

Framework Development for a Burlington Aging Council

March 2021

Ad-hoc development group

- Angela Smith-Dieng, DAIL (Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living)
- Kelly Stoddard-Poor, AARP
- Megan Humphrey, HANDS (Helping And Nurturing Diverse Seniors)
- Heather Filonow, UVMHN Home Health & Hospice
- Molly Dugan, Cathedral Square
- Jim Holway, community member
- Cameron Segal, Living Well Group

Background

- In 2019, City Council created the Senior Study Committee to review and make recommendations regarding the long-term provision of senior services in Burlington. In addition to support for the Heineberg Community Senior Center, the Committee recommended the formation of a “Council on Aging”
- Concept revived after almost a year of COVID-19 by way of the Community Development and Neighborhood Revitalization (CDNR) Committee
- CDNR tasked the creation of an informal group to develop a framework proposal for a “Council on Aging”

Purpose and creation

- There are four main goals of the Burlington Aging Council:
 1. to elevate the contributions of older adults in Burlington
 2. to raise issues facing older adults in Burlington and the organizations that serve them
 3. to make policy recommendations to the Mayor and City Council to address gaps, needs, and opportunities that impact older adults in Burlington
 4. to ensure that the voices of older adults in Burlington are at the forefront of City policy
- Unlike other Boards and Committees, this group recommends this Council be created by City Council resolution

Burlington Aging Council credo: Older residents of Burlington must be valued members of the community

- Older adults are Burlington's
 - Homeowners and taxpayers
 - Business owners, entrepreneurs, and employees
 - Volunteers
 - Civic leaders
 - Artists, musicians, writers
- Older adults are as diverse as the communities in which they live, spanning a 50-year multigenerational age range.
- As older adults age, their contributions and needs for support change over time
- Ageism is a real problem embedded in our culture, leading to increased mortality and poor health outcomes.
- Beyond policies and initiatives, Burlington can address ageism through education and intentional inclusion.

- The intersectionality of the issues and opportunities facing older adults means that this Council will need to use creative and innovative approaches to address challenges.
- This Council would propose issues to the Mayor, City Council, and standing Commissions and Boards as many of these issues fall within the scope of existing Bodies.
- Focus areas include
 - Health Prevention, Access, & Quality: Nutrition & Physical Activity
 - Food Security
 - Multimodal Transportation
 - Accessible Outdoor & Indoor Public Spaces
 - Housing: Affordability, Availability, & Accessibility
 - Social Inclusion
 - Technology accessibility
 - Civic Engagement and Volunteerism
 - Industry Support
 - Family Caregiver Support

(Note: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion [DEI] is present in each focus area and should be a driving force in each subsequent discussion)

Health Prevention, Access, & Quality: Nutrition & Physical Activity

- Older adults must be able to access affordable healthcare in Burlington. It's important that options and initiatives are not focused solely on treating an issue that arises, but preventing future problems.
- Issues including
 - Physical health
 - Dental care
 - Foot care
 - Eye care
 - Mental health
 - Primary care/geriatrician access
 - Substance misuse

Food Security

- In Vermont, about 10% of older adults are food insecure. Burlington must support programs and organizations that are working to address food insecurity.
- Research shows that nutrition programs, such as congregate meals at senior centers, improve health outcomes and reduce healthcare utilization.

Multimodal Transportation

- Many older adults report that due to a lack of transportation options, they are unable to leave their homes. This causes them to miss out on social engagement and volunteer activities, keep them from appointments, and impacts their ability to consistently access food.
- Issues including
 - Safe and clear signage and shelter for public transportation
 - Handicap accessible transportation options
 - Affordable and regularly available transit to and from appointments, grocery stores, senior centers

Accessible Outdoor & Indoor Public Spaces

- Older adults need and want safe and walkable outdoors spaces that are inclusive to all ability levels. Currently, about a quarter of older adults in Burlington report that if they could no longer drive, getting around their neighborhood would be difficult.
- Issues including
 - Addressing seasonal impact on public spaces
 - Sidewalks and streets accessible for wheelchairs and walkers
 - Expanded green spaces
 - Stoplights and walk signals employing extended intervals that allows slower moving pedestrians time to safely cross intersections
 - Lowering curbs
 - Ramps at intersections
 - Adequate benches on walking routes throughout the city
 - Adequate streetlights
 - Zero step entrances in public buildings
 - Staircases with railings and wheelchair ramps

Housing: Affordability, Availability, & Accessibility

- In 2020, over 26,000 Vermont renters and home owners aged 65 and older were paying an unaffordable amount of their income towards housing expenses. About 15% of Vermont's homeless population are 55 or older and older adults that are homeless are especially vulnerable to the challenges the homeless face.
- High cost of living is consistently ranked as the number one most concerning factor that impacts an older adult's ability to continue living in their home.
- Burlington has many affordable housing organizations committed to serving Vermonters with low-income, but the City and existing organizations need more capital to build new units and address gaps in housing variety (ADUs, Duplex, Multiplex, Cottage Courts), rental assistance to make rents truly affordable, and sustainable funding to provide embedded support programs such as SASH in all settings.

Social Inclusion

- The mental and physical health impacts of social isolation are detrimental to all age groups, especially older adults.
- The magnitude of health risks associated with social isolation and loneliness are equivalent to smoking and obesity.
- Social connection is associated with a 50% reduced risk of early death. (we live longer when we are socially connected)
- Burlington must continue to support initiatives and programs that provide engaging , connecting, and enriching opportunities for older adults.

Technology

- Many older adults in Burlington do not have reliable or high quality internet access or adequate technology skills. As the world adapts to an online world, technology accessibility for older adults must be a priority.
- Issues including
 - Broadband access
 - Machine access: computers, tablets, cell phones
 - Technology education

Civic Engagement & Volunteerism

- Older adults in Burlington must be actively engaged in city policy and legislative advocacy, not only to support issues via the ballot box, but to meet city councilors, sit in on committee meetings, and join standing committees like the Burlington Aging Council.
- Burlington can use the growbOLD model through the COVE (Community of Vermont Elders) advocacy team, as a template to engage older adults in Burlington.
- Older adults have one of the highest rates of volunteerism. 1 in 3 older Vermonters (33%) formally volunteer.

Industry Support

- The organizations that provide services for older adults in Burlington are a vital part of the Burlington economy, employing and caring for hundreds of Vermonters. It's important that these organizations are supported.
- Burlington residents consistently report that they would like to stay in their neighborhoods through end of life. By supporting the care organizations here, Burlington can help ensure that's an option.
- Issues including
 - Workforce development
 - Sponsored certification classes
 - Access to funds for nonprofit organizations

Family caregiver support

- Each year more than 30 million family caregivers, or informal caregivers, provide unpaid care to an older adult in the United States. 15 million of those are caring for someone living with dementia. This is primarily a gendered-issue as 65% of those cared for are women and 75% of informal caregivers are women.
- There are more than 30,000 family caregivers in Vermont caring for people with dementia. Caregivers are at higher risk for poor health outcomes.
- Research shows that family caregiver support interventions reduce caregiver burden and delay the need for institutional care.
- Burlington must support programs, initiatives, and organizations that serve informal, unpaid caregivers.

Membership makeup

- No more than 15 members serving 2 year, staggered terms
- Elected Committee Chair

- 1 member representing a healthcare provider (UVM Health Network, Community Health Centers of Burlington, primary care physician, etc.)
- 1 member representing a long-term care organization in Burlington
- 1 member representing an affordable housing organization in Burlington
- 1 member representing an organization working to fight food insecurity in Vermont
- 1 member representing an organization providing advocacy and support for older adults in Vermont
- 1 member representing an organization supporting New Americans in Vermont
- 1 member representing a senior center in Burlington
- 1 member representing an organization providing mental health services in Vermont
- 1 member representing an organization providing transportation services in Vermont
- 1 member representing CEDO
- 3-5 older adults living in Burlington, may be affiliated with the above-mentioned organizations but does not have to be

City of Burlington support

- This group believes that support from the City of Burlington is vital in two ways:
 - Burlington Aging Council staff
 - Representative from CEDO
 - Already supporting Senior Providers Working Task Force
 - Clear, consistent avenue for communication between the Council, the Mayor, City Council, and existing Committees

Burlington Plan on Aging

- In order to plan for current and future needs of older adults in Burlington, this group recommends that the Burlington Aging Council create a “Burlington Plan on Aging” that would update every 4 years.
- The Burlington Plan on Aging will be based off of the Vermont State Plan on Aging and Older Vermonters Act, but further identify goals and objectives specific to Burlington
 - The Vermont State Plan on Aging is a robust document outlining the state’s priorities to meet the needs of older Vermonters.
- A Burlington-specific plan would act as a guiding template for City policy and initiatives.

Potential State-wide

- This group believes that the work that the Burlington Aging Council will undergo can serve as a model for other towns and cities in Vermont