**An Age-Friendly Burlington Action Plan**

**FINANCIAL SECURITY**

**As an Age-Friendly Community, in Burlington:**

Older residents should be able to receive an adequate income and maintain assets for a reasonable quality of life as they age. They should be able to seek and maintain employment without fear of discrimination and with any needed accommodations. Mechanisms should be in place to protect older residents from consumer and financial fraud. Older residents should also be able to retire after a lifetime of work, if they choose, without fear of poverty and isolation.

Being financially secure is closely correlated to the health and well-being of individuals, family and a community. We know that older adults in Burlington and Vermont have significant challenges in achieving the goal of financial security as that age. Inadequate savings for retirement, discrimination in the workplace, and rising healthcare costs despite access to Medicare are all too often exacerbated by inflationary pressures adding to the cost of housing, food, and other essentials. Those on truly fixed incomes can be particularly hard pressed.

Working past the age of 65 is valued. For some is essential to be able to afford shelter, food, medicine, heat, and cooling. For others it is an opportunity to contribute in an economy short of workers at all levels, and find meaning and value in doing work and being compensated for it. Not dismissing workers simply for turning 65, or actively discriminating against them results in benefits both for individuals and the community.

**Moving toward an Age-Friendly Community, in Burlington:**

* City officials strongly support the Vermont Strong objective to increase the amount of income available to older Vermonters working with elected and appointed state and federal officials to advance initiatives.
* Increasing the 60+ workforce participation rate is a priority and Employers have ready access to best practice information on hiring and retaining older workers and increase the number of workers aged 65+, advancing age-appropriate work conditions.
* The Burlington employer community, led by the City, presents a united front against age discrimination by enlisting 100 local employers in the AARP Employer Pledge (*Believe in equal opportunity for all workers; Recognize the value of experienced workers; Recruit across diverse age groups and consider all applicants on an equal basis, regardless of age; Believe that 50+ workers should have a level playing field in their ability to compete and obtain jobs).*
* Older adults seeking to work have direct access to local education and training, equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to be of high value either continuing their career or opting for an encore job.
* All residents have knowledge of and easy access to clear, up-to-date, and culturally relevant guidance and resources to make choices about working or retiring with financial security as they approach and become eligible for Medicare and Social Security benefits. Burlington supports lifelong learning for its citizens, and the “K-Grey” continuum of education and training is actively engaged to address this with city and partner programming.

**Actions: City Council & The Mayor’s Office**

1. Provide staffing support, with a set of dedicated functions at one or more positions that designates an Older Worker Ombudsperson to coordinate the efforts of the Aging Council, provide direct service to employers, and work with partners to advance opportunities for training, education, and resources for older workers of all backgrounds.
2. Provide funding (city and/or partners) for a Marketing Campaign to highlight older worker experiences and employer success stories and narratives. Align campaign with build up to *National Employ Older Workers Week* (September -https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/seniors/national-employ-older-workers-week – with Mayoral Proclamation and events to acknowledge and celebrate).

*National Employ Older Workers Week, held annually the last full week of September, recognizes the vital role of older workers in the workforce. National Employ Older Workers Week aims to increase awareness of this labor segment and develop innovative strategies to tap it. It also highlights the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), which provides on-the-job skills training to individuals fifty-five or older with limited financial resources.*

1. Through the Library, Burlington Parks & Rec, and other partners (e.g., high school, colleges, senior centers, AALV), expand investment in digital literacy resources specific to the needs of older community members. Include alternatives that are culturally appropriate and translated into a variety of languages.

**Summary of Key Investments:**

* Dedicated staffing function (new, not an add-on) as an Older Worker Ombudsperson
* Funding to develop and run a long term marketing campaign on older workers, culminating in Burlington being recognized as an Age Friendly Working Community.
* Providing translation services for programming and the development of online and print materials for outreach and information.
* Additional program funding for the Library and Parks and Rec to expand digital literacy programming through their respective outlets, and develop partnership with community groups to expand their reach.

**Actions: Burlington Aging Council and Age-Friendly Organizational Network (including City Departments) with Staffing Support**

1. In coordination with the city’s Older Worker Ombudsperson create an advisory panel of employers to advise on the marketing campaign, support the AARP Employer Pledge Campaign, and seek out resources to advance best practices in employing older workers, including emphasis on older BIPOC, New American, non-native English speaker workers. Create a value proposition around part-time and flexible work, job share, and opportunities for mentoring.
2. Partner with A4TD to bring their programming to the City.
3. Convene a semi-annual peer group of mature workers (from different fields, backgrounds, experiences, and employers) to share and learn techniques for satisfying work and provide support whether one is returning to the workforce, shifting to a new area or field, reducing hours, or negotiating other flexibility. Document the lessons learned into a deliverable for other older workers to utilize.
4. Consolidate and promote education, training, and guidance resources in Burlington for older workers. Bring together providers (e.g., Library, Parks and Recreation, Senior Centers, Age Well, Community College, Burlington School System/Tech Center, AALV, A4TD’s Senior Community Service Employment Program and The Vermont Returnship Program; AARP’s Resources for Building An Age-Inclusive and Caregiving-Friendly Workforce; Encore’s work engagement initiatives; and Vermont’s developing Workforce Expansion Team (WET) with regional coordinators; HireAbility Vermont) to devise a focused plan and program.
5. Support and advocate on behalf of state initiatives to provide for secure retirement (e.g., VTSaves Retirement Program) through active engagement of state representatives. Promote programs such as VTSaves to all Burlington residents. Include resources for those without access to the internet and those who do not speak English to access these programs. Establish programs to emphasize this for all ages.
6. Work with community partnering organizations, such as SASH and the Vermont Ethics Network, to promote and increase access to educational programs to help older Burlington residents understand the types of legal and financial documents within end-of-life documentation. Work with relevant cultural affinity organizations to include culturally appropriate resources and translated education materials.

**We measure progress as:**

* The Burlington employer community enlists 100 local employers in the AARP Employer Pledge, starting with City Government, and then doubling the number of pledges each year for three years.
* Change in City policy to
	+ signing on to AARP Employer Pledge;
	+ issue a Mayoral proclamation for National Employ Older Workers Week;
	+ action on the part of the city to follow through with policies that open the door to more older workers in city government (negotiated agreements as necessary with unions);
	+ resulting in specific numbers to showcase of older workers in city government, allowing the city to model behavior for other employers.
* Have a better understanding of the demographics of Burlington’s workers, 60+ and how they impact the local economy.
* Employers share data on hiring practices and employment of older workers.
* The marketing campaign builds awareness.
* Enrollment grows at all programs for all programs offered in Burlington.