Making Your Community Work for All Ages

Executive Summary

A Toolkit for Cities

In mid-20th century America, increased wealth from the post-war boom contributed to a trend to larger families, in turn creating a need for housing. Suburbs sprung up everywhere, including here in the Kansas City area. The fast and cost-effective solution for developers meeting this increased housing demand was to build new houses around the fringes of downtowns, made newly accessible by affordable automobiles and an expanding network of roads.

For the last 60 years, the suburbs did exactly what they were designed to do: provide houses and services for the families raising the generation we now call the baby boomers. Baby boomers are aging and community leaders are starting to recognize that their communities need to evolve to meet the new preferences and needs of all ages.

The time to plan for these changes is now. KC Communities for All Ages and the First Suburbs Coalition have developed a toolkit to help elected officials, planners and community leaders respond to these evolving trends, maintain a high quality of life for all residents and to make their cities communities for all ages.

The Kansas City metropolitan area's older adult population ages 65 and older is expected to nearly double.

Population 65 and over

500,000	
400,000	
300,000	
200,000	
100,000	
	2000 2010 2020 2030
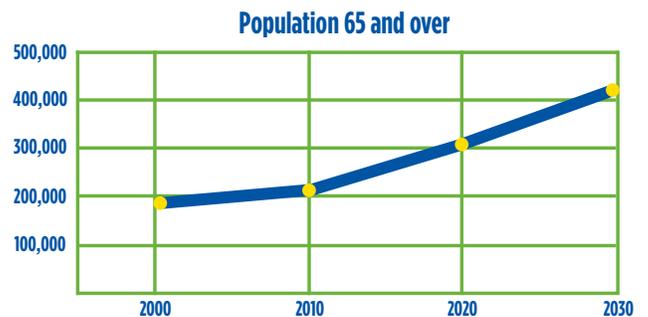
Strategies you'll learn from the toolkit include:

- Involving older adults in community decision making.
- Developing codes for higher-density development.
- Ensuring affordable, accessible housing in your area.
- Designing universal, visitable buildings and retrofitting existing homes for accessibility.
- Creating transportation plans that work for all ages and abilities.
- Promoting walkability and public transportation.

- Creating opportunities for intergenerational interaction.
- Encouraging residents to stay active, engaged and learning.
- Establishing an advisory group, creating goals and objectives to become a community for all ages.

To read the Making Your Community Work for All Ages Toolkit in its entirety, visit www.kccfaa.org. Contact Cathy Boyer-Shesol at cboyer@marc.org or 816/701-8246 to order a printed copy.

Meeting the Challenge
Make your community age friendly

The **Making Your Community Work for All Ages Toolkit** offers strategies to improve facilities and services for older adults that will in turn improve the quality of life for all residents. These strategies include improvements to community design, housing choices, local transportation and the pedestrian environment, community services, programs for healthy living, and civic engagement.

A community for all ages seeks to **meet the needs of the very old, the very young and everyone in between**. It creates and fosters an active, caring and welcoming community that promotes respect, diversity and inclusion of all ages and cultures. Future planning must consider the needs of families with young children, older adults, young professionals, newcomers and more established residents if the first suburbs are to reach their 21st century potential.

A common goal for decision makers in the first suburbs is to develop their communities as **affordable, livable, sustainable places**. The first suburbs developed during a time when such issues as walkability, energy efficiency and environmental sustainability were not uniformly addressed. Community planning is changing to achieve more sustainable, pedestrian-friendly results.

A Changing Population
Plan for the "age wave"

Today, the oldest boomers are in their late 60s. By 2030, **one in five Americans, or about 70 million, will be older than 65**. The aging of the population will place a strain on social welfare systems and require us to rethink how we build and manage our communities.

Boomers are also redefining what it is to "age." As many retire, they are **more active than previous generations**. They have good health care, are mentally and physically fit and live longer.

Millennials are the children of the baby boom generation, some 76 million strong, now in their child-bearing years, and anticipated to be the first American generation to do less well economically than their parents. This age group also faces economic challenges associated with young families, including housing costs, child care and health insurance. They are likely to be the motivating force behind future economic growth.

The **needs of millennials must also be considered** when planning for boomers to age. The two generations want many of the same things: affordable housing, jobs, high-quality educational and recreation opportunities, high-quality health care and other services, and safe, walkable communities. By emphasizing the concept of communities for all ages, it is possible to meet the needs of boomers, millennials and the generations to follow.

Strategies
Choose what works for your community

The toolkit offers helpful strategies for community leaders to address community and neighborhood environment; housing; transportation; communication services and facilities; health care and healthy living — and how to put it all together. **Elected officials in the first suburbs can select the strategies that work best for their respective communities**. Each of these strategies is directly related to aging in place and communities for all ages.

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Aging in Place
Provide options to stay in the community

Many older adults prefer to remain in their own homes for as long as possible. They are comfortable in the neighborhoods where they have lived for years and can remain close to familiar institutions, friends and family. As long as they can afford to live in their current homes and are healthy enough to live independently, aging in place works well. Communities for all ages provide support for this preference, and also to provide options for different housing nearby when living independently is no longer an option.

Greater housing diversity includes smaller homes, apartments and condominiums, single-level duplexes or multiplexes, accessory dwelling units (self-contained units attached to existing single-family dwellings), and small group homes. Older adults who cannot live independently but wish to remain in their communities close to family and friends will need assisted living facilities, continuous-care retirement centers (with living arrangements from independent to nursing care) and long-term nursing homes.

Housing
Build on your strengths

The first suburbs are attractive to potential buyers who seek well-built, well-maintained homes in convenient, close-in neighborhoods with mature landscaping. The houses are smaller and more affordable than in many newer developments and close to employment centers. Moreover, the market will always be strong for homes in neighborhoods that offer the good schools, public safety, economic diversity and vitality, efficient local government, and recreational and cultural amenities found in the first suburbs.

Transportation
Change with residents' needs

Roads dominate the American landscape. For the last 70 years or so, cities and towns have been built around the automobile. In general, the first suburbs are an example of this auto-oriented development pattern. We drive everywhere — to work, to school, to stores and to parks. Modern transportation has served as the backbone of the nation's economy and provided Americans great mobility, but there have also been negative impacts. Low-density use of land is inefficient and expensive, environmental and cultural impacts are significant, and governments are challenged to maintain current infrastructure.

Good planning is needed to meet the mobility needs of both new generations and a growing number of older residents, while addressing accessibility and livability. Some issues are longstanding — congestion and safety, for example. Others are more recent. Increasingly, the bicycle is emerging as a major element of the home-to-work commuter pattern. Communities that address their mobility needs in innovative ways will be well-positioned for success in the 21st century.

Walkability
Make pedestrian improvements

First suburbs can be enhanced by improving opportunities for residents to walk from neighborhoods to services. **Walking improves health for both young and old, promotes social interaction, reduces dependency on cars and reduces energy demands.** Many of the neighborhoods in the first suburbs, however, were not designed with pedestrians in mind. The focus on the automobile after World War II resulted in many neighborhoods with wide streets and no safe sidewalks.

Community Facilities
Keep residents engaged

Community and recreation centers, universities, libraries, museums, parks and other public facilities are important for communities for all ages because they **enable people to connect, share experiences and communicate with each other**. Community services such as lifelong learning, intergenerational programs and volunteer opportunities play a large part in how we perceive our communities. Older adults who have an active social life typically have fewer disabilities and better mental health.

One reason we need to take the idea of a community for all ages seriously is that we can't afford to do things the way we have always done them. Meeting the costs of care as older adults become infirm is a financial issue for families. The impact on both older and younger generations can be considerable, and there are profound economic and societal costs involved as well. The Metlife Report on the Health Status of the 40+ Population estimates total wage, Social Security and private pension losses due to caregiving could range from $283,716 for men to $324,044 for women, for an estimated $655 billion in lost wages per year.

Health Care and Healthy Living
Make healthy options easy to find

Opportunities for physical activity, safe travel, healthy homes and healthy eating are elements of a healthy community. Rising health care costs and increases in chronic health conditions are requiring communities to focus attention on public health. Access to health care is necessary for older adults, who are more likely to live with multiple chronic conditions.

Parks and recreation opportunities play a critical role in creating a healthy and vibrant community for all ages. Growing evidence indicates strong links between parks and recreation and physical and mental health, youth development, social well-being, economic vitality and opportunities for aging in place.

Pulling It All Together
Make YOUR community work for all ages

A goal of a community for all ages is for residents to participate in making decisions about the community. In particular, the participation of older residents can be beneficial in ensuring that decisions about changes to neighborhoods, facilities and programs are suited to the growing population of older users. **This toolkit will help the first suburbs determine the most effective strategies as we prepare for the next generation.**

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first KC suburbs
Conserving the Past . . . Creating the Future

Programs of
MARC
MID-AMERICA REGIONAL COUNCIL

KC Communities *for All Ages*