**Burlington Action Plan for Aging Well**

**SOCIAL CONNECTION AND ENGAGEMENT**

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

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 communities and their contributions are valued by all.

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

* Burlington residents ages 65+ receive the social and emotional support they need, and each year there is a decreasing number who feel socially isolated, exhibit elevated levels of stress, report poor physical health, are unhoused or inadequately house, are food insecure, and for whom mobility is compromised.
* Mobility options (e.g., GMT, NeighborRides, CarShare) report increased usage by older residents.
* The proportion of older adults engaging in regular, year-round, physical exercise shows annual increases.
* Calculate neighborhood walkability and transit scores around needs and uses of older adults living in the city, demonstrating annual increases in scores.
* Burlington’s network of viable senior centers, and other local community institutions such as libraries and churches offer quality and equitable programming for older adults.
* Older adults in Burlington increasingly indicate that they have the resources and information they need to age well in the city.
* Older adults in Burlington residents have equitable access to the highest level of affordable high-speed internet connectivity of any small city in the country, enabling them to have the ability to effectively communicate, receive services, engage as citizens, access life-long learning opportunities as well as employment opportunities via technological engagement.
* Older adults in Burlington seeking to volunteer within their communities will have the means to engage with such opportunities accessibly and inclusively.
* Older adults in Burlington reliably and safely utilize volunteer services to seek assistance in areas such as day-to-day home maintenance and activities of daily living, which allow them to age in place.
* Intergenerational engagement opportunities abound with the support of the City’s schools and other institutions.

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

1. Support a Social Connection and Engagement function across city departments and the coalition of local service organizations to:
   1. Create baseline data on key indicators of successful social connection and engagement.
   2. Create greater efficiency and increase resources available across city departments that provide programs and infrastructure for social connection and engagement.
   3. Collaborate with and include diverse social and cultural groups to ensure inclusion of all older residents.
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.
3. Produce a Burlington-specific resource book for healthy aging and social inclusion.
4. Build a Policy/Program/Resource Framework to address the specific needs of older adults in the event of another emergency (e.g., pandemic) and to meet the challenge of the ongoing climate emergency as it specifically impacts older adults.
5. Build a *Technology for Connection Initiative* for older adults in Burlington starting with a comprehensive Needs Assessment, with targeted emphasis on understanding the needs of the older Burlington residents, including BIPOC and New American communities, addressing technology access, affordability, and supports focused on infrastructure, capabilities, training/education, path to 6G. Identify and secure funding for technology infrastructure and access. Collaborate 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. Increase collaboration between city departments (e.g., Fletcher Free Library and Parks and Recreation) to collaborate with community partners to expand the accessibility to and participation in volunteer programs, especially those that offer additional support and assistance to help older adults stay in their homes. Provide focus on outreach to local BIPOC, New American, LGBTQ+, and other groups to promote volunteer information and opportunities within these groups.

**Summary of Key Investments:**

* Dedicated funding from the city to support:
  + A Social Connection and Engagement function across city departments
  + Planner and Outreach functions to update PlanBTV; create a targeted emergency response framework; map out particular issues and approaches to older adults and the climate emergency.
  + Research, compilation, and update of an Aging Resource Guide (electronic and print on demand) with translation into key languages.
  + Technology of Connection Initiative staffing, technology, infrastructure, and subsidies to support universal access.
  + Library and Parks and Recreation Departments staff to increase programming and support volunteerism.
* City specific Data and Tracking capabilities to identify the need and track impact of investments and interventions.

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

1. Support development of 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.
   1. Convene Stakeholders regularly to support a continuous assessment addressing barriers and opportunities to advance a framework into action for Burlington in coordination with the local and regional efforts of the Stakeholders, and the State aging plan, Age Strong Vermont.
   2. Request that DAIL be proactive with their consultants to have a way to parse out service area specific data to help localities home in on specific groups of older adults.
   3. Collaborate with and include diverse social and cultural groups to ensure inclusion of all older adults in Burlington in the development and provision of social connection and engagement resources.
2. Support the updating [PlanBTV](http://www.burlingtonvt.gov/planbtv), Burlington’s Comprehensive Plan (2019) with a focus explicitly including the growing older population. Expand the limited reference in the plan with clear metrics to determine how Burlington is achieving the goals set. Advocate for a similar update of the Regional ECOS Plan.
3. Support the production of a Burlington-specific resource book for healthy aging and social inclusion and ensure direct comprehensive distribution and access (physical copies and online access, available in multiple languages). Tie the distribution of the resources to polling for feedback on individual and collective attributes of social connection and engagement. 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. Support city planning to provide a framework for a future emergency (e.g., pandemic) response that will include methods to sustain community connection and engagement and reduce isolation. Coordinate an annual review with key stakeholders and city departments to keep current. Add to resources already available, <https://www.fema.gov/fact-sheet/seniors-prepare-now-emergency> and YouTube videos and Podcasts for older adults and Emergency Prep and a How to guide which could be accessed/replicated. E.g. <https://www.fema.gov/about/news-multimedia/podcast>, and at Ready.gov, <https://www.ready.gov/>.
5. Support city planning to specifically address the needs of the older adult population considering the [Climate Emergency](https://nationalhousingtrust.org/news/climate-resilience-and-older-adults-making-connection-affordable-housing), as older adults face additional challenges as a result of their health or financial conditions, and they are far more likely to die or be adversely impacted in climate-fueled disasters.
6. Support a *Technology for Connection Initiative* for older adults living in Burlington.
   1. Conduct a comprehensive Needs Assessment to understand the needs of the older Burlington residents, including BIPOC and New American communities, addressing technology access, affordability, and supports focused on infrastructure, capabilities, training/education, path to 6G.
   2. Implement strategies on how to increase technology access among older BIPOC and New American adults using culturally appropriate education techniques. Explore ongoing technology training and education for older adults to promote accessibility, including collaborations with local tech centers, universities/colleges, and libraries. Identify and involve Businesses already having a record of recruiting, training, and employing older workers.
   3. Promote the [Vermont Assistive Technology Program](https://atp.vermont.gov/), offering free supports and hardware assessments.
   4. Expand safety and security access by collaborating with companies to offer older adults access to security systems at a low cost, such as “Ring app” on the iPhone or other security systems for their home.
   5. 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.
7. Work with Age Well, United Way, and the Senior Centers to expand the accessibility to and participation within volunteer programs. Additionally, conduct work 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 (e.g., Fletcher Free, Heineberg) to better inform community members about how to become involved in volunteering with Age Well.
   3. Work with local BIPOC, New American, LGBTQ+, and other groups to promote volunteer information and opportunities within these groups.
8. Review strategies and evidence-based programs from other similar communities that work to provide affordable and sufficient mobility options for older residents for all their needs.
9. Draw on existing data sources to build a thorough understanding of where our residents over the age of sixty-five are living and what kind of conditions they are living in. Maintain an active database to understand the location and situation of older residents.
   1. Utilize data and reporting materials from Feeding Chittenden and Meals on Wheels to determine the areas of Burlington most heavily populated by older residents, and thus could best utilize social connection programs targeted towards the aging population.
   2. Address how different demographic trends and clusters can inform where diverse types and varieties of resources should be promoted to increase use.

Advancing equity and inclusion:

* Engage those groups serving needs of specific groups (e.g., Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired ( https://www.vabvi.org/); Vermont Center for Independent Living (https://vcil.org/)), Veteran’s organizations.
* Collaborate with local New American and BIPOC community groups to address cultural and social norms that may make social connection and engagement needs different for those in certain cultural groups. Develop culturally informed and translated resources to encompass Burlington’s diverse cultural and ethnic groups.
* Recognize the 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. Consult with the Alzheimer’s Association of Vermont to identify the best strategies and resources.

**We measure progress as we:**

* Develop and track reliable Burlington specific data on needs of, participation by, and programming for older adults.
* Increase participation in programming and use of facilities for social engagement (e.g., Heineberg, Fletcher Free, Parks and Recreation, Age Well).
* Increase in the number of volunteers/applications and usage of helpline within Age Well volunteer services program, and United Way volunteer programs (RSVP and Foster Grandparent programs)
* Develop programming and attract participants in the *Technology for Connection Initiative* programs.
* Track website hits and physical copy distribution numbers for Burlington-specific resource book.
* Increased programming for and participation of older adult BIPOC and New American populations.
* Increase in neighborhood walkability and transit scores.