



Saint Paul Advisory Committee on Aging

Lifetime Communities Grant Project

Final Report

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By Consultant:
Deborah Paone, ABD, MHSA
Principal/Owner
Paone & Associates, LLC
Bloomington, MN

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Advisory Committee on Aging members:

Kathleen Kelso, Chair
Joann Ellis, Vice-Chair
Amy Moser, Secretary
Therese Buckley
Shirley Hunt
Harriet Mednick

Carol Neumann
Muriel Olson
Jocelyn Schowalter
Nancy Utoft
Arlend "Buzz" Wilson
Mary Livingston, staff liaison

Grant Advisory Team Members:

Mary Ann Berglund, Saint Paul Public Library
Kathy Carruth, Highland District Council
Maureen Davidson, West 7th Community Center
Maria Genne, Kairos Alive
Frances Harris, Urban Partnership
Nancy Homans, Office of the Mayor, Saint Paul
Patricia Lull, Saint Paul Area Council of Churches
Afton Martens, Macalester Groveland District Council
Megan Mueller, Youth Commission staff, Saint Paul Parks and Recreation
Souk Moua, Phalen Village Clinic
Gwen Peterson, Manager of Recreation Services, Saint Paul Parks and Recreation
Diane Raff, Living at Home / Block Nurse Program
Chris Rosenthal, Jewish Family Services
Mary Jo Schifsky, Store to Door
Ann Schulte, East Side YMCA
Sai Thao, Neighborhood Development Center
Diane Wanner, District Council Coordinator, Saint Paul City Council Research Office

Focus Group members, including representatives from:

Tubman Elder Programs
Keystone Community Senior Programs
Wilder Foundation
Phalen Village Clinic
Lifetime Home Project - Adaptive Housing / Universal Design.
Pakonen Real Estate Development
And residents of Saint Paul neighborhoods

City of Saint Paul:

Office of the Mayor
City Council
District Councils
Dept. of Planning and Economic Development
Public Libraries
Dept. of Parks and Recreation

Ramsey County Health Department
Metropolitan Council

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Executive Summary

The City of Saint Paul Department of Parks and Recreation received a grant in October 2012 to launch an exploratory assessment of the city's readiness to adopt a *Lifetime Communities* model of planning (also known as "livable communities"). The Lifetime Communities concept focuses on creating places that offer physical, social, and service features for residents of all ages and abilities so that they are "good places to grow up and grow old."^{1 2}

The assessment undertaken was to:

- engage City agencies, community organizations, businesses, and residents in conversations about the concept and focus of a Lifetime Communities approach,
- identify planning and collaborative efforts that could support this approach, and
- explore issues that could advance or inhibit its development.

The intent was to establish a baseline understanding of what kind of planning takes place for Saint Paul, how integrated planning efforts are, how the Lifetime Community concept might fit in, and what resources or other inputs are needed to move ahead. The work would also provide guidance on how to structure efforts and position current advisory groups for facilitating a Lifetime Community approach that would benefit the residents of the City of Saint Paul.

This work was conducted under the direction of the City of Saint Paul Advisory Committee on Aging (ACOA), through a Steering Committee (SC). According to the *City of Saint Paul Community Guide to City Services* the Advisory Committee on Aging advises the Mayor regarding city ordinances affecting older residents, promotes the dignity and independence of Saint Paul's aging population, identifies needs of seniors, helps recognize their contributions, and advocates on issues that impact seniors.³

The Advisory Committee on Aging invited residents and representatives from service organizations and businesses to participate in the work of this project as a Grant Advisory Team (GAT). More than 15 individuals served as members of the GAT. The goal was to create a city-wide, cross-cultural, cross-generational group.

Methods for this work included: group discussions (SC and GAT meetings), identification and review of relevant resources, key informant interviews, and focus groups. This work was conducted from November 2012 through September 2013.

¹ National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, *A Blueprint for Action: Developing a Livable Community for All Ages*. May, 2007. Found at: <http://www.n4a.org/pdf/07-116-N4A-Blueprint4ActionW Covers.pdf>

² Partners for Livable Communities, *Livable Communities for All Ages*. Found at www.livable.org/AginginPlace

³ *City of Saint Paul Community Guide to City Services*. January 2012. Found at: <http://www.stpaul.gov/DocumentCenter/View/57910>

This report provides the findings and a set of recommendations. Quotes are indicated in italics, usually presented within shaded call-out boxes throughout the report.

Findings included:

1. There are several important trends and issues that affect Saint Paul residents and organizations and impact planning and development, including:
 - a. Economic constraints and weak economy
 - b. Demographic changes including aging population and growing ethnic/cultural diversity, with bifurcation between age cohorts
 - c. Concerns about the deterioration of housing stock and the design/layout of homes which were not designed for persons with mobility or functional limitations
 - d. Lack of transportation options for people of all ages, but especially for people who have limited mobility
2. With regard to planning, informants provided the following insights:
 - a. Planning and development at the city and regional level primarily focus on the built environment, not on human or support services
 - b. The City and region's Comprehensive Plans drive much of what happens—they are updated every 10 years
 - c. There has been little focus over the past few decades on designs/projects that are purposefully age-integrated
 - d. Planning resources are diminished from where they were 10 or 20 years ago
 - e. Planners and others would have to have guides/technical assistance/input on how to incorporate the concept and practice of Lifetime Communities into their plans
3. Resident engagement in the planning process was considered important, but there are clearly limitations:
 - a. There are windows of opportunity in the planning process, and these are defined—once the plan is finalized and the strategy set there is still an opportunity for resident engagement, but this will be focused on projects or efforts that address the strategic priorities as they have been set in policy
 - b. Residents can be hard to reach for many reasons--there must be many different methods used to reach them; electronic (web-based) engagement does not/should not replace in-person or telephone methods
 - c. Residents are more likely to get engaged if they are individually invited and if the focus is on their neighborhood—the purpose for the effort must be directly meaningful to that resident
 - d. Older people and the non-traditional resident may be harder to reach, but their voices are important

4. Among the planners and City and regional agency representatives, there was a willingness to learn more about the Lifetime Communities approach and to incorporate this into future planning and development efforts. The informants requested educational and guiding resources and said that there needs to be an advocate group to bring forward insights and information about the needs and strengths of older people and how projects can be adapted to fit all ages and all abilities.

Recommendations and ideas for further development included interest in changing the structure, purpose, and composition of the City of Saint Paul Advisory Committee on Aging to continue exploration of this approach and to pursue the following:

- Establish connections/linkages to other key groups, including advisory groups, as well as key policymaking and planning/development groups and activities.
- Clarify the vision and key components of a Lifetime Community as it could be realized in the City of Saint Paul.
- Create or adapt existing Lifetime Communities checklists/ templates/guides/technical assistance materials to assist planners.
- Get involved in the Comprehensive Plan development process.
- Foster collaboration across sectors and providers and between public and private agencies.
- Foster resident and local service provider engagement.
- Highlight how elders can be seen as assets to a project and within a neighborhood.
- Raise awareness and visibility for this concept and approach through compelling stories, information, and data.

The examination and discussion through this grant project revealed top issues of concern (housing, transportation, connection to human services and amenities, and neighborhood safety). We found informants interested in the Communities for a Lifetime concept. Planners are willing to learn more and are open to incorporating this approach, with assistance. The key informants provided good examples of cross-sector collaboration on which to build. We identified a robust set of resources and references for further study and use. The results provide a good foundation for the next phase of work.