Age & Dementia Friendly Belchertown

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN

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TUFTS Health Plan FOUNDATION

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Acknowledgements

This Community Assessment and Action Plan for making Belchertown an Age and Dementia Friendly Community was developed through funding from the Tufts Health Plan Foundation and technical assistance from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. This project could not have been complete without the hard work and dedication of the Age and Dementia Friendly Working Group that included the following individuals:

- ➢ Jessica Langlois, Director of the Belchertown Council on Aging
- ➢ Doug Albertson, Town Planner
- ➢ John Belding, COA Board member retired Director of Planning at Central MA Agency on Aging
- ➢ Becky Martin, resident and former caretaker
- ➢ Christopher Pronovost, Chief of Police
- ➢ Lorna Stone, Christopher Heights
- ➢ Gail Gramarossa, Resident, (former Belchertown Selectboard chair)

Thanks also Lewis Louraine and Belchertown Community Television (BCTV) for broadcasting the Public Forums and posting recordings of these meetings online.

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Executive Summary

The Age and Dementia Friendly Belchertown Community Assessment and Action Plan was developed with assistance from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission through their Age and Dementia Friendly Pioneer Valley Initiative with funding from the Tufts Health Plan Foundation. This initiative allows PVPC to provide technical assistance to municipalities in the PVPC region (Hampshire and Hampden Counties) and brings together individuals and organizations that are working on similar projects to learn from experts and other community partners about best practices, policies and programs that support aging adults.

Belchertown has a population of 14,888, of which 2,108 or 20.9% are 65 or older. According to data obtained from the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Community Profile, older residents of Belchertown do better than state averages in several healthy aging indicators but have higher rates of tooth loss, obesity and hypothyroidism. They are also less likely to meet CDC guidelines for physical activity or have annual dental exams.[1]

The number of older adults who are veterans of military service is higher (21.8%) than the state (18.8%), and 24.5% of people over 65 live alone. More than 15% of residents over 65 are diagnosed with deafness or hearing impairment and 4.5% have self-reported vision difficulty. Over 21% of people over 65 have self-reported ambulatory difficulties while 3.8% are diagnosed with mobility impairments, and 12.5% of people over the age of 65 have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's or Dementia.[2]

Community Engagement

Residents of Belchertown were engaged in this Community Assessment in three ways: through an Age and Dementia Friendly Working Group, administration of a Belchertown Livable Community Survey (a shorter version of a survey developed by AARP), and through two public forums that were held using Zoom Meetings and also broadcast live on Belchertown Community Television (BCTV).

A total of 135 survey responses were collected through online promotion on social media and municipal websites, and hard copies distributed by the senior center in brown bag food distribution packages and to those who received hard copies of the Senior center newsletter. More than 94% of survey respondents were over the age of 60, and 63% were over the age of 70. As the Belchertown Livable Community Survey was administered during the state-mandated shutdown, social isolation was an issue of major concern, with fifty-five (55) respondents saying that this was a concern since the start of the pandemic while only nine (9)

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[1] Massachusetts Healthy Aging Community Profile (2018)

[2] Ibid.

respondents said that it was a concern prior to COVID. Other concerns that were greater since the start of the pandemic included getting basic maintenance completed on a home or apartment (33 since the pandemic, 15 prior to the pandemic), accessing quality health care (28 since the pandemic, 12 prior), and having reliable and safe transportation (19 since, 10 before).

At the Age Friendly Belchertown forum (broadcast on Zoom and BCTV), participants commented on transportation challenges in the community, especially for people with disabilities. Some participants noted that with the closure of Baystate Mary Lane in Ware, most people will need to get to Palmer (to Baystate Wing) or to Northampton (Cooley Dickinson Hospital and medical offices) for medical appointments. Food insecurity, housing, access to affordable internet services, and information about accessible trails were also some of the comments gathered at this first Public Forum.

The second Public Forum included a presentation by a representative from the Alzheimer's Association about how to recognize the signs of dementia and how to communicate with people who have dementia. Forum participants who had experienced caregiving for an older parent with dementia noted that they appreciated the practical suggestions on how to communicate with someone with dementia, and that this would be a useful training for schools and community members who have elder relatives. Forum participants also commented that support for caregivers is important as the experience of losing someone to Alzheimer's can take a big emotional toll, and coordinated care is critical as some people with dementia have a number of health issues.

Review of Existing Plans and Reports

PVPC staff reviewed existing plans and reports that have been completed in Belchertown for language and recommendations that support older adults. The reports that were reviewed include the Belchertown Housing Needs Assessment (2009); the Regulatory Assessment for Healthy Community Design (2016); a Route 202 Bikeability Assessment; Walk Audits of Route 202 Common to the Courthouse and Stop & Shop to Crystal Spring Plaza; the Municipal Vulnerability Program report (2018); the Carriage Grove Master Plan (2020) and the Belchertown Master Plan Economic Development Update (2021).

The Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community

The Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative modified a model originally developed by the World Health Organization to include nine domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community. This model combines domains of the social and built environment that support an aging population, one that is increasingly at risk of having Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia. Community engagement in Belchertown revealed concerns related to aging in place that were accentuated by the pandemic. These included social isolation, finding contractors or funding for basic home repair and maintenance, and accessing health care.

The Community Assessment highlights areas within the Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community where supports or environments should consider people with dementia as well as older adults. One of the main aspects of being a Dementia Friendly Community involves building awareness among many sectors of the community. This is a priority for the Belchertown Council on Aging and one of their first priority actions is to schedule trainings on how to recognize the signs of dementia and communicate with people who have dementia.

Communication, Information and Technology

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of technology for communication, shopping, participating in fitness programming, and telehealth services, as well as for maintaining social and family connections when the Senior Center, businesses, restaurants and cultural venues were closed. The pandemic also exposed a "Digital Divide," particularly among older adults. This divide can be caused by the expense of purchasing a device or internet service as well as the knowledge of how to use devices such as computers or laptops, or the software for online communications or meetings.

During the pandemic the Belchertown Senior Center implemented a tablet loan program to assist people who did not own equipment in having access to technology, and trained people on how to use the tablets. The Senior Center also assisted people in connecting to low-cost internet that was available to eligible residents during the pandemic. Most high-speed internet service in Belchertown is provided by Spectrum. It is critical that town officials negotiate with this provider to ensure that low-cost connection options are available to all residents.

A Communications Committee, initiated by the Belchertown Selectboard, started to meet as this Assessment was in process, with the purpose of establishing a consistent and broad-reaching system of getting information out to town residents through the Town website and other avenues. The Town is fortunate to have an active cable access television station, BCTV, that broadcasts meetings and information on town events and posts recordings on the Town website.

Belchertown may also focus on facilitating a culture of support and acceptance for older adults and people living with dementia by providing staff training for local government, community organizations and businesses, and ensure that signage and information in public buildings and outdoor spaces uses large, bold fonts and simple language.

Housing

Most survey respondents (81%) said that it was either very important (22%) or extremely important (59%) for them to be able to stay in their own homes, either independently or with a caregiver as they age. However, when comparing where most survey respondents live now (68% in single family homes) with where people would like to live in the next five years if their situation changes, most choose other types of housing such as assisted living or senior independent living communities, apartments or townhomes, or accessory apartments. This

speaks to the need for having a diversity of housing options available as well as services for those who choose to remain in their own homes.

Like many communities, Belchertown has a shortage of housing that is affordable to people with lower incomes, and there are few options for people who want to downsize from single family homes to smaller homes or apartments with a bedroom on the first floor. According to the MHAC Community Profile, 7.2% of Belchertown residents over the age of 65 had incomes below the poverty line and 18.5% of homeowners over the age of 65 spent more than 35% of their income on housing (mortgage, taxes and insurance) while only 5.2% of renters over 65 spent more than 35% of their income on housing.

According to the 2019 Belchertown Town Report, the Belchertown Housing Authority manages 48 apartments for adults over the age of 65 or people with disabilities, sixteen family housing apartments and two group homes. There are no elevators available for accessing the second-floor units that are designated for seniors.

Plans for redevelopment of the Carriage Grove property included both the Christopher Heights property and development of 144 senior independent living units. The plan also includes areas for multifamily residential units, light industrial and mixed-use commercial development. Walkways are included in the plan to accommodate pedestrians and people in wheelchairs, with benches spaced along walkways and sidewalks to allow for resting or socializing. Although not directly included in the plans, the redevelopment could include a facility for memory care if the Town determines that this is a need for the community.

For those who choose to age in place, some may need help with basic tasks such as cleaning, preparing food, yard work, or transportation assistance as they start to lose physical or cognitive capacities in their later years. This is particularly true for people who live into their nineties and beyond, when the risks of cognitive or physical impairments become increasingly likely. Likewise, with age comes greater likelihood of having mobility limitations, which might require that a wheelchair ramp be built or grab bars installed in bathrooms. Help with minor home maintenance projects, yard work, snow shoveling, and other minor tasks is an area that can sometimes be addressed through volunteer programs such as the RSVP program based in Northampton, or through a Village model program. Village models are mainly volunteer-based programs that people can join as volunteer service providers or as people in need of assistance.

Identifying contractors who can modify homes to improve safety and accessibility and funding programs to help people with home modifications, and publicizing information about resources to help people at risk of eviction are some of the priority actions identified to help Belchertown residents age in place.

Buildings and Outdoor Spaces

Buildings and outdoor spaces provide places for people to gather, recreate, socialize and exercise both indoors and outside. Parks with accessible walking trails, sidewalks, bike paths and bike lanes, accessible buildings and restrooms are all facilities that are important for inviting active transportation, recreation and social interaction. According to the Belchertown Livable Community Survey, parks (77 respondents) were second to restaurants (102 respondents) in terms of places where people liked to spend their free time prior to the pandemic and were the most used places during the pandemic (49 respondents).

Participants in the Age Friendly Belchertown public forum commented that it would be helpful to have a map of trails and walking routes noting levels of difficulty and accessibility for people with mobility impairments, and also whether dogs are allowed on the trails. Participants also commented that a newsletter noting recreation programs available for people of all ages would encourage people to be more active. Others noted that many rural roads, including Barton Avenue, are not safe for walking as cars travel fast and there are no shoulders for pedestrians.

Making all public buildings and outdoor spaces Dementia Friendly and ADA accessible; updating and expanding the ADA assessment and transition plan; increasing connectivity and accessibility of outdoor spaces and trails to other amenities, and creating a plan for locating outdoor gathering places and seating are some of the recommendations for improving outdoor spaces and buildings in Belchertown.

Transportation and Streets

Transportation services available in Belchertown include limited bus service through the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) which operate on a fixed route from Belchertown center to Amherst and UMass along Route 9. The PVTA also offers door-to-door on demand van service for seniors (over 60) and people with disabilities, and paratransit services are provided for people with disabilities who live within ¾ miles of a PVTA route.

The Senior Center also offers rides in town with a wheelchair accessible van, and operates a ride service to out of town medical appointments in personal vehicles with drivers who are paid through funding from WestMass Elder Care. Senior Center rides are available Monday through Friday during hours when the senior center is open. The driver service will assist people to get to their appointments, but riders must be able to transfer safely and independently in and out of their homes, the driver's car, and the medical building. One forum participant noted that it is difficult for people with disabilities to get to doctors' appointments out of town as the Senior Center van does not give rides outside of Belchertown.

Although most respondents to the Belchertown Livable Community Survey said that they drive themselves as their main means of transportation, just over 13% said that they walk to get to the places that they need to go. According to the WalkScore calculation (at www.walkscore.com) the Walk Score near the Belchertown Senior Center is 45 out of 100, a

score that indicates that the community is "car dependent." Recommendations have been made in previous assessment reports for improvements to roadways to create safer conditions for walking and biking and to make sidewalks more accessible. The Town does not currently have a Complete Streets program which could be a source of funding for improvements to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

Annual surveying of older adults and people with disabilities to monitor transportation needs, expanding low-cost transportation services, developing a plan to interconnect networks of trails and bicycle facilities, and implementing programs that promote safe driving are some of the actions identified to improve transportation resources for older adults in Belchertown.

Health and Community Services
The care needs of older adults who are aging in place can vary from assistance with basic tasks such as cleaning, shopping, cooking, yard work, snow shoveling, and minor home maintenance projects; to full-time medical or home health assistance provided by professional or family caregivers.

WestMass Elder Care is the designated Aging Services Access Point and Area Agency on Aging for Belchertown, providing a number of critical services for older adults and their families. The Belchertown Senior Center provides assistance for residents over the age of 60 in many areas including assisting with access to healthy or prepared food through congregate meals (when the Senior Center is open), the Brown Bag food distribution program, and Meals on Wheels; assistance with signing up for insurance through the SHINE (Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone) program; and providing health screenings on site. As noted above, the Senior Center also provides transportation services, and also programs to help with balance, strength, and overall fitness.

According to data from the Community Profile compiled by the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative, 12.5% of Belchertown residents over the age of 65 have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias. With a population of approximately 2,100 people over 65, this means that approximately 260 people in Belchertown are living with dementia.

Some goals for improving Health and Community Services include cataloguing existing community, social and health service programs in town, collaborating with local organizations to train and educated health care and social service providers on how to access services and inform clients about town resources, and continuing to identify barriers for residents who need assistance in accessing services.

Social Participation and Inclusion
The pandemic increased feelings of social isolation among many populations but was especially difficult for older adults who relied on the Senior Center for social programming, meals, and transportation services. The pandemic increased the incidence of feelings of social isolation

among survey respondents by almost 600%, with nine respondents having concerns prior to the pandemic and 55 respondents saying that they have been concerned with social isolation since the state-mandated stay-at-home order.This is not surprising as most respondents said that before the pandemic they spent time in restaurants and cafes (102 respondents), or attended church or other faith-based organizations, meetings or civic activities, went to the gym, or volunteered for charitable organizations, while during the pandemic few people visited any of these venues other than parks and outdoor spaces, which became important gathering places.

The Belchertown Cultural Council provides a range of engaging, entertaining, and educational community events for older adults to participate in, and also organizes events at the Belchertown Senior Center.

The Belchertown Cultural Council organizes town-wide events, including Art Week, Food Truck Fridays, and Winter Light Night on the Belchertown Common. Ensuring that the locations of these events are accessible for people in wheelchairs or that assistance is provided if needed, can ensure that the events are inclusive for people of all ages. Including older adults, as well as people with dementia and their caregivers, in the planning for activities and events can ensure that the events themselves are inclusive for people of all ages and abilities.

Intergenerational programming is another way to ensure that community members build an understanding of the needs and interests of older adults, and that the skills and experience that older adults have to offer are celebrated in the community. The Senior Center is located close to the Belchertown High School, providing an excellent opportunity for such programming.

Belchertown can encourage social participation and inclusiveness by seeking funding to provide staffing for Memory Cafes and meaningfully engaging older adults and people with dementia in developing programs and services; training library staff and providing programming for people with dementia, continuing to build intergenerational programs, and ensuring access to outdoor activities and spaces.

Employment and Civic Engagement

According to the Belchertown Community Profile close to 27% of people over 65 were employed in the past year (at the time data was collected). Most of the respondents (75%) to the Belchertown Livable Community Survey are retired, while 10% said that they do not anticipate ever fully retiring. The remaining 15% planned to retire within 3 years (4%), 6-10 years (7%), 10 years (1%) or were not sure (3%). Less than 3% of respondents said that they needed help finding employment.

The Belchertown Senior Center offers assistance in matching local employers with younger seniors who are looking for work, although this program had to be put on hold during the pandemic.

Many survey respondents (8%) said that they needed help finding volunteer opportunities, with 6% of the total respondents saying that they did not know how to find these opportunities. One participant in the Public Forum said that she did not know how to find about volunteer opportunities and thought it would be helpful to know what would be required in different volunteer positions.

Some recommended strategies for providing opportunities for older adults to work and volunteer in the community include fostering an age friendly attitude in town through education and outreach; increasing awareness among employers on the benefits of hiring older workers, and providing trainings for new board or commission members.

Public Safety

Most survey respondents said that they felt safe in Belchertown, with 41% saying they feel safe most of the time and 57% saying they always feel safe. Survey respondents were also asked if they feel informed about what to do in the event of a weather or other local emergency, and 91% said that they did feel informed.

The Belchertown Council on Aging participates with the Police and Fire Departments in the TRIAD program which is a national organization initially started by the National Sheriffs' Association, the International Chiefs of Police, and the AARP. Engagement of older adults in the SALT program is a great way for municipal staff to hear about the concerns of older adults, and also to provide them with education on basic safety in their homes. SALT (Seniors and Law Enforcement Together) is the TRIAD program on the community level.

The SALT program and staff at the Senior Center assist residents with filling out the File of Life documents that include important medical information and are stored in a prominent location in case of emergencies. This program also allows people to voluntarily put their names on a list if they have dementia and may wander from their homes.

Some recommendations for improving safety for older adults include posting information on the SALT program on the municipal website, providing regular trainings for emergency personnel on recognizing the signs of dementia, and seeking funding to expand cooling stations and emergency shelters.

Access, Equity and Inclusion

Access, Equity and Inclusion domain should be considered throughout all the domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community. Improvements that benefit people who may be living with a disability or with dementia can benefit the whole community.

In Belchertown, sectors of particular concern include people with dementia, veterans, LGBTQ+, people living with disabilities, people with substance use disorders, and people living in different types of residential environments. When implementing the Actions included in the

attached Action Plan, the Town should consider how strategies can reach these sectors and how people directly affected can be included in the process of planning and implementation of priority actions.

Some prioritized actions to improve Access, Equity and Inclusion include creating an "age friendly business" recognition program in the community, conducting outreach to people at risk of social isolation, and developing intergenerational programs with the schools.

Action Plan and Plan Implementation

The Age and Dementia Friendly Belchertown Action Plan includes goals and actions improving the livability of Belchertown for people of all ages and making the town a welcoming and supportive place for people living with dementia. The Action Plan identifies Lead Entities, partners, metrics for measuring progress, and project priorities.

The Age and Dementia Friendly Belchertown Working Group was formed to work with the PVPC on the development of this Community Assessment and Action Plan. An implementation committee made up of members of this working group and others identified by the Working group will be developed to implement strategies found in the Action Plan section of this report.

Introduction

This Community Assessment Report was developed with assistance from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission through their Age and Dementia Friendly Pioneer Valley Initiative that provides technical assistance to municipalities in the PVPC region (Hampshire and Hampden Counties) through funding from the Tufts Health Plan Foundation. This initiative also brings together individuals and organizations in the PVPC region on a quarterly basis to learn from experts and other community partners about best practices, policies and programs that support aging adults.

The report is organized by the Domains of Livability of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community. Although communities do not have to develop Action Plans for every domain in this model, assessing where communities are in each domain area can be helpful to establish a baseline understanding of where the community is and helps participants to measure progress going forward.

This Community Assessment draws from existing plans and assessments that have been completed for the Town in the past and incorporates the results of the community engagement activities to develop recommendations for actions that the Town can take going forward to be a more livable and welcoming place for people of all ages and abilities.

Background

Belchertown has a population of 14,888, of which 2,108 or 20.9% are 65 or older. According to data obtained from the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Community Profile, older residents of Belchertown do better than state averages in several healthy aging indicators but have higher rates of tooth loss, obesity and hypothyroidism. They are also less likely to meet CDC guidelines for physical activity or have annual dental exams.[3]

The majority of Belchertown's population is White (96%) with the remaining population identifying as Asian (3.2%) and Black or African American (0.8%). The number of older adults who are veterans of military service is higher (21.8%) than the state (18.8%), and 24.5% of people over 65 live alone. More than 15% of residents over 65 are diagnosed with deafness or hearing impairment and 4.5% have self-reported vision difficulty. Over 21% of people over 65 have self-reported ambulatory difficulties while 3.8% are diagnosed with mobility impairments, and 12.5% of people over the age of 65 have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's or Dementia.[4]

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[3] Massachusetts Healthy Aging Community Profile (2018)

[4] Ibid.

The Town of Belchertown joined the Age Friendly Pioneer Valley initiative in August of 2020. At that time, all public buildings were closed due to a State mandated shutdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Town applied for Age Friendly Community designation through AARP and was awarded the designation in November of 2020. The Age Friendly Community Designation gives the Town two years to develop a Community Assessment and Action Plan. Submission of this report to the AARP will finalize the Age Friendly Designation for the Town. Submission of the Action Plan to Dementia Friendly Massachusetts and signing a pledge will also make the Town a Dementia Friendly Community.

Community Engagement

Residents of the Belchertown Community were engaged in this Community Assessment in three ways: through an Age and Dementia Friendly Working Group, administration of a Belchertown Livable Community Survey (a shorter version of the AARP Livable Community Survey), and through two public forums that were held using Zoom Meetings and also broadcast live on Belchertown Community Television (BCTV).

Working Group

The Age and Dementia Friendly Belchertown Working Group was formed to oversee the process of developing a Community Assessment and Action Plan. The group was facilitated by staff from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission with support from an intern from the UMass School of Public Health. The Belchertown working group included the following individuals:

➢ Jessica Langlois, Director of the Belchertown Council on Aging

➢ Doug Albertson, Town Planner

➢ John Belding, COA Board member retired Director of planning at Central MA Agency on Aging

➢ Becky Martin, resident and former caretaker

➢ Christopher Pronovost, Chief of Police

➢ Lorna Stone, Christopher Heights

➢ Gail Gramarossa, resident and former chair, Belchertown Selectboard

Once this Community Assessment and Action Plan is finalized, the Working Group will meet on a regular basis to oversee the progress of implementing the strategies included in this report and report successes to AARP and Dementia Friendly Massachusetts.

Belchertown Livable Community Survey

The Working Group reviewed the AARP's Livable Community Survey as well as shorter versions of the survey that had been developed in other communities. A survey specific to the needs of the Belchertown community was developed and the final survey was formatted to fit onto

seven pages with a cover letter on the first page so that it could be easily printed and distributed to people who preferred to fill out the hard copy of the survey rather than taking it online. Hard copy surveys were distributed with brown bag food distribution packages, and also to people who requested them and those who receive hard copies of the Senior Center newsletter. Senior Center staff entered hard copy survey responses into the online platform.

Surveys were also administered online with a link that was publicized on the COA website, and on COA and Town Facebook pages. Survey respondents were entered into a drawing for two Stop and Shop Gift Cards.

A total of 135 surveys were completed. Community engagement for the development of the Community Assessment was directed to older adults and people who care for them in order to understand the experiences of older adults living in Belchertown. The survey reached its mark as more than 94% of survey respondents were over the age of 60, and 63% were over the age of 70. The majority of survey respondents were White and non-Hispanic (93%) while 1% each were Chinese, Hispanic, and Black or African American, and 4% of respondents "preferred not to say." Most survey respondents (81%) have lived in Belchertown for more than five years.
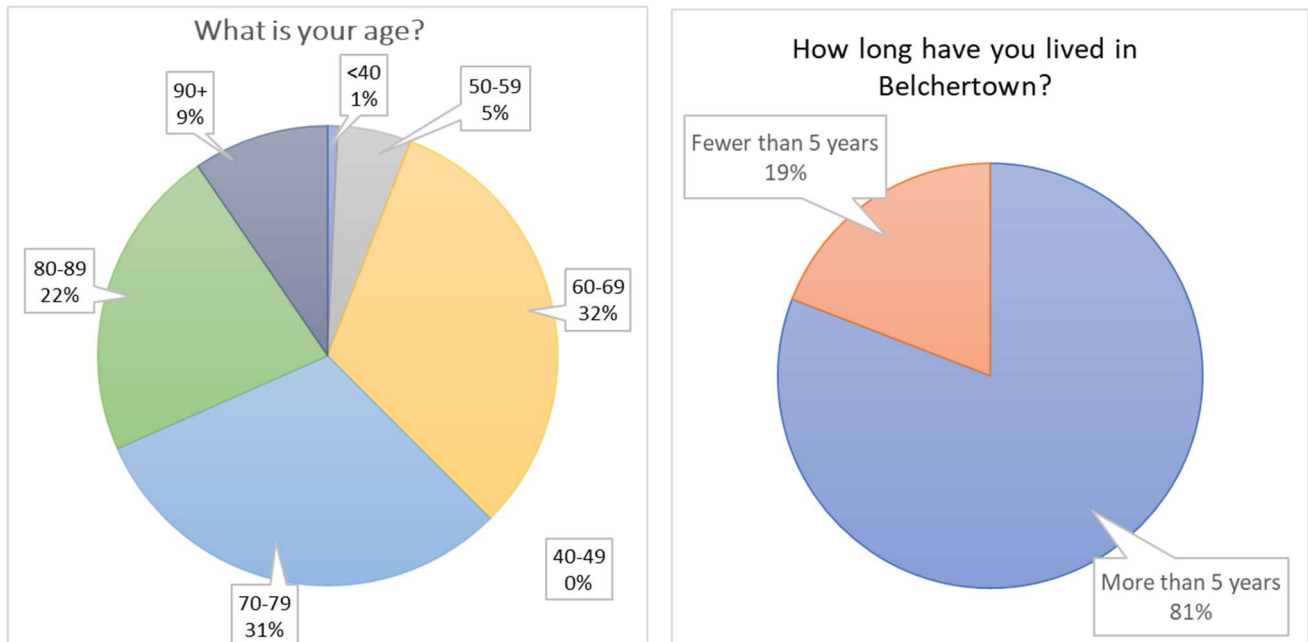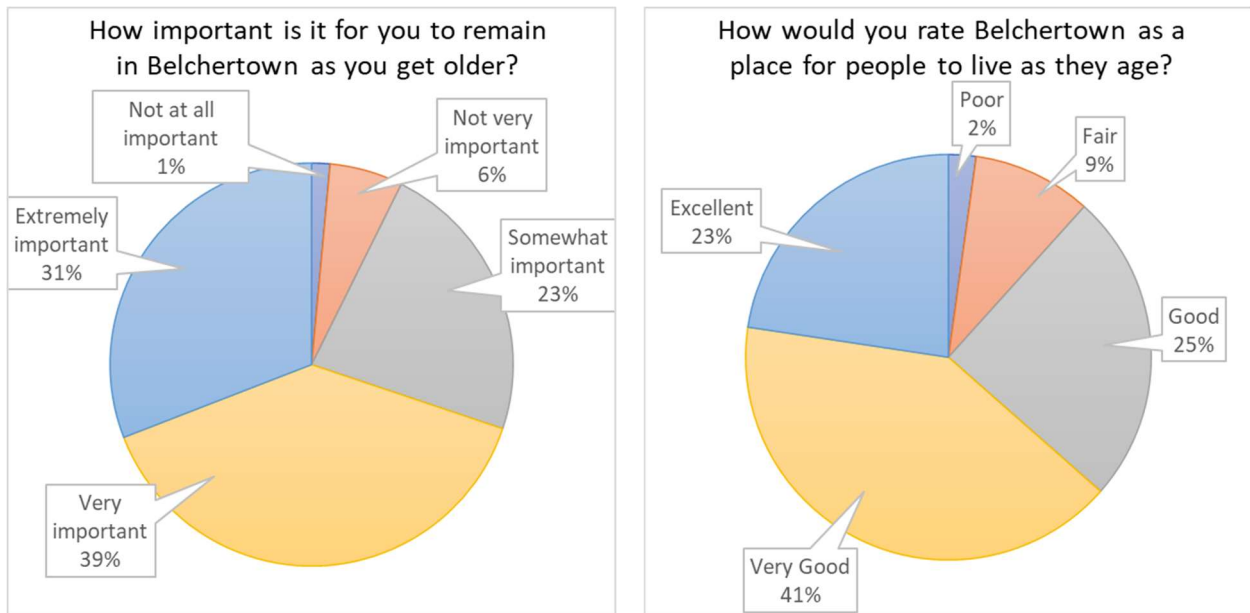

Figure 1 - Characteristics of Belchertown Livable Community Survey Respondents

Figure 2 - Belchertown Livable Community Survey – Is Belchertown a good place to grow old?

The majority of survey respondents (64%) said that Belchertown was an Excellent or Very Good place for people to live as they age, while 11% said that the community is a Fair or Poor place to live. While it may be impossible to please everyone, it is important to understand the aspects of a community that make some people feel that it is not the best place in which to grow old. Seventy percent of respondents said that it was either very important or extremely important for them to be able to stay in Belchertown as they got older.

As the Belchertown Livable Community Survey was administered during the state-mandated shutdown, social isolation was an issue of major concern, with fifty-five (55) respondents saying that this was a concern since the start of the pandemic while only nine (9) respondents said that it was a concern prior to COVID. Other concerns that were greater since the start of the pandemic included getting basic maintenance completed on a home or apartment (33 since the pandemic, 15 prior to the pandemic), accessing quality health care (28 since the pandemic, 12 prior), and having reliable and safe transportation (19 since, 10 before).
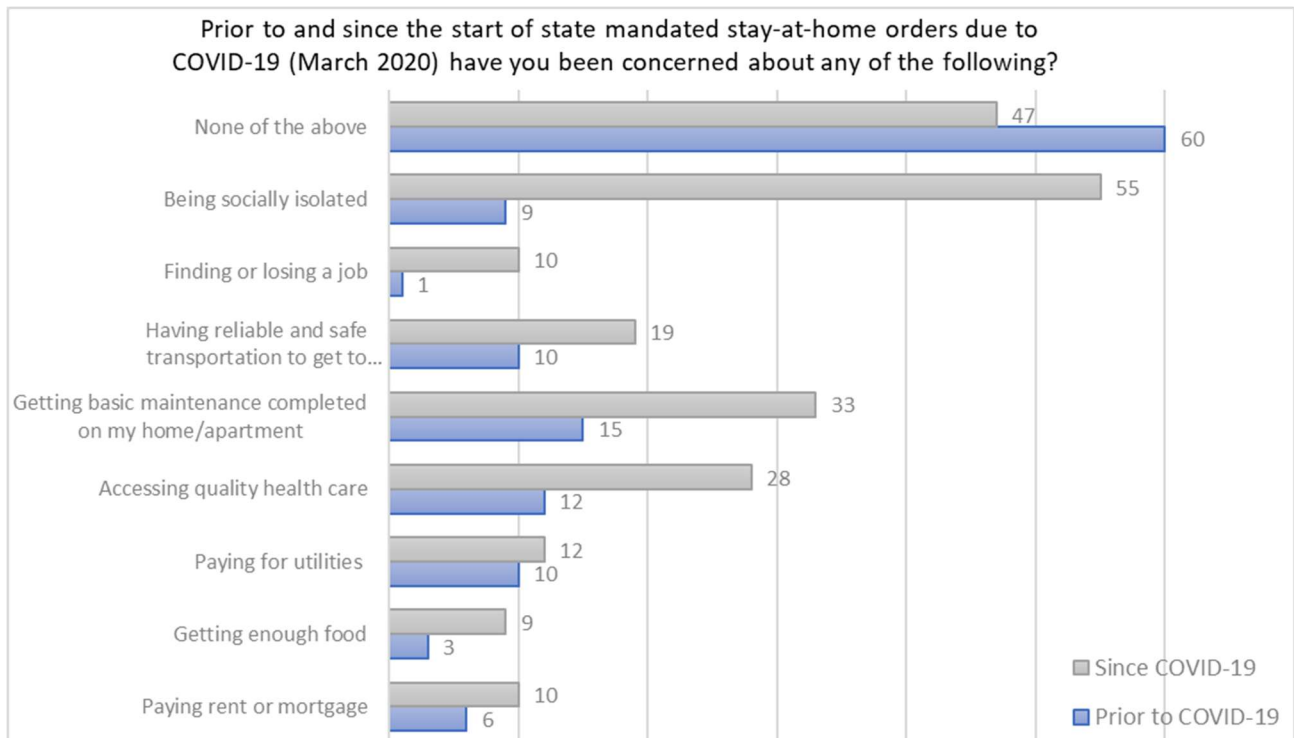
Figure 3 - Concerns prior and during the pandemic (Belchertown Livable Community Survey, 2020)

Public Forum #1 – Age Friendly Belchertown, February 28, 2021

The first public forum to gather community input on Belchertown as an Age Friendly Community was held on Zoom and was broadcast live on Cable Access TV. Members of the Working Group were in attendance as well as a few members of the public, with others (potentially) watching on Cable Access TV. A recording of the Forum was posted on the Belchertown Cable Access website for people to view at a later date.

Forum participants commented on transportation challenges in the community, especially for people with disabilities. While the Senior Center provides transportation in town using vans owned by the Town, it does not offer trips beyond the town boundaries. Many people need rides to medical appointments, and some participants noted that with the closure of Baystate Mary Lane in Ware, most people will need to get to Palmer (to Baystate Wing) or to Northampton (Cooley Dickinson Hospital and medical offices).

Forum participants also noted that the Sargent Street Rapid Care clinic that had been located in town was not open. Food insecurity, housing, access to affordable internet services, and information about accessible trails were also some of the comments gathered at this first Public Forum. A full list of comments is included in **Appendix B.**

Public Forum #2 – Dementia Friendly Belchertown, March 10, 2021

The second Public Forum included a presentation by a representative from the Alzheimer's Association about how to recognize the signs of dementia and how to communicate with people who have dementia. The presenter noted that age is the greatest risk factor for Alzheimer's or Dementia, and that the risk of dementia can be lowered through good nutrition, exercise, cognitive activities, and socializing. Conditions including macular degeneration, hearing loss and social isolation can exacerbate dementia.

Forum participants who had experienced caregiving for an older parent with dementia noted that they appreciated the practical suggestions on how to communicate with someone with dementia, and that this would be a useful training for schools and community members who have elder relatives so that they can learn how to interact with family members. Forum participants also commented that support for caregivers is important as the experience of losing someone to Alzheimer's can take a big emotional toll, and coordinated care is critical as some people with dementia have a number of health issues.

One participant asked how the Town can develop an understanding of where people who have been diagnosed with dementia live, and whether or not they have a caregiver or need assistance. A suggestion was made to work with hospitals or health care providers to better understand the need that exists in the community. Emergency personnel also keep a list of households where people with dementia or other health conditions live so that this information is available in case of emergency.

Review of Existing Plans and Assessments

Several assessments have been conducted in Belchertown over the last six years through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's (MassDPH) Mass in Motion program which promotes active living and healthy eating, and through other grant programs. The following reports were reviewed for this Assessment, and recommendations have been referenced throughout the report as they apply to the Domains of Livability in Belchertown.

- ➢ Belchertown Housing Needs Assessment (2009)
- ➢ Belchertown Regulatory Assessment for Healthy Community Design
- ➢ Route 202 Bikeability Assessment
- ➢ Walk Audits of Route 202 Common to the Courthouse and Stop and Shop to Crystal Spring Plaza
- ➢ Municipal Vulnerability Program (MVP) Report (Fuss & O'Neill 2018)
- ➢ Carriage Grove Master Plan (2020)
- ➢ Belchertown Master Plan – Economic Development Update (2021)

Findings from these assessments have been integrated into this report as they relate to planning for an aging population.

The Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community

The World Health Organization developed a model for assessing a community's ability to support an aging population through assessment of domains of livability, or elements of the physical and social environments that are key determinants of whether people can remain healthy, independent and autonomous as they age. The original model included Eight Domains of Livability for an Age Friendly Community. Over time communities found that it made more sense to plan around domains of the community that impact their abilities to be both Age and Dementia Friendly. The Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative (MHAC) modified the Eight Domains of Livability into the Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community, which includes nine domain areas. Some communities have also added domains such as Food Security or Financial Stability to the suggested domain areas. We have used the MHAC model to assess where Belchertown is in terms of each of the domain areas. The model is helpful in considering elements of a community that extend beyond the built environment and that are critical to the needs of older adults, but also contribute to healthy, active, more livable communities.
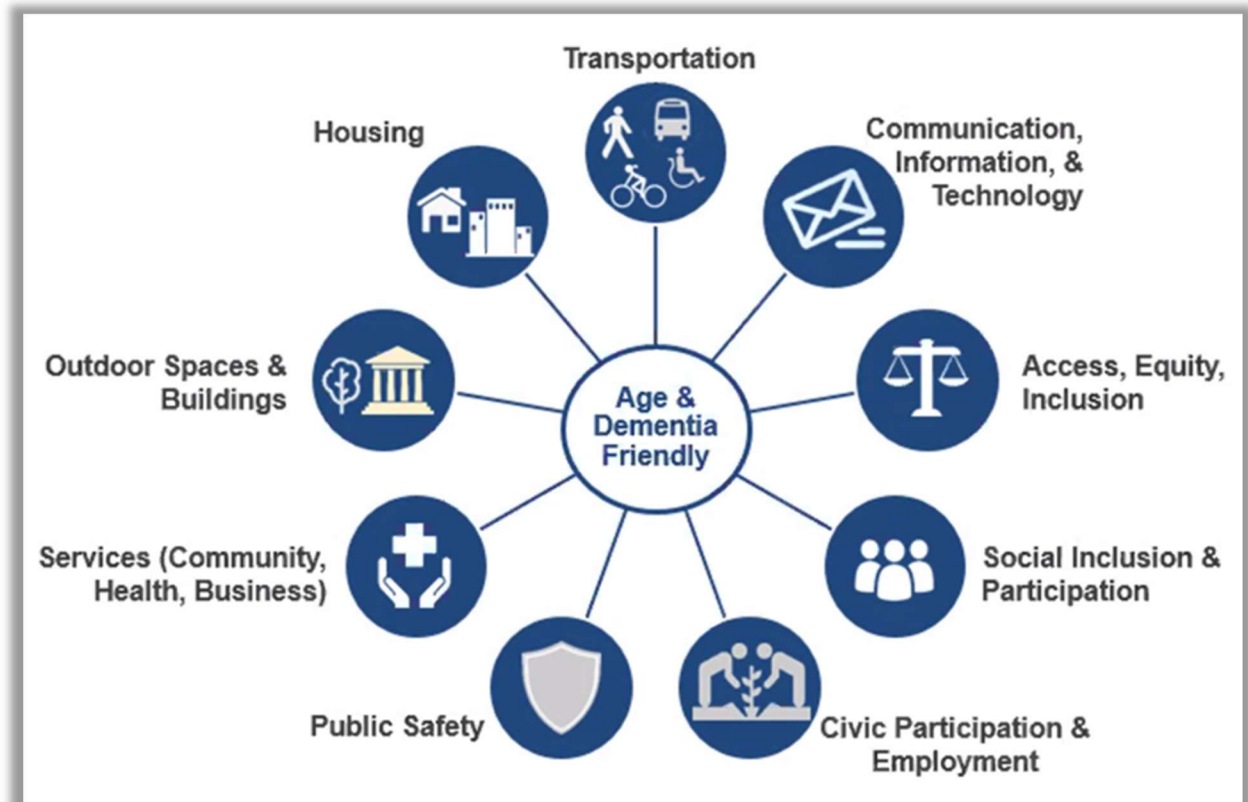

Figure 4 - The Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community (Source: Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative)

Community engagement in Belchertown revealed concerns related to aging in place that were accentuated by the pandemic. These included **social isolation**, finding contractors or funding for **basic home repair and maintenance**, and **accessing health care**, likely due to transportation services not being available or the fear of going to a hospital or medical offices during the pandemic.

Planning for a Dementia Friendly Community

As populations age, the number of people diagnosed with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia also increases along with the need for understanding of the signs of dementia and how to work with and support people with dementia and the people who care for them. It is important for many sectors of the community to be educated about the signs of dementia and for communities to provide safe and comfortable spaces where people with dementia and their caregivers can meet or seek respite care. Dementia Friendly Communities foster the ability of people living with dementia to remain in community and engage and thrive.

Dementia Friendly America is a national network of communities, organizations and individuals seeking to ensure that communities across the US are equipped to support people living with dementia and their caregivers. Dementia Friendly America offers suggestions for how the following ten sectors of a community should be involved in planning for a dementia friendly community[5]:

- **Transportation, Housing and Public Spaces (local government)** – Infrastructure that makes communities more livable for people with dementia and their caregivers.

- **Businesses** – Dementia supportive customer service, environments and polices that support employee caregivers.

- **Legal and Advance Planning Services** – Legal services that help vulnerable clients express their wishes early and avoid problems such as unpaid expenses.

- **Banks and Financial services** - Dementia friendly practices that help maintain clients' independence while protecting them from problems.

- **Neighbors and Community Members** – Raising awareness to help neighbors and community members understand and support people living with dementia.

- **Independent Living** – Home-based services available to maximize independence and promote autonomy and a high quality of life.

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[5] https://www.dfamerica.org/what-is-dfa

- **Communities of Faith** – Faith communities use dementia friendly practices to provide a welcoming, compassionate environment and spiritual connection.

- **Care throughout the Continuum** – Early diagnosis of dementia and ongoing medical care; patient education; and connecting patients and their caregivers with community resources that promote quality of life.

- **Memory Loss Supports and Services** – A spectrum of settings and services needed by people with dementia – from long-term care facilities and assisted and independent living residences, to home care, adult day services, and hospice care.

- **Emergency Planning and First Response** – Community planning and family preparation considers safety, security, and needs of people with dementia in disaster planning and emergency response.

This Community Assessment highlights areas within the Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community where supports or environments should consider people with dementia as well as older adults. However, as the main aspect of being a Dementia Friendly Community involves building awareness among the sectors listed above, the following recommendations are focused specifically on the next steps that Belchertown will take once designated as a Dementia Friendly Community.

Dementia Friendly Community Goals & Strategies

DF Goal: Build awareness, acceptance, and a culture of support for people living with dementia and the people who care for them.

Strategies

1. Develop a committee of the Age and Dementia Friendly Belchertown Working Group to implement trainings and a public awareness campaign about dementia in Belchertown.

2. Recruit volunteers to become Dementia Friends Champions who will provide trainings for community groups and neighbors.

3. Encourage trainings on how to recognize signs of dementia and communicate with people with dementia for all municipal staff.

4. Continue the Triad program that partners emergency personnel (Police and Fire Departments) with the Council on Aging and older adults to address safety concerns of older adults in the community.

5. Identify and reach out to family care givers to connect them with support programs and opportunities for meeting with other caregivers of people with dementia.

6. Schedule memory cafes at the Senior Center and other locations in the community.

7. Educate restaurant owners about Purple Table programs and provide trainings for interested restaurant owners and their staff.

Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Belchertown

The following sections summarize the findings from the community engagement process, discussions with the Age and Dementia Friendly Working Group and the review of existing plans and reports. Each section includes Assets and Accomplishments as well as Recommendations that apply to the domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community as illustrated in Figure 4, above.

Communication, Information and Technology

The Communication, Information and Technology Domain spans all other domains, as residents must know where to find information about programs, services, and places that are age and dementia friendly in order to use and appreciate these resources. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of technology for communication, shopping, participating in fitness programming, and telehealth services, as well as for maintaining social and family connections when the Senior Center, businesses, restaurants and cultural venues were closed.
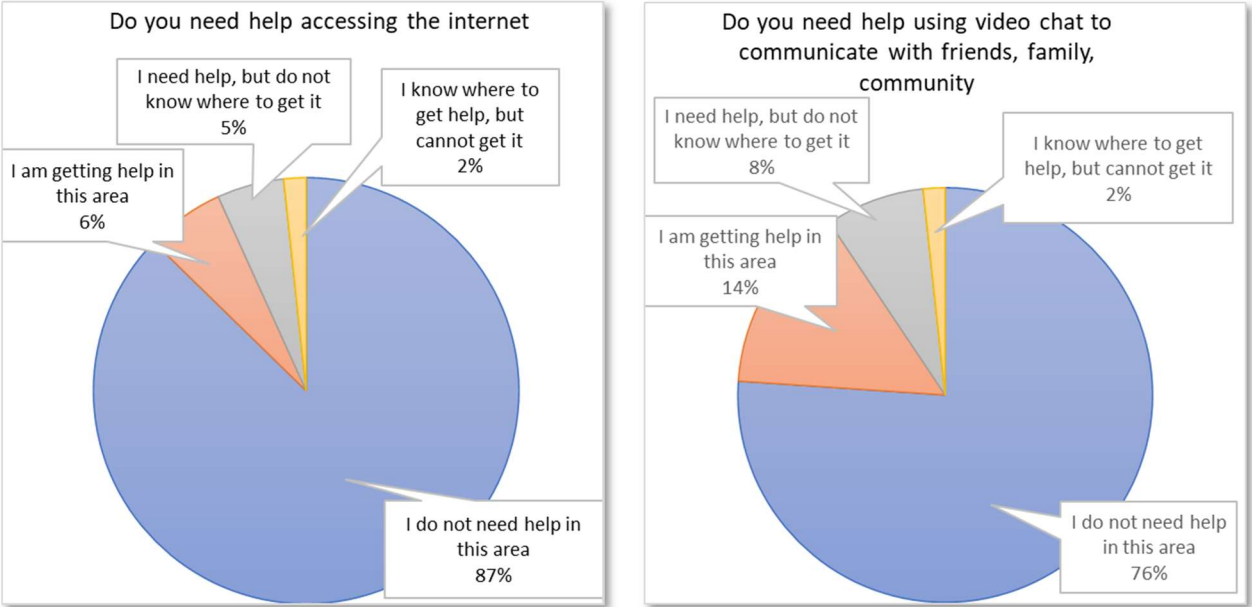
Figure 5 - Assistance needed with accessing the internet or using video chat software (Belchertown Livable Community Survey – 2021)

The pandemic also illuminated the gap in use and access to technology known as the "Digital Divide." This divide can be caused by the expense of purchasing a device or internet service as well as the knowledge of how to use devices such as computers or laptops, or the software for online communications or meetings. Although most survey respondents said they did not need help accessing the internet, 7% said that they needed help and either did not know where to get it or were not getting help, while 6% said that they were getting help accessing the internet.

More respondents said that they needed help in using video chat software to communicate with friends, family and the community (Figure 5).

The Belchertown Senior Center implemented a tablet loan program to assist people who did not own equipment in having access to technology, and trained people on how to use the tablets. The Senior Center also assisted people in connecting to low-cost internet that was available to eligible residents during the pandemic. However, even with the knowledge, connection and equipment, understanding how to avoid online scams or malware and the cost of equipment and internet access are hurdles that are not easily overcome. Most high-speed internet service in Belchertown is provided by Spectrum. It is critical that town officials negotiate with this provider to ensure that low-cost connection options are available to all residents.

A Communications Committee, initiated by the Belchertown Selectboard, started to meet as this Assessment was in process, with the purpose of establishing a consistent and broad-reaching system of getting information out to town residents through the Town website and other avenues. The Town is fortunate to have an active cable access television station, BCTV, that broadcasts meetings and information on town events and posts recordings on the Town website.

When asked where they get information about services for older adults, most survey respondents said that the Senior Center (116 respondents) was their main source of information (Figure 5). The Senior Center publishes a regular newsletter that is mailed to people who want hard copies and emailed to others. During the pandemic the Senior Center also conducted regular wellness check-in calls by phone for people who were not comfortable with online services or communications. Postings on the COA page on Facebook about this program drew referrals from friends or family members. An estimated 25-30 phone calls to seniors were made monthly through this program.
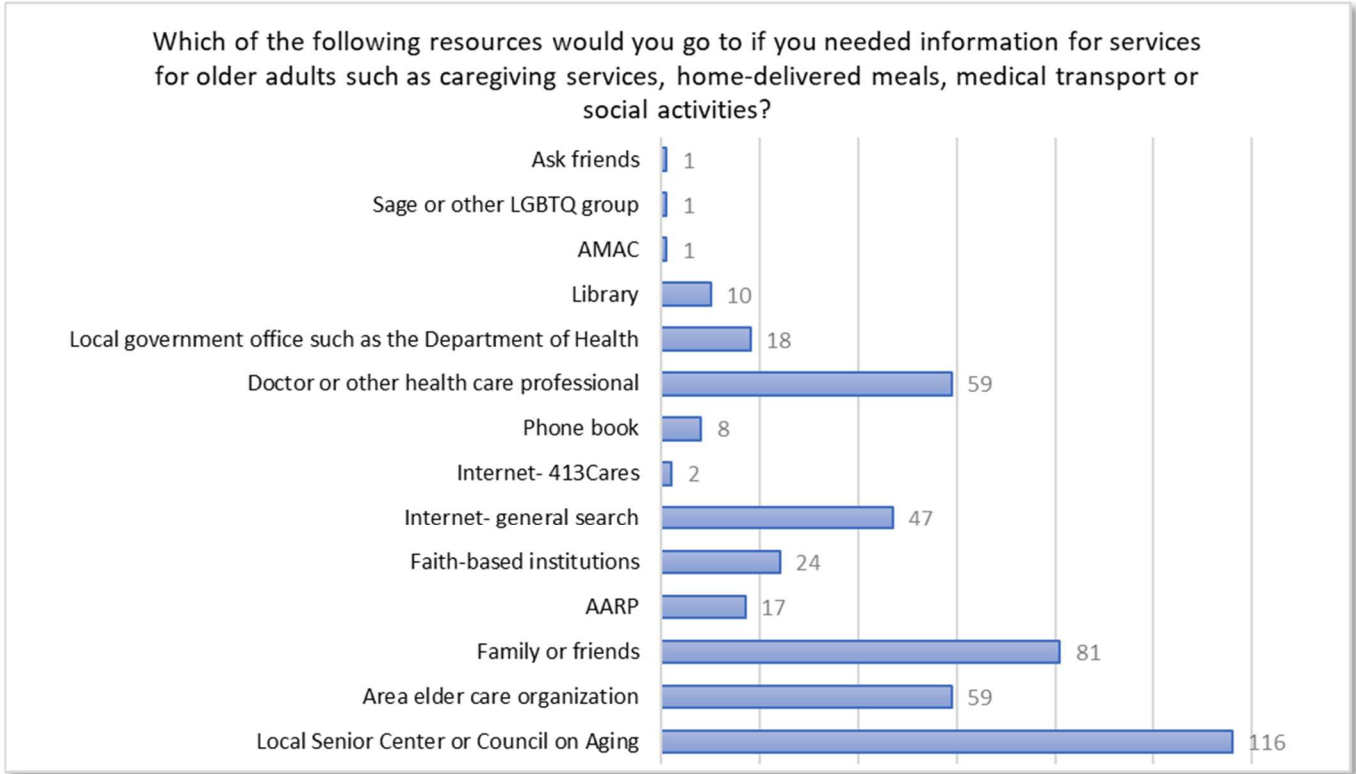
Figure 6 - – Main resources for information about services for older adults (Source: Belchertown Livable Community Survey, 2021)

During the first public forum, participants commented that they did not know where to look for information about volunteering or services available in the community, or places to walk that are handicapped accessible. A member of the communications committee was present and said that the committee is looking at making the Town website easier to navigate so that it is clear where this information can be found.

The Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) report for Belchertown included emergency communication to vulnerable populations as a societal challenge, particularly for those who no longer have land lines. The work that of the Triad program which partners the COA with fire and police departments to understand the needs of older adults, and to create a database of locations of home bound seniors or others with medical or mobility concerns is an important response to this concern.

Connection to the faith community can be another way for people to get information when they are not connected to internet or they do not receive the Senior Center newsletter. A resident who attends the St. Francis of Assisi Parish commented that the church puts out a weekly bulletin with volunteer opportunities and other updates. The four churches currently in operation in Belchertown are:

- Christ Community Church (Dwight Chapel) – 1255 Federal Street – 413-253-0292, https://www.gracefortheway.org/

- Belchertown United Church of Christ (The Congregational Church) – 413-323-7442, http://www.belchertownucc.org, email: belchertownucc@gmail.com

- Hope United Methodist Church – 31 Main Street – 413-323-7584, http://hopebelchertown.org, email: btownhopeumc@gmail.com

- St Francis of Assisi Parish – 24 Jabish Street – 413-323-6272

Assets/Accomplishments

➢ Communications Committee has formed to look at the Town website and other communication resources.

➢ The Senior Center publishes a regular newsletter, conducts regular wellness calls for those who are not connected, and has an Ipad loan program in place as well as training for people who do not own their own devices for accessing online programs or other resources.

➢ There is an active faith community that could be included as partners in community information and outreach efforts.

➢ Cable access television station is a critical partner in broadcasting local meetings for people who do not have internet or otherwise can't access online meetings.

Goals & Strategy Recommendations

Goal 1: Ensure that all residents have access to information about policies and programs that provide opportunities for health and community engagement.

Strategies:

1. Create a basic, but effective Municipal Communication Plan. Inventory what municipal info is being shared by each department, including both non-emergency and emergency channels;

   • Survey residents to see how they are getting their news

   • Identify gaps and weaknesses in local communications; adopt effective methods to fill communication gaps.

2. Participate in all communication outlets (Newsletters/Posting Boards/Blogs/Twitter/ Facebook, All Call system, local cable access television); identify the best formats for homebound seniors to broaden communications with residents of all ages.

3. Continue to identify and reach out to socially isolated residents via personal contact from trusted municipal staff; develop "Buddy system" with volunteers who can reach out to socially isolated residents.

4. Add links on COA page of the Town website to timely information and broadcasts of interest to older residents. Collaborate with other COAs to share links and resources.

5. Collaborate with existing community-based networks such as faith communities, civic groups, education channels, business groups, to share information.

6. Update the Town website regularly and poll users about the ease of navigation. Design for the broadest range of consumers, including those with visual or physical impairments, multiple languages, etc.

7. Continue to build relationships with private sector institutions and service providers; provide information on programs that are available through partnerships between public and private facilities.

Goal 2: Facilitate a culture of support and acceptance for older adults and people living with dementia.

Strategies:

1. Provide staff training for local government, community and civic organizations, faith communities, and businesses on how to recognize and effectively communicate with customers with dementia.

2. Ensure that municipal staff are trained on how to work with people with dementia and older adults, and that services provided at municipal facilities always include friendly, person-to-person assistance.

3. Ensure that printed information – including official forms or invoices and text on visual displays in public spaces - has large lettering with main ideas in bold type; simple and straightforward sentences and simple language; and is available in multiple languages as needed.

4. Ensure that telephone answering services give instructions slowly and clearly and tell callers how to repeat the message at any time. Offer options for people with hearing impairments.

5. Ensure that reading glasses or magnifying glasses are available at election locations for people with visual impairments.

6. Research the cost and feasibility of offering information and other communications in Spanish or other languages as needed (review updated Census data). Engage community members who speak languages other than English to determine whether interpreter and translation services are needed for municipal documents and public meetings.

Recommendations/strategies from previous reports

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Report (2018):

➢ Develop/implement emergency communications system with focus on expanding an already robust system with text alerts and/or finding other ways to reach homes and individuals that do not have access to land lines.
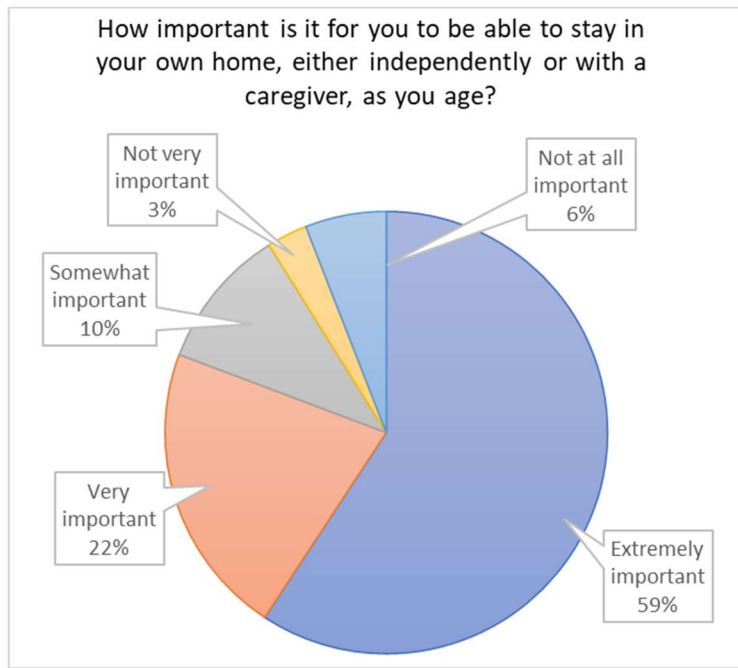
Housing

As people age, their housing needs may change in terms of the amount of living space they need or can afford, and property they want to maintain. Many people choose to locate closer to services or amenities that they can walk to when they lose the ability to drive, or when they lose a spouse and want to locate closer to community centers. The following considerations are important when considering housing for older adults:

- ➢ Affordability – Smaller or shared units, accessory apartments, home sharing
- ➢ Accessibility – 1st floor, or elevator access, wheelchair ramps
- ➢ Home Modification Loan or Grant Programs – For people who want to remain independent and in their own homes
- ➢ Assisted Living and Long-Term Care options – For people who need supported care in their later years.
- ➢ Smart Growth – Housing is located near retail, services, community centers.
- ➢ Neighborhoods – Are safe, well-let and walkable

Like many communities, Belchertown has a shortage of housing that is affordable to people with lower incomes, and there are few options for people who want to downsize from single family homes to smaller homes or apartments with a bedroom on the first floor. According to the MHAC Community Profile, 7.2% of Belchertown residents over the age of 65 had incomes below the poverty line and 18.5% of homeowners over the age of 65 spent more than 35% of their income on housing (mortgage, taxes and insurance) while only 5.2% of renters over 65 spent more than 35% of their income on housing.

Most survey respondents (81%) said that it was either very important (22%) or extremely important (59%) for them to be able to stay in their own homes, either independently or with a caregiver as they age. However, when comparing where most survey respondents live now (68% in single family homes) with where people would like to live in the next five years if their situation changes, most choose other types of housing such as assisted living or senior independent living communities, apartments or townhomes, or accessory apartments. This speaks to the need for having a diversity of housing options available as well as services for those who choose to remain in their own homes.

Figure 7 - Importance of staying at home as they age (Belchertown Livable Community Survey, 2021)
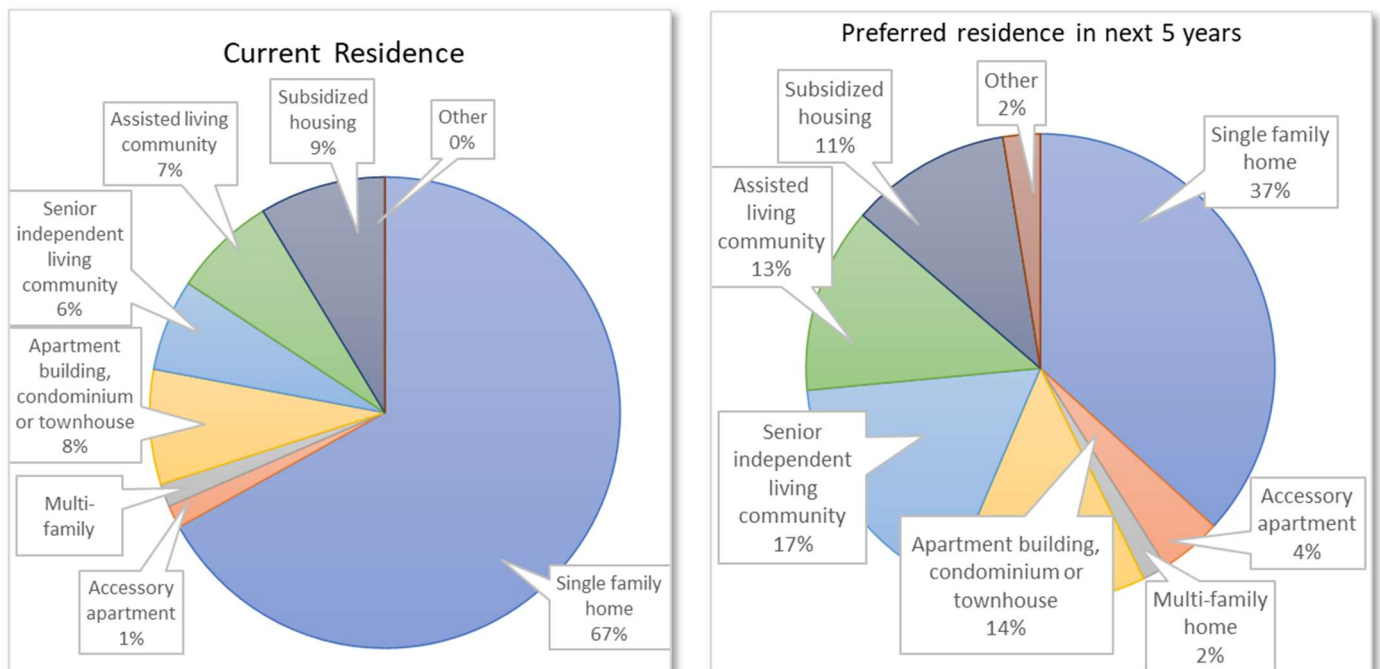
Figure 8 - Comparison of current residents, to the type of residence people would want to move to if circumstances change in the next 5 years (Belchertown Livable Community Survey, 2021)

Housing Supply

According to the 2019 Belchertown Town Report, the Belchertown Housing Authority manages 48 apartments for adults over the age of 65 or people with disabilities, sixteen family housing apartments and two group homes. There are no elevators available for accessing the second-floor units that are designated for seniors. A 2009 Housing Needs Assessment for the town noted that in total there were only 205 units of subsidized housing in the community which was far below the 10% goal for the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SDI) for the town.

Christopher Heights is a newer assisted living facility that was built on the former State School property and is one of the first phases of the Carriage Grove development plan that was completed for the town through assistance from Mass Development. The Christopher Heights facility offers 83 units of assisted living units for people with a range of income levels. Some accommodations for people with dementia, but the facility does not have facilities for people in danger of wandering. It is located within walking distance of the Senior Center and public library and offers smooth pathways for walking or rolling on the campus.

Plans for redevelopment of the Carriage Grove property included both the Christopher Heights property and development of 144 senior independent living units. Negotiations with a potential developer for these additional housing units is currently underway. The plan also includes areas for multifamily residential units, light industrial and mixed-use commercial development. Walkways are included in the plan to accommodate pedestrians and people in wheelchairs, with benches spaced along walkways and sidewalks to allow for resting or socializing. Although not directly included in the plans, the redevelopment could include a facility for memory care if the Town determines that this is a need for the community.

The 2009 Housing Needs Assessment and Action Plan notes that although the 300 units of senior housing units on the Pine Valley Plantation does not meet the criteria for SHI units, these are units that seniors can move into allowing some larger single-family homes to open up for families.

In 2019, Belchertown adopted a zoning amendment to allow owners of single-family homes to build accessory apartments with a special permit. While this ordinance may not increase the formal inventory of subsidized housing, it will allow homeowners to downsize on their property, or to have a separate living unit for family or professional caregivers to live on site.

The Town also allows mixed use development in the two business districts and allows multi-family housing in a few areas zoned as "multiple family residential." The town adopted the Community Preservation Act in 2005, allowing funds to be raised through a tax levied on real property to establish a fund that will help the community to preserve open space and historic sites, create affordable housing, and develop outdoor recreation facilities. To date the town has

used funds to support first-time home-buyers, housing authority properties, and as a contribution to development costs for Christopher Heights.
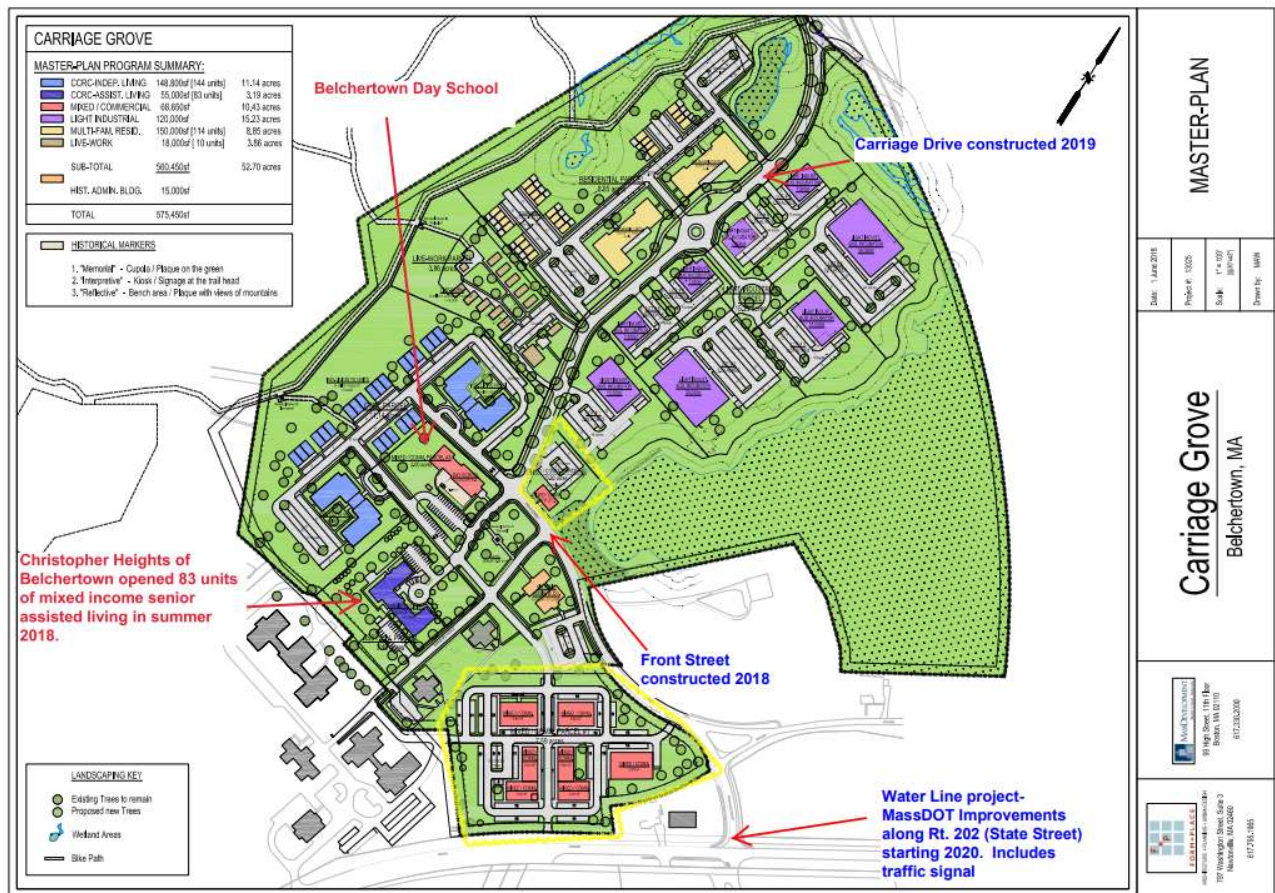
Figure 9 - Carriage Grove Development Plan (Source: Mass Development 2021)

Aging in Place

As noted above, most of the Belchertown Livable Community Survey respondents said it was either very important or extremely important for them to be able to stay in their own homes as they age. Although not everyone needs assistance as they age, many may need help with basic tasks such as cleaning, preparing food, yard work, or transportation assistance as they start to lose physical or cognitive capacities in their later years. This is particularly true for people who live into their nineties and beyond, when the risks of cognitive or physical impairments become increasingly likely. Likewise, with age comes greater likelihood of having mobility limitations, which might require that a wheelchair ramp be built or grab bars installed in bathrooms.

Do you need help getting home modifications (e.g. bars in shower, wheelchair ramp)

- I need help, but do not know where to get it — 9%
- I know where to get help, but cannot get it — 2%
- I am getting help in this area — 9%
- I do not need help in this area — 80%

Do you need help getting home repairs (e.g. new roof, electrical repairs)

- I need help, but do not know where to get it — 13%
- I know where to get help, but cannot get it — 4%
- I am getting help in this area — 4%
- I do not need help in this area — 79%
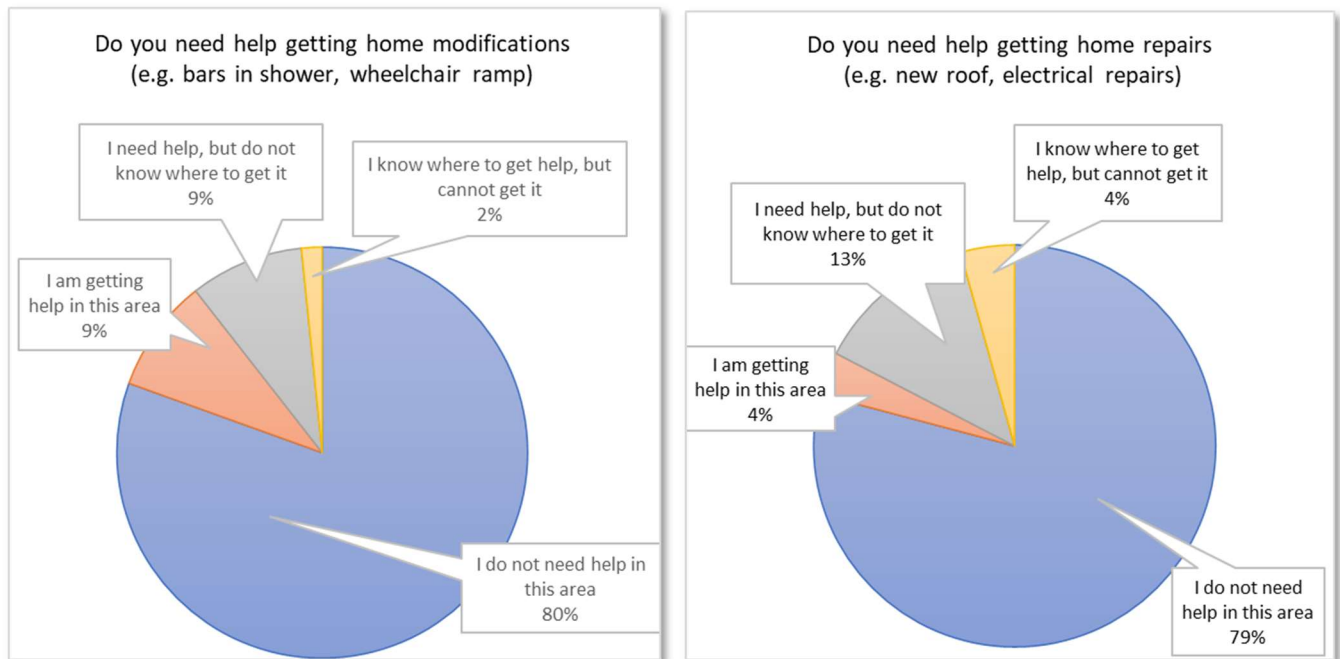
Figure 10 - Assistance needed with home modifications and Home Repairs (Belchertown Livable Community Survey, 2021)

For those survey respondents who need help with home modifications, 9% said they were getting help and 9% said that they needed help but did not know where to get it while 2% said that they were not getting the help that they needed. More respondents (13%) said that they did not know where to get help with home repairs, and 4% said that they knew where to get help but were not getting the help that they needed.

The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) administers a Home Loan Modification Program that provides low interest loans for eligible homeowners to modify their homes to accommodate the needs of older adults and people with disabilities. Loans are available to people with gross incomes up to $179,200 for a one-person household and $255,800 for a 4-person household (Figure 11). The program provides assistance finding contractors as well as applying for loans. Information on this program may be found at http://www.pvpc.org/projects/home-modification-loan-program-hmlp.

Figure 11 – 2020 Income Guidelines for the Home Modification Loan Program (PVPC)

2020 Income Guidelines

Household Size	Eligible with Gross Income up to:
1	$179,200
2	$204,800
3	$230,400
4	$255,800

At least 21% of survey respondents said that they needed help with doing simple home repair, and 13% said that they needed help but did not know where to get it. Help with minor home maintenance projects, yard work, snow shoveling, and other minor tasks is an area that can sometimes be addressed through volunteer programs such as the RSVP program based in Northampton, or through a Village model program. Village models are mainly volunteer-based programs that people can join as volunteer service providers or as people in need of assistance. Nearby programs include Northampton Neighbors, Amherst Neighbors, and Easthampton Neighbors. Each program is structured a little differently and depends on a paid or volunteer coordinator. Developing a Neighbors or Village model program may be something that the Town could investigate on a local or regional level in the future.

Assets and Accomplishments

➢ The Carriage Grove development has added 83 units of assisted living (Christopher Heights) and in the process of adding 144 units of independent living units for seniors close to the Senior Center, police station and schools.

➢ Business Neighborhood Center District encourages shared parking and variety of housing types.

➢ Accessory Apartments are allowed on single family homes by special permit, providing an option for all single family homeowners to downsize and/or make rental income on their own properties.

➢ The Town has adopted the Community Preservation Act, allowing funds to be raised for affordable housing through a tax on the assessment of real property.

➢ Residents may apply for low interest loans through the Home Loan Modification Program administered by PVPC.

Goals and Strategy Recommendations

Goal 3: Ensure that a range of safe, affordable, and accessible single and multi-unit housing options are available to meet the needs of the aging population in Belchertown.

Strategies:

1. Update the Housing Needs Assessment and develop a Housing Production Plan that includes an inventory of the existing housing stock and engages older adults in determining the types of housing desired in order for them to be able to stay in community.

   - Create a detailed inventory of suitable property in town for the development of affordable, mixed income, mixed use, and assisted living housing.

2. Ensure that a variety of supported housing options are available to meet the need including assisted living, nursing homes, and units tailored to people with dementia; ensure that affordable supported housing units are available for low to moderate income residents.

   - Develop planning and zoning tools to prioritize and incentivize housing development models that provide for a mix of housing types in individual developments.

   - Expand housing choices through research and adoption of innovative housing models, zoning and financing options - Ex. Tiny houses, cottage type housing.

   - Encourage housing development close to village centers, public transportation and major community services.

   - Monitor development of Accessory Dwelling Units and consider allowing by right rather than by special permit.

   - Adopt an inclusionary zoning bylaw to increase affordable housing opportunities.

   - Amend use and dimensional requirements to expand housing options.

   - Develop mixed-use districts.

3. Identify available Federal, State and Regional housing resources/funding sources to increase affordable housing supply in the community.

4. Develop a relationship with local land trust or support creation of a new local land trust to assist with acquiring land for future affordable housing.

Goal 4: Provide support for all Belchertown residents in locating affordable housing options and services to support aging in place.

Strategies:

1. Start a Senior Property Tax Work-Off Program.
2. Identify a group or individual to manage, administer, and implement Belchertown's housing initiatives.
3. Conduct outreach on existing affordable housing resources.
4. Assist homeowners in finding reliable and affordable home maintenance contractors and resources for modifying homes as needed to improve safety and accessibility.

5. Develop and disseminate materials regarding home modification and rehabilitation funds available for low-income households; seek funding to keep these services available.

6. Identify licensed contractors who can do home assessments that will allow people to age in place.

7. Make information and assistance available to consumers about aging-in-place on municipal and regional websites.

8. Provide resources and counseling for people at risk of eviction and identify shelters or programs to assist people who are un-homed.

9. Research and consider development of the Village Model at the local or regional level and identify NORCs (Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities) to provide assistance to elders who wish to remain in their homes and community.

Recommendations/strategies from previous reports

Belchertown Housing Needs Assessment (2009):

1. Identify group or individual to manage, administer, and implement Belchertown's housing initiatives.

2. Conduct outreach on existing affordable housing resources and establish a housing contact in town.

3. Create a detailed inventory of suitable property in town for the development of affordable, mixed income, mixed use, and assisted living housing.

4. Adopt an inclusionary zoning bylaw to increase affordable housing opportunities.

5. Amend use and dimensional requirements to expand housing options in Belchertown.

6. Create affordable housing design guidelines.

7. Purchase existing homes for affordable housing and create a deed restriction program.

8. Subsidize affordable units in future mixed-use/mixed-income housing developments.

9. Add affordable housing units to BHA developments and existing apartments in town.

10. Start a Senior Property Tax Work-Off Program.

11. Fund a Housing Rehabilitation program.

12. Develop a relationship with local land trust or support creation of a new local land trust to assist with acquiring land for future affordable housing.

Belchertown Regulatory Assessment for Healthy Community Design (2015):

➢ Develop mixed-use districts.

➢ Develop a variety of housing types within walking distance from goods, services, and green space.

➢ Revise zoning to encourage greater density.

Buildings and Outdoor Spaces

Buildings and outdoor spaces provide places for people to gather, recreate, socialize and exercise both indoors and outside. Parks with accessible walking trails, sidewalks, bike paths and bike lanes, accessible buildings and restrooms are all facilities that are important for inviting active transportation, recreation and social interaction. Amenities such as benches, shaded resting spots, and lighting all support older adults, people with disabilities, and people of all ages. The amount of physical activity that people engage in is related, in part, to the availability of safe and convenient places to walk and ride a bike. During the pandemic, parks and open spaces were vital places for people to meet with friends or to get exercise while buildings and gyms were closed. According to the Belchertown Livable Community Survey, parks (77 respondents) were second to restaurants (102 respondents) in terms of places where people liked to spend their free time prior to the pandemic and were the most used places during the pandemic (49 respondents).

Outdoor Spaces

The Town has received funding for the design and development of the Lake Wallace Sensory Trail, a handicapped accessible walking trail that borders Lake Wallace and will be connected to pathways at Christopher Heights and the Senior Center. The plan includes development of an amphitheater, outdoor classroom, a boardwalk to Foley Field, and an observation platform next to the lake. This project will provide a valuable resource for all town residents, but particularly for older adults using the Senior Center and/or living at Christopher Heights and the new independent living units in the Carriage Grove development area.

Several assessments of outdoor spaces for overall community health as well as for people with disabilities have been completed for the town in the last several years. The **Belchertown Regulatory Assessment for Healthy Community Design** noted that walkability is best in the downtown/historic area of the community. The New England Small Farm Institute has organized a community garden located near a facility that houses many older adults, allowing them access to affordable healthy food and the opportunity to partake in physical activity and socialize. The report recommends some improvements including increased intersection safety, expansion of sidewalks and bicycle networks, better transit, and more accessible and connected open spaces with parking and clearer signage to allow for older adults to move safely and more independently. The development of mixed-use districts is also an important step for Belchertown, allowing housing opportunities within walking distance from goods and services, promoting more physical activity and independence. Reducing setback requirements and more flexible off-street parking requirements can also make buildings more accessible to those walking and biking.

Participants in the Age Friendly Belchertown public forum commented that it would be helpful to have a map of trails and walking routes noting levels of difficulty and accessibility for people with mobility impairments, and whether dogs are allowed on the trails. Participants also commented that a newsletter noting recreation programs available for people of all ages would encourage people to be more active. Others noted that many rural roads, including Barton Avenue, are not safe for walking as cars travel fast and there are no shoulders for pedestrians.

Buildings for Indoor Gathering

The Clapp Memorial Library and the Belchertown Senior Center are two important public buildings for people to participate in programming during their hours of operation. The library recently installed new air conditioning making it a good place to be for people who don't have air conditioning during heat spells. The proximity of Christopher Heights to the Senior Center and public schools suggests opportunities for collaboration on programming and events, and shared use of public spaces.

Assets and Accomplishments

➢ Design for the Lake Wallace Sensory Trail have been completed and funding is in place to build the trail as well as an outdoor amphitheater and classroom.

➢ The Carriage Grove Development includes plans for connecting Christopher Heights, the Senior Center, and new Lake Wallace Trail as well as providing accessible pathways for circulation on site for pedestrians and people in wheelchairs.

➢ The proximity of Christopher Heights and the Senior Center to the Belchertown schools offers opportunities for intergenerational programming and collaborative use of spaces for programming and events.

➢ Air conditioning has been installed at the Clapp Memorial Library, offering a possible cooling center for heat emergencies. (Town Report, 2019)

Goals and Strategy Recommendations

Goal 5: Provide opportunities for use of public buildings and outdoor spaces by people of all ages and abilities.

Strategies

1. Work toward making public buildings and outdoor spaces in town Dementia Friendly & ADA accessible.

   • Update and expand ADA assessment and transition plan.

   • Activate ADA committee to develop a system to identify needed improvements to public buildings and town-owned outdoor spaces, develop prioritization plans and track action

2. Assess / solicit feedback from older residents on desired outdoor recreational opportunities to inform future expenditures on parks and recreation.

3. Encourage creation of trails, parks and bikeways close to centers of population and/or where public transportation is available.

4. Encourage development of age friendly trails in community owned conservation and recreation areas. Maintain vegetation to reduce exposure to ticks.

5. Create a plan for locating/developing outdoor gathering spaces and seating, and advocate for public outdoor seating/areas as a priority in all new business and housing projects. Develop and maintain a master map of all outdoor seating and gathering areas.

   • Encourage location of park benches where they are not isolated from other park activities.

   • Provide benches that have backs and arms at regular intervals in shady areas

6. Support Town efforts to enhance connectivity, including long-range mapping to identify easements and routes for more direct walking/biking connections to schools, shopping, town/outdoor resources, and other amenities.

7. Provide information on all trails in town, their levels of difficulty and whether they are ADA compliant and/or accessible to people in wheelchairs.

8. Require new housing projects to provide access routes to connect to existing trails or activity centers.

9. Site accessible bathrooms near walking loops, or between destinations, where possible. Provide unisex restrooms to allow someone to be assisted without causing embarrassment to themselves or another user.

10. Assess/upgrade existing lighting and signage in public buildings and outdoor spaces. Seek funding for more extensive infrastructure improvements.

11. Maintain sidewalks, parking lot and other pavement around public buildings and in parks to reduce potential trip hazards including glare, uneven surfaces, sudden transitions, etc.

12. Review Dementia Friendly Environments checklist when planning for improvements to parks, public spaces and/or public buildings:

   • Entrances are clearly visible and understood

   • Signage is clear and high contrast with background

   • Lighting is bright and include natural light where possible

   • Flooring is plain and not shiny or slippery and free of clutter

13. Make sure wayfinding markers are easily recognizable, clearly visible, and at frequent intervals.

14. Include adult fitness equipment in parkscapes.

Goal 6: Increase programming for older adults that encourages active living and social interaction in buildings and outdoor n in Belchertown.

1. Provide training to local businesses and their employees on how to recognize and work with people with dementia, and how to create Dementia Friendly environments to better serve their customers with different abilities.

2. Encourage the creation of walking groups or walking buddy programs through councils on aging or other municipal departments, posting on community website and bulletin boards

3. Establish regular, organized activities in parks, both age-specific and multigenerational, by partnering with local organizations.

Recommendations/strategies from previous reports

Belchertown Regulatory Assessment for Healthy Community Design 2015:

➢ Create more accessible and connected open spaces.

   o Include more parking, signage, and shared knowledge of existing places.

   o Reduce setback requirements in areas to make buildings more accessible to people walking/biking.

Transportation and Streets

The decision to stop driving oneself can be one of the most difficult transitions that comes with aging. Slower reaction times, difficulty seeing at night, and cognitive impairments are only a few of the challenges that people face as they age, and that make driving more difficult and potentially dangerous. Features on newer automobiles such as backup cameras and distance monitors can help with some of the difficulties with aging, and often people choose their own methods of dealing with the changes such as not driving at night or avoiding left-hand turns. Eventually some people make the decision to stop driving and rely on friends or family members to drive them or use public transportation or other transportation services available in the community. When asked if they modified their driving to make it easier or safer, most survey respondents said that they avoided driving at night or in bad weather, while other said that they avoided driving in unfamiliar areas or long distances or avoided parallel parking.

Figure 12 illustrates the continuum of assistance that is needed as people transition from being independent and driving themselves, to not driving and taking public transit, to needing help getting to the door and then through the door. When people can use public transit and walk to transit stops, it is important to have good lighting and sidewalks. When they can no longer walk, they may require paratransit or private transportation services, and in some cases caregivers to assist them into and out of vehicles.
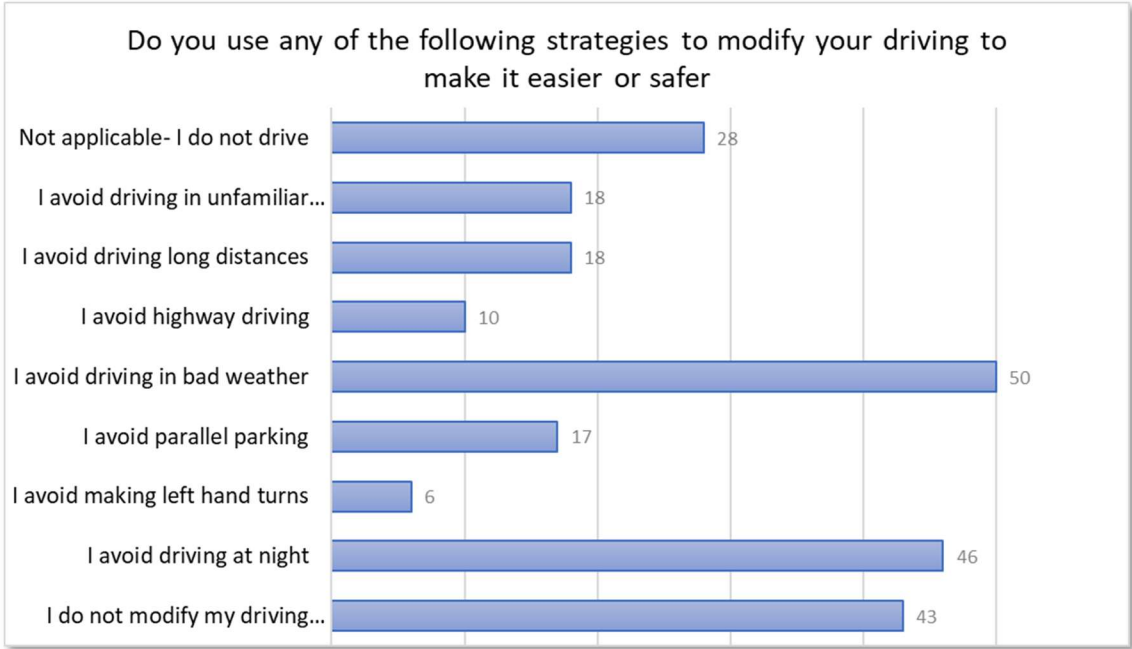
Figure 11 - Strategies employed to modify driving to make it easier. Source: Belchertown Livable Community Survey, 2021.
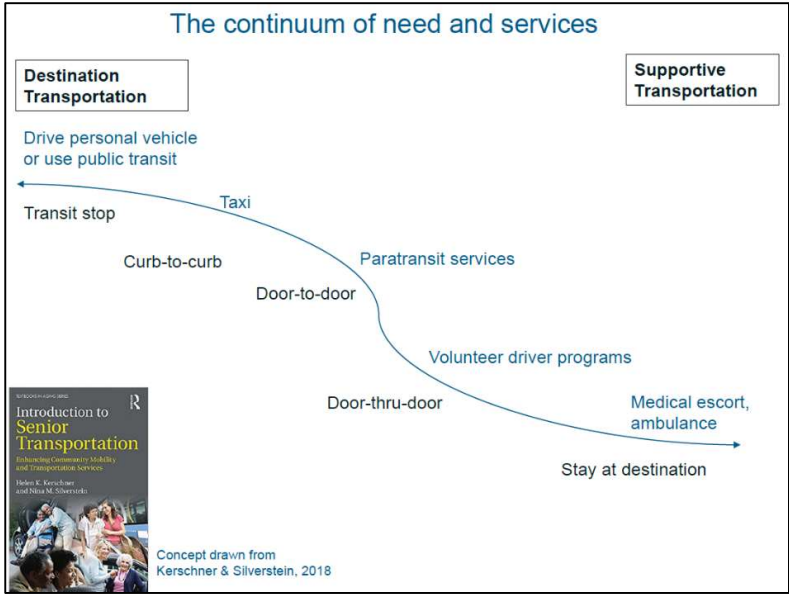
Figure 12 - The continuum of Transportation Needs and Services.
Source: Kerschner and Silverstein. Introduction to Senior Transportation (2018)

Transportation Services

Services such as public transportation via bus or train, senior center vans, and private transportation services are important to have in place when older adults in the community lose the ability to drive. Balance issues, fragile bones and the hearing and vision impairments that

come with age create additional challenges to mobility and greater need for assistance in getting around.

Transportation services available in Belchertown include limited bus service through the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) which operate on a fixed route from Belchertown center to Amherst and UMass along Route 9. The PVTA also offers door-to-door on demand van service for seniors (over 60) and people with disabilities on Monday-Friday from 8 am to 4:30 pm on a space available basis. The service provides rides within the PVTA service area. Paratransit services are provided for people with disabilities who live within ¾ miles of a city route.

The Senior Center also offers rides in town with a wheelchair accessible van, and operates a ride service to out of town medical appointments in personal vehicles with drivers who are paid through funding from WestMass Elder Care. Senior Center rides are available Monday through Friday during hours when the senior center is open. The driver service will assist people to get to their appointments, but riders must be able to transfer safely and independently in and out of their homes, the driver's car, and the medical building.

One person who attended the Public Forum commented that there is no way for people with disabilities to go out of town for medical appointements since the handicapped accessible van operated by the Senior Center does not go out of Belchertown. The PVTA paratransit service does provide rides to out of town locations, but some clarification may be needed on what the limitations are of this service.

There was also concern about the Baystate Mary Lane hospital closing in the coming year, meaning that residents will have to travel to Palmer or Springfield for appointments with Baystate. The Quaboag Connector, based in Ware, provides rides for anyone in their 9-town service area which includes Belchertown as well as Ware, Palmer, Brookfield, East Brookfield, Hardwick, Monson, Warren and West Brookfield. The service may expand to other towns pending funding. Rides currently must be scheduled in advance, but the Connector is also looking into an online reservation system that could be used to schedule rides on the same day.

Walking and Biking

Walking and biking are other ways that older adults can get around without having to rely on automobiles or transportation services. Many choose to live within walking distance of stores and amenities when they get older in order to maintain independence without needing a car. As noted above, plans for the Carriage Grove property include pedestrian circulation around the former campus with connections to the Senior Center, schools and parks.

The WalkScore calculation (at www.walkscore.com) at the Christopher Heights address is 45 out of 100, a score that indicates that Belchertown is "car dependent." This evaluation also gives the location a score of 40 for being "somewhat bikeable." This score is not surprising for a rural community as it calculates the number of services and amenities near the address for which the score is determined.

Through Healthy Hampshire, a program administered by the Collaborative for Educational Services and funded through the

Figure 13 - WalkScore for Christopher Heights and Senior Center

Massachusetts Department of Health, several assessments of Belchertown's roads and parks have been assessed for biking, walking and for accommodations for people with disabilities.

The **Belchertown Route 202 Bikeability Assessment** recommended redesigning the road to eliminate wide turn radii and shorten crossing distances for bicycles and pedestrians between Checkers Marketplace and the Senior Center to improve safety for all users. From the Senior Center to the Courthouse, the report also recommended redesigning intersections to calm traffic, creating bike lanes wherever feasible, and adding more signage could make individuals feel safer while traveling.

The Walk Audit Reports of **Route 202 Common to Courthouse** and **Stop & Shop and Crystal Spring Plaza** identified infrastructure challenges and made recommendations for improving safety and comfort of the roadways for pedestrians. General recommendations included implementing traffic calming techniques, increasing the safety and visibility of crosswalks, consolidating curb cuts and making sidewalks continuous across them, adding benches and greenery to provide shade and resting points, and connecting sidewalks to trails. Reports noted that sidewalks were too narrow in many spots and were bumpy and rough which creates a tripping hazard for older adults and is wheelchair inaccessible. The section of State Street between the Senior Center and Courthouse has no sidewalks, and the closest bus stop to the Courthouse requires a 1.3-mile walk without a designated walking space. Participants in the walk audit were concerned that the crosswalks located at the Senior Center intersection are too long and would benefit from curb extensions. At the George Hannum and Route 9 intersection the pedestrian light does not have a countdown clock or audio for those who are visually
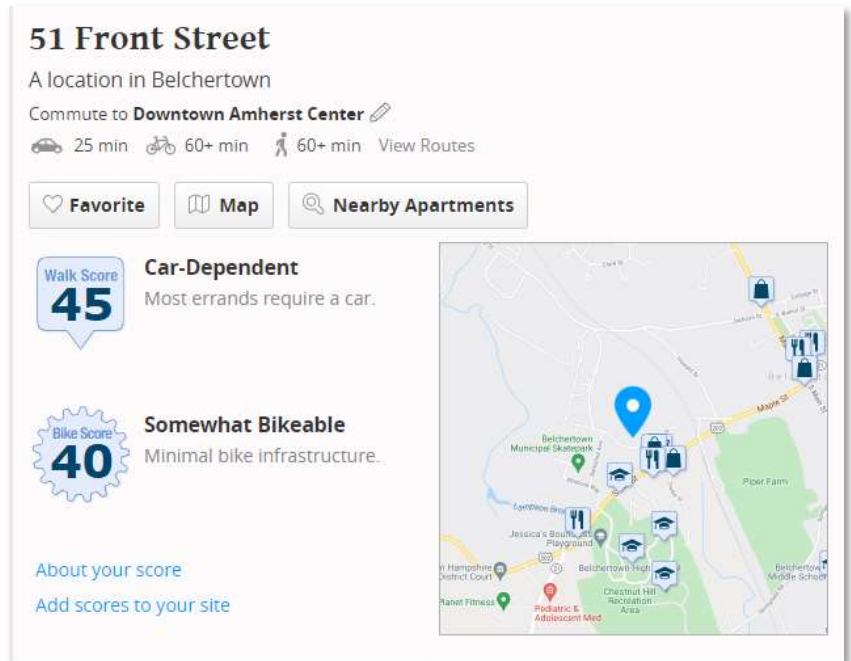
impaired. There are also no curb ramps with detectable warning strips at the George Hannum and Route 9 intersection.

The Town could benefit from adopting a Complete Streets policy or a commitment to improve roadway infrastructure for all users including pedestrians, people on bicycles, people in wheelchairs, transit riders and motorists. The Complete Streets Program, administered by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) provides up to $50,000 for communities to hire a consultant to develop a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan once they have adopted a Complete Streets Policy, and up to $400,000 for infrastructure improvements after a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan (phase 2) has been approved by the State. The process of developing the Complete Streets Prioritization Plan includes an assessment of existing infrastructure and community engagement to understand where people want to see improvements for walking and biking.

The Safe Routes to School program also provides grants for infrastructure improvements for towns that participate in the program. This funding could benefit seniors in Belchertown as well given the proximity of the school to the Senior Center and Christopher Heights.

Assets & Accomplishments

- ➢ Belchertown is served by the PVTA Route 45 & Belchertown Shuttle as well as on demand vans for seniors and people with disabilities.
- ➢ The town is served by the Quaboag Connector which provides rides within its 9-town service area.
- ➢ The Senior Center provides rides for medical appointments through paid drivers (in their personal cars).
- ➢ Sidewalks are in place in the downtown area and connect to surrounding neighborhoods.
- ➢ The Carriage Grove development plan includes a circulation plan for pedestrians and people in wheelchairs and connects destinations including the Senior Center, Christopher Heights, the proposed Lake Wallace Sensory Trail, etc.
- ➢ Assessments for walkability and bikeability have been completed through the Healthy Hampshire Mass in Motion program.

Goals and Strategy Recommendations

Goal 7: Ensure that transportation services are available to residents of all ages and abilities to allow access food, medical appointments, employment, and education.

Strategies:

1. Post information on transportation services including PVTA fixed routes and on demand services, Senior Center Van and Quaboag Connector service areas and fares on Senior Center website and provide information in multiple locations in town.

2. Survey older adults and people with disabilities annually in multiple formats to monitor transportation needs.

3. Explore the feasibility of expanding the Quaboag Connector to offer shared transportation services to a broader area and expand existing Town services as needed.

4. Expand program that pays drivers to provide rides to medical appointments out of town or other in-town appointments as needed; explore participation with RSVP and confirm whether rides are offered through that program.

5. Continue to train transit and COA van drivers on the unique needs of older adults, including best practices for how to interact, as well as recognize/respond appropriately to cognitive impairment, etc.

6. Research the cost, availability and safety of ride share service options (e,g. Lyft, Uber or taxi service); provide training on how to use Apps and determine whether assisting apps such as GoGo Grandparent would be useful to the population that needs to use ride sharing services.

7. Promote affordable home delivery services in town. Include information on stores that deliver on COA website.

Goal 8: Ensure that roads and trail networks are safe and comfortable for use by people of all ages and abilities.

Strategies:

1. Develop a plan for an interconnected network of trails and bicycle facilities that are safe and comfortable for all ages and all abilities.

2. Plan and design dementia friendly, safe roads and walking/bicycling environments for drivers and pedestrians:
   - walking/cycling paths are protected from heavy traffic
   - crosswalks on busy roads have audible cues and appropriate timing.

3. Develop a map of safe walking and biking routes for people of all ages and abilities and make it available throughout town in print and in digital form on the Town website.
   - Promote use of high visibility vest for people walking on roads.

4. Research the implications for the Town to adopt a Complete Streets Program starting with a Complete Streets Policy, hich would make the Town eligible for fund to develop a

Complete Streets Prioritization Plan and apply for funding to implement improvements to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

5. Review data on rural roads and plan for safer use by pedestrians through signage, walkable shoulders, or parallel walking routes.

6. Evaluate town-wide public parking and drop-off locations for safety, lighting, convenience and accessibility for those with special needs, i.e. low vision, physical or cognitive impairments.

Goal 9: Implement programs that promote safe driving and transition to other forms of transportation.

Strategies:

1. Support and allow space for driver skill retention with community organizations, through partnerships with AARP, AAA, RMV, Auto Insurance providers.

2. Collaborate with auto dealerships, mechanics and others town businesses to develop incentives and discounts for car maintenance for older adults; provide pickup and drop-off service for nominal fee.

Recommendations/strategies from previous reports

Belchertown Route 202 Bikeability Assessment:

➢ Town Common to Checkers – Add bike lanes when feasible; create alternative route so that bikers do not have to go over the bridge.

➢ Checkers to Senior Center - Redesign roadways (narrow turning radii, improve poor pavement quality, shorten crossing distances for pedestrians and bicyclists) to make the area more safe

➢ Senior Center to Courthouse – Square off or redesign intersections to calm traffic and encourage biking.

Route 202 "Common to Courthouse" Walk Audit Report:

➢ Implement traffic calming techniques

➢ Increase safety and visibility of crosswalks, add Push-button pedestrian signals

➢ Tighten turning radius at each intersection and driveway

➢ Make sidewalks consistent across curb cuts and driveways

➢ Add benches and plant shade trees

➢ Reduce the number of curb cuts

➢ Add sidewalks:

　　o Connect sidewalks to trails

- o Senior Center to Courthouse section of State Street
- o Bus drops people off at the common, no sidewalks between there and the courthouse – high traffic speeds

Stop and Shop and Crystal Spring Plaza Walk Audit Report

General recommendations:

➢ Consolidate curb cuts

➢ Redesign Crystal Springs Plaza intersection - Add curb bump-outs, striped pedestrian crossing, etc.

➢ Implement traffic calming techniques

➢ Increase safety and visibility of crosswalks and add pedestrian activated lights with countdown clock and audible warning for people with visual impairments (George Hannum/Route 9 intersection)

➢ Make sidewalks continuous across curb cuts and driveways

➢ Add benches, plant trees for shade

➢ Connect sidewalks to trails

➢ Add curb ramps with detectable warning strips (George Hannum/Route 9 intersection)

➢ Improve lighting

➢ Add shade trees to cool sidewalk (Route 9/Route 202 intersection)

Belchertown Regulatory Assessment for Healthy Community Design 2015:

➢ Improve intersection safety.

➢ Expand sidewalks and bicycle networks.

➢ Improve public transit options – focus on downtown and route 9 where bus service already exists.

➢ Amend parking requirements (in Zoning) to allow for more flexible off-street parking and reduce the number of spaces needed.

➢ Incorporate of pedestrian facilities into road reconstruction and maintenance.

➢ Reduce of the number of curb cuts.

Health and Community Services

The care needs of older adults who are aging in place can vary from assistance with basic tasks such as cleaning, shopping, cooking, yard work, snow shoveling, and minor home maintenance projects; to full-time medical or home health assistance provided by professional or family caregivers. The pandemic highlighted the need for assistance with accessing food either due to

difficulties in accessing transportation, fear of going out during the pandemic, or due to financial insecurity.

Very few respondents to the Belchertown Livable Community Survey said that they needed help with providing care to someone else (3% said they were getting help, 2% said they needed help but did not know where to get it); getting training for their caregiver (2% said they were getting help, 1% said they needed help and did not know where to get it); or giving their caregiver time off (4% said they were getting help, 1% said they needed help but did not know where to get it). Some who responded that they are already receiving care may be residents of Christopher Heights, which provides some services on site.

WestMass Elder Care is the designated Aging Services Access Point and Area Agency on Aging for Belchertown, providing a number of critical services for older adults and their families. Services include home care and assistance in providing home care providers; Adult Family Care (AFC) which connects people needing a supervised living environment with families who are willing to provide a living space in exchange for support and payment for caregiving; family caregiver support including counseling, support groups, training, respite, and financial assistance; options counseling services to help older adults navigate the choices and services available as care needs increase; money management; LGBTQ+ support services including a Rainbow Supper Club; and an ombudsman program.

The Belchertown Senior Center provides assistance for residents over the age of 60 in many areas including assisting with access to healthy or prepared food through congregate meals (when the Senior Center is open), the Brown Bag food distribution program, and Meals on Wheels; assistance with signing up for insurance through the SHINE (Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone) program; and providing health screenings on site. As noted above, the Senior Center also provides transportation services, and also programs to help with balance, strength, and overall fitness.

The Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QVCDC) provided some senior care assistance during the pandemic in the form of financial assistance and help with grocery shopping.

Health Care

Health care becomes increasingly important as people age and being able to access care when one loses the ability to drive can be challenging. As noted above, the Belchertown Senior Center provides rides for medical appointments for people who need them but does not provide services outside of Belchertown for people with disabilities.

Area hospitals that serve Belchertown include Baystate Medical Center in Springfield, Baystate Wing in Palmer, Cooley-Dickinson Medical Center in Northampton. Baystate Medical Practices, Cooley Dickinson Medical Group have facilities in Belchertown for medical appointments and

non-emergency services. A rapid care clinic on Sargent Street was closed during the pandemic but may be re-opening.

Assistance with Basic Tasks

In addition to being able to access medical facilities and doctor's offices, the care needs of older adults include assistance with basic tasks such as cleaning, cooking, yard work, snow shoveling, and minor home maintenance projects. The Belchertown Senior Center has paid staff who can help with some tasks. Some communities in the Pioneer Valley have implemented volunteer-based "Village Model" or "Neighbors" programs to provide assistance with these tasks. These programs are generally started and run by volunteers and may require a fee from residents who wish to sign up for services.

Access to Healthy Food

Food insecurity was a problem for many vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 pandemic but was especially prevalent among older adults who relied on senior center meals or transportation services to obtain food. During the pandemic, the Belchertown Senior Center increased delivery of Brown Bag food bags and Meals on Wheels. Stop and Shop provides food delivery for a minimum of $35 in groceries.

Belchertown hosts a farmers market and the New England Small Farm Institute which provides courses and support for small farmers. The site has also offered community gardens for Belchertown residents in the past.

Very few survey respondents (2) said that they were not able to buy food due to a shortage of money.

Assets & Accomplishments

- ➢ The Council on Aging provides activities and educational programs; health and wellness clinics; congregate meals, Brown Bag program, Mobile food pantry, and Meals on Wheels; Outreach and SHINE (Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone) programs.
- ➢ WestMass Elder Care provides many services for older adults, including counseling and resources for finding long-term care providers.
- ➢ Farmer's market and New England Small Farm Institute (NESFI) provide healthy food options; there is a community garden at NESFI close to the Senior Center.
- ➢ The Senior Center offers rides to medical appointments in other communities through paid drivers in personal vehicles.

Goal 10: Ensure that older residents of Belchertown have access to health care and community services that support their ability to live long and healthy lives.

<u>**Strategies**</u>:

1. Work with elder care organizations, health care providers and the Alzheimer's Association to offer service personnel and first responders continuing education on concerns specific to older adults, including those with dementia or other cognitive or physical challenges.

2. Provide information and space to offer successful health and fitness programs to all age groups to increase utilization and to improve health of community members - e.g. A Matter of Balance, Get Cuffed.

3. Catalogue existing community, social and health service programs in town and work with key service providers to disseminate information to residents via municipal channels, using a variety of media (see Communications Plan).

4. Provide information on counseling and support groups for caregivers of people with dementia.

5. Continue to participate in the Triad program which partners emergency service providers with the Council on Aging to address needs of older adults and people with specific health needs. Engage at risk older adults in these efforts.

6. Advocate for ongoing and consistent funding for necessary community and health services

7. Increase access to community and health services through sharing of information, increasing access and knowledge of how to use technology, and transportation services.

   • Encourage and support the expanded use of telemedicine services where appropriate.

8. Engage health system and community stakeholders to identify gaps in services and find solutions for more complete provision of health/medical, and community services.

   • Evaluate if health and community services are addressing concerns specific to older adults and successful aging, including access to geriatricians, prevention, nutrition, movement and psychological well-being.

9. Survey older adults in the community to identify barriers for residents to seeking assistance, including lack of transportation, fear, stigma or other.

10. Research the feasibility of developing a Village or Neighbors model which coordinates volunteers to provide services that allow people to age in place. Services may include home health care (through certified agencies), chore services, grocery & pharmacy delivery, safety monitoring programs, and transportation assistance.

11. Collaborate with 413-Cares to train local health care and social service providers on how to use the platform and inform clients about this resource.

Social Participation and Inclusion

Participation in social activities, either formal or informal, is important to one's mental health. Conversely, social isolation and loneliness can cause poor health outcomes. Research shows that loneliness and social isolation can increase the risk of premature death and has been associated with a 50% increased risk of dementia as well as increased risk of heart disease and stroke, depression, anxiety, and suicide.[6] The report also highlights increased risk of loneliness among more vulnerable populations of older adults including immigrants; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) populations; minorities; and victims of elder abuse.

The pandemic increased the incidence of feelings of social isolation among survey respondents by almost 600%, with nine respondents having concerns prior to the pandemic and 55 respondents saying that they have been concerned with social isolation since the state-mandated stay-at-home order. This is not surprising as most respondents said that before the pandemic they spent time in restaurants and cafes (102 respondents), or attended church or other faith-based organizations, meetings or civic activities, went to the gym, or volunteered for charitable organizations (Figure 14), while during the pandemic few people visited any of these venues other than parks and outdoor spaces, which became important gathering places.

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[6] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2020. Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. (Citation from https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html)

Other than the Belchertown Senior Center, where did you like to spend your free time in Belchertown prior to COVID-19 (March 2020)?

Category	Participated remotely	Visited or participated in person
Other	0	4
None of the above	7	13
Volunteering with charitable...	2	40
Church or faith-based organization	3	49
City meetings or other civic activities	4	39
Gym or fitness class	1	39
Museum or cultural center	1	28
Restaurants or café	2	102
Parks or outdoor spaces	1	77
Library	12	54

■ Participated remotely   ■ Visted or participated in person

Other than the Belchertown Senior Center, where do you like to spend your free time in Belchertown since COVID-19 (March 2020)?

Category	Participated in remote activities	Visited or participated in person
Other	1	0
None of the above/ have not participated since...	7	9
Volunteering with charitable organizations	13	7
Church or faith-based organization	16	9
City meetings or other civic activities	19	4
Gym or fitness class	6	6
Museum or cultural center	2	3
Restaurants or café	14	17
Parks or outdoor spaces	3	49
Library	21	5

■ Participated in remote activities   ■ Visted or participated in person
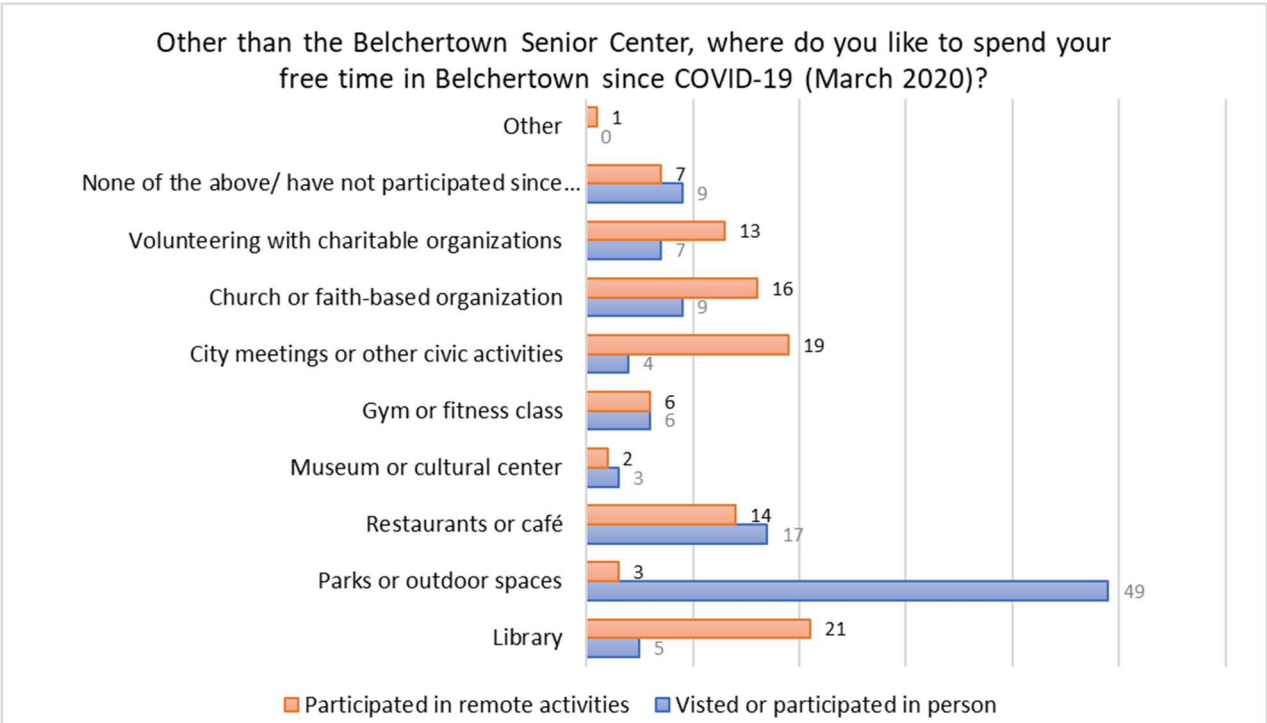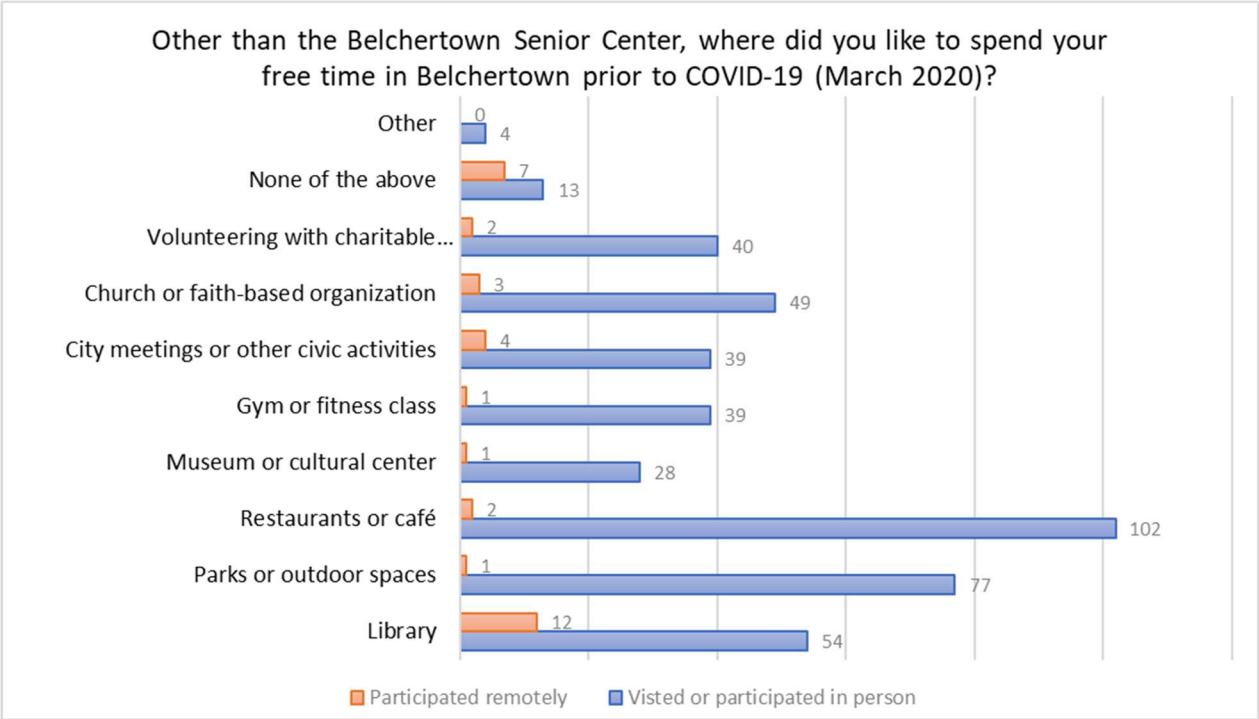
Figure 14 - Places where people liked to spend free time prior to and during the pandemic

The Belchertown Senior Center offers many opportunities for social interaction through programming and congregate meals but was forced to close during the pandemic. When asked how frequently they used the Senior Center, almost half (47 prior to COVID and 43 since the beginning of the pandemic) said that they had never used the services or programs offered by the senior centers. Reasons given included no interest, not knowing what services or programs are available, not being old enough, and inconvenient times. Although it is not critical that older adults use the Senior Center, it is important that those who feel most socially isolated feel welcome to attend programs or services, and that they know what is available. Additional outreach to those most at risk may uncover whether additional connections or invitations should be made to this at-risk population.

If never, what is the reason that you do not currently use programs or services offered by the Belchertown Senior Center?

Reason	Count
Currently do not need assistance	3
In assisted living facility	2
Unable to because of COVID-19	6
Too far from home	1
Unable to participate due to physical/mental health	5
Active at home	2
I do not know what programs and services are available	8
I am not old enough	10
I participate in programs elsewhere	6
Hours of the programs and services are inconvenient	9
I do not have time	5
I am not interested	18

Figure 15 - Reasons for not using the Belchertown Senior Center (Source: Belchertown Livable Community Survey, 2021).

The Clapp Memorial Library, located on South Main Street, offers programming for all ages. The library was closed during the pandemic and started in-person browsing in June 2021 by appointment. Online book groups and other programming has continued through the pandemic, along with curbside pickup of books. The library is located approximately one mile from Christopher Heights and the Senior Center and is close to a property managed by the Belchertown Housing Authority.

The Belchertown Cultural Council organizes town-wide events, including Art Week, Food Truck Fridays, and Winter Light Night on the Belchertown Common. Ensuring that the locations of these events are accessible for people in wheelchairs or that assistance is provided if needed, can ensure that the events are inclusive for people of all ages. Including older adults, as well as

people with dementia and their caregivers, in the planning for activities and events can ensure that the events themselves are inclusive for people of all ages and abilities.

Intergenerational programming is another way to ensure that community members build an understanding of the needs and interests of older adults, and that the skills and experience that older adults have to offer are celebrated in the community. The Senior Center is located close to the Belchertown High School, providing an excellent opportunity for such programming.

Inclusion of all sectors of the community in social programming is important in building an inclusive and Age and Dementia Friendly community. Providing trainings to staff of the library, volunteers at townwide events, and the broader community can ensure that people with dementia are treated with respect and supported by the community. Likewise, other sectors such as veterans, people who are not fluent in English, and people of all cultures and ethnicities should be considered in the planning, outreach and implementation of event programming.

Social Participation and Inclusion - Assets & Accomplishments

- ➢ The Belchertown Senior Center offers congregate meals, fitness classes, educational and social programming for all residents over the age of 60 and for people with disabilities.
- ➢ The Senior Center is located close to Christopher Heights and the Belchertown Schools, creating opportunities for collaboration on intergenerational programming.
- ➢ The Clapp Memorial Library offers online and in person programming and is within walking distance of Christopher Heights and the Senior Center
- ➢ The Belchertown Cultural Council provides programming for all town residents.

Goals and Strategy Recommendations

Goal 11: Ensure that older adults and people with dementia have opportunities for social interaction through programming and planning of events.

Strategies:

1. Seek funding to provide staffing for a Memory Café and other activities for people with dementia living outside a formal care setting and their caregivers (adult day programs, creative arts/music, intergenerational connections, outings/group activities).
   - Meaningfully engage people with dementia in developing programs and services
2. Work with library to train staff and provide programming for people with dementia
3. Continue to build Intergenerational programs for mutual benefit - connect with area schools and colleges to facilitate intergenerational conversations and engagement.
4. Ensure access to a variety of outdoor/physical activities that allow residents to interact with the natural world and participate in physical activities at varying intensity levels (i.e., walking, hiking, biking, birding, etc.)

5. Ensure that activities and events are welcoming to people with dementia who may have to attend with a companion, caregiver, or family member.

6. Provide information about accessibility of facilities and transportation options for community meetings and events.

7. Adopt policies to ensure that events are held at venues or locations that are conveniently located, accessible, well-lit, and easily reached by public transportation or at times when transportation services are available.

8. Identify public meeting places in town for conversation circles (cafes, libraries), and schedule programming in these places to engage more residents in the community.

9. Provide consistent outreach in multiple formats to ensure that people at risk of social isolation get information and feel welcome to attend activities and events.
   • Enlist those who are isolated to become engaged by helping others.

10. Identify "naturally occurring retirement communities" (NORCs) and develop neighborhood networks or "circles" using available communication channels and volunteers to serve as leads.

11. Provide a wide variety of activities that appeal to a diverse population, including people who may not speak English as their first language or others who don't normally participate in community events.
    • Provide outreach information and events in other languages as determined by the needs of residents

12. Organize regional activities (with other senior centers?) for group engagement.

Employment, Civic Engagement and Volunteer Opportunities

According to the Belchertown Community Profile, 7.2% of residents over 65 lived below the poverty line in 2018, a rate slightly less than the statewide average of 8.7%. Close to 27% of people over 65 were employed in the past year (at the time data was collected). Although many people save for retirement, some do not or choose to continue working past retirement age. The Belchertown Senior Center offers assistance in matching local employers with younger seniors who are looking for work, although this program had to be put on hold during the pandemic.

Every community benefits from an active and engaged population. Many older adults who have retired from their lifetime careers and have enough in social security and retirement funds have time and interest to participate in volunteer activities, and decades of life and job experience. Some choose to work after retirement in a new area of employment, to earn additional income or to keep busy, and others choose to participate in volunteer opportunities.

Most of the respondents (75%) to the Belchertown Livable Community Survey are retired, while 10% said that they do not anticipate ever fully retiring. The remaining 15% planned to retire

within 3 years (4%), 6-10 years (7%), 10 years (1%) or were not sure (3%). Less than 3% of respondents said that they needed help finding employment. Many survey respondents (8%) said that they needed help finding volunteer opportunities, with 6% of the total respondents saying that they did not know how to find these opportunities. One participant in the Public Forum said that she did not know how to find about volunteer opportunities and thought it would be helpful to know what would be required in different volunteer positions.

The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is a nationwide program coordinated by the National Senior Service Corps and provides grants to qualified agencies and organizations "for the dual purpose of engaging people 55 or older in volunteer service to meet community needs and to provide a high-quality experience that will enrich the lives of volunteers."[7] Community Action Pioneer Valley hosts the RSVP of the Pioneer Valley program, matching volunteers with organizations that need volunteers. Opportunities include leading Healthy Bones and Balance classes, distributing Brown Bags of groceries or Meals on Wheels, offering classes at senior centers, and many others. The program provides liability insurance for volunteers who provide rides as part of their volunteer service.

Assets & Accomplishments

➢ COA is Working on a program to help younger seniors find employment
➢ Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is based in Northampton and helps to match volunteers with opportunities throughout the Pioneer Valley

Goals and Strategy Recommendations

Goal 12: Provide opportunities for older adults to work and volunteer in the community.

Strategies:

1. Foster an age-friendly attitude in town, through education - reinforcing the fact that "age happens" to everyone and age discrimination is illegal in hiring, retention, promotion and training of employees.
2. Increase awareness among employers in town on the benefits of hiring older workers, including the use of flexible work schedules attractive to older or second-career workers, i.e. "flex time", part-time, work at home, job sharing, etc.
3. Provide training for new board/commission members, encourage boards to convene for continuing education and trainings, and develop a mentoring system
4. Provide flexible options for people with dementia to volunteer and provide training, recognition, guidance and compensation for personal costs.

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[7] https://www.benefits.gov/benefit/884

5. Provide training and education opportunities for people with dementia.

6. Develop intergenerational skill building/mentoring opportunities with COA's and community groups and local schools, i.e. youths teach elders about technology or other current studies, while elders teach youths about careers, life skills etc.

7. Increase involvement in government and civic affairs by residents by creating Civic Issues forum or newsletter

8. Increase the number of older adults running in local elections, volunteering, and serving on municipal boards/commissions by publicizing opportunities to serve requirements for running for municipal positions

9. Increase public engagement with elected/appointed officials by increasing publicity/outreach for public meetings/calls for comment in a number of formats and venues.

10. Increase knowledge around saving, budgets, retirement planning, managing credit/debt by developing a list of financial/estate planning resources and related services and offering programs to residents.

11. Create or connect with volunteer leadership programs for residents interested in serving on non-profit or other boards, or on municipal committees.

Public Safety

The Belchertown Council on Aging participates with the Police and Fire Departments in the TRIAD program which is a national organization initially started by the National Sheriffs' Association, the International Chiefs of Police, and the AARP. In Hampshire County, 13 communities are actively involved in the program. TRIAD is a community policing initiative in which seniors, law enforcement and other service providers increase safety through education and crime prevention. SALT (Seniors and Law Enforcement Together) is the TRIAD program on the community level. In Belchertown, it is composed of the director of the Senior Center, Belchertown Police and Fire Departments.

The SALT program and staff at the Senior Center assist residents with filling out the File of Life documents that include important medical information and are stored in a prominent location in case of emergencies. This program also allows people to voluntarily put their names on a list if they have dementia and may wander from their homes.
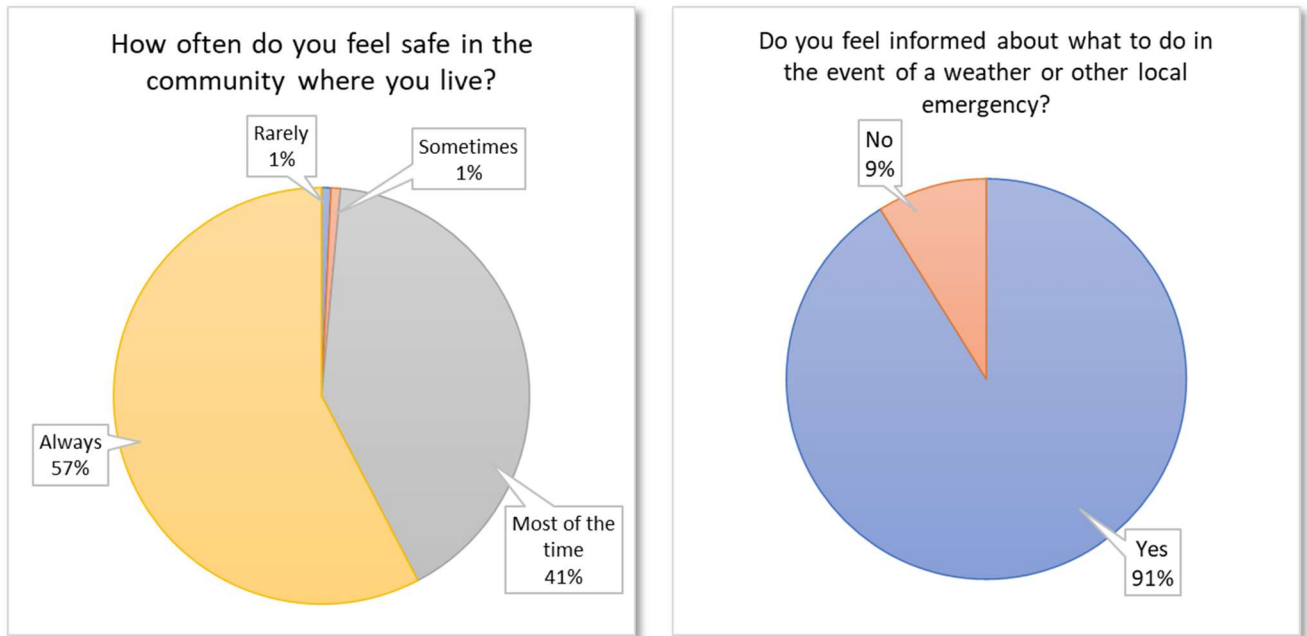
Figure 16 - Belchertown Livable Community Survey responses regarding safety

Most survey respondents said that they felt safe in Belchertown, with 41% saying they feel safe most of the time and 57% saying they always feel safe. Survey respondents were also asked if they feel informed about what to do in the event of a weather or other local emergency, and 91% said that they did feel informed. Engagement of older adults in the SALT program is a great way for municipal staff to hear about the concerns of older adults, and also to provide them with education on basic safety in their homes.

Assets & Accomplishments

➢ Belchertown participates in the SALT program, a community level version of the TRIAD program

Goals and Strategy Recommendations

Goal 13: Ensure the safety of all residents, including older adults and people with dementia, through multi-sectoral partnerships and programming.

Strategies

1. Post information on the TRIAD or SALT programs on both the Senior Center and Police Department websites to educate residents about the File of Life and other important documents.
   • Encourage residents to keep their File of Life documents updated regularly.

2. Provide regular trainings for all emergency personnel on recognizing the signs of dementia and how to communicate with people with dementia

3. Explore funding and logistics for cooling stations and emergency shelters to develop expanded offerings, potentially at one of the local schools, that would address residents' needs during hazard events, including extreme temperature events, floods, or storms.

Recommendations/strategies from previous reports

MVP Report (2018):

➢ Explore funding and logistics for cooling stations and emergency shelters to develop expanded offerings, potentially at one of the local schools, that would address residents' needs during hazard events, including extreme temperature events, floods, or storms.

Access, Equity and Inclusion

The Access, Equity and Inclusion domain, although placed at the end of this Community Assessment report should be considered throughout all of the domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community. The Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative produced a guidebook called "Healthy Aging for All" (HAFA) which includes a "Crosswalk" to review how strategies proposed for each domain area affect different sectors of the population. Improvements that allow people who may be living with a disability or with dementia can benefit the whole community. The HAFA guide recommends considering each of the following sectors of a community as applicable when developing plan, working groups, and implementing strategies for an age and dementia friendly community:

- Race/Ethnicity
- Age
- Behavioral Health
- Country of Origin
- Dementia
- Disability
- Economic Security
- Gender
- Geographic Area
- Language
- LGBTQIA
- Religion
- Residential Setting
- Substance Use Disorder
- Veterans

Assets & Accomplishments

- ➢ IPad Loan program through Senior Center provides access to social and educational programming for people who do not own equipment.
- ➢ WestMass Elder Care offers Rainbow Supper Club for LGBTQ+ seniors.
- ➢ Disabilities Committee in place.

Goals and Strategy Recommendations

Goal 14: Ensure that all strategies included in this Action Plan include all sectors of the community and target populations most at risk of social isolation or poor health outcomes wherever applicable.

Strategies:

1. Create an "age friendly business" recognition program in the community.

2. Create Community learning projects, e.g. community gardens; multi-cultural festivals or other forums/events, to encourage dialogue and understanding.

3. Encourage active and healthy aging educational programs, such as book study groups, for all community members to increase awareness and understanding.

4. Develop an outreach program that includes people at an increased risk of social isolation including CALD, A&TSI, LGBTI, living alone and homeless to remain engaged in their community.

5. Include Age Friendly activities as part of an inclusive Community Compact.

6. Develop a set of intergenerational activities with schools and older adults.

7. Ensure that a range of community events and activities are available to meet the diverse population, including people living with dementia by providing dementia-specific activities as well as mainstream activities that are supportive of people with dementia.

8. Ensure community outreach and planning activities with outreach components are developed to ensure broad access and ability to respond by residents of all ages and are presented in such a manner that people with dementia have the ability to participate.

Action Plan

This Action Plan for an Age and Dementia Friendly Belchertown details goals and strategies for improving Belchertown's social and built environments to make the town a welcoming place for people of all ages and abilities. According to the Livable Community Survey, comments gathered at public forums, and discussions with members of the Age and Dementia Friendly Belchertown Working Group, the areas of greatest concern in Belchertown include developing an awareness about people living with dementia in the community, social isolation, completing basic maintenance and home modification (Aging in Place), transportation services, and access to quality health care. The following Action Plan is ordered by domains of the highest importance to residents of Belchertown based on the community engagement efforts completed for this report. However, this report and Action Plan are dynamic documents that will be amended as conditions change in the community.

Plan Implementation

The Age and Dementia Friendly Belchertown Working Group was formed to work with the PVPC on the development of this Community Assessment and Action Plan. An implementation committee made up of members of this working group and others identified by the Working group will be developed to implement strategies on the following pages. In addition, the following steps are recommended for the implementation of this report.

1) Develop an Implementation Committee for an Age and Dementia Friendly Belchertown. Continue to build this committee to include sectors of the community as well as regional and state partner organizations and agencies.

2) Distribute the Community Assessment and Action Plan to Town boards, committees, social groups and faith organizations to solicit input and volunteers for an implementation committee, and to build awareness of ways that these groups can participate in making Belchertown Age and Dementia Friendly.

3) Submit report to AARP and Dementia Friendly Massachusetts for final certification as an Age and Dementia Friendly Community.

4) Select strategies for implementation each year.

5) Report on successes and challenges – both to the community, AARP and Dementia Friendly Massachusetts.

Dementia Friendly Community Strategies

Goal: Build awareness, acceptance, and a culture of support for people living with dementia and the people who care for them.			
Actions	**Lead Entity/** Partners	**Metrics**	**Priority (High, Medium, Low)**
D-1	Develop a committee of the Age and Dementia Friendly Belchertown Working Group to implement trainings and a public awareness campaign about dementia in Belchertown.	COA	Subcommittee development	High
D-2	Recruit volunteers to become Dementia Friends Champions who will provide trainings for community groups and neighbors.	COA, residents	# of Dementia Friends and Dementia Friends Champions	High
D-3	Encourage trainings on how to recognize signs of dementia and communicate with people with dementia for all municipal staff.	**COA,** Alzheimer's Association	# of trainings	High
D-4	Continue the SALT program that partners emergency personnel (Police and Fire Departments) with the Council on Aging and older adults to address safety concerns of older adults in the community; encourage residents to register on a list of people living with dementia or other health concerns.	**COA**, Fire Dept, Police Dept	SALT meetings, Identification of at risk residents	High
D-5	Identify and reach out to family care givers to connect them with support programs and opportunities for meeting with other caregivers of people with dementia.	**COA,** Alzheimer's Association, WestMass Elder Care	Information on support programs, # of people involved	High
D-6	Schedule memory cafes at the Senior Center and other locations	**COA,** Alzheimer's	Memory Café	High

		Association	schedule	
D-7	Educate restaurant owners about Purple Table programs and provide trainings for interested restaurant owners and their staff.	**COA**, Alzheimer's Association, local restaurants	# of trainings, # purple table restaurants	Medium

Communication, Information and Technology

Goal 1: Ensure that all residents have access to information about policies and programs that provide opportunities for health and community engagement.			
Actions	**Lead Entity/** Partners	**Metrics**	**Priority (High, Medium, Low)**
1a	Create a basic, but effective Municipal Communication Plan. Inventory what municipal info is being shared by each department, including both non-emergency and emergency channels; • Survey residents to see how they are getting their news • Identify gaps and weaknesses in local communications; adopt effective methods to fill communication gaps.	Communications Committee of the Selectboard (**Jennifer Turner, SB Chair**) Municipal IT staff	Communications Plan	High
1b	Participate in all communication outlets (Newsletters/Posting Boards/Blogs/Twitter/ Facebook, All Call system, local cable access television); identify the best formats for homebound seniors to broaden communications with residents of all ages.	Communications Committee, COA, residents	Survey of homebound seniors	High
1c	Continue to identify and reach out to socially isolated residents via personal contact from trusted municipal staff; develop "Buddy system" with volunteers who can reach out to socially isolated residents.	**COA,** volunteers	Formalized program; # volunteers, # of calls each month	High

1d	Add links on COA page of the Town website to timely information and broadcasts of interest to older residents. Collaborate with other COAs to share links and resources.	**COA**, Town website, BCTV, PVPC	Website, resources	High
1e	Collaborate with existing community-based networks such as faith communities, civic groups, education channels, business groups, to share information.	Faith communities, COA, Communications Committee, civic groups, BCTV, Chamber of Commerce, local FB pages	# of outlets # of postings Communications Plan	High
1f	Update the Town website regularly and poll users about the ease of navigation. Design for the broadest range of consumers, including those with visual or physical impairments, multiple languages, etc.	Communications Committee	Updated Town Website	
1g	Continue to build relationships with private sector institutions and service providers; provide information on programs that are available through partnerships between public and private facilities.	COA, Christopher Heights; Baystate Wing; West Mass Elder Care, GSSS, Housing Authority properties	Notice of programs offered by private facilities and service providers	

Goal 2: Facilitate a culture of support and acceptance for older adults and people living with dementia.

	Actions	**Lead Entity/** Partners	**Metrics**	**Priority (High, Medium, Low)**
2a	Provide staff training for local government, community and civic organizations, faith communities, and businesses on how to recognize and effectively communicate with customers with dementia.	**COA,** Police and Fire, Municipal Departments, businesses, banks, Alzheimer's Association, Dementia Friends	# of trainings # of Departments, organizations, individuals trained	High
2b	Ensure that municipal staff are trained on how to work with people	All Municipal Depts.,	Customer	High

		COA	satisfaction surveys	
	with dementia and older adults, and that services provided at municipal facilities always include friendly, person-to-person assistance.			
2c	Ensure that printed information – including official forms or invoices and text on visual displays in public spaces - has large lettering with main ideas in bold type; simple and straightforward sentences and simple language; and is available in multiple languages as needed.	Municipal Departments, Communications Committee	Policy or memo about lettering; implementation of policy	
2d	Ensure that telephone answering services give instructions slowly and clearly and tell callers how to repeat the message at any time. Offer options for people with hearing impairments.	Municipal Departments	Town Policy	
2e	Ensure that reading glasses or magnifying glasses are available at election locations for people with visual impairments.	Town Clerk/Elections Officials	Glasses at election locations	
2f	Research the cost and feasibility of offering information and other communications in Spanish or other languages as needed (review updated Census data). Engage community members who speak languages other than English to determine whether interpreter and translation services are needed for municipal documents and public meetings.	Communications Committee; Schools	Translation of materials and website	Low (for now)

Housing

Goal 3: Ensure that a range of safe, affordable, and accessible single and multi-unit housing options are available to meet the needs of the aging population in Belchertown.			
Actions	**Lead Entity/** Partners	**Metrics**	**Priority (High, Medium, Low)**
3a	Update the Housing Needs Assessment and develop a Housing Production Plan that includes an inventory of the existing housing stock and engages older adults in determining the types of housing desired in order for them to be able to stay in community. ● Create a detailed inventory of suitable property in town for the development of affordable, mixed income, mixed use, and assisted living housing	Planning, with COA participation	HPP, Housing Needs Assessment	High
3b	Ensure that a variety of supported housing options are available to meet the need including assisted living, nursing homes, and units tailored to people with dementia; ensure that affordable supported housing units are available for low to moderate income residents.	Planning, Housing Developers (?)	# of housing units	High

3c	Develop planning and zoning tools to prioritize and incentivize housing development models that provide for a mix of housing types in individual developments. ● Expand housing choices through research and adoption of innovative housing models, zoning and financing options - Ex. Tiny houses, cottage type housing. ● Encourage housing development close to village centers, public transportation and major community services. ● Monitor development of Accessory Dwelling Units and consider allowing by right rather than by special permit. ● Adopt an inclusionary zoning bylaw to increase affordable housing opportunities. ● Amend use and dimensional requirements to expand housing options. ● Develop mixed-use districts.	Planning	Zoning changes	
3d	Identify available Federal, State and Regional housing resources/funding sources to increase affordable housing supply in the community.	Planning, PVPC	Funding Sources identified, grants received	
3e	Develop a relationship with local land trust or support creation of a new local land trust to assist with acquiring land for future affordable housing.	Planning, Housing Committee	Land acquisition	
3f	Explore alternative living models such as shared housing, co-housing, and intergenerational housing to expand the housing options for older adults looking for a supported living environment.	Housing Committee, COA	Research on alternative living models	

Goal 4: Provide support for all Belchertown residents in locating affordable housing options and services to support aging in place.

Actions	**Lead Entity/** Partners	**Metrics**	**Priority (High, Medium, Low)**

4a	Start a Senior Property Tax Work-Off Program.	COA, Selectboard	Program adopted/approved	High
4b	Identify a group or individual to manage, administer, and implement Belchertown's housing initiatives.	Planning, Selectboard	Entity designated to implement housing	
4c	Conduct outreach on existing affordable housing resources.	COA, PVPC	Outreach materials	
4d	Assist homeowners in finding reliable and affordable home maintenance contractors and resources for modifying homes as needed to improve safety and accessibility.	COA, PVPC	Regional directory	High
4e	Develop and disseminate materials regarding home modification and rehabilitation funds available for low-income households; seek funding to keep these services available.	Planning,	Home modification loan program; outreach materials	High
4f	Identify licensed contractors who can do home assessments that will allow people to age in place.	COA, PVPC	Contractor list	Ongoing
4g	Make information and assistance available to consumers about aging-in-place on municipal and regional websites.	COA	Updated website	High
4h	Provide resources and counseling for people at risk of eviction and identify shelters or programs to assist people who are un-homed.	Housing entity, Wayfinders	Eviction prevention programs and counseling	
4i	Research and consider development of the Village Model at the local or regional level and identify NORCs (Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities) to provide assistance to elders who wish to remain in their homes and community	COA, volunteers	Research on Village model	

Buildings and Outdoor Spaces

Goal 5: Provide opportunities for use of public buildings and outdoor spaces by people of all ages and abilities.			
Actions	**Lead Entity/** Partners	**Metrics**	**Priority (High, Medium, Low)**
5a Work toward making public buildings and outdoor spaces in town Dementia Friendly & ADA accessible. • Update and expand ADA assessment and transition plan. • Activate ADA committee to develop a system to identify needed improvements to public buildings and town-owned outdoor spaces, develop prioritization plans and track action	Planning, Conservation, Disabilities Committee	ADA Assessment and Transition Plan Prioritized list of projects	High
5b Assess / solicit feedback from older residents on desired outdoor recreational opportunities to inform future expenditures on parks and recreation.	Planning, Conservation, OSRP Committee	# survey responses from older residents; forums located at senior center or other locations convenient to older adults.	High
5c Encourage creation of trails, parks and bikeways close to centers of population and/or where public transportation is available.	Planning Dept, OSRP	OSRP, Bike and Pedestrian and/or trail network plan	High - working on OSRP now
5d Encourage development of age friendly trails in community owned conservation and recreation areas. Maintain vegetation to reduce exposure to ticks.	Conservation, Planning, trail committee	# of Accessible Trails; trail maintenance guide	High
5e Create a plan for locating/developing outdoor gathering spaces and seating, and advocate for public outdoor seating/areas as a	PB/Planning - site plan review	Inventory and map of bench locations;	High/medium

	priority in all new business and housing projects. Develop and maintain a master map of all outdoor seating and gathering areas. • Encourage location of park benches where they are not isolated from other park activities. • Provide benches that have backs and arms at regular intervals in shady areas		Site Plan Review	
5f	Support Town efforts to enhance connectivity, including long-range mapping to identify easements and routes for more direct walking/biking connections to schools, shopping, town/outdoor resources, and other amenities.	Conservation, Planning	OSRP, Bike and Pedestrian and/or trail network plan	High
5g	Provide information on all trails in town, their levels of difficulty and whether or not they are ADA compliant and/or accessible to people in wheelchairs.	Conservation	Map of trails - online and paper format	High
5h	Require new housing projects to provide access routes to connect to existing trails or activity centers.	Planning Dept, Planning Board	Site Plan Review, Special Permit, Subdivision Regs	High
5i	Site accessible bathrooms near walking loops, or between destinations, where possible. Provide unisex restrooms to allow someone to be assisted without causing embarrassment to themselves or another user.	Selectboard, Planning, Recreation Dept.	Plan for locating and building and/or mapping accessible restrooms	Medium
5j	Assess/upgrade existing lighting and signage in public buildings and outdoor spaces. Seek funding for more extensive infrastructure improvements.	Planning, Conservation	Assessment of lighting, Signage	Medium
5k	Maintain sidewalks, parking lot and other pavement around public buildings and in parks to reduce potential trip hazards including glare, uneven surfaces, sudden transitions, etc.	DPW	Sidewalk Maintenance Inventory and plan	Medium (expensive)

			for improvements	
5l	Review Dementia Friendly Environments checklist when planning for improvements to parks, public spaces and/or public buildings: • Entrances are clearly visible and understood • Signage is clear and high contrast with background • Lighting is bright and include natural light where possible • Flooring is plain and not shiny or slippery and free of clutter	Commission on Disabilities/ site plan review	DF Checklist, process for reviewing designs and buildings	Medium
5m	Make sure wayfinding markers are easily recognizable, clearly visible, and at frequent intervals.	Conservation, Planning Dept.	Assessment of need for wayfinding system; funding and implementation of wayfinding system.	Medium
5n	Include adult fitness equipment in parkscapes	Recreation Dept, Conservation, Planning	Identified location and plan for developing fitness stations	

Goal 6: Increase programming for older adults that encourages active living and social interaction in buildings and outdoor in Belchertown.

	Actions	Lead Entity/ Partners	Metrics	Priority (High, Medium, Low)
6a	Provide training to local businesses and their employees on how to recognize and work with people with dementia, and how to create Dementia Friendly environments to better serve their customers with different abilities.	COA, Planning, volunteers	# of trainings, DF Environments Checklist	High
6b	Encourage the creation of walking groups or walking buddy programs through councils on aging or other municipal departments, posting on community website and bulletin boards	Planning Dept, OSRP	OSRP, Bike and Pedestrian and/or trail network plan	Medium

6c	Establish regular, organized activities in parks, both age-specific and multigenerational, by partnering with local organizations.	Rec Dept, COA, Cultural Council	Programming and participation	Medium

Transportation and Streets

Goal 7: Ensure that transportation services are available to residents of all ages and abilities to allow access food, medical appointments, employment, and education.			
Actions	**Lead Entity/** Partners	**Metrics**	**Priority (High, Medium, Low)**
7a	Post information on transportation services including PVTA fixed routes and on demand services, Senior Center Van and Quaboag Connector service areas and fares on Senior Center website and provide information in multiple locations in town.	PVTA, COA, QVCDC	# of places where information is posted	
7b	Survey older adults and people with disabilities annually in multiple formats to monitor transportation needs.	COA, Planning	Annual survey, responses	
7c	Explore the feasibility of expanding the Quaboag Connector to offer shared transportation services to a broader area and expand existing Town services as needed.	QVCDC, Selectboard	Feasibility Study	
7d	Expand program that pays drivers to provide rides to medical appointments out of town or other in-town appointments as needed; explore participation with RSVP and confirm whether rides are offered through that program.	COA, RSVP	# rides, # ride requests	
7e	Continue to train transit and COA van drivers on the unique needs of older adults, including best practices for how to interact, as well as recognize/respond appropriately to cognitive	COA, AA	# of trainings, # of drivers and staff trained	

	impairment, etc.			
7f	Research the cost, availability and safety of ride share service options (e,g. Lyft, Uber or taxi service); provide training on how to use Apps and determine whether assisting apps such as GoGo Grandparent would be useful to the population that needs to use ride sharing services.	COA, Ride Share service providers	Research on ride share services	low
7g	Promote affordable home delivery services in town. Include information on stores that deliver on COA website.	COA. Local grocery stores	# and cost of home delivery	

Goal 8: Ensure that roads and trail networks are safe and comfortable for use by people of all ages and abilities.

	Actions	**Lead Entity/** Partners	**Metrics**	**Priority (High, Medium, Low)**
8a	Develop a plan for an interconnected network of trails and bicycle facilities that are safe and comfortable for all ages and all abilities.	Planning, Conservation, DPW, PVPC or consultant	Bicycle and Pedestrian Network Plan	High
8b	Plan and design dementia friendly, safe roads and walking/bicycling environments for drivers and pedestrians: • walking/cycling paths are protected from heavy traffic • crosswalks on busy roads have audible cues and appropriate timing.	Planning, Conservation, DPW	# of roads and trails that are safe and accessible	High
8c	Develop a map of safe walking and biking routes for people of all ages and abilities and make it available throughout town in print and in digital form on the Town website. • Promote use of high visibility vest for people walking on roads.	Planning, Conservation, DPW	Map of bicycle and pedestrian routes and levels of comfort and accessibility	high

8d	Research the implications for the Town to adopt a Complete Streets Program starting with a Complete Streets Policy, hich would make the Town eligible for fund to develop a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan and apply for funding to implement improvements to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.	Planning, DPW	Complete Streets Policy Complete Streets Prioritization Plan	
8e	Review data on rural roads and plan for safer use by pedestrians through signage, walkable shoulders, or parallel walking routes.	Planning, Conservation, DPW	# of safe walking routes	
8f	Evaluate town-wide public parking and drop-off locations for safety, lighting, convenience and accessibility for those with special needs, i.e. low vision, physical or cognitive impairments.	Planning, DPW	Parking & lighting evaluation	high

Goal 9: Implement programs that promote safe driving and transition to other forms of transportation.

	Actions	Lead Entity/ Partners	Metrics	Priority (High, Medium, Low)
9a	Support and allow space for driver skill retention with community organizations, through partnerships with AARP, AAA, RMV, Auto Insurance providers.	COA	Driver skill retention programs	
9b	Collaborate with auto dealerships, mechanics and others town businesses to develop incentives and discounts for car maintenance for older adults; provide pickup and drop-off service for nominal fee.	COA, local businesses	Incentive programs for car maintenance	

Health and Community Services

	Goal 10: Ensure that older residents of Belchertown have access to health care and community services that support their ability to live long and healthy lives.			
	Actions	**Lead Entity/** Partners	**Metrics**	**Priority (High, Medium, Low)**
10a	Work with elder care organizations, health care providers and the Alzheimer's Association to offer service personnel and first responders continuing education on concerns specific to older adults, including those with dementia or other cognitive or physical challenges.	**COA,** WestMass Elder Care, Alzheimer's Association, first responders	Trainings for first responders	
10b	Provide information and space to offer successful health and fitness programs to all age groups to increase utilization and to improve health of community members - e.g. A Matter of Balance, Get Cuffed.	**COA,** Schools	Programs offered, #s of participants	
10c	Catalogue existing community, social and health service programs in town and work with key service providers to disseminate information to residents via municipal channels, using a variety of media (see Communications Plan).	**COA,** WestMass Elder Care, Baystate	Communications plan, resource guide	
10d	Provide information on counseling and support groups for caregivers of people with dementia.	**COA,** WestMass Elder Care, Alzheimer's Association	Information on support groups for caregivers	
10e	Continue to participate in the Triad program which partners emergency service providers with the Council on Aging to address needs of older adults and people with specific health needs. Engage at risk older adults in these efforts.	**COA,** Police, Fire Depts.	Triad Committee Participation by older adults	

10f	Advocate for ongoing and consistent funding for necessary community and health services	**COA,** Health Dept.	Funding levels for health and community services	
10g	Increase access to community and health services through sharing of information, increasing access and knowledge of how to use technology, and transportation services. • Encourage and support the expanded use of telemedicine services where appropriate.	**COA,** Baystate, Cooley Dickinson Hospital	# programs offering telemedicine Ride services for medical appointments	
10h	Engage health system and community stakeholders to identify gaps in services and find solutions for more complete provision of health/medical, and community services. • Evaluate if health and community services are addressing concerns specific to older adults and successful aging, including access to geriatricians, prevention, nutrition, movement and psychological well-being.	**COA,** Health Care Providers, social service agencies	Survey, identified needs	
10i	Survey older adults in the community to identify barriers for residents to seeking assistance, including lack of transportation, fear, stigma or other.	**COA,** WestMass Elder Care	Survey, barriers to accessing assistance	
10j	Research the feasibility of developing a Village or Neighbors model which coordinates volunteers to provide services that allow people to age in place. Services may include home health care (through certified agencies), chore services, grocery & pharmacy delivery, safety monitoring programs, and transportation assistance.	**COA,** community volunteers	Research on the Village Model or similar programs.	
10k	Collaborate with 413-Cares to train local health care and social service providers on how to use the platform and inform clients about this resource.	**COA,** Public Health Institute of Western MA	413-Cares participation	

Social Participation and Inclusion

Goal 11: Ensure that older adults and people with dementia have opportunities for social interaction through programming and planning of events.			
Actions	**Lead Entity/** Partners	**Metrics**	**Priority** (High, Medium, Low**)**
11a Seek funding to provide staffing for a Memory Café and other activities for people with dementia living <u>outside</u> a formal care setting and their caregivers (adult day programs, creative arts/music, intergenerational connections, outings/group activities). • Meaningfully engage people with dementia in developing programs and services	COA	# Memory Cafes Grant or other funding to hold programs	
11b Work with library to train staff and provide programming for people with dementia	**COA,** Library	# trainings # staff trained	
11c Continue to build Intergenerational programs for mutual benefit - connect with area schools and colleges to facilitate intergenerational conversations and engagement.	**COA,** Schools	# intergenerational programs	
11d Ensure access to a variety of outdoor/physical activities that allow residents to interact with the natural world and participate in physical activities at varying intensity levels (i.e., walking, hiking, biking, birding, etc.)	Conservation, Recreation groups; COA	# outdoor activities or programs accessible for older adults	

11e	Ensure that activities and events are welcoming to people with dementia who may have to attend with a companion, caregiver, or family member.	Parks and Recreation COA Cultural Council	# Dementia Friendly activities and events Guide to making events Dementia Friendly	
11f	Provide information about accessibility of facilities and transportation options for community meetings and events.	**COA**	Information about accessibility	
11g	Adopt policies to ensure that events are held at venues or locations that are conveniently located, accessible, well-lit, and easily reached by public transportation or at times when transportation services are available.	Selectboard, Cultural Council	Town policies	
11h	Identify public meeting places in town for conversation circles (cafes, libraries), and schedule programming in these places to engage more residents in the community.	**COA,** Chamber of Commerce, Library	Accessible meeting locations	
11i	Provide consistent outreach in multiple formats to ensure that people at risk of social isolation get information and feel welcome to attend activities and events. • Enlist those who are isolated to become engaged by helping others.	**COA**	Outreach efforts Volunteer participation # people reached	
11j	Identify "naturally occurring retirement communities" (NORCs) and develop neighborhood networks or "circles" using available communication channels and volunteers to serve as leads.	**COA**	Locations of NORCs Neighborhood circles	

11k	Provide a wide variety of activities that appeal to a diverse population, including people who may not speak English as their first language or others who don't normally participate in community events. • Provide outreach information and events in other languages as determined by the needs of residents	**COA,** Selectboard	Policy on translations # of events and materials offered in other languages	
11l	Organize regional activities (with other senior centers?) for group engagement.	**COA,** other COAs/Senior Centers	Shared activities	

Employment, Civic Engagement and Volunteer Opportunities

Goal 12: Provide opportunities for older adults to work and volunteer, to in the community			
Actions	**Lead Entity/** Partners	**Metrics**	**Priority** (High, Medium, Low)
12a Foster an age-friendly attitude in town, through education - reinforcing the fact that "age happens" to everyone and age discrimination is illegal in hiring, retention, promotion and training of employees.	**COA,** Selectboard	Reframing Aging campaign	
12b Increase awareness among employers in town on the benefits of hiring older workers, including the use of flexible work schedules attractive to older or second-career workers, i.e. "flex time", part-time, work at home, job sharing, etc.	COA - outreach dept.	Outreach campaign	
12c Provide training for new board/commission members, encourage boards to convene for continuing education and trainings, and develop a mentoring system	Municipal boards	Board trainings	

12d	Provide flexible options for people with dementia to volunteer and provide training, recognition, guidance and compensation for personal costs.	COA, RSVP	# volunteer opportunities	
12e	Provide training and education opportunities for people with dementia.	**COA** Alzheimer's Association, West Mass Eldercare	# of opportunities for people with dementia	
12f	Develop intergenerational skill building/mentoring opportunities with COA's and community groups and local schools, i.e. youths teach elders about technology or other current studies, while elders teach youths about careers, life skills etc.	COA/Schools	Intergenerational programming	
12g	Increase involvement in government and civic affairs by residents by creating Civic Issues forum or newsletter	**COA,** Municipal boards	Civic issues forum or newsletter	
12h	Increase the number of older adults running in local elections, volunteering, and serving on municipal boards/commissions by publicizing opportunities to serve and requirements for running for municipal positions.	COA board - majority are retired Municipal boards	Policy for publicizing open seats and requirements	
12i	Increase public engagement with elected/appointed officials by increasing publicity/outreach for public meetings/calls for comment in a number of formats and venues.	Municipal boards and departments	# of places calls for comment are posted, # of formats	
12j	Increase knowledge around saving, budgets, retirement planning, managing credit/debt by developing a list of financial/estate planning resources and related services and offering programs to residents.	COA	Resource list, programming	
12k	Create or connect with volunteer leadership programs for residents interested in serving on non-profit or other boards, or on municipal committees.	RSVP, COA	Volunteer leadership programs	

Public Safety

Goal 13: Ensure the safety of all residents, including older adults and people with dementia, through multi-sectoral partnerships and programming.			
Actions	**Lead Entity/** Partners	**Metrics**	**Priority (High, Medium, Low)**
13a Post information on the TRIAD or SALT programs on both the Senior Center and Police Department websites to educate residents about the File of Life and other important documents. • Encourage residents to keep their File of Life documents updated regularly.	**COA,** Police, Fire Departments	# of documents/filled out Information on File of Life posted	
13b Provide regular trainings for all emergency personnel on recognizing the signs of dementia and how to communicate with people with dementia	**COA,** Alzheimer's Association, Dementia Friends	# of trainings # of people trained	
13c Explore funding and logistics for cooling stations and emergency shelters to develop expanded offerings, potentially at one of the local schools, that would address residents' needs during hazard events, including extreme temperature events, floods, or storms.	Emergency Management Committee (Police, Fire Depts.), COA	Emergency shelters and cooling station identified; funding for coordinator	

Access, Equity and Inclusion

Goal 14: Ensure that all strategies included in this Action Plan include all sectors of the community and target populations most at risk of poor health outcomes when applicable.			
Actions	**Lead Entity/** Partners	**Metrics**	**Priority (High, Medium, Low)**
14a Create an "age friendly business" recognition program in the community.	**COA,** Chamber of commerce	Business recognition program; checklist	
14b Create Community learning projects, e.g. community gardens; multi-cultural festivals or other forums/events, to encourage dialogue and understanding.	**COA;** Conservation; Cultural Council	Community learning projects	
14c Encourage active and healthy aging educational programs, such as book study groups, for all community members to increase awareness and understanding.	**COA;** library, schools	Study groups, programming	
14d Develop an outreach program that includes people at an increased risk of social isolation including CALD, A&TSI, LGBTI, living alone and homeless to remain engaged in their community.	**COA**; WestMass Eldercare	Outreach program	
14e Include Age Friendly activities as part of an inclusive Community Compact.	Planning	Community Compact	
14f Develop a set of intergenerational activities with schools and older adults.	COA, Schools	Intergenerational programming	

14g	Ensure that a range of community events and activities are available to meet the diverse population, including people living with dementia, by providing dementia-specific activities as well as mainstream activities that are supportive of people with dementia.	COA, Cultural Council, Recreation	Programming supportive of people with dementia	
14h	Ensure community outreach and planning activities with outreach components are developed to ensure broad access and ability to respond by residents of all ages and are presented in such a manner that people with dementia have the ability to participate.	Communications Committee, COA	Outreach regarding Town issues	