

Alice M. Sapienza, DBA
Member, Sudbury Council on Aging

LIVABLE SUDBURY: PROCESS FOR MOVING FORWARD

Although Sudbury is new to the concept, nearly two decades ago, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) published “Liveable communities: An evaluation guide.” Its purpose was to help residents assess how they could remain independent as they aged, while staying in their own communities.

In 2012, what had by then emerged as the AARP Network of Age Friendly Communities became an independent affiliate of the World Health Organization (WHO) and its age friendly cities and communities program. WHO researchers undertook a study in 2006, in 33 cities around the world—including Portland, OR, and New York City. They concluded that a livable community provides the structures and services to support residents’ wellbeing and productivity, and their participation in and contribution to the vibrant life of the community.

When Sudbury was accepted into this network in April 2018, we joined a process connecting us internationally; nationally across the U.S. from Hawaii to Maine; and as one of more than 25 Massachusetts cities and town. In addition, on a regional level, Sudbury was 1 of 13 towns northwest of Boston that submitted a collaborative application.

What is the process of becoming livable?

Clearly, as the original AARP publication stated, it begins with an assessment of the current status of a community. WHO defined eight domains that, in their most effective state, constitute a livable community. Each domain, in turn, is defined by very specific elements (e.g., “public transportation is reliable and frequent, including at night and on weekends and holidays”) that can be measured and determined to be satisfactory or in need of improvement.

Although we were accepted in this network in April, Sudbury’s livable assessment began last fall with analyses of the town’s population—past, present, future—using national, regional, and town data. Other relevant town reports or plans completed within the previous 5 years were reviewed, to identify intersections and opportunities for collaboration with respect to making Sudbury a more livable community.

The second phase consisted of two community forums held in November. These meetings allowed the consultants to hear directly from the community about the features of Sudbury that impact its perceived livability across all ages. The next steps, underway now, include targeted focus groups and an online survey of residents 18 years of age and older. These will provide a systematic determination of strengths and challenges to livability in our town. When all work is completed, key results and implications/recommendations will be presented at a public meeting,

and an electronic copy of the final report will be made available to all sometime in late summer or early fall.

Sudbury's livable assessment will inform its Master Plan and be available for all town departments, helping to integrate decision-making by referring to a common set of data. It will also inform the work of our local collaborative of towns.

With regard to that collaborative, all towns will focus their age-friendly efforts on housing and transportation. At a collective level, when there is interest in and capacity for expanding efforts, the collaborative will investigate other domains. On the other hand, housing and transportation affect all other domains directly or indirectly, especially social participation, civic participation and employment, and health and community services.

What we have learned over the past two decades is that a livable community is attractive not only to residents but also to area businesses and people looking to live in suburban towns. Providing the structures and services that support individuals as they age is recognized, now, as benefiting all.