***Drafting the Burlington Action Plan for Aging Well***

**SOCIAL CONNECTION AND ENGAGEMENT**

**Goal**

Older Residents should be free from isolation and loneliness, with affordable and accessible opportunities in their communities for social connectedness, including work, volunteering, lifelong learning, civic engagement, arts, culture, and broadband access and other technologies. Older Residents are critical to our local economies and their contributions should be valued by all.

**Recommended Objectives:**

1. The City of Burlington will establish a clear system of budgetary and project review that follows explicit guidance for Age Friendly Communities. This will prioritize system enhancements to best serve older residents in making safe, affordable, and efficient connectivity and mobility choices that results in:
   1. An increase in the proportion of older residents engaging in regular, year-round physical exercise
   2. An increase in ridership with GMT and other transit services (e.g., NeighborRides) and participation by older residents in CarShare.
   3. An increase in Older citizen satisfaction with year round walkability.
   4. An increase in Walkability/Transit scores (https://www.walkscore.com/) for every neighborhood.
2. Older Burlington residents will increasingly indicate that they have the resources and information they need to age well in Burlington, and have known avenues to communicate and engage with city policy and programs. This includes a targeted set of communications tools to provide information, alerts and opportunities to older Burlington residents, and a clear conduit of communications specific to older residents to City Council and the Mayor’s office.
3. The City of Burlington will recognize thatEmotional Wellness of all residents is a critical attribute of a livable and sustainable community and link to community indicators. Emotional Wellness will serve as a key determinant of health when developing programming aimed to support social connection and engagement of older residents in Burlington.
4. Older Burlington residents will have the highest level of high-speed internet connectivity of any small city in the country and will have the ability to effectively communicate, receive services, engage as citizens, access life-long learning opportunities as well as employment opportunities via technological engagement.
5. Older Burlington residents seeking to volunteer within their communities will have means to engage with such opportunities accessibly and inclusively. Additionally, older Burlington residents seeking assistance can reliably and safely utilize volunteer services in areas such as day-to-day home maintenance.

**Recommended Strategies:**

1. Create and fund a Social Connection and Engagement Coordinator based in the Mayor’s office to coordinate across city departments and engage the necessary coalition of service organizations to:
   1. Create baseline data on key indicators of successful social connection and engagement, and link this data to the city and private investment in programs and infrastructure.
   2. Create greater efficiency and increase resources available across city departments that provide programs and infrastructure for social connection and engagement of Burlington’s growing older population.
   3. Convene Stakeholders regularly (e.g., SASH, Howard, Cathedral Square, AgeWell) for a continuous Community Emotional Wellness framework assessment addressing barriers and opportunities to advance a framework into action for Burlington in coordination with the State Aging Plan.
2. Update planBTV: Burlington’s Comprehensive Plan (2019) [www.burlingtonvt.gov/planbtv](http://www.burlingtonvt.gov/planbtv) with a focus explicitly including the growing older population.
   1. The limited reference currently should be expanded with clear metrics to determine how Burlington is achieving the goals set. Advocate for a similar update of the Regional ECOS Plan.
3. Produce a Burlington-specific resource book for healthy aging and social inclusion and ensure direct comprehensive distribution and access (physical copies and online access, possibly building off the COVE guide but more specific to Burlington). Tie the annual distribution of the resource book to polling for feedback on individual and collective attributes of social connection and engagement.
   1. Include specific dimensions for individuals facing Alzheimer’s and dementia to better inform them and their caregivers about healthy aging social inclusion for this population, with specific attention to [utilizing social connection as a preventative strategy](https://www.alz.org/help-support/brain_health/stay_mentally_and_socially_active#) for symptoms of cognitive decline.
4. Conduct a full Pandemic Program debrief in a strategic meeting with major stakeholders, as well as representative older residents. Create a STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK: Emergency Response to a Pandemic, to build a new Policy/Program/Resource Framework to prepare and then implement as needed in the event of a future crisis. Key attributes will include methods to sustain community connection and engagement and reduce isolation during an emergency. Review and update annually with key stakeholders and city departments.
5. Build a *Technology for Connection Initiative* for Burlington Older Residents
   1. Conduct a comprehensive Needs Assessment to understand the needs of the older Burlington residents, including BIPOC and New American communities re: technology access and supports focused on infrastructure, capabilities, training/education, path to 6G. Consider how tech access can be advanced in a culturally appropriate manner so that it is embraced by New Americans/elder BIPOC population.
   2. Advance Training/Education opportunities and participation rates:
      1. Tap into and pilot high schools and colleges for student/intergenerational tech teaching programs.
      2. Explore ongoing tech training and education for older adults to promote accessibility. E.g., Collaborations with local tech centers, universities/colleges and libraries.
   3. Promote the Vermont Assistive Technology Program that offers free supports/hardware/assessments.<https://atp.vermont.gov/>
   4. Identify and Secure Funding:
      1. Assess funding coming from federal grants and funds for technology infrastructure
      2. Explore whether insurance/other private companies would step in to support the technologies and tech access for older Burlington residents.
      3. Expand low-cost tech bundle/programs like those offered by BT.
      4. Explore options with other vendors to offer discounts to older Vermonters for internet service and tech support.
   5. Expand Safety/Security Access: Collaborate with security/safety companies to offer older adults access to security systems at a low cost e.g., “Ring app” on the iPhone or other security systems for their home.
   6. Work with partner groups to expand and standardize the use of in-home technology to help older adults age in place (<https://www.nia.nih.gov/news/nih-initiative-tests-home-technology-help-older-adults-age-place>) to support health, safety, and caregiving.
6. Work with Age Well and United Way to expand the accessibility to and participation within volunteer programs. Additionally, work can be done with local community partners, such as senior centers and health care providers, to increase awareness of Age Well’s volunteer resource helpline for those in need of additional support staying in their homes.
   1. Collaboration with Fletcher Free Library and local senior centers to provide in-print resources on Age Well and United Way volunteer programs and helpline – one pager, FAQ sheet, how to apply information
   2. Screenings of volunteer informational videos at local community centers (Fletcher Free, Heineberg, etc.) to better inform community members about how to become involved in volunteering with Age Well
7. Draw on existing data sources to build a thorough understanding of where our residents over the age of 65 are living and what kind of conditions they are living in. Maintain an active data base to understand the location and situation of older residents.
   1. Utilize data and reporting materials from Feeding Chittenden and Meals on Wheels to determine what areas of Burlington are most heavily populated by older residents, and thus could best utilize social connection programs targeted towards the aging population.

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| **Strategy** | **Short-term**  **(1-3 years)** | **Medium-term**  **(3-6 years)** | **Long-term**  **(7-10 years)** |
| 1. Development of Social Connection and Engagement coordinator |  | X |  |
| 1. Update planBTV with aging-specific information | X |  |  |
| 1. Burlington-specific resource book on aging and social connection | X |  |  |
| 1. Pandemic Program debrief and strategic framework | X |  |  |
| 1. Development of *Technology for Connection Initiative* | X |  |  |
| 1. Expansion of knowledge about Age Well volunteer resources | X |  |  |
| 1. Geographic assessment of where older residents live | X |  |  |
| 8. |  |  |  |

**Additional Questions**

How do the above objectives and strategies advance equity and inclusion? Please list any specific groups who are left out of these strategies?

* It is important to collaborate with local New American community groups to attend to cultural and social norms that may make social connection and engagement needs different for those in certain cultural groups. This includes work with organizations including the following: AALV/USCRI/Somali/Bhutanese/Congolese associations, etc.
* It is important to recognize additional challenges that those with Alzheimer’s, dementia, and other forms of cognitive decline may see in acquiring resources to promote social connection and engagement. For this, consulting with the Alzheimer’s Association of Vermont would be beneficial.

Who are the key partners to accomplish these strategies?

* Those engaged with programming for older Burlington residents – SASH, Cathedral Square, Heineberg Senior Center, AgeWell, Howard Center, United Way
* Those representing Burlington’s New American and BIPOC communities

What funding or resources will be needed to accomplish these strategies?

* Funding for position of Social Connection and Engagement Coordinator within Mayor’s office
* Funding for staffing to adapt planBTV to address Burlington’s aging population
* Funding for website design, physical print copies of resource guide
* Funding for development of technology education program

What legislation or policy change (local or state) will be needed to accomplish these strategies?

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What data could be used to measure success of these strategies?

* Usage data and attendance numbers of pre-existing programs and facilities for social engagement (Heineberg, Fletcher Free, etc.)
* Numbers of volunteers/applications and usage of helpline within AgeWell volunteer services program
* Numbers of volunteers/applications for United Way volunteer programs (RSVP and Foster Grandparent programs)
* Attendance numbers of *Technology Initiative* programs
* Site visits and physical copy distribution numbers for Burlington-specific resource book

What existing programs or initiatives support these strategies?

* Social programs via Senior Centers, Fletcher Free Library, AgeWell, Senior Housing Centers (Cathedral Square), SASH
* Age Well volunteer program and helpline (1-800-642-5119)
* United Way volunteer programs focused on 55+ individuals (RSVP, Foster Grandparent programs)

How do these strategies reflect the input and priorities of Older Vermonters?

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Additional Suggestions and Comments: