ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

TO:	Senior Commission
FROM:	Paul Council, Community Services Manager
PREPARED BY:	Pete Steele, Community Services Section Manager
SUBJECT:	2014 Work Plan item: Pilot Walkability-Livability Assessment
DATE:	March 9, 2015

RECOMMENDATION
Review and provide feedback on preferred approach to conducting a pilot livability assessment.

BACKGROUND
The Senior Commission 2014 Workplan includes the following objective:

> Conduct a pilot neighborhood assessment of "walkability-livability" to determine its
> value in assessing how well our neighborhoods support aging in place.

Staff researched a number of available tools for conducting such assessments, and recommends one of those as the most applicable to our circumstances: Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide from AARP Public Police Institute. This evaluation and assessment tool is the most realized and has the opportunity for broader application. The recommended guide allows for evaluating (8) core areas within our community;

1. Transportation
2. Walkability
3. Safety and Security
4. Shopping
5. Housing
6. Health Services
7. Recreation and Cultural Services
8. Caring Community

At the March 9, 2015 Senior Commission meeting staff ask the Senior Commission if it would like to continue moving forward with this work plan item, and if to select two of the eight core areas listed for inclusion in the pilot.

Included with this report are two attachments. Attachment 1 will provide you an overall introduction to the AARP assessment tool; and attachment 2 provides an example of one of its surveys.

ATTACHMENTS
1. Introduction to Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide
2. Sample Survey

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INTRODUCTION
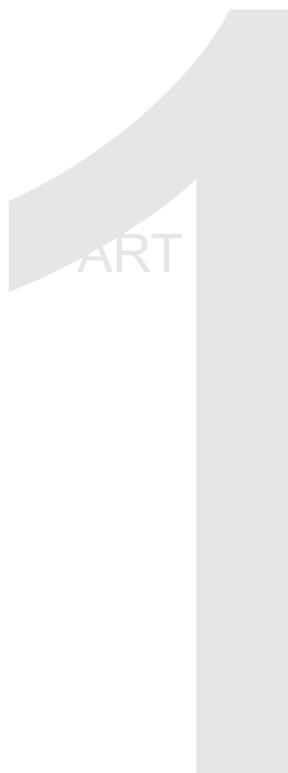
We all want to live in a livable community. Each of us has his or her own image of what such a community should look like. That image is shaped, in part, by our reaction to the communities in which we now live or used to live. For older residents, a livable community would include elements that help them to maintain independence and quality of life.

The physical characteristics of a community often play a major role in facilitating our personal independence. A safe pedestrian environment, easy access to grocery stores and other shops, a mix of housing types, and nearby health centers and recreational facilities are all important elements that can positively affect our daily lives. However, poor community design can make it difficult for us to remain independent and involved in the community around us. For instance, a limited mix of housing types can be a challenge to aging within the same community; poorly maintained sidewalks can be a personal safety concern; and physical barriers, such as busy highways and high walls, can divide and isolate communities.

> *A livable community is one that has affordable and appropriate housing, supportive community features and services, and adequate mobility options, which together facilitate personal independence and the engagement of residents in civic and social life.*

The purpose of this Livable Communities Evaluation Guide is to encourage us to take a new look at the community or neighborhood in which we now live. Although this guide is written from the perspective of older persons, the features and services discussed promote livability for persons of all ages and abilities. The intent is not to "grade" or rank communities, but rather to help residents identify areas where they can direct their energies toward making their community more livable for themselves and others. Livability will only become a reality in our individual communities and neighborhoods if citizens actively take charge and move to bring about key changes.

Creating and Updating the Livable Communities Evaluation Guide

In 2000, AARP published *Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide*, prepared by Patricia Pollack of Cornell University, so that older volunteers and other interested community members could assess the capacity of their community to meet the needs of older adults. The survey proved to be a useful tool for community volunteers who wanted to take a closer look at their own communities as a starting point for mobilizing others to effect change. This updated Guide builds on the previous document but reflects additional interests and concerns. It also includes new success stories and offers follow-up contact information and new references, including references to useful Internet sites. Although Internet references to specific documents may change over time, the basic sites will continue to be useful. Older residents, as well as others in the broader community, increasingly rely on the Internet as a valuable source of information. For those who do not own their own computers, many senior centers and public libraries have computers available for public access and offer computer classes as well.

Involving Focus Groups

An important part of creating this updated Guide was the active participation of older community residents across the country. In an effort to gain a broad awareness of current perceptions of livability and community issues, a research team conducted 14 focus groups with older residents and caregivers in 13 cities in five areas of the country. The communities included Sun City, Pebble Creek, and Mesa, Arizona; Boone and Gowrie, Iowa; Borough Park, Bayridge, Hempstead, and Northport, New York; Carnation, Renton, and Bellevue, Washington; and Sarasota and St. Petersburg, Florida.

Collectively, these groups were diverse in income, race, and ethnicity. They included participants from age-restricted and intergenerational communities as well as communities in rural, urban, and suburban areas. These communities ranged in population from less than 1,000 to significantly more than one million residents. All par-

ticipants were living independently, and most were actively engaged in their communities. In addition to these focus groups, the research team created an interactive website, which attracted responses from 80 older citizens from across the country.
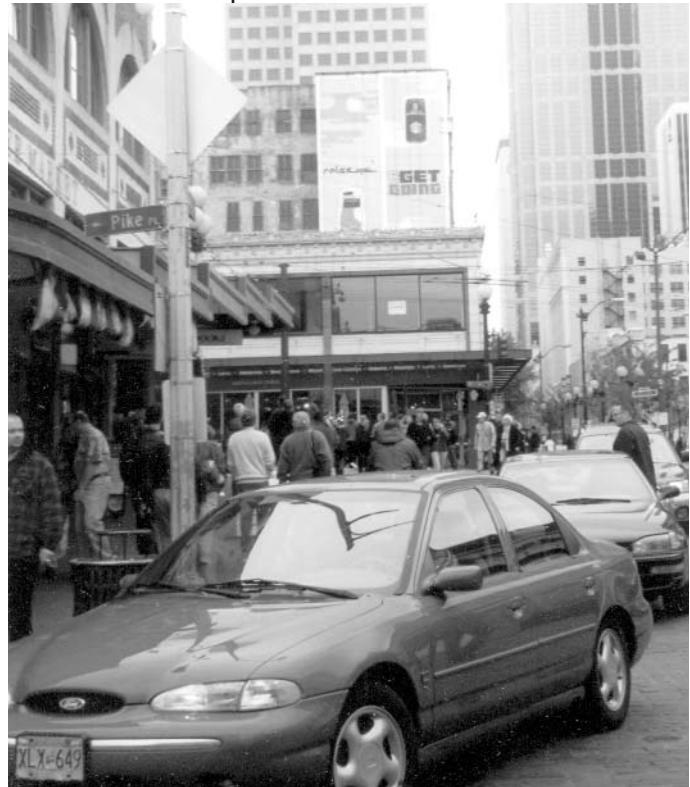
Participants in each focus group were selected to represent a range of interests and expertise in a given community. The participants themselves defined "community" in ways that reflected their own experiences. Some defined community in terms of the formal geographic boundaries of a particular city or subdivision; others defined it in terms of a neighborhood or particular older adult housing complex and nearby environs. Still others saw their community reaching out to include those who were linked by common organizations and associations. This type of variation is also anticipated from those who will use this guide.

Defining Elements of Livability
Despite their diverse mix of communities and participants, all of the focus groups agreed on a common definition of a livable community that is friendly to older adults-a caring community that offers a high quality of life and fosters continued independence. Each group independently developed its own list of elements that participants felt characterized an older adult-friendly community. The lists were remarkably similar. They noted in particular the importance of nearby quality health facilities, a reliable public transportation system, variety in housing types, a safe and secure environment, access to shopping, a physical environment that fosters walking ("walkability"), and opportunities for recreation and culture. Respondents to the online survey identified very similar areas of concern.

Each focus group then proceeded to conduct an initial on-the-spot community self-assessment to explore the ways in which its own community reflected its image of livabil-

ity, noting areas that needed improvement. The elements that the groups identified as improving livability reflected the participants' personal experience as well as their collective perception of the community in which they lived. The Internet responders also underscored positive aspects of their community and those that needed attention.

Moving from Discussion to Action
Several of the focus groups actually began to plan an action strategy to address issues that they had identified as needing attention. The agenda varied considerably depending on the setting and the participants' experience. For example, topics of interest included advocating for more local dial-a-ride services, pressing for a senior center in a forgotten part of the community, raising funds for a new intergenerational center, facilitating better communication strategies among community groups, advocating for more accessibility options in new homes, and identifying ways to increase opportunities for social interaction.

The *Guide* as a Step toward Action
It may be difficult for a small group to change a whole community, but residents can draw attention to an issue that is important to them and join forces with others who share similar concerns. Older volunteers in communities across the nation have done exactly that. In one community, for example, an organized group of older adults pushed for installation of a pedestrian walk signal. In another community, a group organized to keep the local hospital from closing.

This *Guide* is intended to empower groups of older volunteers to better understand their communities and work to improve them. It offers a series of community self-assessment surveys that will help groups to identify issues of concern, and it provides contacts to whom volunteers can express those concerns. The issue areas highlighted in these surveys reflect concerns raised within the focus groups and the Internet website, as well as other suggestions based on experience. Individuals and groups using this *Guide* are sure to identify additional

issues for their communities. What is important is for each group to select an issue that its members are deeply concerned about-and can do something about-and to address this challenge.

How to Use the *Guide*

Part II, Introducing the Community Survey, provides general information about the reasons why a group may want to conduct a community survey; describes the general process for carrying out a survey, including any advance preparation tasks; and outlines a range of steps that groups can take to follow up on their findings. Before you begin a community survey process, read this section carefully; it provides useful information that applies to all of the surveys.

Part III, Conducting the Community Survey, is divided into sections according to issue areas that groups of active older persons have identified as important to maintaining independence and quality of life. Each section offers a description of livability as it relates to that issue area, a survey to guide a new look at a community or neighborhood, and a set of follow-up steps to address those issues.

Part IV, More Information and Contacts, identifies a variety of additional resources and sources of information.

WALKABILITY

Introduction

Walking is the oldest form of transportation, and sidewalks are the fundamental building blocks of a pedestrian network. For older adults who no longer drive, sidewalks are a crucial resource for remaining active and interacting with others. Most important, they allow older people to get to a variety of vital destinations, such as shopping and medical facilities. (This survey is concerned with walking as a crucial mode of transportation. The recreational aspects of walking are covered in Section 7, Recreation and Cultural Activities.)

Unfortunately, in too many communities, the transportation system has been built around the automobile, and little consideration has been given to the needs and desires of pedestrians. Lack of sidewalks, construction of sidewalks too close to streets and roads, and lack of maintenance can discourage people from using this vital aid to walking and can keep those who need to walk from reaching their destination.

Challenges for Pedestrians and Why People Don't Walk

Obviously, many people do walk. But many more would like to walk if their community had an adequate pedestrian system in place that made walking safe and enjoyable. What are some of the challenges that your community faces in encouraging walking as an alternative mode of transportation? Here are a few common problems; your community may have different or additional concerns.

Weather

Weather plays a role in when, where, and how far people are willing to walk. Realistically, there is not much we can do about the weather, but if other physical constraints are minimized, weather can become less of a factor in walking. For example, having and enforcing rules about keeping sidewalks clear of ice and snow can make walking safer and more possible in winter.

Discontinuous and Disjointed Routes

Sidewalks that stop and then pick up again later can make it physically impossible for some pedestrians to reach a destination. Sidewalks that do not go where people want or need to go can discourage residents from walking.

Traffic Conflicts

Poor design and poor placement of sidewalks cause pedestrians real or perceived danger from fast-moving vehicles. Locating a sidewalk immediately next to busy streets can discourage many people from using it. For instance, having a strip of grass between the sidewalk and roadway may help pedestrians feel safer.

Difficulty in Crossing Streets

Pedestrian signals, where available, often do not accommodate those who walk more slowly than the standard four feet per second. This presents a serious danger, particularly where there are very wide streets, or where multi-lane streets lack a median for pedestrians to pause until the next signal.

Personal Security

Poor design and lighting can contribute to people feeling vulnerable to crime and fearful about walking.

Poor Design

Narrow sidewalks that make it difficult for two people to walk side-by-side can discourage people from walking.

Lack of Maintenance

Uneven surfaces, broken pavement, and large cracks are examples of poorly maintained sidewalks and increase the risk of falling.

Obstructions

Obstructions such as overgrown bushes and trees can make it difficult for people to walk on a sidewalk. Likewise, poor planning can result in obstacles such as fire hyrdants or utility poles being placed in a sidewalk. In addition, unleashed dogs can be threatening to a person walking along a sidewalk.

WALKABILITY SURVEY

Preparing to Conduct the Survey
To conduct a survey of the walking opportunities in your community, it is important that your teams take the time to walk the streets and record their results. If your community is very large, you may want to select a smaller, more manageable area on which to focus. Depending on the interests of the survey teams, you also may want to focus on specific issues, such as sidewalk location or maintenance.

An added note about preparing for this survey: Although the survey questions provided here focus on problems with sidewalks, consider asking your survey teams to collect information about areas that are particularly commendable as well. Being able to demonstrate that your objectives are being met in some locations can bolster your argument for action in other locations.

Getting Ready Checklist
(see pages 9-14 for more details)

Review and Define
- ❑ Review the sample Walkability survey
- ❑ Define the community to assess

Gather Materials
- ❑ Street maps
- ❑ Clipboards
- ❑ Note paper or handheld voice recorder (if desired)
- ❑ Pens, pencils, highlighters
- ❑ Measuring tape (if desired)
- ❑ Stopwatch or watch with second hand (if desired)
- ❑ Comfortable walking shoes and clothing
- ❑ Camera (if desired)
- ❑ Flashlight (Some questions address lighting issues, and you will have to check for this at night. You will need a flashlight to record your responses and pro vide light in those areas where lighting is inade quate.)

Collect Useful Background Material
- ❑ Get census information on sections of the community with significant numbers of older residents
- ❑ Gather information about regulations on sidewalk snow removal and other maintenance issues

Enlist Allies and Partners
- ❑ Local library staff
- ❑ City planning staff
- ❑ Community transportation agency
- ❑ Local police (an officer may be willing to join you on a nighttime survey)
- ❑ Other:

Complete Other Tasks
- ❑ Form survey teams (DO NOT GO ALONE TO DO THE SURVEY AT NIGHT)
- ❑ Ask for volunteers to carry out specific jobs
- ❑ Create a schedule for conducting the survey
- ❑ Make sure volunteers are familiar with survey area

Conducting the Survey

Sidewalks and Their Maintenance

1. Are there sidewalks throughout your community?

❑   YES   ❑   NO

2. Are the sidewalks well maintained? (Surfaces should be flat with only minor cracks and minimal separation between slabs.) Note the location of problem sidewalks.

❑   YES   ❑   NO

_____
_____
_____

3. Are curb-cuts visible? Would it be difficult for those with visual impairments to detect them or those with wheelchairs or walkers to negotiate them? Note the location of problem curb-cuts.

❑   YES   ❑   NO

_____
_____
_____

Useful Terms to Know
Curb-cut: The area cut out of the edge of a sidewalk at an intersection. Curb-cuts allow people with wheelchairs, bicycles, and strollers to move easily from the sidewalk to

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4. Are any sidewalks obstructed by bushes or overhanging tree branches? Note the location of problem sidewalks.

❑   YES   ❑   NO

_____
_____
_____

5a. Does the community have a regulation regarding snow removal from sidewalks? (Your local public works department or city/county manager's office should have this information.)

❑ YES   ❑ NO

Note locations where sidewalks are not cleared, if applicable._____
_____
_____

5b. Does the community have a program to help older persons clear snow from the sidewalk in front of their home?

❑ YES   ❑ NO

6. Are the sidewalks wide enough for at least two people to walk together? (A minimum width of 4 feet is needed for two people to walk together.)

❑ YES   ❑ NO

Note the location of substandard sidewalks on the survey map.

_____
_____
_____

7. Do bicyclists, skateboarders, roller skaters, and other nonpedestrian users make walking difficult?

❑ YES   ❑ NO

If this is a problem in specific areas, locate those areas on the survey map.

_____
_____
_____

8. Are there other problems that affect use of the side-walks, such as animal waste or unleashed dogs that threaten pedestrians?

❑ YES ❑ NO

If this is a problem in specific areas, locate the areas on the survey map.

_____
_____
_____

Traffic Signals

9. Are traffic signals located at pedestrian crossings?

❑ YES ❑ NO

Note on the survey map where you think additional traffic signals are needed.

_____
_____
_____

10. Do the traffic signals provide adequate time for pedestrians to cross the street without feeling rushed?

❑ YES ❑ NO

Note on the survey map the location of signals that do not provide adequate time for crossing.

_____
_____
_____

11. Do signals have push-to-walk buttons to help stop traffic on a busy street?

❑ YES ❑ NO

Note location of signals without push-to-walk buttons on the survey map.

_____
_____
_____

Traffic signals generally provide a safe method for pedestrians to cross a street. However, non-signalized crosswalks can create a false sense of security that could result in a pedestrian fatality. The Federal Highway Administration Highway Design Handbook for Older Drivers and Pedestrians: Recommendations and Guidelines (December 2000) suggests that the shorter stride and slower gait of less agile older pedestrians requires that pedestrian control signal timing should be based on an assumed walking speed of .85 meters or 2.8 feet per second.

12. Do any long streets with no intersections have mid-block crosswalks?

❑ YES ❑ NO

Note location on the survey map.

_____
_____
_____

13. Are crosswalks well marked? (This could include striping, signage for pedestrians and vehicles, caution lights.)

❑ YES ❑ NO

Note locations of crosswalks that are not well marked.

_____
_____
_____

14. Do all crosswalks have curb-cuts to provide a transition from the sidewalk to the roadway?

❑ YES ❑ NO

Note locations on the survey map of crosswalks that do not have curb-cuts or curb-ramps.

_____
_____
_____

15. Are curb-cuts textured to alert persons with visual impairments that they are about to enter the street?

Pedestrian Amenities

16. Are the sidewalks in your community shaded by trees?

❑ YES ❑ NO

Note on the survey map where there are no shade trees.

_____
_____
_____

17. Are there resting places (e.g., benches, low walls) for pedestrians along the sidewalks?

❑   YES   ❑   NO

Note on the survey map where resting places are located, especially in areas of the community with many older residents.

_____
_____
_____

18. Are there enough resting places?

❑   YES   ❑   NO

Note on the survey map where you think additional resting places are needed.

_____
_____
_____

19. Are resting places shaded adequately from the sun?

❑   YES   ❑   NO

Note on the survey map the location of seating places that are not shaded.

_____
_____
_____

20. Do the community's signs provide clear directions for pedestrians?

❑   YES   ❑   NO

Note on the survey map where you think signs are needed or should be improved.

_____
_____
_____