages and abilities and it would be an amenity for those travel to Portland as tourists and visitors.

***Action Item 2 – Celebrate the Lives and Experiences of Older Portlanders*:** Portland's history should be celebrated and recorded so that future generations have the ability to learn directly from people who lived through our city's growth and transformations. Storytelling, oral histories, and written histories are several ways to pass along this knowledge and experience and it provides an opportunity for much needed intergenerational exchanges and programs.

***Action Item 3 – Support Neighborhood-based Efforts for Older Adults*:** Portland is a city of neighborhoods which includes volunteer neighborhood associations, an Office of Neighborhood Involvement, and myriad organizations and events. Neighborhood associations, formal and informal groups, and city agencies need to focus on involving older adults in social activities, as well as being intentional to learning about and from those older adults within their geographies. Neighborhood associations should consider appointing multigenerational and/or aging representatives, neighborhood association and districts coalition offices should explore supporting village organizations[3] such as the Eastside Village in Portland.[4]

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[3] Source: Village-to-Village Network: http://www.vtvnetwork.org/. Villages are membership-driven, grass-roots organizations that, through both volunteers and paid staff, coordinate access to affordable services including transportation, health and wellness programs, home repairs, social and educational activities, and other day-to-day needs enabling individuals to remain connected to their community throughout the aging process.

[4] Source: Eastside Village PDX: http://eastsidevillage.wordpress.com/. The Eastside Village, PDX service area will cover all or part of 13 Portland neighborhoods: Buckman, Kerns, Laurelhurst, Sunnyside, North Tabor, Montavilla,  Hazelwood (west of 122nd), Hosford-Abernethy, Richmond, Mt Tabor, Mill Park, South Tabor, and Powellhurst-Gilbert (north of Powell).

# Action Area: Communication and Information

**Background:** Communication and the access of information in today's society can be constant and overwhelming. Different age cohorts have different levels of comfort and ability to use various media and although we seem to be moving toward communicating through digital communication formats, there are a variety of preferences for older adults, including print media and community information areas (e.g., pin boards, pamphlets, displays). In order for Portland to be age-friendly with respect to communication and information, it is important to provide information in an easy-to-find manner, improve online resources and formatting (e.g., age-friendly websites), utilize existing organizations to disseminate information and opportunities for engagement and activities, and provide educational opportunities for learning new technologies and media.

*Action Item 1 –Develop a Central Clearinghouse for Aging-related Information:* Information about services, events, social activities, and other issues that are useful to older adults in Portland is vast. Although Multnomah County has a hotline – with a real person on the end of the line – the City of Portland lacks such a service. Partnering with the County or providing a central clearing for information would be helpful to older adults.

*Action Item 2 – Improve Online Resources and Create Standards for Age-friendly Media:* Online age-friendly interfaces are not very common although guidelines are available (e.g., Oregon Health and Science University). Having a list of best practices and standards for online communication will be helpful to consumers and producers of information.

*Action Item 3 – Improve the Dissemination of Communication and Information through Existing Organizations:* There are many organizations that are underutilized and underappreciated when it comes to the aging network. Faith based organizations, neighborhood associations, and senior centers are examples of places where information exchanges can and should be concentrated. A concerted effort is needed to understand how information is disseminated using electronic and print materials.

*Action Item 4 – Age-friendly Campaign:* What does age-friendly mean and why does it matter? How can we become more age-friendly and how can individuals contribute? These questions surround the push to make all cities age-friendly and Portland, in particular, seems to be primed to take the initiative to the next level. An educational campaign should be launched that focuses on: highlighting the fact that our city is aging in an unprecedented fashion; understanding that aging is a personal issues that affects everyone; providing examples of what age-friendly is (e.g., respecting older adults, visitable housing, intergenerational mentoring); and highlighting opportunities for community support and action. (See "What is a Caregiver Campaign" for an example.[5])

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[5] Source: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation: http://whatisacaregiver.org/.

# Action Area: Community and Health Services

**Background:** Community and health service may be one of the most important aspects of an age-friendly city as it is critical for the health and well-being of people of all ages and abilities. We are at a moment in time when health care transformations are in front of us and it will be critical that we create a system of services and care in Portland that meets the needs of an aging population.

*Action Item 1 – Improving Older Adult Wellness and Preventive Health Care:* The scientific evidence has pointed to the need for moving away from a focus on acute care and highly specialized service providers toward team health and preventive approaches to health care. As health care continue to evolve in the near future, Oregon and Portland have an opportunity to be innovative in developing systems of care and support. In addition to preventive approaches to health, hospitals and long-term care settings need to be better integrated into the fabric of our neighborhoods so that environments are supportive and healing, rather than barriers and detrimental to our health.

*Action Item 2 –Emergency management:* From earthquakes to volcanic eruptions to wind storms, Portland is vulnerable to emergencies. Planning for vulnerable populations is paramount in emergency preparedness and Portland has a need for improving its response systems from City agencies to neighborhood volunteers.

*Action Item 3 – Neighborhood Hubs:* Housing and transportation should provide accesses to key services that meet the daily needs of people of all ages and abilities. Service areas of Portland are lacking in services and infrastructure (e.g., access to sidewalks, government services, fresh food) and should be targeted for improvement if we are to meet the City's goal of becoming more equitable. In order to become age-friendly, we need to be intentional in our approaches to identify neighborhood hubs and removing barriers to age friendliness in these critically important areas for neighborhood residents. Two areas that should be of particular interest are ensuring that libraries are age-friendly hubs, and that neighborhood schools are transformed in community centers that meet the needs of a range of residents.

*Action Item 4 – Educational Campaign on Active Aging:* Active Aging is a fundamental component of age-friendly cities as it looks at aging individuals in a holistic manner. Services and health care, in part, critical for promoting active aging, but individuals also need to be educated and empowered as to how that can positively affect their own health and well-being. Such an educational campaign would be helpful to all ages and abilities and should focus broadly on individual and group health.