



# Age & Dementia Friendly Amherst COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT & ACTION PLAN JULY 2024

## Acknowledgements

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## Introduction

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The Age & Dementia Friendly Amherst Community Assessment and Action Plan was developed with assistance from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission through the Age Friendly Pioneer Valley Initiative funded by the Tufts Health Plan Foundation/Point32Health. This initiative allowed PVPC to provide technical assistance to municipalities in the PVPC region (Hampshire and Hampden Counties) and to bring together individuals and organizations on a quarterly basis to discuss best practices, policies and programs that support an aging population, people living with dementia and their care partners.

The report is organized by the Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community, a model developed by the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative that combines the World Health Organization's Eight Domains of Livability and Dementia Friendly America's Ten Domains of a Dementia Friendly Community. Although communities do not have to develop Action Plans for every domain in this model, assessing where communities are in each domain area can be helpful to establish a baseline understanding of the social and built environments and helps participants to measure progress going forward.

The report draws from existing plans and assessments that have been completed for the Town and incorporates the results of the Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Community Survey and other community engagement activities to develop recommendations for actions that the Town can take going forward to make Amherst a great place to grow up and grow old. Action Plan priorities were selected by the Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Working Group.

## Background

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The Town of Amherst has the largest population of any city or town in Hampshire County (at 39,263 according to the 2020 Census), although the majority of that population is made up of college students who reside in town during the academic year. The University of Massachusetts at Amherst (enrollment of 23,146 undergraduates in the Fall of 2022), Hampshire College (enrollment of 472 in 2021) and Amherst College (enrollment 1,970 in 2021) are all located in Amherst.

According to 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates, the number of people 60 and older living in Amherst is 4,248 or 10.2% of the total population. In 2010, the number of people 65 and older was 2,506 or 6.7% of the total population. Population data from the Town census for 2022 reported 5,200 people over the age of 60 living in Amherst, suggesting that the ACS estimates may be low.

Compared to state averages, older residents of Amherst do better on many indicators of healthy aging. Rates are better for: Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, hypertension, heart attack, Ischemic heart disease, congestive heart failure, lung cancer, colon

cancer, ulcers, anemia, and chronic kidney disease. They are also less likely to have high cholesterol or be obese. However, compared to state averages, older residents of Amherst have higher rates of benign prostatic hyperplasia, hypothyroidism, migraine, post-traumatic stress disorder, and personality disorders.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of Amherst's population over age 65 is White (91.9%) with the remaining population identifying as Black or African American (4.4%), Asian (1.8%), Hispanic or Latino (1.8%), or Other (1.9%).<sup>2</sup>

The number of older adults (over 65) who are veterans of military service is lower (13.4%) than the state (18.8%), and 29.6% of people over 65 live alone (compared to 30.2% in the state as a whole). Sixteen percent of residents over 65 are diagnosed with deafness or hearing impairment and 4.2% have self-reported vision difficulty. Over 10% of people over 65 have self-reported ambulatory difficulties while 2.8% are diagnosed with mobility impairments, and 11.7% of people over the age of 65 have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's or Dementia (compared to 13.6% in the state).<sup>3</sup>

The Town of Amherst joined the Age Friendly Pioneer Valley initiative in December of 2021. Town staff invited representatives from several municipal departments and boards, health care, and community-based organizations to be on a Working Group for the purposes of advising on public forums, reviewing the Community Assessment, and setting priorities in the 5-year Action Plan.

## **Review of Existing Plans and Reports**

To understand the context in which the Town of Amherst is working to plan for an aging population, PVPC staff reviewed plans and reports that the Town has adopted in recent years and highlighted findings pertinent to healthy aging. The reports that PVPC reviewed include the Master Plan (2010), the Open Space and Recreation Plan (2017), the Transportation Plan (2015), Bike and Pedestrian Network Plan (2019), and Crosswalk Design Standards (2017). Other resources used for this report include the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative Community Profile, which includes health and demographic data for older adults, and an automatically generated Basic Housing Needs Assessment<sup>4</sup> developed through an online tool created by the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission for all communities in Massachusetts.

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<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative 2018 Community Profile. Data sources include the American Community Survey (2012-16), Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Master Beneficiary Summary File (2014-15), and the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (2010-15).

<sup>2</sup> Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative Community Profile (2018).

<sup>3</sup> Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative Community Profile (2018).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.housing.ma/hadley/report>

## Community Engagement

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The Town of Amherst has committed substantial staff and resources to engaging residents in community projects. The Town has a Community Engagement Coordinator on staff, and a website (Engage Amherst) that was developed specifically to provide information and information about opportunities to engage in community projects. The Town created an Age & Dementia Friendly Community Project page on the Engage Amherst website and developed a plan for community engagement for the project as well as an engagement plan for distribution of the survey. These plans included a list of organizations that could be asked to distribute the survey and forum invitations to their email lists, as well as locations to place hard copies.

Older residents and key stakeholders – people who work in municipal departments, boards and committees, or nonprofit organizations that serve older adults – were engaged in this Community Assessment through an Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Working Group, administration of the Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Community Survey (a shorter version of the AARP Livable Community Survey), and a series of topic-based listening sessions held on Zoom and open to the public.

### **Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Working Group**

The Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Working Group was formed to oversee the process of developing a Community Assessment and Action Plan. The group was facilitated by staff from the Amherst Planning Office, the director of the Amherst Senior Center and staff from PVPC. The Working Group included representatives from Amherst Neighbors; municipal departments including Planning, Engagement, Police and Fire departments; the Amherst Affordable Housing Trust; Disability Access Advisory Committee; Human Rights Committee; Board of Health; Recreation Commission; Library; faith communities; Amherst Housing Authority; CRESS; UMass; Amherst Survival Center; Craig's Door; and residents from area independent and assisted living facilities.

The Working Group met early in the process to review the survey and to plan for public forums, and later after the series of five forums was completed to review findings and the draft report. The group received regular updates on community engagement events and meeting notes and provided input on the priorities that would be included in the final Action Plan.

### **Community Survey**

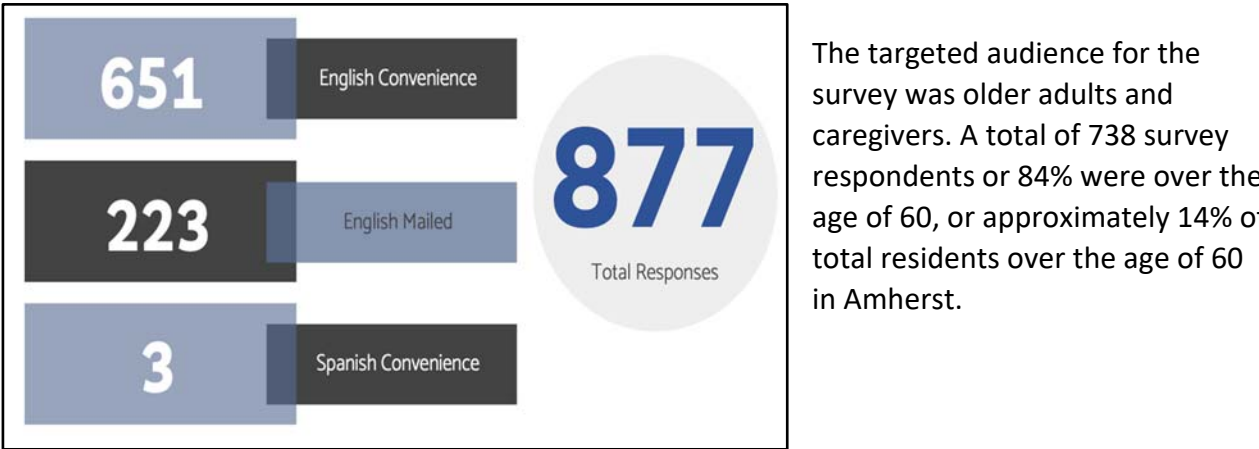
The Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Community Survey was modified for use in Amherst based on surveys conducted in other communities (starting with the AARP Livable Communities Survey) and was reviewed and approved by the Working Group. The Town and the Amherst Housing Trust contributed resources to print hard copies of the surveys and to mail them to a sample of 500 residents over the age of 55 with a self-addressed stamped envelope. A second mailing (without stamped envelopes) was sent out to those who had not responded to the first mailing.



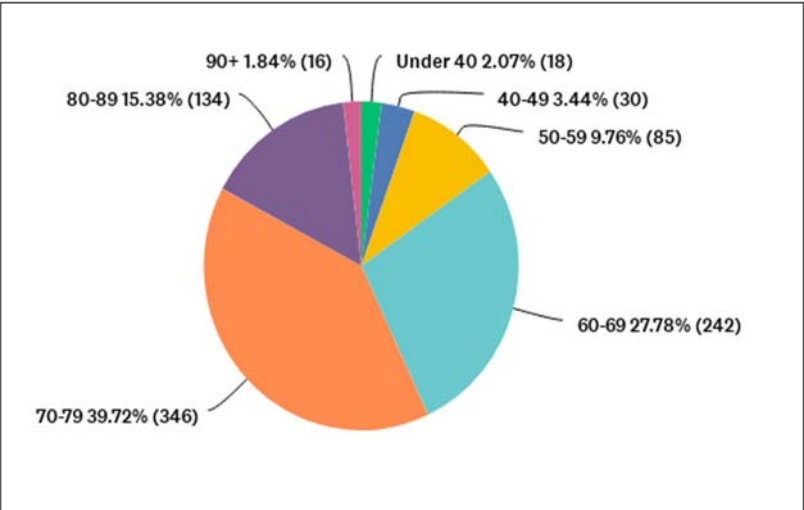
The survey was made available online with a link on the Engage Amherst website, and hard copies were placed at strategic locations such as the Bangs Center (where the Senior Center is located), library, Amherst Survival Center, and Craig’s Place. The survey was translated into Spanish and Portuguese, and cover letters included notes in Korean, Chinese, and Khmer, saying that people could contact the Senior Center if they wished to take the survey in those languages. Only three people took the survey in Spanish, and the Senior Center did not receive any requests for translations into other languages. The Engage Amherst website, which can be translated into multiple languages through a setting selected by the user, also included a link to the survey.

Surveys that were not mailed were referred to as “convenience” surveys. In total, there were 877 survey responses, made up of 651 Convenience surveys, 223 mailed surveys, and three Spanish language (online) responses.

**Figure 1 - Age & Dementia Friendly Amherst Community Survey responses by source**

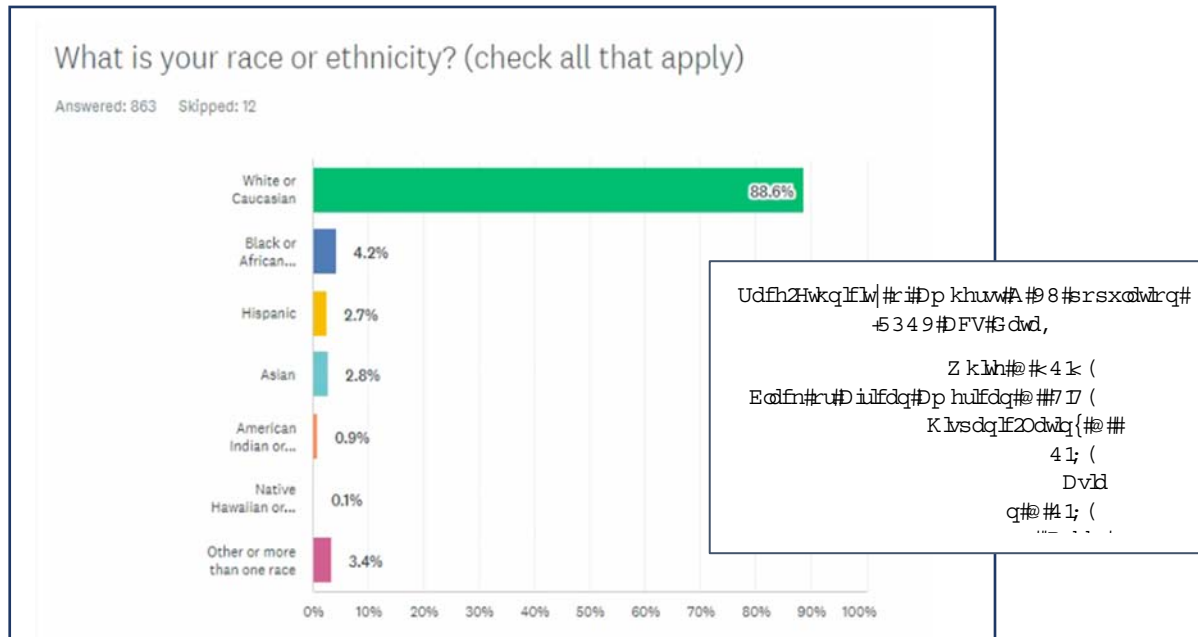


**Figure 2 - Age of survey respondents**





**Figure 3 - Race and Ethnicity of Survey Respondents**

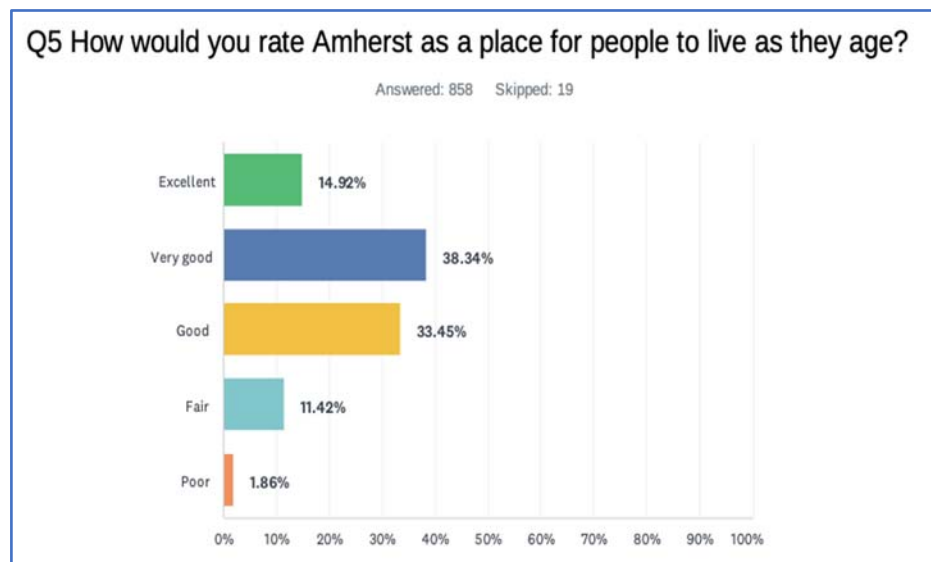


The Age Friendly Amherst Working Group and members of the Amherst Housing Trust made a concerted effort to reach people of diverse races and ethnicities so that responses would be representative of Amherst’s population. Reviewing the makeup of survey respondents next to race and ethnicity data from the MHAC Community Profile (2016 ACS) suggests that respondents were fairly representative of Amherst’s racial and ethnically diverse population.

Only 15% of survey respondents rated Amherst as an excellent place for people as they age, and 38% rated the Town as Very Good. Financial security is a big concern for people responding to the survey, as almost 40% of respondents said that

**Figure 4 - Rating Amherst as a place to live for older adults (Age & Dementia Friendly Amherst Community Survey)**

the inability to pay for what they need in the future was a concern.



## Public Forums

Four topic-based discussions were held on Zoom and one forum was held in person for Spanish speakers. All of the forums were recorded and made available for later viewing on the project page on [www.EngageAmherst.org](http://www.EngageAmherst.org).

For the first four forums, basic “best practices” for the topic of the forum and survey results were presented, then staff from municipal departments or organizations that serve older adults (such as Amherst Neighbors) discussed the programs and services available in Amherst. Participants were asked to share what they saw as assets and challenges in Amherst in the topic area. The Spanish forum was held in Spanish and included discussion of highlights from the four previous forums as well as some survey results. The topics and dates of the forums were as follows:

- Housing and Aging in Place (May 2022)
- Social Participation and Inclusion; Employment and Civic Engagement (June 2022)
- Transportation and Buildings and Outdoor Spaces (July 2022)
- Health and Community Services, Public Safety (September 2022)
- Spanish Listening Session (held in Spanish with the help of CRESS staff) (October 2022)

Forums were advertised on Engage Amherst, and flyers were posted at the Senior Center and library, and other locations. For the Spanish forum, staff from CRESS handed out flyers at locations where they were doing community visits and invited people who they spoke with to come to the forum. Unfortunately, no Spanish speakers attended the Spanish forum, so greater understanding of how to engage the Spanish-speaking community is something the Town needs to continue to develop. Comments from forum participants have been included in the relevant sections of this report.

## The Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community

The World Health Organization developed a model for assessing a community’s ability to support an aging population through assessment of domains of livability, or elements of the physical and social environments that are key determinants of whether people can remain healthy, independent and autonomous as they age. The original model included Eight Domains of Livability for an Age Friendly Community. Over time communities found that it made more sense to plan around domains of the community that impact their abilities to be both Age and

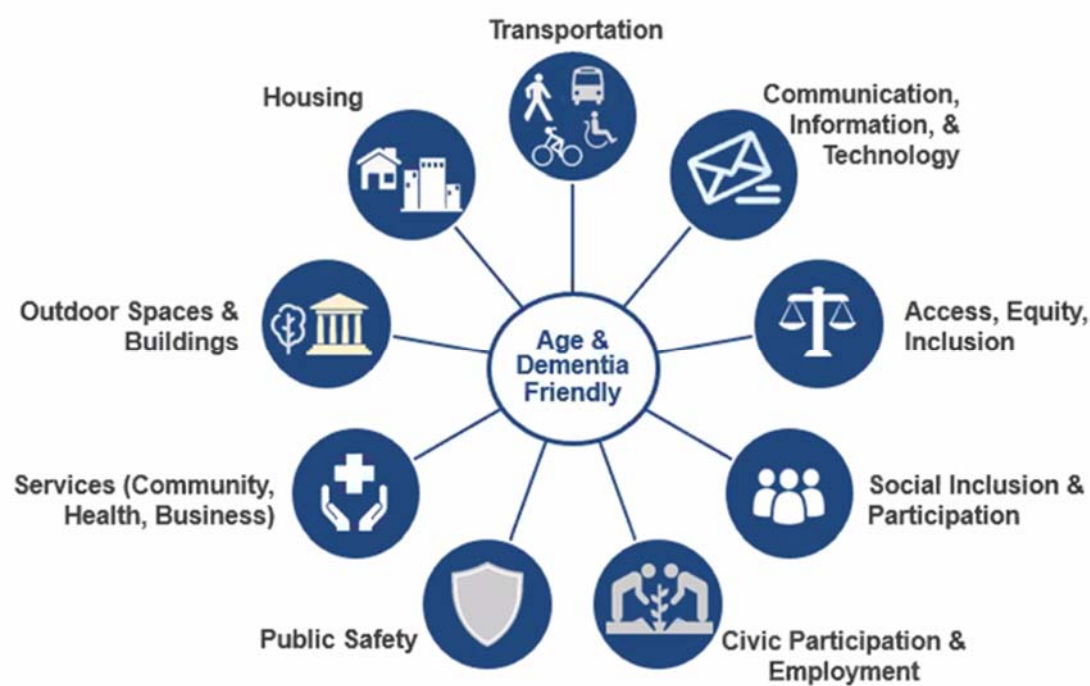
Dementia Friendly. The Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative (MHAC) modified the Eight Domains of Livability into the Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community, which includes nine domain areas. Some communities have also added domains such as Food Security or Financial Stability to the suggested domain areas.

The MHAC Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community are reminiscent of the Social Determinants of Health model which estimates the impacts of the built and social environments, or places where one lives, works and plays, have greater impact on one’s health than clinical care.

We have used the MHAC model to assess where Amherst is in terms of the policies, programs, systems and environments that support older adults in each of the domain areas. The model is helpful in considering elements of a community that extend beyond the built environment and that are critical to the needs of older adults, but also contribute to healthy, active, more livable communities.

The results of the Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Community Survey indicate that Housing, Health and Caregiver Services, and Transportation are the highest priorities for the Town to focus on in the next five years. Thirty-three percent of survey respondents thought that **Housing** should be the first priority. **Health and Caregiver Services** were the primary concern for 23% of survey respondents. **Transportation** is also an area that many survey respondents thought important, with 54% of respondents ranking it as the second most important area of focus. Communication and Social Engagement, Outdoor Spaces and Building Accessibility, and Social Inclusion were also considered important areas for the Town to focus on in the next five years.

Figure 5 - The Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community (Mass Healthy Aging Collaborative)



## Planning for a Dementia Friendly Community

As populations age, the number of people diagnosed with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia also increases along with the need for understanding of the signs of dementia and how to work with and support people with dementia and the people who care for them. It is important for many sectors of the community to be educated about the signs of dementia and for communities to provide safe and comfortable spaces where people with dementia and their caregivers can meet or seek respite care. Dementia Friendly Communities foster the ability of people living with dementia to remain in community and engage and thrive.

According to the MHAC Community Profile data, approximately 11.7% of people over the age of 65 in Amherst have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia. Cooley-Dickinson Hospital hosts the Pioneer Valley Memory Care Initiative that serves people with dementia and their care partners who live in Amherst, Northampton and Easthampton. The PVMCI, funded by the Eisenberg Family Trust, is a coalition of health care and community providers dedicated to empowering and supporting older adults living with dementia and their family caregivers to improve their quality of life.<sup>5</sup> The program partners with Village or Neighbors organizations in three communities to connect people with dementia and their care partners to these volunteer-based organizations to provide companionship, transportation, and other forms of support. Amherst Senior Services also offers Memory Cafes and support for caregivers in-house and through Highland Valley Elder Care.

Dementia Friendly America is a national network of communities, organizations and individuals seeking to ensure that communities across the US are equipped to support people living with dementia and their caregivers. Dementia Friendly America offers suggestions for how the following ten sectors of a community should be involved in planning for a dementia friendly community.

### Ten Sectors of a Dementia Friendly Community

1. **Transportation, Housing and Public Spaces** (local government) – Infrastructure that makes communities more livable for people with dementia and their caregivers.
2. **Businesses** – Dementia supportive customer service, environments and policies that support employee caregivers.
3. **Legal and Advance Planning Services** – Legal services that help vulnerable clients express their wishes early and avoid problems such as unpaid expenses.
4. **Banks and Financial Services** - Dementia friendly practices that help maintain clients' independence while protecting them from problems.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cooleydickinson.org/programs-services/geriatrics/pioneer-valley-memory-care-initiative>

5. **Neighbors and Community Members** – Raising awareness to help neighbors and community members understand and support people living with dementia.
6. **Independent Living** – Home-based services available to maximize independence and promote autonomy and a high quality of life.
7. **Communities of Faith** – Faith communities use dementia friendly practices to provide a welcoming, compassionate environment and spiritual connection.
8. **Care throughout the Continuum** – Early diagnosis of dementia and ongoing medical care; patient education; and connecting patients and their caregivers with community resources that promote quality of life.
9. **Memory Loss Supports and Services** – A spectrum of settings and services needed by people with dementia – from long-term care facilities and assisted and independent living residences, to home care, adult day services, and hospice care.
10. **Emergency Planning and First Response** – Community planning and family preparation considers safety, security, and needs of people with dementia in disaster planning and emergency response.

This Community Assessment includes people with dementia in all recommendations within each Domain of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community. However, one of the main tasks of a Dementia Friendly Community involves building awareness among the sectors listed above.

The following recommendations are focused specifically on the next steps that Amherst can take to build awareness and support for people with dementia and their care partners.

### Dementia Friendly Community Goals & Actions

**Goal 1:** Build awareness, acceptance, and a culture of support for people living with dementia and the people who care for them.

#### Actions

- 1.1 Work with the Triad Program partners (Amherst Senior Services, Police, Fire, Emergency Services, and CRESS) and health care providers to develop a voluntary registry of people living with dementia or other health concerns and encourage people with dementia and family members to register for this list.
- 1.2 Identify and reach out to family caregivers to connect them with support programs and opportunities for meeting with other caregivers of people with dementia.
- 1.3 Identify respite care opportunities for family caregivers at all income levels and connect people to these resources.
- 1.4 Continue to encourage trainings for all municipal staff on how to recognize signs of dementia and communicate with people with dementia.

- 1.5 Hold Dementia Friends trainings for community members and recruit volunteers to become Dementia Friends Champions who can conduct Dementia Friends trainings.
- 1.6 Publicize memory cafes and other programs for people with dementia and their care partners. Work with the faith community and Amherst Neighbors to enable people in early stages of dementia to attend social and cultural events and to maintain connections in the community.
- 1.7 Continue to raise awareness about dementia and available resources for people with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.
- 1.8 Continue to expand services and programs for people with dementia and their families (such as the Pioneer Valley Memory Care Initiative) through partnerships with Cooley-Dickinson Hospital and other health and social service agencies.
- 1.9 Explore and evaluate online scheduling tools to allow neighbors and volunteers to help people with dementia get out into the community and to cultural events.

## Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst

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The following sections summarize the findings gathered from the Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Community Survey, public forums, and review of existing plans and reports. The Domain sections have been placed in order of importance according to the survey responses. Each section includes Goals and Actions that are also detailed in an Action Plan at the end of this report.

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### Housing

As people age, their housing needs may change in terms of the amount of living space they need or can afford, and property they want to maintain. Many older adults choose to locate closer to services and amenities that they can walk to when they lose their ability to drive, or when they lose a spouse and want to locate closer to community centers. For people who want to stay in their own homes or communities, additional services may be required in order to allow them to continue to live independently or to “age in place.”

The following factors are important when considering housing for older adults:

- **Affordability** – Smaller or shared units, accessory apartments, tiny houses, home sharing
- **Accessibility** – 1st floor, or elevator access, wheelchair ramps
- **Safety** – Removal of trip hazards, grab bars in bathrooms to prevent falls, smoke and Carbon Monoxide detectors installed
- **Assisted Living and Long-Term Care options** – Living spaces that provide a continuum of care to meet potential care needs as people age, and available home care providers for people aging in place

- **Smart Growth** – Housing is located near retail, services, amenities, and community centers and infrastructure is in place to allow for safe walking, biking and use of a wheelchair
- **Neighborhoods** – Safe, connected, well-lit and walkable

Housing was the number one priority (29.6%) identified among survey respondents for the Town to focus on in the next five years. Eighty-three percent of respondents also said it is extremely important (53%) or very important (30%) to be able to stay in their homes as they age. However, when asked where people would like to live if conditions change in the next five years, forty-six percent of respondents said they would like to have the option to downsize into senior independent living, an apartment or condo, assisted living, a group home, and/or a location close to services.

For older adults looking to move to another type of housing, 6% reported that they needed help finding affordable housing or help finding a smaller home or apartment but did not know where to go for help. The Amherst Senior Center staff helps residents sign up for affordable housing, and can connect them with information and referrals. However, in Amherst and many communities, the waiting list for subsidized housing units is very long. In 2022, 7800 people were on the waiting list for family units and 2,740 people for elderly and handicapped individuals. The Amherst Housing Authority manages a total of 22 units of family housing, 115 units of housing for the elderly (people over the age of 60), 9 special occupancy units, and 41 Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program subsidies<sup>6</sup> The Amherst Housing Authority also manages 428 federally assisted public housing developments and/or federally subsidized housing vouchers.

Participants in the Housing listening session expressed concern that there are limited options for downsizing in Amherst, not only for people who are eligible for subsidized housing but also for all income levels. Participants noted concern that the housing market in Amherst is shifting toward more rental units than owner-occupied housing, with much of the rental development targeted for students and young professionals. A majority (71%) of survey respondents found it either very (38%) or extremely (33%) important to remain in Amherst as they age, demonstrating a demand for more housing options in the community for older adults.

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<sup>6</sup> 2024 [Amherst Housing Authority Annual Plan](#)



Figure 6 - Importance of staying in Amherst as people age

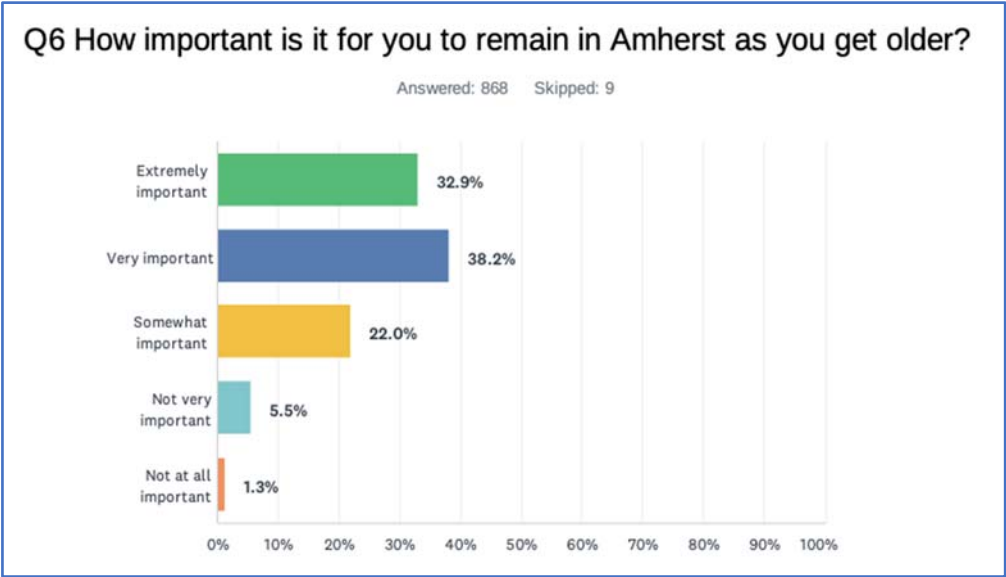
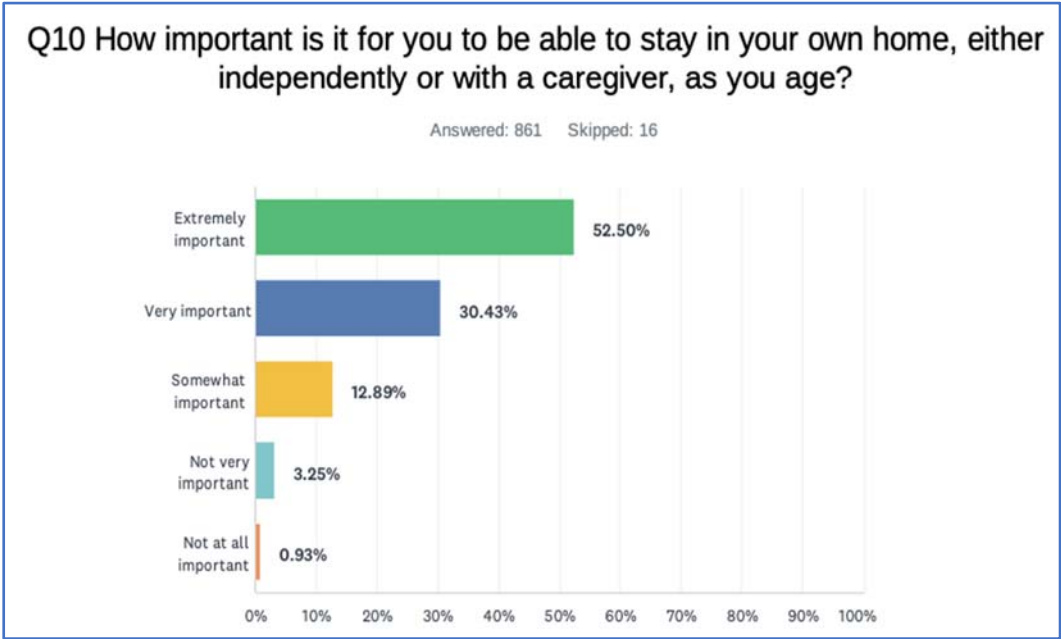
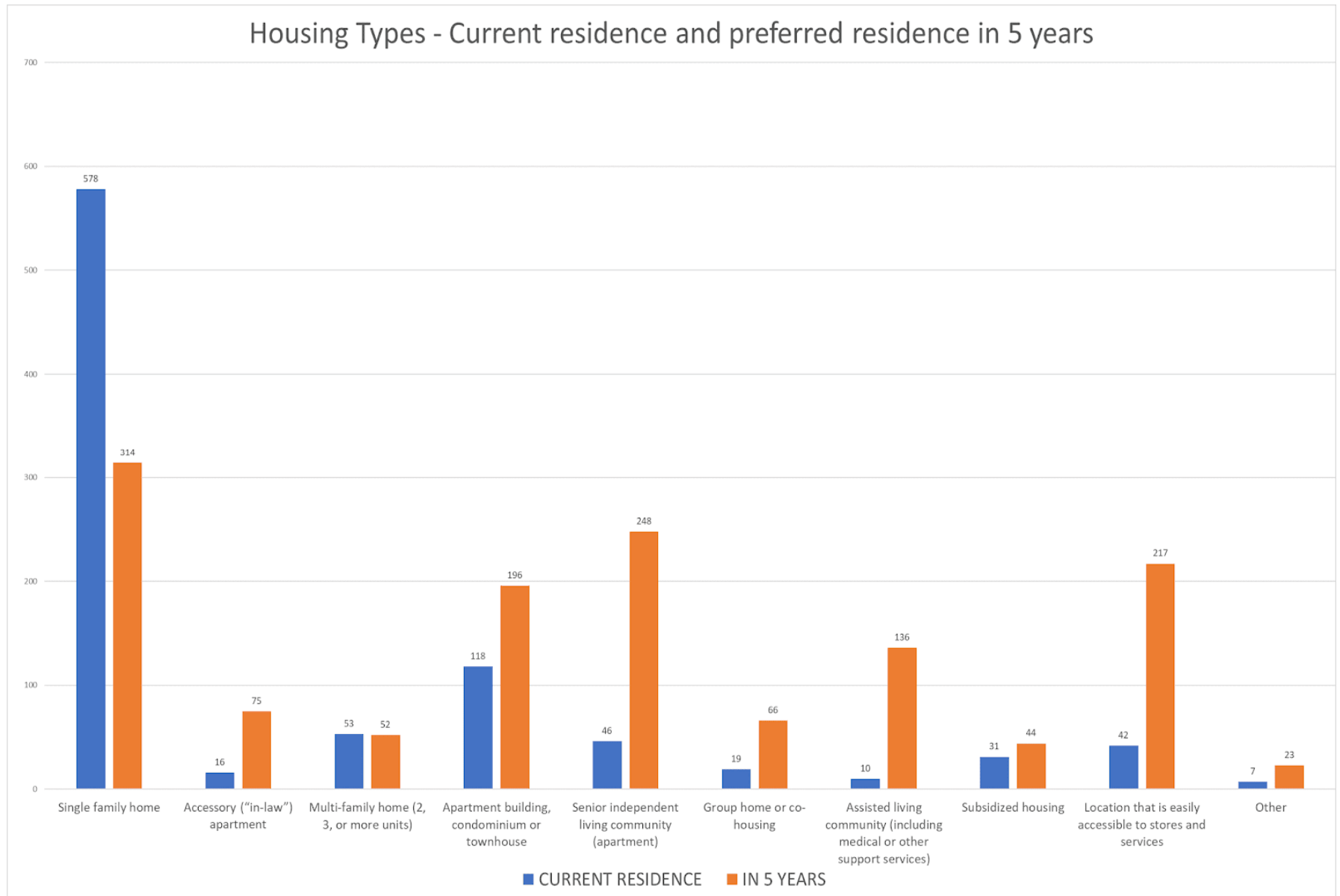


Figure 7 - Importance of aging in one's home (Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Community Survey)



**Figure 8** - Comparison between current residence and desired housing type if conditions change (Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Community Survey)



## Housing Supply

According to the 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates, detached single family units account for 50% of housing stock in Amherst and multi-family homes account for the other 50%. The 2020 Amherst Master plan notes that there is more renter occupied housing (59%) than owner occupied housing (41%). Amherst has an Affordable Housing Inventory (AHI) of 12.6% which meets the State's goal of a 10% AHI for each community in Massachusetts.

The Amherst Housing Authority manages several properties including Ann Whalen Apartments, Chestnut Court, and Jean Elder House. Ann Whalen Apartments consists of eighty one-bedroom apartments, four of which are wheelchair accessible. Chestnut Court offers thirty one-bedroom apartments, with most of the units on the ground floor. Jean Elder House consists of three apartments (1-, 2-, and 3-bedroom) for elderly or disabled individuals. The waiting list for Housing Authority properties in Amherst is extremely long, with approximately 2,742 elderly or handicap applicants currently waiting for one of the 35 handicapped accessible or approximately 100 one or two-bedroom units. Additionally, there are 6,035 applicants through the Alternative Housing Voucher Program that serves people with disabilities who are under the age of sixty-five.

## Zoning

The Amherst Zoning Regulations allow internal or attached accessory apartments by right and detached accessory apartments require a special permit. One of the units must be owner-occupied and can house no more than three adults. Accessory apartments can add to the inventory of smaller units available in the community, and can allow homeowners to downsize, provide a space for a caregiver to live independently, or can provide rental income to the property owner.

The Town also adopted inclusionary zoning ([Article 15](#) in the Zoning Regulations) which requires that all developments over 9 units include units that are affordable in perpetuity and provides incentives for building more affordable units than are required in the regulations.

A recurring theme throughout the survey and topic-based discussions was the need for siting new housing in locations close to services and amenities such as grocery stores, parks or trails. In addition to calling for zoning to allow accessory apartments, the 2020 Amherst Master Plan, recommends amending dimensional regulations to encourage construction of smaller homes and smaller lots. Currently there is no grocery store in any of Amherst's town centers. However, efforts are being made to site a food coop in town.

The Amherst Affordable Housing Trust works to create safe and affordable housing for the most vulnerable populations in Amherst. There are multiple projects overseen by the Housing Trust, including the East Street-Belchertown Road Project and the Amherst Studio Apartments at 132 Northampton Road that will provide more affordable housing units. However, there is no mechanism currently to designate units to be for older adults.

In spite of the progress that the Housing Trust and the Town has made to encourage development of smaller and affordable housing units, participants in the housing forum expressed concern that there is no guarantee that older adults will have access to these units due to the high demand for student housing.

### **Supported Housing**

There are several supported housing options in Amherst including Applewood at Amherst, Greenleaves, The Arbors, and the Center for Extended Care and Rehabilitation. Applewood at Amherst (Loomis Communities) and Greenleaves are both independent living communities. The Arbors is an assisted living community; and the Center for Extended Care and Rehabilitation facility consists of a 53-bed dementia care unit, a 43-bed traditional long-term care unit, and a 38-bed rehabilitation and short-term recuperation unit.

### **Aging in Place**

As noted above, most survey respondents said that it is extremely important (52%) or very important (30%) for them to be able to stay in their homes as they grow older. Although many said that they would like to be able to move into an independent living facility or a smaller or more affordable housing type, the shortage of smaller units may make it necessary for most older residents to stay in their homes as they age.

As people age, difficulties with balance and brittle bones make falling especially harmful. For people with dementia, mobility, visual and hearing limitations may be exacerbated by reduced navigational abilities caused by dementia. Modifications including removing tripping hazards, adding grab bars, or adding wheelchair ramps may be needed to allow people to continue living in their homes safely. Grants are available to residents of Hampshire County through Community Action of the Pioneer and the PVPC administers a Home Modification Loan Program for residents of Amherst. In some communities, the fire department offers home inspections and recommends safety improvements.

### **Alternate Housing Options**

Having a large student population in the community may present an opportunity for older adults to rent out rooms to help pay for housing maintenance and upkeep, and also to have some help with basic tasks. Programs such as Nesterly provide a web-based platform which allows people to list their rental spaces and takes care of rental forms, vetting tenants and screening for safety and compatibility. This program is currently utilized in Boston and Lynn, MA as well as central Ohio and Louisville, Kentucky. Other communities have developed partnerships with university housing offices, with programs that allows homeowners to charge lower rent in exchange for a few hours of help with basic tasks such as shoveling or preparing meals. These programs warrant further research, particularly given the shortage of private home care providers.

## Housing Goals and Actions

**Goal 2:** Ensure that a range of safe, affordable, and accessible single and multi-unit housing options are available to meet the needs of the aging population in Amherst.

### Actions

- 2.1 Create new channels of advocacy to support the development of housing in Amherst that is universally accessible, includes smaller units, and is located within walking distance of town centers.
- 2.2 Provide incentives (property tax rebates, flexible parking requirements, etc.) to bring grocery stores or neighborhood markets and other amenities to town centers.
- 2.3 Provide incentives for private owners of first floor rental units to rent to older adults with benefits including lower rates of turnaround.

**Goal 3:** Provide support and assist with alternative housing models to enable Amherst residents to safely age in place.

### Actions

- 3.1 Continue to provide information and assistance for older residents in single family homes to get property tax abatements in exchange for work.
- 3.2 Continue to connect homeowners with Home Modification Loan and Grant programs through PVPC and Community Action of the Pioneer Valley.
- 3.3 Collaborate with Amherst Neighbors to understand the areas of greatest need for people aging in place (i.e. help with basic tasks, transportation, home care attendants). Pursue funding or collaboration with students or other groups to provide additional services where needed.
- 3.4 Work with UMass, Hampshire and Amherst Colleges to address issues with rental units including absentee landlords, etc.
- 3.5 Explore alternative living arrangements for older adults including congregate housing, smaller shared living arrangements to address affordability and availability of housing for older adults.
- 3.6 Provide assistance and education to older adults on housing options such as home sharing, or how to design and build accessory apartments for income or housing for caregivers.
- 3.7 Consider pursuing a program (such as Nesterly) which screens students to rent rooms from older adults at reduced rates in exchange for assistance with home care or basic tasks. (Planning Board, UMass, COA)

## Transportation

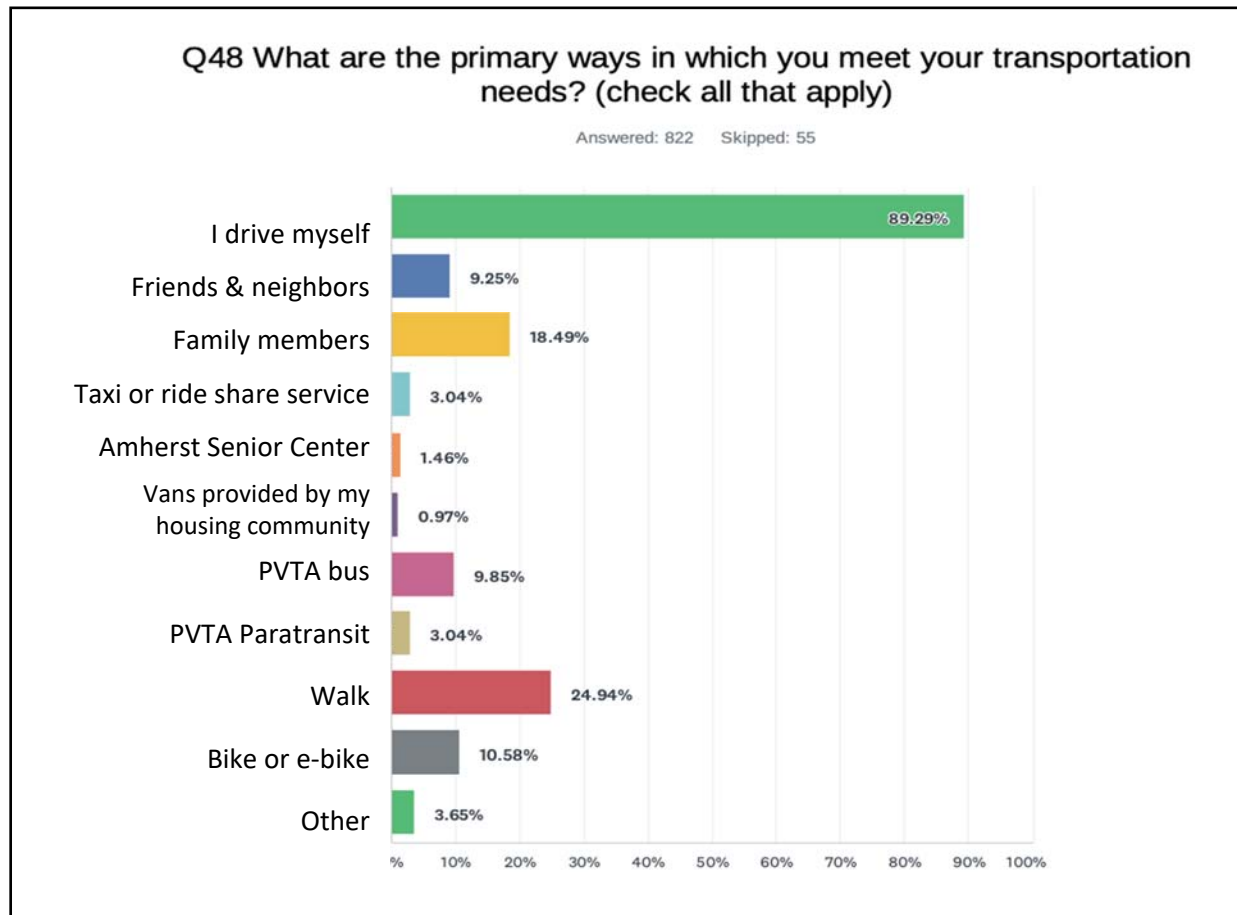
The decision to stop driving can be one of the most difficult transitions that comes with aging. Slower reaction times, difficulty seeing at night, and cognitive impairments are only a few of the challenges that people may face as they age, and that make driving more difficult and potentially dangerous. Features on newer automobiles such as backup cameras and distance monitors can help with some of the difficulties with aging, and often people choose their own methods of dealing with the changes such as not driving at night or avoiding left-hand turns. Eventually some people make the decision to stop driving and rely on friends or family members to drive them or use public transportation or other transportation services available in the community. When asked what are the primary ways in which one meets their transportation needs, a majority (89%) of respondents said they drove themselves, others said that family members (18.5%) or friends or neighbors (9%) drove them, and almost 10% said that they use PVRTA buses. A large number of respondents (25%) said that they walk or ride a bike or e-bike (11%).

As people age, a continuum of assistance may be needed as people transition from being independent and driving themselves, to not driving and taking public transit, to needing help getting to the door and then through the door. When people can use public transit and walk to transit stops or other destinations, it is important to have good lighting and safe walking routes with shoulders or well-maintained sidewalks (shoveled in the winter) on busier roads. When they face mobility limitations, they may require paratransit or private transportation services, and in some cases caregivers to assist them into and out of vehicles.

In response to the question about whether they had any major difficulties in meeting their transportation needs, seventy-nine percent of survey respondents said that they had no difficulties. Of those who did have difficulties, most (9% of total respondents) said that the PVRTA bus was unavailable or inconvenient. Others said that they have physical limitations (6%), need help getting into their house or carrying packages (4.5%), or Senior Center transportation was unavailable or inconvenient. At the time the survey was conducted, the Senior Center did not provide transportation, but has since acquired a van so will be filling in some transportation needs during the hours the Senior Center is open.

Sixty respondents added other difficulties, including basic concerns about finding transportation when they are no longer able to drive, poor bus routes or schedules, and the cost of car maintenance, repair, or insurance. A few people said they were not comfortable driving at night, or they were not comfortable taking public transportation since the pandemic.

**Figure 9 - Primary ways that people meet their transportation needs (Age & Dementia Friendly Amherst Community Survey)**



## Transportation Services

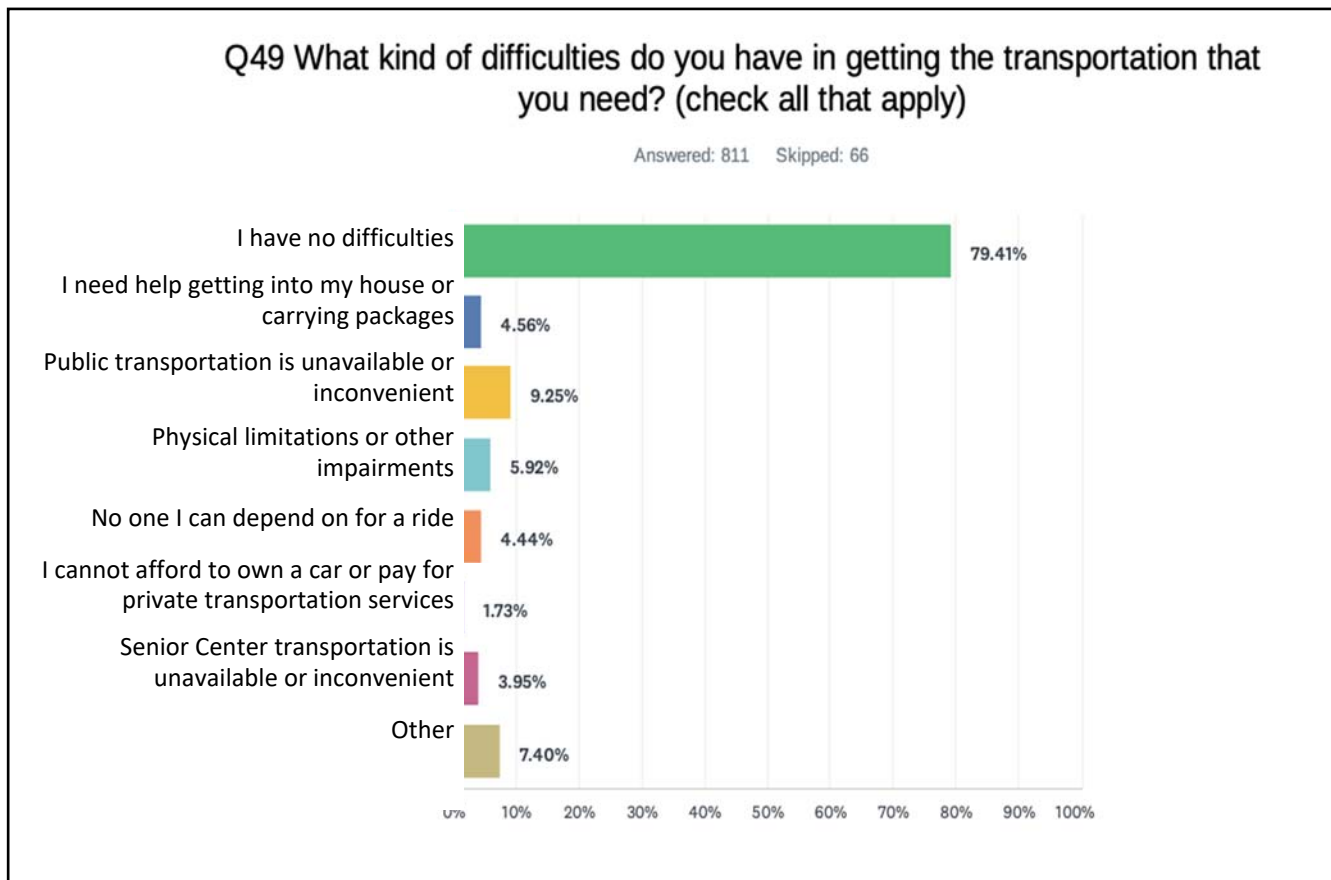
Services such as public transportation, senior center vans, and private transportation services are important to have in place when older adults in the community lose the ability to drive or the resources to maintain a personal automobile. Transportation services available in Amherst include fixed route bus service and on-demand van rides and paratransit through the **Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA)**; van transportation through the **Amherst Senior Center**; and rides in private vehicles provided by and for members of **Amherst Neighbors**.

The PVTA operates several fixed routes that provide service along Route 9 from Northampton to Amherst Center with stops at Smith, Hampshire, and Amherst Colleges, UMass, and the Hampshire Mall (B49); to Boston with stops in Ware, Brookfield, Spencer, and Worcester (B79); to South Hadley, Holyoke and Springfield (R29); from UMass to the Valley Medical Center; Amherst center north to Sunderland; and several other routes. Through an arrangement between PVTA and the colleges and university in Amherst, all routes that stop at the colleges are free (fares have been paid by the colleges and UMass).



The PVTA also offers door-to-door Dial-a-Ride services Monday through Friday for people 60 and over. This service must be scheduled one day in advance and rides are provided between 8 am and 4:30 pm. Paratransit service is also offered in Amherst for people with disabilities and must also be scheduled in advance. PVTA representatives who attended the transportation forum said that it would be possible to expand the hours of paratransit services if the need exists. This is something the Town may want to investigate through the PVTA and Disabilities Advisory Committee.

**Figure 10** - Difficulties in accessing transportation services or rides (ADFA Community Survey)

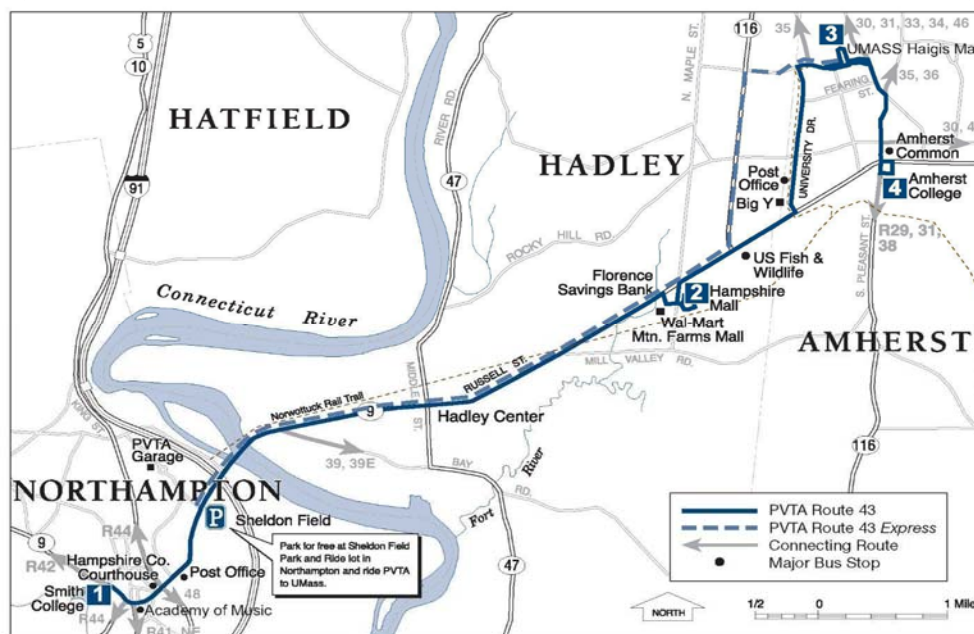


A few survey respondents suggested locations where they would like to see PVTA bus service. These included South Amherst Commons, Southeast Street to Bay Road, and between Amherst College and Colonial Village. One respondent asked that bus schedules and routes be posted for those who do not have smart phones. Others commented that bus drivers were not lowering the step, making it difficult for them to get on and off of the bus (for people with mobility limitations), and that some bus stops were not shoveled after snowstorms, making it impossible for people with mobility or visual impairments to get from the stop onto the bus.

The PVTA offers one-on-one travel training programs for older adults, people with disabilities, and anyone else who is new to the PVTA system. Travel trainers will ride with consumers on their chosen routes to make them feel more comfortable about how to use the services.

In the public forum on transportation, the director of Amherst Neighbors noted that the demand for rides provided through Amherst Neighbors volunteers is growing rapidly. People requesting rides must sign up to be a member of Volunteer Neighbors and schedule a home visit before requesting services. According to the website, Amherst Neighbors requests that rides or other services be requested one to two weeks in advance – the volunteer-operated organization is not an emergency rider service. Riders must be able to get themselves in and out of a car but can bring foldable walkers and wheelchairs. Uber and Lyft are available in Amherst but is costly, and availability depends on the number of drivers available. Currently these services do not offer paratransit services, but have piloted offering paratransit rides in the Boston area in partnership with the MBTA. Additional information on how to build out such services or supplement what exists with other on-demand services such as micro-transit, a ride service that would be available to Amherst residents, could be considered if the demand for volunteer-based rides through Amherst Neighbors continues to increase.

**Figure 11 - PVTA Route 43** (Note: Several other Amherst routes available at <https://www.pvta.com>)



## Walking and Biking Infrastructure

Many older adults choose to live within walking distance of stores, services or other amenities such as parks so that they can continue to be active and independent without having to drive. Twenty-five percent of survey respondents said that they walk to meet some of their transportation needs and, except for the 80-89 age group, walking was second only to driving as the preferred way that survey respondents in every age group meet their transportation needs.

However, in response to the question about whether people ever feel unsafe in Amherst, 37 respondents said that they felt unsafe walking due to unsafe road conditions for walking, biking or crossing the street. Locations where improvements are needed according to the comments on the survey are noted in Figure 12.

The Town has an active Transportation Advisory Board which oversaw the development of the Amherst Transportation Plan (2015), Crosswalk Design Standards (2017), and the Bike and Pedestrian Network Plan (2019). The Town has adopted a Complete Streets policy which says that the Town will improve streets for all users (pedestrians and people on bikes as well as for automobiles and transit). However, the Town has not applied for funds to complete a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan (up to \$50,000 is available to hire a consultant to complete this plan) which would enable the Town to access up to \$400,000 to implement roadway, bicycle and pedestrian projects.

Clearing of snow on sidewalks is a common complaint in discussions about community walkability, particularly for older adults and people with mobility limitations. Amherst's snow clearing policy maintains that landowners are responsible for clearing sidewalks on their properties. For people using wheelchairs or walkers, or with visual impairments, snowbanks blocking ramps or sidewalks that are icy or have not been cleared of snow can be major barriers to being able to get around.

## Transportation Assets

- Free PVTA buses throughout town and reduced fair on-demand van or paratransit service for people over 60 or with disabling conditions
- Volunteer ride service through Amherst Neighbors
- Sidewalks, bike lanes, and shared use trails in some areas

**Figure 11 - Free responses regarding locations where survey respondents do not feel safe**

Location	# of respondents
<b>Party streets (unsafe college students walking around/driving fast, etc.):</b>	2
McClellan St	1
North Pleasant St	1
<b>Unsafe crossing:</b>	8
North Pleasant St	2
Amity St	3
Lincoln	1
Sunset Ave	1
Near North Roundabout	1
<b>Unsafe walking:</b>	14
Lincoln	3
Sunset Ave	2
Fearing	1
Olympia Place	1
South Amherst 116	1
Lower Main St	1
Pelham Rd	1
Amity St	4
<b>Unsafe bicycling:</b>	6
Northampton Rd	1
<u>NorthEast</u> street from Shutesbury Road to College Street	1
Strong Street	1
Lower Main St	1
Pelham Rd	1
Amity St	1
<b>Unsafe access to public transportation:</b>	2
Hulst Rd	1
South East St (no sidewalks/street lights walking to bus stop)	1

## Transportation Challenges

- Limited options for people that need assistance getting in/out of vehicles, limited amount of wheelchair accessible (volunteer) drivers
- High demand for rides from Amherst Neighbors – people want the flexibility of rides in personal vehicles
- 25% of people walk for some of their transportation needs, but there are many locations in town where people do not feel safe walking (due to poor or no sidewalks, crosswalks, or drunk college students).
- Not many older adults use public transit although it is free and frequent fixed-route buses are provided by PVTa.
- Need for a better snow clearing system, especially at bus stops.
- There is a need for benches at transit stops.
- Some pedestrian signals no longer have sound for visually impaired (although the Town has plans to inventory these signals and make plans for repairing them)

## Transportation Goals & Actions

**Goal 4:** Ensure that transportation services are available and information on how to use them is easily accessible for residents of all ages and abilities to allow access to food, medical appointments, employment, education, and social connections.

### Actions

- 4.1 Expand hours and service area for paratransit services for people who use wheelchairs – both public (through PVTa and the senior center) and private (for hours and days when the Senior Center is closed).
- 4.2 Continue to assist older adults in signing up for paratransit and on-demand senior transportation services and provide regular outreach about this assistance program.
- 4.3 Continue to work with PVTa Travel Trainers to provide transit orientation programs for people who are transitioning from driving personal vehicles.
- 4.4 Discuss with PVTa limited transportation options when students are not in town (fixed route bus service). Consider stops at locations where older people are living.
- 4.5 Consult with Mass Mobility to determine possible solutions for ride services that could supplement or replace volunteer ride services offered by Amherst Neighbors.
  - a. Look into contracting with Uber or Lyft to provide rides for older adults or consider adopting a Microtransit program to fill gaps in transportation needs.
  - b. Expand volunteer driver program with Amherst Neighbors through incentives such as stipends or property tax work-off program to compensate drivers for time and fuel costs.
- 4.6 Improve transit stops with benches and/or bus shelters, consulting users about priority locations.

**Goal 5:** Ensure that roads, sidewalks and trail networks are safe and comfortable for use by people of all ages and abilities.

### **Actions**

- 5.1 Research system or policy change for clearing of snow on sidewalks – possibly allowing property owners to sign up with a private vendor or volunteers when they can't clear snow themselves.
  - a. Partner with colleges or school groups to develop an Adopt a Bus Stop shoveling program.
  - b. Develop Neighbor Circles through Amherst Neighbors to recruit people to help with shoveling in their neighborhoods.
- 5.2 Improve sidewalks near senior living and to create connections to bus stops.
- 5.3 Develop an easy reporting system for sidewalk maintenance needs to prevent trip hazards.
- 5.4 Develop a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan with funds from the State's Complete Streets Program to make the Town eligible for implementation funds for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.
- 5.5 Develop a plan for lighting of sidewalks and road crossings in town centers to improve safety while using standards that support "dark skies" values.

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## **Buildings and Outdoor Spaces**

The amount of physical activity that people engage in is related, in part, to the availability of safe and convenient places to walk or ride a bike or participate in recreational or fitness activities. According to the Amherst Community Profile, 78.3% of Hampshire County residents over the age of 60 reported some physical activity within the last month, 31.3% met CDC guidelines for muscle strengthening activity and 58.3% met CDC guidelines for aerobic physical activity.<sup>7</sup> While it is difficult to determine the activity levels of older adults in Amherst from county-wide data, the trails and

Buildings that are open to the public and outdoor spaces such as parks, sidewalks and park benches, provide places for people to gather, recreate, socialize and exercise both indoors and outside. Parks or conservation land with accessible walking trails, sidewalks, bike paths and bike lanes, and accessible buildings and restrooms are all facilities that are important for inviting active transportation, recreation, and social interaction. Amenities such as benches, shaded resting spots, and lighting provide additional comfort and support for older adults, people with disabilities, and people of all ages. In New England, places for indoor exercise and socializing are

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<sup>7</sup> Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative Community Profile (2018)



also important in winter months when sidewalks are covered with snow and ice, or weather is not as welcoming.

**Figure 12** - Improvements to the Bangs Center access funded by Share Streets & Spaces Grant



During the pandemic, parks, trails and other public outdoor spaces were vital places for people to meet with friends or to get exercise while buildings and gyms were closed. According to the Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Survey, most respondents (over 75%) said that parks or outdoor spaces were places where most respondents like to spend their free time, even when all indoor spaces were presumed to be fully open. Other important spaces for people included restaurants and cafes (59% of survey respondents), the library (53%), and museums and

cultural centers. Many people also said that they like to be home in their free time (57%).

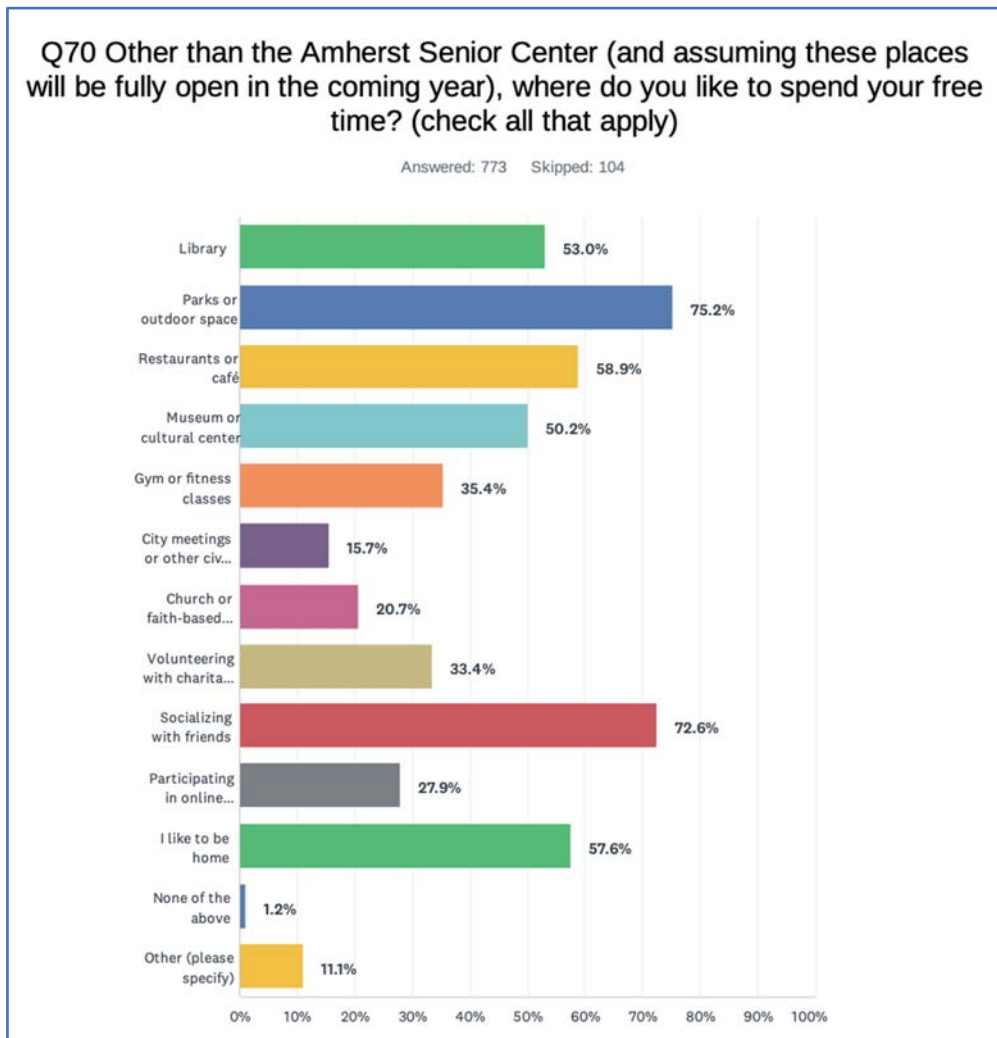
The Town of Amherst took advantage of the Shared Streets and Spaces grant program that was developed by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) during the pandemic to help communities make quick changes to outdoor spaces to accommodate the additional demand and need to accommodate activities such as outdoor dining on sidewalks. With funds from this program, the Town repaired existing stairs, constructed a new ADA compliant ramp, and installed new lights, benches and a bike rack.

## Outdoor Spaces

Amherst last updated the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) in 2017. OSRPs must be updated every eight years, so the Town will be due for an update in 2025. The 2017 OSRP includes goals that benefit older adults as well as people of all ages in the community. These include increasing opportunities for passive and active recreation in and near village centers; improving stewardship of existing conservation land, trails and recreation facilities by increasing personnel and funding for these purposes; and extending, maintaining and improving the Town's trail system to create a greenway network throughout the town.

The Amherst Conservation Department currently manages a trail network that covers 80 miles of paths and trails, and helps to maintain regional trails that extend to nearby communities. Management of these resources includes increasing connectivity for wildlife habitat and safe use for the public. The OSRP also prioritizes the need for connecting these resources with local trails, parks, public schools and village centers.

**Figure 13** - Places where respondents like to spend their time (other than the Senior Center)  
(AFDF Amherst Community Survey)



At the time the 2017 OSRP was developed, recreational activities in Amherst were coordinated by the Leisure Services and Supplemental Education (LSSE) Department. Some of the critical community needs for Amherst as determined by the LSSE also benefit older adults, including the following:

- *To create new and successful active recreational facilities in or close to the village centers to improve the quality of life for all age groups and diverse populations in the community;*
- *To create a distinct Recreation Department that maintains, schedules use of, and generates funding for the maintenance and creation of active recreational facilities.*
- *To maintain and improve existing facilities, trails, and recreational spaces to meet the changing needs of the community.*



- *To actively pursue development of a significant Community Recreation Facility in the Town Center that provides active outdoor fields and indoor facilities for swimming, basketball, other court sports, exercise/weight rooms, and could accommodate both a senior center and teen center with appropriate facilities.*
- *To increase accessibility of existing recreational areas and trails, as well as connections between conservation areas and trails and public facilities at recreational fields.<sup>8</sup>*

Since the development of the 2017 OSRP, a Recreation Department was created to manage recreational programming and resources in town. Fitness programs for older adults are primarily organized by the Amherst Senior Center. However, the Parks and Recreation Department also offers a number of activities for all ages including Qi Gong, Dance, and “Sandlot Sports.”

Neighborhood parks or “parklets” that were mentioned in the public forum on transportation and public spaces included Kendrick Park, Groff Park, a new dog park, and Sweetzer Park. These are all important outdoor gathering spaces that are located in closer proximity to residential and commercial centers.

## **Buildings and Indoor Spaces**

The Amherst Senior Center is located in the Bangs Community Center in downtown Amherst. The Bangs Center offers conference rooms, meeting spaces, and a computer lab for use by community groups and has accessible restrooms that are open to the public during the hours when the building is open. Some respondents to the Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Community Survey commented that the Senior Center was small and outdated, and called for a larger Senior Center with more handicapped accessible parking.

Amherst has three public libraries, the Jones Library which is located on Amity Street near the center of town, the Munson Memorial Library in South Amherst, and the North Amherst Library. Design plans have been developed for the redevelopment of the North Amherst Library, and include accessibility features such as a no-step entrance and handicapped parking.

For any public building, it is important to design with all users in mind from the beginning rather than having to go back to retrofit or add accessibility features at a later date. This concept of Universal Design applies to both indoor and outdoor spaces.

The Town completed an ADA Self-Assessment and Transition Plan in 2020 to determine whether town-owned buildings and parks are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act and to develop a road map for removing barriers to noncompliant facilities and to ensure ongoing compliance. The Town has a Disabilities Advisory Committee in place that was involved with the development of the ADA Self-Assessment and Transition Plan and meets regularly to oversee implementation of the plan.

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<sup>8</sup> Amherst Open Space and Recreation Plan (2017)

**Figure 14 - Design Concept for North Amherst Library**



Since developing the ADA Transition Plan, the Town has added an annual line item for improvements in capital budget and replaced crosswalks and curb ramps on Amity Street, East & North Pleasant Street; added a new ADA ramp outside the Bangs Center and fixed the automatic door opener and other issues at the main entrance to the Bangs Center; ordered listening devices that will be available in all meeting rooms in the Bang Center; and added an accessibility tool to the Town website that make it more useable by people with visual impairments. The Town is having an expert look at pedestrian crossing signals to make sure they are working properly.

The ADA Self-Assessment and Transition Plan only impacts Town-owned properties and does not apply to private properties or the colleges and university in town.

### Assets

- ADA Self-Assessment and Transition Plan in place
- The Town has been successful in getting funds for several Shared Streets and Spaces projects.
- 80 miles of trails and several shared use paths for safe off-street walking or biking
- Small neighborhood parks including Kendrick Park, Groff Park, Dog Park, and Sweetzer Park that offer intermediate outdoor spaces near Town centers

### Challenges

- Not much accessible parking near the Bangs Center, and some comments that the Bangs Center is outdated and small – many people expressed the need for a new senior center
- Need for more benches and outdoor gathering spaces in town centers (plazas, parklets – park benches, tables and chairs)

## Buildings and Outdoor Spaces Goals and Actions

**Goal 6:** Provide opportunities for use of public buildings and outdoor spaces by people of all ages and abilities.

### Actions

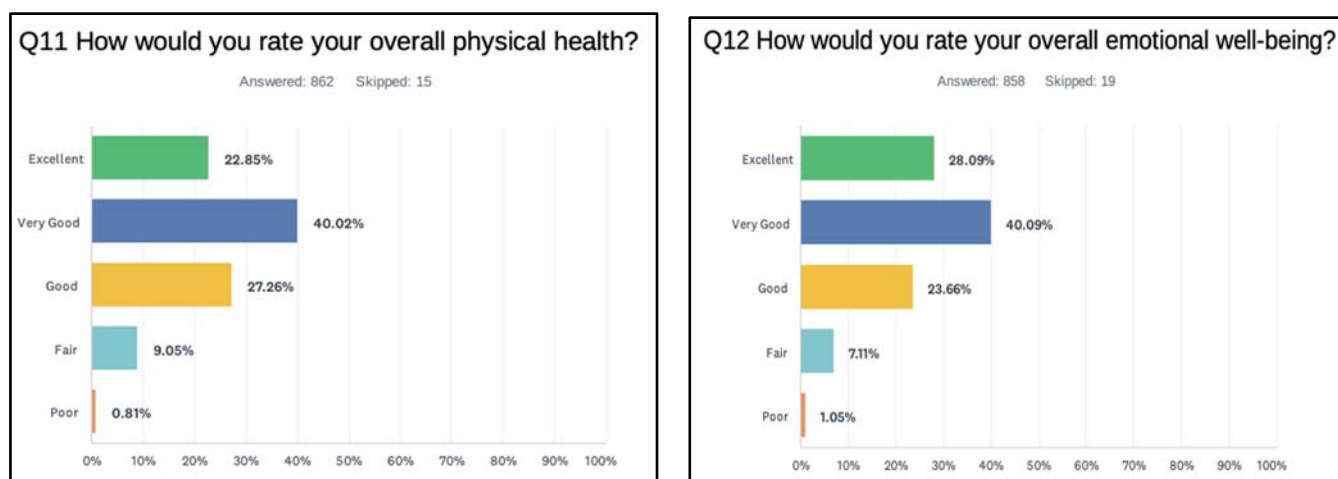
- 6.1 Plan for an expanded Community Center or Senior Center with ample parking and universal design.
  - 6.2 Continue to create plazas or pocket parks, and identify locations for benches in downtown spaces, to create more comfortable and inviting outdoor gathering places for people of all ages.
  - 6.3 Expand recreational programming and spaces for recreational activities (such as Pickle Ball) for older adults to encourage greater activity and social connections.
  - 6.4 Improve pedestrian and bicycle networks in Town centers with connections to trails and conservation and recreation areas.
  - 6.5 Adopt universal design standards for all new public buildings.
  - 6.6 Publicize the map of accessible trails and their level of difficulty, accessibility and amenities (such as shaded picnic areas, accessible restrooms, etc.) that is available online and in hard copy form.
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## Health and Community Services

Next to Housing, Health and Community Services were considered by Survey respondents as the most important issues for the Town to focus on to make it a more livable community for people as they age. The care needs of older adults who are aging in place can vary from assistance with basic tasks such as cleaning, shopping, cooking, yard work, snow shoveling, and minor home maintenance projects to full-time medical or home health assistance provided by professional or family caregivers. The pandemic highlighted the need for assistance with accessing food either due to difficulties in accessing transportation, fear of going out during the pandemic, or financial insecurity. This section discusses the health and social service resources that are currently available in Amherst as well as other community services (with the exception of transportation) that people need to help them live long and healthy lives.

Most survey respondents rated their health as Very Good (40%) or Excellent (23%), while 27% rated their physical health as Good. A total of 10% rated their health Fair (8%) or Poor (1%). More respondents rated their emotional well-being as Very Good (40%) or Excellent (27%), with 8% rating emotional well-being as Fair (9%) or Poor (1%) (**Figure 16**).

**Figure 15 - Physical health and emotional well-being (AFDF Amherst Community Survey)**



As the Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community suggest, health is affected not only by the availability of health care services, but also by the social and physical environment where people live, work and play. As people age, they may encounter barriers that prevent them from fully participating in their communities. Among the 344 people who responded to the question about physical conditions that they had at the time of the survey, 35% said they had sensory impairments (such as visual or auditory limitations), 37% had mobility limitations, and 34% had one or more chronic diseases. Twenty-two percent said that they had memory loss or forgetfulness, 6% had been diagnosed with dementia, and 23% had a psychological condition. Having environments and systems in place to help people overcome some of the barriers that arise with limitations in physical or cognitive capacities can help people to maintain much of their independence into their later years.

### Hospitals and Health Care Services

The Amherst Medical Center/Valley Medical Group, located off Route 9 on the eastern side of town, offers a broad range of services including primary care, physical therapy, eye care, radiology, surgery, advance care planning and hospice care. Cooley Dickinson Hospital (CDH) is located nearby in Northampton, and Baystate Hospital has hospitals in Greenfield, Springfield, and Palmer.

As mentioned previously, Cooley-Dickinson Hospital (CDH) is facilitating the Pioneer Valley Memory Care Initiative with the towns of Amherst, Easthampton and Northampton in partnership with Neighbors organizations from these communities. The purpose of this program is to understand the needs of people with dementia and their care partners and to connect these families with community support services.

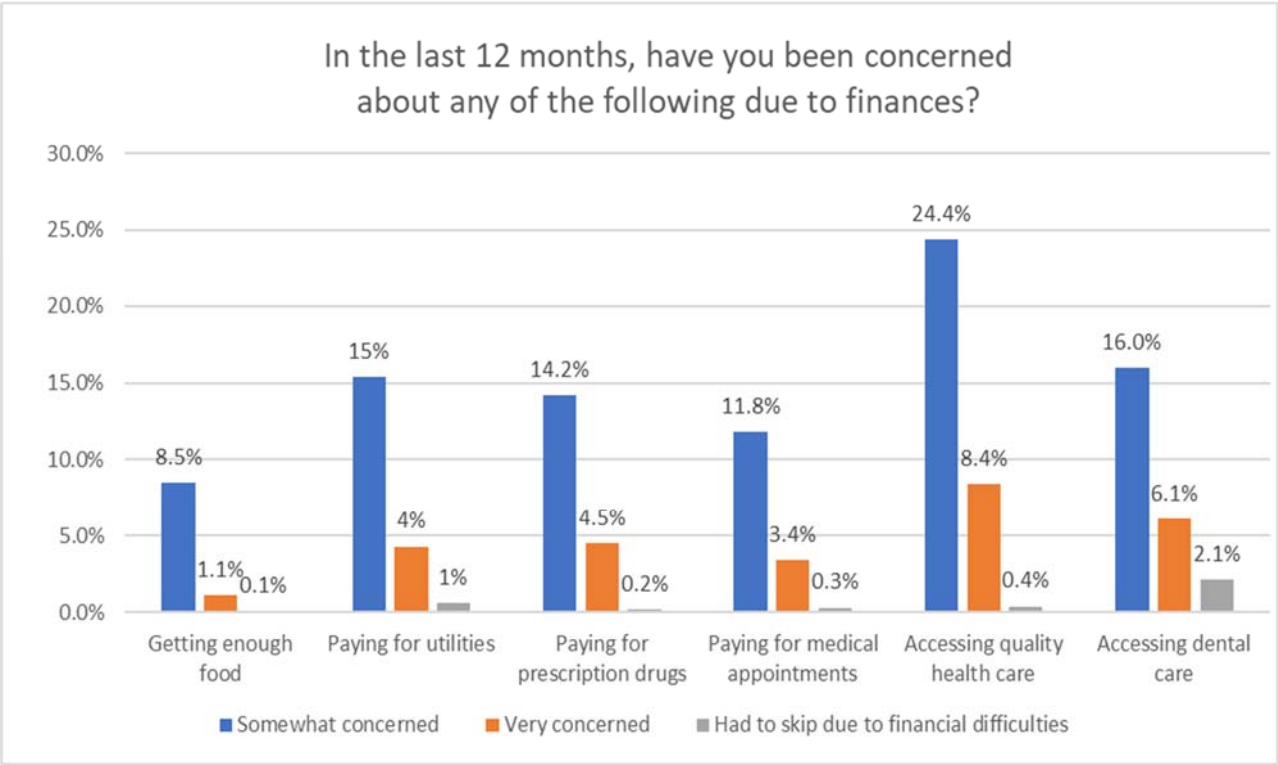
Many older adults experience multiple health issues and can benefit from having one person to coordinate their care needs. This task may fall on primary care physicians, case workers or family members. Developing an understanding of the full range of health problems, how medications

should be administered, and scheduling appointments can be critical to improving care for people with multiple health concerns.

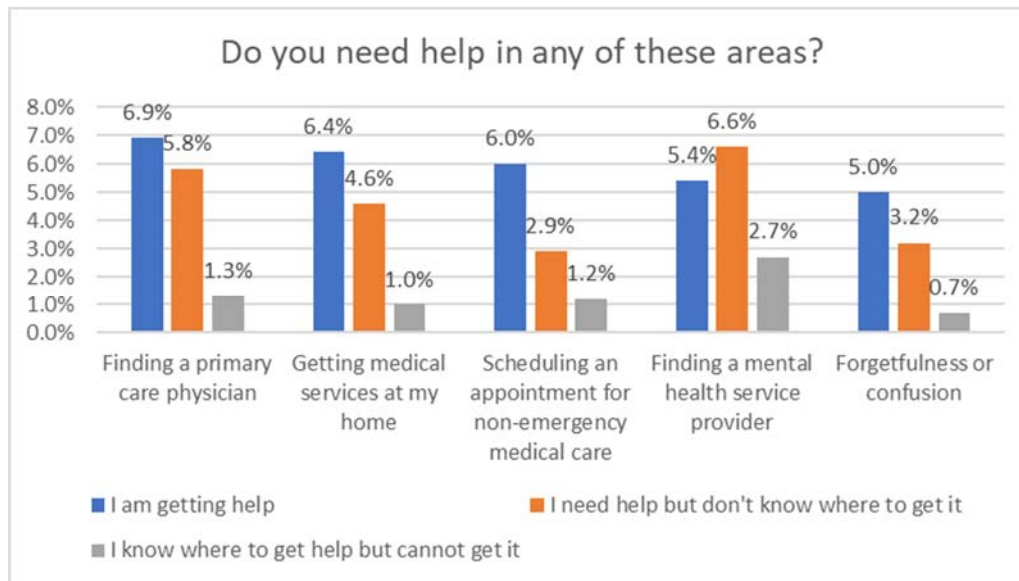
**Access and Affordability of Health Care**

Financial insecurity is an issue for many older adults in Amherst and elsewhere when it comes to accessing care. When asked if they were concerned about medical costs, 8.4% of survey respondents said that they were very concerned about being able to access quality health care, 6.1% were very concerned about paying for dental care, and 2.1% of respondents said that they had to skip dental treatment due to financial difficulties (Figure 17). Many survey respondents said that they needed help finding a mental health service provider (6.6%), finding a primary care provider (5.8%) and getting medical services at home (4.6%), and didn’t know where to find help (Figure 18).

**Figure 16** - Financial concerns related to medical care (AFDF Amherst Community Survey)



**Figure 17** - Areas where people need help finding health services (AFDF Amherst Community Survey)



## Senior Center Services

The Amherst Senior Center (in the Bangs Community Center) offers a number of services and programs for older adults that support healthy aging. Staff can also assist people with finding the services that they need outside the Senior Center. A few of the services offered at the Amherst Senior Center include the following:

- Weekly blood pressure clinic
- Van transportation
- Meals on Wheels and Grab & Go lunches through Highland Valley Elder Services
- Shopping bag of food from the Food Bank of Western MA (monthly)
- Amherst Survival Center Senior Mobile Nutrition Program (monthly)
- Fitness classes and equipment
- Assistance with access to social services, MassHealth applications, public benefits
- One-on-one technical assistance over the phone and in person to help with computers, tablets and smart phones; assistance with setting up access to virtual programming/Zoom
- Foot Care Clinics
- Reiki Sessions (suggested donation)
- SHINE (insurance) counseling
- Medical equipment loans
- Cooling/warming center

Although the majority (58%) of survey respondents were over the age of 70, only 25% of survey respondents said that they had used services or participated in programs at the Senior Center. When asked what the reasons were for not using the Senior Center, 21% said they were not

interested, 18% said they were not old enough, and 16% participated in programs elsewhere. Thirty-two percent of the respondents to this question (199 total) added comments to the “other” category, with most (48) saying that they had participated in programs prior to the pandemic but were not comfortable attending since the pandemic. Forty respondents felt that they did not need the Senior Center yet, and 14 said that the Town needs a better Senior Center. Others commented that parking is limited or they were not interested in the programming.

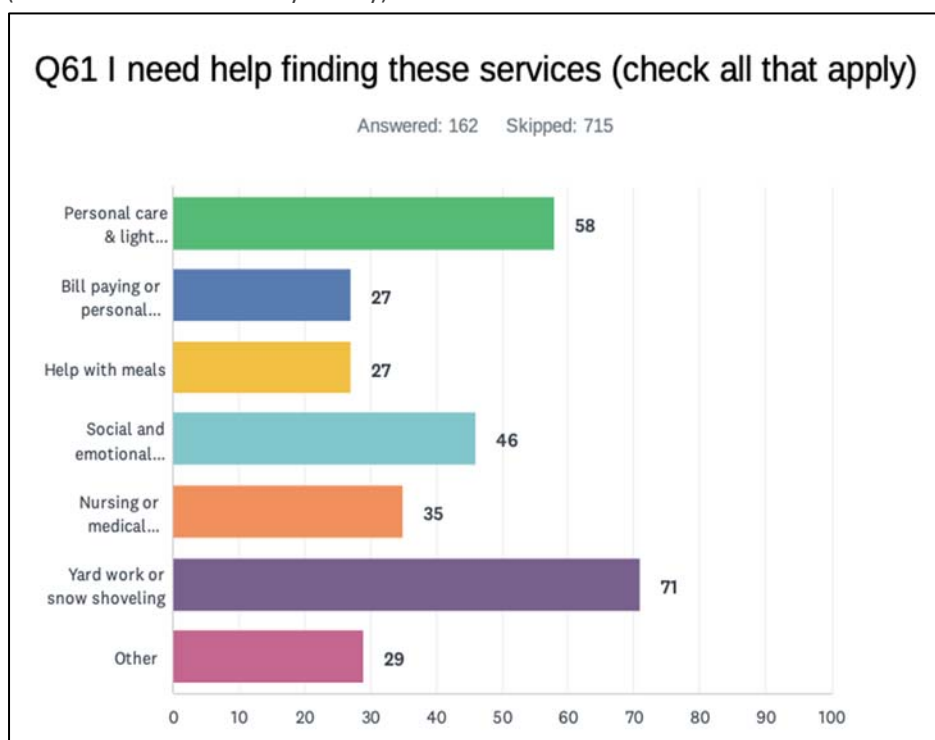
### Help with Basic Tasks

Twenty-three percent of survey respondents said that they needed help with basic tasks or errands such as changing a light bulb, shopping or shoveling snow. Thirty-nine percent (121) of respondents said that they had received help with yard work or snow shoveling from a friend or relative, 20% had received help with bill paying or personal finances and 27% with personal care and light housekeeping. Fourteen percent of respondents said that they did not have a friend or neighbor nearby who they could call for help if needed.

Difficulty with finding help with basic home or yard maintenance is often a big hurdle when people begin to experience physical difficulties such as loss of balance, arthritis, or vision or hearing impairments. For people experiencing cognitive decline or various forms of dementia, paying bills and managing finances or household repairs becomes very difficult. When asked if they needed help finding services, 71 respondents or 44% of those who answered the question said that they needed help finding someone to do yard work or to shovel snow, 58 or 36% needed help finding someone to help with personal care or light housework, and 28% said then needed help finding social or emotional support services.



**Figure 18** - Assistance needed in getting help with basic tasks or emotional support (AFDF Amherst Community Survey)



Amherst residents are fortunate to have an established “Neighbors” program that offers volunteer assistance from other community members (often older adults who understand that they may need the services at some point) who have the ability to offer their services. These programs have also been very successful in Northampton (with the largest Neighbors network in the country) and Easthampton. According to the director of Amherst Neighbors, requests for rides are the most popular need for members of the Neighbors network. This is an area where the Town may need to seek an alternative solution to the transportation needs of older residents.

Maintaining clear pathways in winter is also an issue for older adults, both for those responsible for shoveling sidewalks in front of their homes and for people with mobility limitations who rely on wheelchairs to get to bus stops or to get to services. Some neighbor networks establish neighborhood circles (Northampton) or a community volunteer pool (Portland, ME) to help with shoveling snow. The colleges and university in Amherst could present an opportunity to set up a system for students to help older adults with shoveling and other basic tasks.

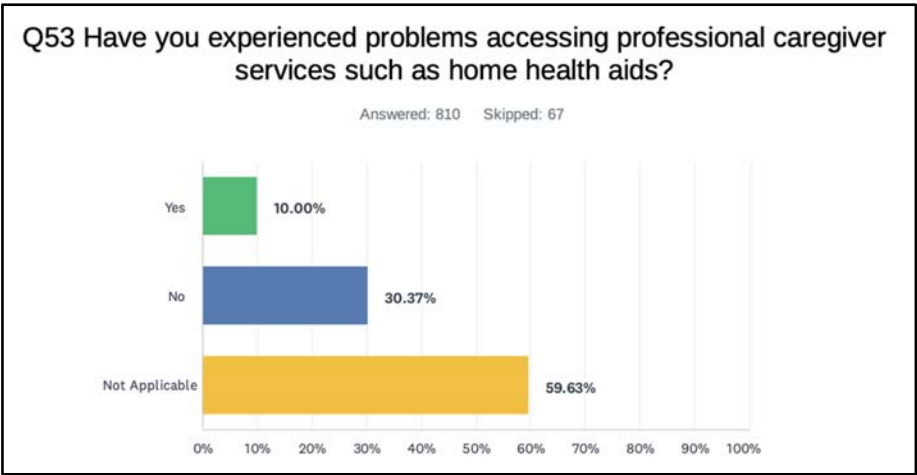
### Caregiver Services and Support

In this post-pandemic time, the region and country as a whole are seeing historic shortages in health and home care providers. Low wages, particularly for home health aids who make on average \$15/hour, make it difficult to fill these positions.<sup>9</sup> For workers who live far from Amherst, transportation is an issue as their transportation to Amherst is generally not covered by

<sup>9</sup> Boston Indicators and SkillWorks, “Care Work in Massachusetts,” September 2022.

employers. Ten percent or approximately 81 survey respondents said that they had experienced difficulty in accessing professional caregiver services (Figure 19).

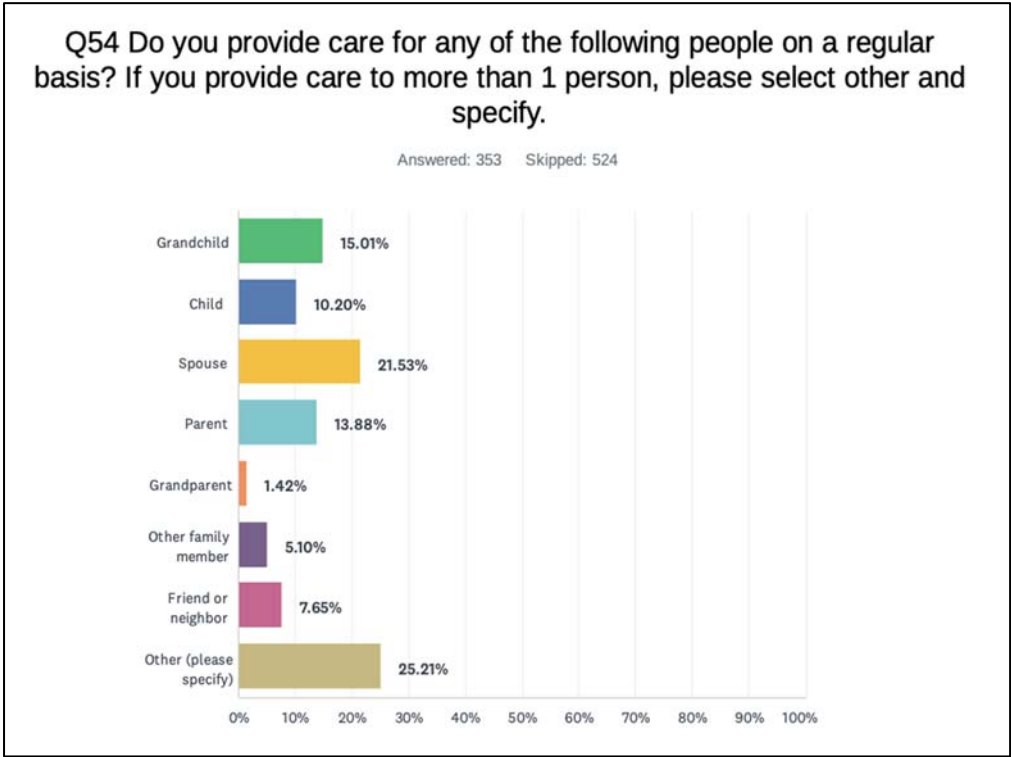
Figure 19 - Difficulty accessing professional caregiver services (AFDF Amherst Community Survey)



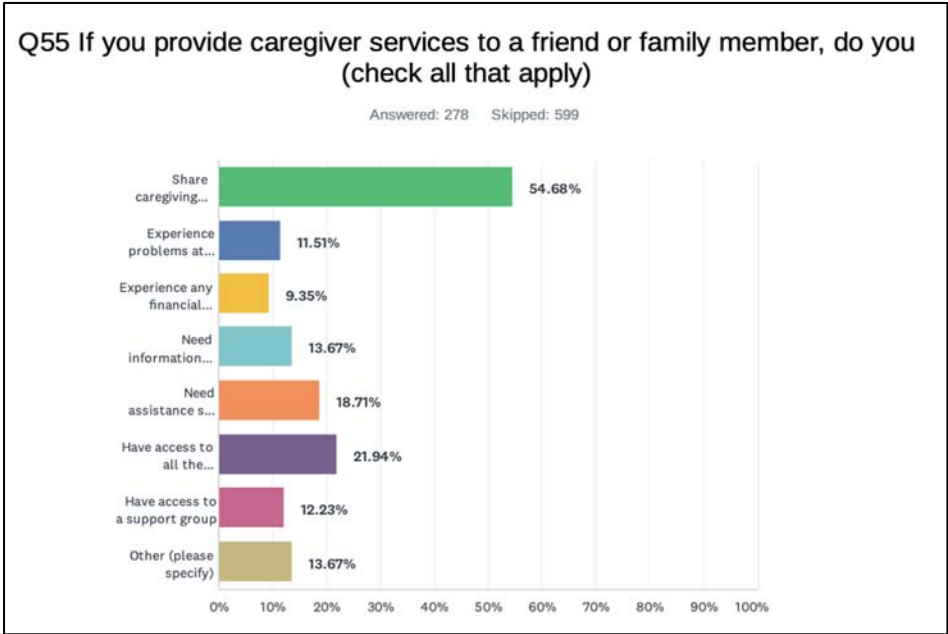
With the shortage of professional caregivers, the responsibility for caring for older adults often falls on family members, friends and neighbors. Over 40% of survey respondents (353 people) responded that they provide care on a regular basis to a spouse (21%), parent 14%), grandchild (15%), child (10%), or to a friend or neighbor (8%). Many caregivers find themselves in a position of caring for more than one person (parents and grandchildren, for example).

Caregiving can be emotionally and financially draining as people have to take time off of work to provide care or use their own funds to supplement payment of professional caregiving services for a loved one. Nineteen percent of survey respondents who said they cared for a friend or family member said that they needed help with respite care, 11% said they experienced problems at work, and 9% said they experienced financial problems with caregiving (Figure 22). The Executive Office of Elder Affairs offers a Caregiver Support Program for family caregivers, which provides free support services including counseling, training and respite care.

**Figure 20 - Family caregiver services provided (by 40% of survey respondents)**  
(AFDF Amherst Community Survey)



**Figure 21 - Challenges experienced by caregivers (AFDF Amherst Community Survey)**



For people taking care of someone with dementia, the Alzheimer’s Association provides numerous resources and online or in person support groups for caregivers and people in early

stages of dementia. The Amherst Senior Center can also provide some support services, and local adult day facilities can offer respite care.

The presence of the UMass School of Nursing and other programs could be an opportunity for involving students in the community and to fill the gap in home health care needs. The presence of two colleges and one university in town suggest an opportunity for intergenerational interaction and collaboration in this area.

### Food Insecurity

Food insecurity and inadequate diets can affect older adults in several ways. Living on a fixed income, having few options for transportation after one gives up driving, and not living within walking distance of a food store can limit one's access to healthy food options. In addition, losing the ability to grip a spoon or open a can, or experiencing cognitive decline can limit one's ability to prepare food. Many survey respondents (23 or 3.9%) reported that they took advantage of SNAP benefits counseling offered by the Senior Center. Seventy respondents (8.5%) reported that they were somewhat concerned about getting enough food, and nine respondents (1%) said they were very concerned.

The Amherst Survival Center is an important resource for community members who are in need of emergency food and offers a monthly box of food to be delivered to eligible older residents. Shopping bags of food are also provided to eligible older residents through the Senior Center with food supplied by the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts. Highland Valley Elder Services assists the Amherst Senior Center with supplying prepared foods to people in their homes through the Meals on Wheels program, and offers free lunch pickup at the Senior Center every weekday for people age 60 and over. Ensuring that people know about these food support options, reducing stigma around asking for help with getting food, and assisting people with signing up for SNAP benefits are ways the Town can assist older adults with alleviating food insecurity.

### Health and Community Services Goals and Actions

**Goal 7:** Ensure that older residents of Amherst have access to health care and services that support their ability to live long and healthy lives.

#### Actions

- 7.1 Expand support networks for people with dementia and their care partners and include people with these experiences in program development.
- 7.2 Ensure that all older adults are aware of food assistance programs offered by the Senior Center and Amherst Survival Center, and continue to assist people with accessing SNAP benefits.
- 7.3 Explore the possibility of working with other service organizations, colleges and universities, or schools to assist Amherst Neighbors volunteers with meeting the needs of older residents who have signed up for help.

- 7.4 Explore a collaborative arrangement with UMass School of Nursing and other programs to fill the home care needs of older residents.
  - 7.5 Work with health care providers at Cooley Dickinson Hospital and other area hospitals to establish a system of care coordination for older patients.
  - 7.6 Expand the Pioneer Valley Memory Care Initiative that connects people with dementia with community support systems such as Amherst Neighbors.
  - 7.7 Advocate for Medicaid reimbursement of higher wages for home care and home health care workers to build a more consistent and sustainable work force.
  - 7.8 Expand the home care and home health care workforce and advocate for coverage of home care services by Medicare for all income levels.
  - 7.9 Explore all options available for Amherst residents to live healthy and fulfilling lives either in long-term care facilities or at home. Ensure an adequate number of practitioners per patient in long-term care facilities, and/or that people can access home care providers when needed through advocacy at the state level.
  - 7.10 Explore different models of housing that include partnerships with care providers.
- 

## Communication, Information and Technology

Communication about resources and programs in multiple formats is essential to the success of all of the domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community. Residents must know how to access information about these resources in order to use and appreciate them. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of technology, not only for accessing information, but also for social interaction, telehealth services, public meetings, shopping, and fitness programming when businesses and public buildings were closed. The pandemic also brought to light the “digital divide” which exists in some communities and populations due to lack of resources to purchase equipment or sign up for high-speed internet, or lack of understanding of how to use equipment (phones, computers or tablets) to access services and programs.

When asked where they went for information on services for older adults, 79% went to the Senior Center and 65% relied on family or friends for information. Many also had the ability to conduct internet searches (51%) or relied on a doctor or other health care professional (51%), and 45% said that Amherst Neighbors was an important resource for information. A few respondents (6%) were familiar with the 413Cares.com resource which is a platform where service providers can post services and refer people to other services. This platform is very useful for social workers or community health workers who are tasked with connecting clients to services. The platform is less well known by the general public but could be a valuable resource for individuals and caregivers as long as service providers post information about their services and people know how to find the resources on the website.

Most people who responded to the Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Community Survey said that they were comfortable with computers or smart phones, with only 5.3% saying that they were not comfortable with these devices. However, when asked if they needed assistance in using or obtaining devices, only 71% said that they did not need assistance or equipment. Nine percent of respondents said that they needed access to equipment such as a laptop or tablet, while 13% said they needed training on how to use their equipment and 16% wanted training on how to use Zoom or other video meeting platforms. The Amherst Senior Center currently provides one-on-one assistance for people who need help with using their computers, phones, or tablets. Both the Jones Library and the Bangs Center (where the Senior Center is located) have free WiFi and computers that people can use while on site, and the Jones Library loans out tablets and WiFi hotspots for people who do not have regular internet service.

Figure 22 - Information sources accessed for services benefiting older adults (AFDF Amherst Community Survey)

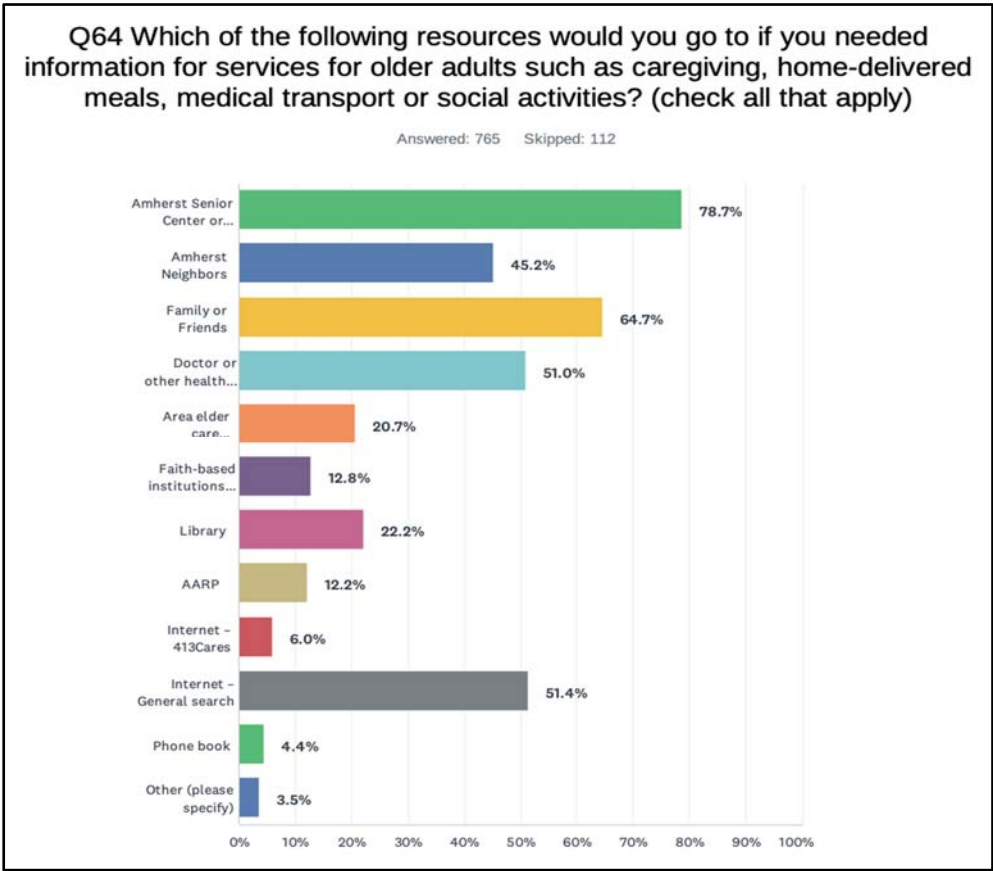
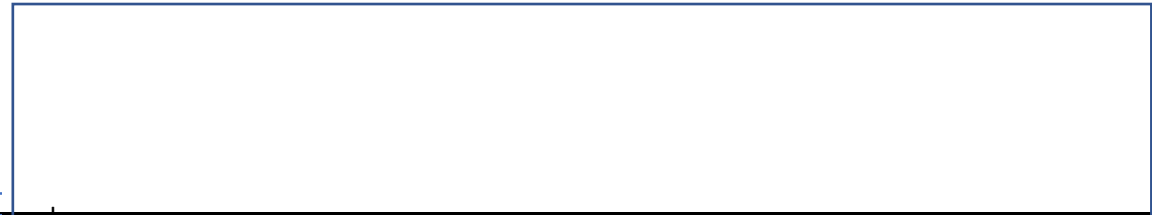
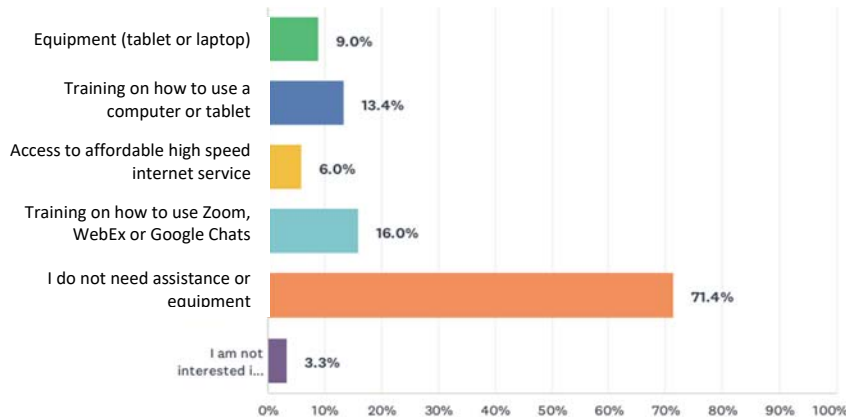


Figure 23 - Assistance needed with technology (AFDF Amherst Community Survey)



**Q63 Do you need assistance with any of the following in order to use technology to access basic information or to attend programs online?  
(check all that apply)**

Answered: 664 Skipped: 213



In addition to those who don't have access to technology, communication challenges exist with people with visual or hearing impairments, and those whose first language is not English. Thirty-five percent of survey respondents reported having sensory impairments (either visual or hearing or both), and according to the MHAC Community Profile, 16% had a diagnosed hearing impairment, while just over 4% had self-reported visual impairments.

Once people are connected to technology, it can help those with physical impairments to participate in meetings that would otherwise be hard to get to in person. However, additional assistance such as closed captioning for the hearing impaired; presentations, websites and meetings are formatted to accommodate people who have vision impairments; and translation services for non-English speakers should be considered in order to remove the barriers that restrict participation by many community members. People with cognitive impairments such as dementia can also benefit from technology such as voice-activated devices that play music or turn on a television.

The Amherst town website and Engage Amherst website employ Google Translate to allow people to select the language in which to view the website, but these tools do not currently extend to surveys, printed materials, or most reports that are uploaded for public review. Additional devices or programs on how to use technology for people with visual impairments would benefit many in the community.

The Engage Amherst website is part of a Town initiative to improve communications and engagement of citizens and includes an Office of Community Engagement which updates the site and develops engagement plans for Town projects, including the Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst project. This commitment to communication provides ample opportunity for civic engagement and participation in the development of the policies that affect all members of the community.



Amherst has an active local cable access television station, Amherst Media, which films local meeting, offering both live broadcasts and recordings for later viewing. The station also provides a platform for locally created programming that is available for online viewing. Amherst Senior Services publishes a comprehensive bi-monthly newsletter that details program offerings, and a website that lists many services and resources. In the open-ended question about how the Amherst Senior Center could better meet the community's needs, **14** respondents mentioned need for improved communication (better website, information in multiple places, monthly calendar) and **7** respondents need more information on services and how to access/register for them.

### Communication, Information and Technology Goals and Actions

**Goal 8:** Ensure that all residents have access to information about policies and programs that provide opportunities for health and community engagement.

#### Actions

- 8.1 Continue to assist older adults in acquiring equipment and training on how to use it, and provide assistance with accessing low cost or free broadband service. (COA and Library)
- 8.2 Invite an audiologist to give a presentation on free smart phones and use of captioning available to income eligible people.
- 8.3 Investigate the use of technology to provide access to books, music and online programming for people with visual, audio and cognitive impairments and offer workshops on these topics at the Amherst Senior Center or Library.
- 8.4 Provide accommodations for vision and hearing impaired (closed captioning, interpreter) on the Town website and in spaces used for public meetings (including the Bangs Center). Use black lettering on Town website; make those who update and design website aware that contrast and font sizes are important.
- 8.5 Develop a Town policy for translation of materials available to the public and interpretation at public meetings, and identify funding needs for these services.

**Goal 9:** Facilitate a culture of support and acceptance for residents of all ages and abilities.

#### Actions

- 9.1 Provide training for municipal staff, community and civic organizations, faith communities, and businesses on how to recognize and effectively communicate with customers with dementia and other cognitive disabilities.
- 9.2 Ensure that printed information – including official forms or invoices and text on visual displays in public spaces – has large lettering with main ideas in bold type; simple and straightforward sentences and simple language; and is available in multiple languages as needed.
- 9.3 Ensure that telephone answering services give instructions slowly and clearly and tell callers how to repeat the message at any time. Offer options for people with hearing impairments.

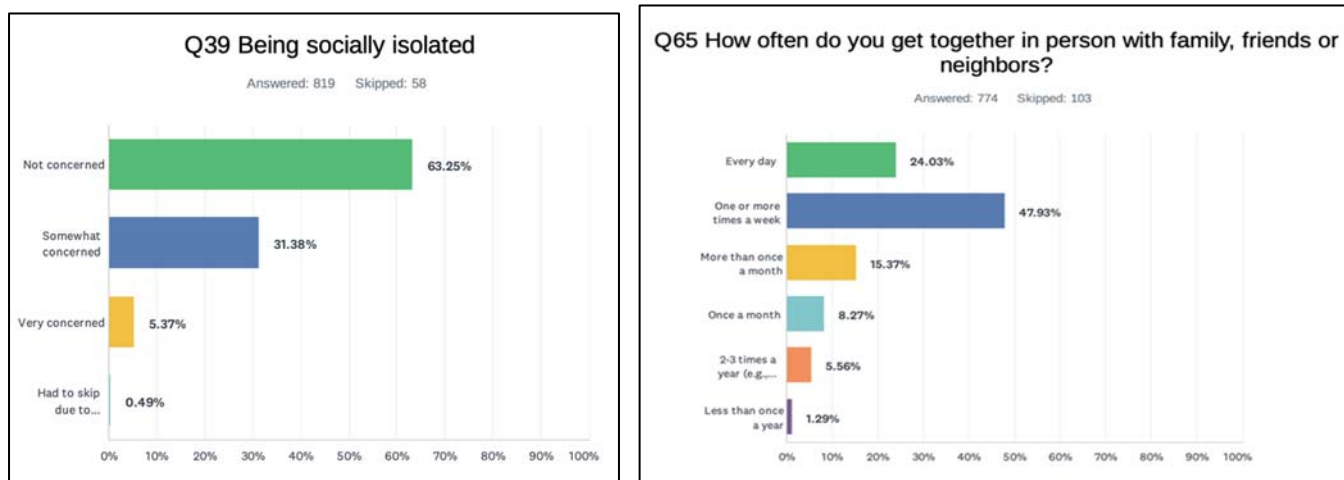
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## Social Participation and Inclusion

Participation in social activities, either formal or informal, is important to one's mental health. Conversely, social isolation and loneliness can cause poor health outcomes. Research shows that loneliness and social isolation can increase the risk of premature death and has been associated with a 50% increased risk of dementia as well as increased risk of heart disease and stroke, depression, anxiety, and suicide. This research also highlights increased risk of loneliness among more vulnerable populations of older adults including immigrants; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) populations; minorities; and victims of elder abuse.

At the time the Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Community Survey was issued, 31% of respondents were somewhat concerned about being socially isolated, and 5% were very concerned. Approximately 15% of respondents said that they got together in person with family friends or neighbors no more than once a month.

**Figure 25** - Concerns about social isolation and frequency of socializing  
(Age & Dementia Friendly Amherst Community Survey)



The Amherst Senior Center provides an important resource for people to gather for social and cultural events such as congregate meals and musical performances, fitness classes, and educational programs. However, only 25% of survey respondents (out of the 700 who answered the question) said that they had attended programs or used services at the Senior Center in the last 12 months. When asked why they had not used the senior center, 20% said that they were not interested, 18% said they were not old enough, 16% said that they participated in programs elsewhere, 10% said they did not know what was available, and 10% said that the parking was difficult. Of the 199 people who responded to the open-ended question about other reasons that they had not participated, 25% said that they were still not comfortable attending anything in person due to Covid. Forty respondents said that they did not need the services that the Senior Center provides at this time, and 14 said that the Town needs a better Senior Center. Twenty-

three percent of survey respondents said that they would participate in programs at the Senior Center if they were offered in the evening.

The pandemic increased social isolation among many older adults as they were advised to stay home. Transportation services and places where people had the opportunity to socialize were closed during the first year of the pandemic, leaving outdoor spaces such as parks and walking trails some of the few places where people could connect with others in person. According to the Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Community Survey, parks or outdoor spaces were the places where most (72%) people said that they like to spend their free time (other than the Senior Center). In terms of places, being at home (57%) was the second most popular places where people spend their free time, restaurants and cafes (59%) were third, and the library (53%) fourth. As to what people like to do with their free time, most (72%) said they liked to socialize with friends. In the open-ended responses to this question, respondents added art or hobbies; walking and hiking; gardening; community events; and classes, book groups or political organizations as ways that they like to spend their free time.

**Figure 24** - Additional activities that people like to do in their spare time

Other (please specify)	86
Artistic/Gaming Hobbies	13
Hike/Walk/Outdoor Activites	12
Gardening	11
Community Events/Locations	10
Education/Books/Political Organizations	10
Isolation	8
Friends/Family	6
Volunteering/Philanthropy	6
Musical Events/Cinema/Theatre	6
Working	5
Exercise/Sports	5
Online Communication/Activities	5
Unable/Problem w Amherst/Other	5
Traveling	3

Amherst has two public libraries (in addition to libraries at the colleges and university) that provide programming and activities for older adults as well as all community members.

Inclusion of all sectors of the community in social programming is important in building an inclusive and Age and Dementia Friendly community. People with dementia are at high risk of social isolation as they may not be able to drive or may become confused or agitated when they are out in public spaces. Providing activities such as memory cafes or support groups for people with dementia and their care partners could ensure a welcoming space for socializing. Also, trainings for staff of the library, volunteers at town-wide events, and the broader community can ensure that people with dementia are treated with respect and supported by the community. Likewise, planning and outreach of events or programming should consider all sectors at risk of social isolation including veterans; people who are not fluent in English; people with vision, hearing or mobility impairments; and people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Seventeen percent of respondents said that they had a condition or impairment that limited their ability to fully participate in their community. Thirty-five percent (out of the 344 who answered the question) of survey respondents said that they had a sensory (vision or hearing) impairment or condition, and 37% had mobility impairments. The Town has an office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion that is working to make Town policies and practices more inclusive.

A Number of faith-based organizations are located in Amherst and serve people of a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The Bethany Baptist Church offers services in Spanish, and the

Amherst Chinese Christian Church conducts some services in Chinese dialects. Faith-based communities are important sources of social and spiritual connection and could be good places to offer information on health and social services, social programs, and other topics relating to aging.

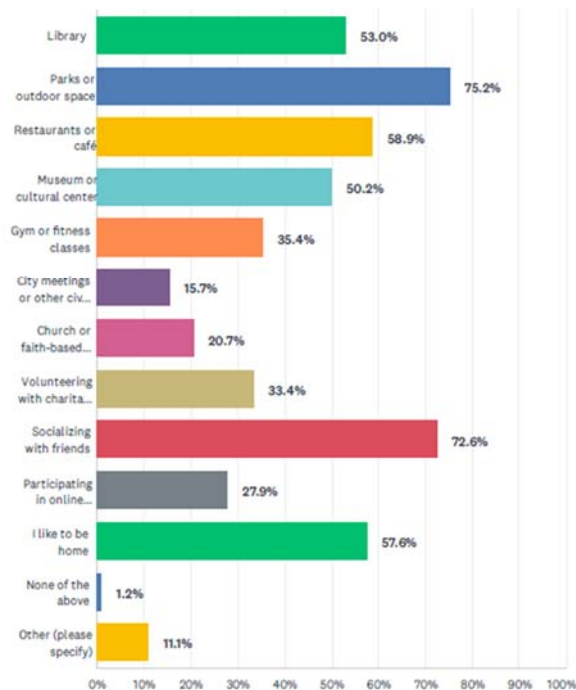
When asked what ways the Amherst Senior Center could better meet their needs, 299 people responded. A sampling of the responses is in **Figure 26**.

**Figure 25** - Places and people with whom survey respondents spend their free time (AFDF Community Survey)

**Figure 26** - A sampling of open responses for how the Amherst Senior Center can better meet the needs of older residents

Q70 Other than the Amherst Senior Center (and assuming these places will be fully open in the coming year), where do you like to spend your free time? (check all that apply)

Answered: 773 Skipped: 104



#### In what ways can the Amherst Senior Center better meet your needs?

- Accessible & easy to use website
- Engage people across the life span
- New larger, up to date senior center
- Memory cafes, volunteers to give caregivers a break
- More parking
- More varied cultural programs
- Fitness programs
- Topics of interest – end of life, legal basics, medical resources, courses for seniors at local colleges
- More information on programs
- Make the center more environmentally friendly – zero waste, safe energy, environmental conversations,
- Bilingual discussion circles. More bilingual staff and volunteers
- Programs in other languages, assistance for hearing impaired
- Trips to concerts, etc.
- Educational programs
- Strategies for memory loss
- Civic engagement training

#### Assets

- Two colleges and one university, opportunities for lifelong learning
- Highly educated older population
- Active programming offered by Senior Center and Library
- Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- Office of Civic Engagement offers numerous opportunities for residents to become involved in municipal projects and boards
- Strong and multi-cultural faith communities
- Amherst Neighbors offers company and social opportunities as well as practical support

#### Challenges/Opportunities

- Outdated Senior Center, little parking nearby
- Many people still afraid of going out after the pandemic
- Older people feel uncomfortable around students, especially at night

- Need for policy and resources to allow more programming in other languages, and translation of information
- Many people are not aware of local resources
- Many people have limited knowledge about the Amherst Senior Center

## Social Participation and Inclusion Goals and Actions

**Goal 10:** Ensure that older adults and people with cognitive or physical impairments have opportunities for social interaction through programming, planning of events, and access to technology.

### Actions

- 10.1 Work with DEI office to identify translation and interpretation needs of older residents and identify funding sources.
- 10.2 Continue to upgrade the Bangs Center and municipal meeting rooms with equipment to assist people with audio or visual impairments. Connect the Facilities Department with the DAAC or people with hearing impairments to ensure there is understanding about the devices or assistance needed.
- 10.3 Develop programming with UMass and local schools to encourage intergenerational interaction and support.
- 10.4 Support expansion of parking near the Bangs Center.
- 10.5 Collaborate with Amherst Media and other senior centers and local cable access stations to offer online and hybrid meetings and social and fitness programming that can be accessed online or re-broadcast on cable access TV.
- 10.6 Establish a Memory Café and other activities for people with dementia and their caregivers (adult day programs, creative arts/music, intergenerational connections, outings/group activities, respite care). Meaningfully engage people with dementia in developing programs and services whenever possible.
- 10.7 Work with library to train staff and provide programming for people with dementia.
- 10.8 Provide information about accessibility of facilities and transportation options for community meetings and events.

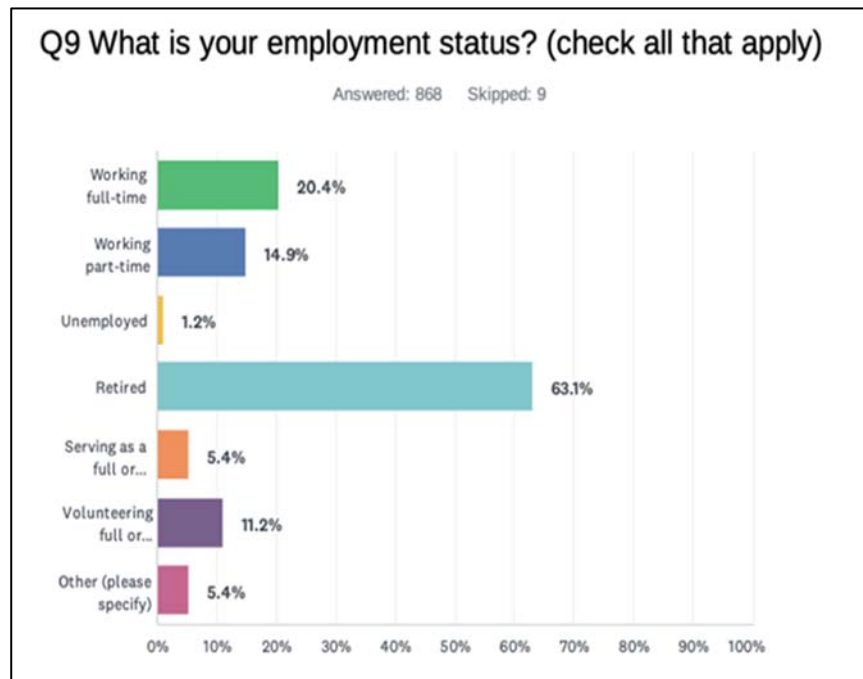
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## Employment and Civic Engagement

Most respondents (63%) to the Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Community Survey said that they were retired, but a little over 20% responded that they were working full-time and 15% said they were working part-time. Those who are working may be the younger respondents, but as many people (including several prominent politicians) continue to work into their 70s and some into their 80s if they enjoy their work or need the additional income.

Eight percent of survey respondents said that they were somewhat concerned about finding or losing a job, and 4% were very concerned about this issue. The Massachusetts Councils on Aging administers a 50+ Job Seekers program that helps older adults to find work. This program offers a year-round, 12-week training program that helps people deal with agism, create resumes, find information on available positions, and work on interviewing skills.

Figure 27 - Employment status (AFDF Community Survey)



Engagement of business leaders on making businesses accessible for all residents and welcoming for people with dementia can ensure a welcoming environment for older residents. Age Strong Boston developed an Age Friendly Business certification program that includes a checklist on social and environmental actions that businesses can adopt to make them more welcoming to people of all ages.

## Volunteering

Thirty-three percent of survey respondents said that they like to spend their free time volunteering with charitable organizations or local boards. The Town offers opportunities for residents to serve on numerous volunteer boards and committees and offers a property tax work-off program in exchange for time eligible older adults spend volunteering for certain activities.

The RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program) offers volunteer opportunities with agencies in Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire Counties including positions such as providing assistance with insurance (SHINE program), money management, food delivery, transportation, and Healthy Bones and Balance classes. RSVP volunteers also help with technology trainings or other skills.

## Engage Amherst

Amherst adopted a new Home Rule Charter that includes several provisions for encouraging engagement of Amherst residents. The Town now has an office of Community Engagement which employs several Community Participation Officers (CPOs) and hosts a website, Engage Amherst, which makes it easy for people to tap into ways that they can engage in discussions on various



projects. The website allows people to select different languages to view the website and some accessibility features for people with visual impairments. One challenge that the Town needs to address is a policy on translation of documents and interpreter services at meetings. Holding one forum in Spanish for the Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst project was a step in this direction. However, no Spanish speaking participants showed up for the meeting, so additional efforts to engage non-English speakers should be considered.

## Employment and Civic Engagement Goals and Actions

**Goal 11:** Provide opportunities and assistance for older adults who want to work and volunteer in the community.

- 11.1 Expand opportunities for property tax reduction in exchange for hours worked. Market volunteer opportunities broadly.
- 11.2 Develop intergenerational skill building/mentoring opportunities with the COA, community groups and local schools, e.g. youth teach elders about technology or other current studies, while elders teach youths about careers, life skills, etc.
- 11.3 Connect people with volunteer programs through RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program) for volunteer opportunities outside of the Senior Center.
- 11.4 Develop a policy for translation and interpreter services as well as outreach to non-English speakers to ensure inclusion of all residents in public discussions.
- 11.5 Consider implementing an Age and Dementia Friendly business certification program using the Age Strong Boston checklist as a model.

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## Public Safety

Feeling safe in one's home is important for everyone, and especially those who live alone. In Amherst, approximately 30% of people over the age of 65 live alone.<sup>10</sup> Close to 18% of survey respondents said that there were times when they did not feel safe in their communities. In Amherst, the main reason that people did not feel safe was due to unsafe streets or sidewalks, speeding cars, lack of street lighting, and fear of drunken college students (see discussion in the Transportation section, above). However, a few respondents (7) said that they were afraid of the police. This issue mainly comes up for people of color due to historic profiling of black and brown individuals (mostly men or boys) and repeated incidents of police brutality against black men in cities and towns throughout the country that comes up far too often in the media.

The Town of Amherst has launched an innovative program that places social workers into the community to address situations that are better suited for response for social or mental health workers than police. This program is called Community Responders for Equity, Safety and Service (CRESS). According to the director of the CRESS program, who presented at a public forum for the

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<sup>10</sup> MHAC Community Profile (data from 2016-18 5-year ACS)

Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst project, approximately 50% of CRESS responses are for older adults. The program is based on building relationships between CRESS workers and community members to establish a system of trust, and to offer a community response program that does not include weapons or other means of force when interacting with the public.

Amherst also has a Triad or SALT (Seniors And Law enforcement Together) program in place that is a collaboration between the COA and police, fire, sheriff's department, district attorney's office, and older adults that meet with the common goal of the safety and security of older adults in the community. The program sponsors a house numbering program where reflective numbers are installed close to the road so that the house can be easily found by emergency personnel, a lock box program where a lock box is installed to hold a house key and may be accessed by emergency personnel in case someone is inside and can't come to the door. The Amherst Police Department has an officer on staff who leads the program and is familiar with the challenges of people living with dementia and other aspects of people aging in the community.

The Council on Aging's website includes a page on cybersecurity and tips for online safety. These tips are especially important for new users of technology. The District Attorney's office keeps communities up to date with cybersecurity issues that may come up for older adults as well.

## Public Safety Goals and Actions

**Goal 12** : Ensure the safety of all residents, including older adults and people with dementia, through multi-sectoral partnerships and programming.

### Actions

- 12.1 Work with the Triad Program partners (Police, Fire, Emergency Services) to develop a database of people living with dementia or other health concerns and encourage people with dementia and family members to register for this list.
- 12.2 Ensure that regular trainings are available for all emergency personnel on recognizing the signs of dementia and how to communicate with people with dementia.
- 12.3 Continue to educate older adults about what to do in the case of emergency.
- 12.4 Post information on the Triad program on both the Senior Center and Police Department websites to educate residents about the File of Life and other important documents. Encourage residents to keep their File of Life documents updated regularly.
- 12.5 Continue to collaborate with law enforcement, Amherst Senior Services and CRESS to coordinate calls from older residents who need regular check-ins or have safety concerns.

## Action Plan

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This Action Plan for an Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst details goals and strategies for improving Amherst's social and built environments to make the town a welcoming place for people of all ages and abilities. According to the Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Survey and

comments gathered at topic-based public forums, the areas of greatest concern in Amherst include Housing, Health and Community Services, and Transportation.

The following Action Plan is ordered by domains of the highest importance to residents of Amherst based on the community engagement efforts completed for this report. However, this report and Action Plan are dynamic documents that will be amended as conditions change in the community.

The Goals and Actions included in the Action Plan include lead entities, partner organizations or entities, metrics for measuring progress, and the priority as identified through the results of community engagement and the capacity of the entities assigned.

Priority levels are as follow:

- **Short-Term (ST)** – 1-3 years
- **Medium Term (MT)** – 4-6 years
- **Long Term (LT)** – 7-10 years

## Plan Implementation

The Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Working Group was formed to work with the PVPC on the development of this Community Assessment and Action Plan. An implementation committee made up of members of this working group and others identified by the Town will be developed to implement strategies on the following pages. In addition, the following steps are recommended for the implementation of this report.

- 1) Continue to build the Age and Dementia Friendly Working Group to include multiple sectors of the community as well as regional and state partner organizations and agencies.
- 2) Distribute the Community Assessment and Action Plan to Town boards, committees, social groups and faith organizations to solicit input and volunteers for an implementation committee, and to build awareness of ways that these groups can participate in making Amherst Age and Dementia Friendly.
- 3) Submit report to AARP and Dementia Friendly Massachusetts for final certification as an Age and Dementia Friendly Community.
- 4) Select strategies for implementation each year.
- 5) Report on successes and challenges – both to the community, AARP and Dementia Friendly Massachusetts.

## Age and Dementia Friendly Amherst Action Plan

Dementia Friendly Community Goals & Actions				
<b>Goal 1: Build awareness, acceptance, and a culture of support for people living with dementia and the people who care for them.</b>				
<b>Actions</b>		<b>Lead Entity/ Partners</b>	<b>Priority Level</b>	<b>Metrics</b>
1.1	Work with the Triad Program partners (Amherst Senior Services, Police, Fire, Emergency Services, and CRESS) and health care providers to develop a voluntary registry of people living with dementia or other health concerns and encourage people with dementia and family members to register for this list.	Senior Center, Triad partners	High	Registry in place; # registered
1.2	Identify and reach out to family caregivers to connect them with support programs and opportunities for meeting with other caregivers of people with dementia.	Senior Center; Pioneer Valley Memory Care Initiative (CDH); HCES	Medium	# of programs; # caregivers participating
1.3	Identify respite care opportunities for family caregivers at all income levels and connect people to these resources.	Senior Center	Medium	# respite care opportunities # people connected
1.4	Continue to encourage trainings for all municipal staff on how to recognize signs of dementia and communicate with people with dementia.	Senior Center, Alzheimer's Association	Ongoing	# trainings # participants
1.5	Hold Dementia Friends trainings for community members as well as all sectors of municipal government and public facing businesses and organizations. Recruit volunteers to become Dementia Friends Champions who can provide Dementia Friends trainings to others. .	Senior Center, Amherst Neighbors, JFCS (holds DF Champions trainings)	Low	# DF trainings # participants

1.6	Publicize memory cafes and other programs for people with dementia and their care partners. Work with the faith community and Amherst Neighbors to enable people in early stages of dementia to attend social and cultural events and to maintain connections in the community.	<i>Senior Center, Amherst Neighbors, Faith community</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i># memory cafes # participants</i>
1.7	Continue to raise awareness about dementia and available resources for people with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.	<i>Senior Center, Amherst Neighbors, PVMCI</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i># people contacted</i>
1.8	Continue to expand services and programs for people with dementia and their families (such as the Pioneer Valley Memory Care Initiative) through partnerships with Cooley-Dickinson Hospital and other health and social service agencies.	<i>CDH – PVMCI Amherst Neighbors</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i># people served</i>
1.9	Explore and evaluate online scheduling tools to allow neighbors and volunteers to help people with dementia get out into the community and to cultural events.	<i>Senior Center</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Online tool recommendations</i>

## Housing Goals & Actions

***Goal 2: Ensure that a range of safe, affordable, and accessible single and multi-unit housing options are available to meet the needs of the aging population in Amherst.***

<b><i>Actions</i></b>		<b>Lead Entity/ Partners</b>	<b>Priority Level</b>	<b>Metrics</b>
2.1	Create new channels of advocacy to support the development of housing in Amherst that is universally accessible, includes smaller units, and is located within walking distance of town centers.	<i>Housing Trust, COA, Planning Dept.</i>	<b><i>High</i></b>	<i># of Advocacy networks # people involved in advocating for housing</i>

2.2	Provide incentives (property tax rebates, flexible parking requirements, etc.) to bring grocery stores or neighborhood markets and other amenities to town centers.	<i>Planning Dept.</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Zoning changes</i>
2.3	Provide incentives for private owners of first floor rental units to rent to older adults with benefits including lower rates of turnaround.	<i>Planning Dept.</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Incentive program</i>
<i>Goal 3: Provide support and assist with alternative housing models to enable Amherst residents to safely age in place.</i>				
<b><i>Actions</i></b>		<b><i>Lead Entity/ Partners</i></b>	<b><i>Priority Level</i></b>	<b><i>Metrics</i></b>
3.1	Continue to provide information and assistance for older residents in single family homes to get property tax abatements in exchange for work.	<i>Senior Center, Town Depts.</i>	<b><i>High</i></b>	<i># of people participating in property tax work-off program</i>
3.2	Continue to connect homeowners with Home Modification Loan and Grant programs.	<i>Senior Center, CAPV</i>	<b><i>Medium</i></b>	<i>Updated information on loan and grant programs</i>
3.3	Collaborate with Amherst Neighbors to understand the areas of greatest need for people aging in place (i.e. help with basic tasks, transportation, home care attendants). Pursue funding or collaboration with students or other groups to provide additional services where needed.	<i>Amherst Neighbors, Senior Center, schools</i>	<b><i>Medium</i></b>	<i>Additional volunteer networks assisting Amherst Neighbors</i>
3.4	Work with UMass, Hampshire and Amherst Colleges to address issues with rental units including absentee landlords, etc.	<i>Planning, UMass, colleges</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Agreements around rental housing</i>

3.5	Explore alternative living arrangements for older adults including congregate housing or smaller shared living arrangements to address affordability and availability of housing for older adults.	COA/Senior Center, Amherst Neighbors	Low	Discussion about alternate living arrangements
3.6	Provide assistance and education to older adults on housing options such as home sharing, or how to design and build accessory apartments for income or housing for caregivers.	Housing Trust, Planning, UMass	Low	Information on housing options
3.7	Consider pursuing a program (such as Nesterly) which screens students to rent rooms from older adults at reduced rates in exchange for assistance with home care or basic tasks.	COA/Senior Center, UMass	Low	Discussions with Nesterly, research on other home share programs

## Transportation Goals & Actions

**Goal 4:** Ensure that transportation services are available and information on how to use them is easily accessible for residents of all ages and abilities to allow access to food, medical appointments, employment, education, and social connections.

<b>Actions</b>		<b>Lead Entity/ Partners</b>	<b>Priority Level</b>	<b>Metrics</b>
4.1	Expand hours and service area for paratransit services for people who use wheelchairs – both public (through PVTA and the senior center) and private (for hours and days when the Senior Center is closed).	Senior Center, PVTA	<b>High</b>	Expanded hours Ridership
4.2	Continue to assist older adults in signing up for paratransit and on-demand senior transportation services and provide regular outreach about this assistance program.	Senior Center, PVTA Travel Trainers	<b>High</b>	# people signed up for paratransit



4.3	Continue to work with PVRTA Travel Trainers to provide transit orientation programs for people who are transitioning from driving personal vehicles.	Senior Center, PVRTA	<b>Medium</b>	# of people who work with travel trainers
4.4	Discuss with PVRTA limited transportation options when students are not in town (fixed route bus service). Consider stops at locations where older people are living.	Senior Center, Amherst Neighbors, PVRTA	Low	PVRTA routes, ridership
4.5	Consult with Mass Mobility to determine possible solutions for ride services that could supplement or replace volunteer ride services offered by Amherst Neighbors. a. Look into contracting with Uber or Lyft to provide rides for older adults or consider adopting a Microtransit program to fill gaps in transportation needs. b. Expand Senior Center van service or volunteer driver program with Amherst Neighbors through incentives such as stipends or property tax work-off program to compensate drivers for time and fuel costs.	Senior Center, Mass Mobility, Amherst Neighbors	Low	Expanded ride service
4.6	Improve transit stops with benches and/or bus shelters, consulting users about priority locations.	Planning, Senior Center	Low	Improved bus shelters, benches added
<b>Goal 5:</b> Ensure that roads, sidewalks and trail networks are safe and comfortable for use by people of all ages and abilities.				
<b>Actions</b>		<b>Lead Entity/ Partners</b>	<b>Priority Level</b>	<b>Metrics</b>

5.1	<p>Research system or policy change for clearing of snow on sidewalks – possibly allowing property owners to sign up with a private vendor or volunteers when they can't clear snow themselves.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Partner with colleges or school groups to develop an Adopt a Bus Stop shoveling program</li> <li>b. Develop Neighbor Circles through Amherst Neighbors to recruit people to help with shoveling in their neighborhoods.</li> </ul>	Senior Center, Planning, DPW, Amherst Neighbors, schools	<b>High</b>	Revised policy/program for sidewalk shoveling
5.2	Improve sidewalks near senior living facilities and complete sidewalk connections to bus stops where needed.	Planning, DPW	<b>Medium</b>	Sidewalk connectivity; sidewalk condition tracking
5.3	Develop an easy reporting system for sidewalk maintenance needs to prevent trip hazards.	DPW, Planning	<b>Medium</b>	Sidewalk reporting system in place
5.4	Develop a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan with funds from the State's Complete Streets Program to make the Town eligible for implementation funds for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.	Planning, DPW	Low	Complete Streets Prioritization Plan in place; funding for implementation; # of improvements
5.5	Develop a plan for lighting of sidewalks and road crossings in town centers to improve safety while using standards that support "dark skies" values.	Planning, DPW	Low	Sidewalk lighting plan in place

## Buildings & Outdoor Spaces Goals & Actions

**Goal 6: Provide opportunities for use of public buildings and outdoor spaces by people of all ages and abilities.**

Actions		Lead Entity/ Partners	Priority Level	Metrics
6.1	Plan for an expanded Community Center or Senior Center with ample parking and universal design.	COA, Amherst Neighbors, Planning	<b>High</b>	<i>Funding and plans for new senior center</i>
6.2	Continue to create plazas or pocket parks, and identify locations for benches in downtown spaces, to create more comfortable and inviting outdoor gathering places for people of all ages.	Planning, Conservation	<b>Medium</b>	<i>New parks, improved public spaces</i>
6.3	Expand recreational programming and spaces for recreational activities (such as Pickle Ball) for older adults to encourage greater activity and social connections.	Parks & Recreation; Senior Center	<b>Medium</b>	<i>Expanded programming, participation</i>
6.4	Improve pedestrian and bicycle networks in Town centers with connections to trails and conservation and recreation areas.	Planning, Conservation	Low	<i>Bike and Pedestrian network; connecting trails</i>
6.5	Adopt universal design standards for all new public buildings.	Planning	Low	<i>Universal Design Standards in place</i>
6.6	Publicize the map of accessible trails and their level of difficulty, accessibility and amenities (such as parking, shaded picnic areas, accessible restrooms, etc.) that is available online and in hard copy form.	Senior Center, Parks & Recreation	Completed	<i>Map posted online</i>

## Health & Community Services Goals & Actions

**Goal 7:** Ensure that older residents of Amherst have access to health care and services that support their ability to live long and healthy lives.

Actions		Lead Entity/ Partners	Priority Level	Metrics
7.1	Expand support networks for people with dementia and their care partners and include people with these experiences in program development.	<i>Senior Center; Alzheimer's Association</i>	<b>High</b>	<i>Support network for people with dementia and care partners</i>
7.2	Ensure that all older adults are aware of food assistance programs offered by the Senior Center and Amherst Survival Center and continue to assist people with accessing SNAP benefits.	<i>Senior Center, Amherst Survival Center</i>	<b>High</b>	
7.3	Explore the possibility of working with other service organizations, colleges and universities, or schools to assist Amherst Neighbors volunteers with meeting the needs of older residents who have signed up for help.	<i>Senior Center, Amherst Neighbors, service organizations; colleges and university</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Agreements with schools or other service organizations</i>
7.4	Explore a collaborative arrangement with UMass School of Nursing and other programs to fill the home care needs of older residents.	<i>Senior Center, UMass</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Cooperative program</i>
7.5	Work with health care providers at Cooley Dickinson Hospital and other area hospitals to establish a system of care coordination for older patients.	<i>Cooley Dickinson Hospital, Senior Center</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Care Coordination System in place</i>
7.6	Expand the Pioneer Valley Memory Care Initiative that connects people with dementia with community support systems such as Amherst Neighbors.	<i>Cooley-Dickinson Hospital; Amherst Neighbors</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Expanded Memory Care Initiative</i>
7.7	Advocate for Medicaid reimbursement of higher wages for home care and home health care workers to build a more consistent and sustainable work force.	<i>Senior Center; Amherst Neighbors</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Advocacy guidance</i>

7.8	Expand the home care and home health care workforce and advocate for coverage of home care services by Medicare for all income levels.	<i>Amherst Neighbors; residents</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Monitor legislation regarding payment for home care workers</i>
7.9	Explore all options available for Amherst residents to live healthy and fulfilling lives either in long-term care facilities or at home. Ensure an adequate number of practitioners per patient in long-term care facilities, and/or that people can access home care providers when needed through advocacy at the state level.	<i>Amherst Neighbors; resident advocates</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Monitor people aging in place and in long-term care facilities</i>
7.10	Explore different models of housing that include partnerships with care providers.	<i>Senior Center; care providers</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Models reviewed</i>

Communication, Information & Technology Goals & Actions				
<b>Goal 8:</b> <i>Ensure that all residents have access to information about policies and programs that provide opportunities for health and community engagement.</i>				
Actions		Lead Entity/ Partners	Priority Level	Metrics
8.1	Continue to assist older adults in acquiring equipment and training on how to use it and provide assistance with accessing low cost or free broadband service.	<i>Senior Center, Library, UMass students, RSVP, Amherst Neighbors</i>	<b>High</b>	<i># of people seeking equipment and assistance; programs available</i>
8.2	Invite an audiologist to give a presentation on free smart phones and use of captioning available to income eligible people.	<i>Senior Center, Amherst Neighbors, DAAC</i>	<b>Medium</b>	<i>Presentation scheduled</i>

8.3	Investigate the use of technology to provide access to books, music, websites and online programming for people with visual, audio and cognitive impairments and offer workshops on these topics at the Amherst Senior Center or Library.	Senior Center, Library, DAAC	<b>Medium</b>	Programs for visually impaired
8.4	Provide accommodations for vision and hearing impaired (closed captioning, interpreter) on the Town website and in spaces used for public meetings (including the Bangs Center). Use black lettering on Town website; make those who update and design website aware that contrast and font sizes are important.	Planning, Facilities Departments, DAAC	Ongoing	Evaluation of website by vision impaired; public meeting rooms equipped
8.5	Develop a Town policy for translation of materials available to the public and interpretation at public meetings and identify funding needs for these services.	Community Engagement Dept; UMass, Amherst College for translation services	Low	Translation policy in place
<b>Goal 9: Facilitate a culture of support and acceptance for residents of all ages and abilities.</b>				
<b>Actions</b>		<b>Lead Entity/ Partners</b>	<b>Priority Level</b>	<b>Metrics</b>
9.1	Provide training for municipal staff, community and civic organizations, faith communities, and businesses on how to recognize and effectively communicate with customers with dementia and other cognitive disabilities.	Senior Center, Library, Alzheimer's Association; Dementia Friends	<b>High</b>	Trainings scheduled; # attending
9.2	Ensure that printed information – including official forms or invoices and text on visual displays in public spaces – has large lettering with main ideas in bold type; simple and straightforward sentences and simple language; and is available in multiple languages as needed. Edit what is important on public bulletin boards so that they are not overwhelming to people with visual or cognitive impairments.	Community Engagement Dept; High School or College Student volunteers	Low	Review of printed information; policy in place

9.3	Ensure that telephone answering services give instructions slowly and clearly and tell callers how to repeat the message at any time. Offer options for people with hearing impairments.	<i>Community Engagement, Municipal Departments</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Municipal policy in place</i>
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## Social Participation & Inclusion Goals & Actions

**Goal 10:** *Ensure that older adults and people with cognitive or physical impairments have opportunities for social interaction through programming, planning of events, and access to technology.*

Actions		Lead Entity/ Partners	Priority Level	Metrics
10.1	Work with DEI office to identify translation and interpretation needs of older residents and identify funding sources.	<i>DEI Office, Communications Office</i>	<b>High</b>	<i>Translation program in place</i>
10.2	Continue to upgrade the Bangs Center and municipal meeting rooms with equipment to assist people with audio or visual impairments. Connect the Facilities Department with the DAAC or people with hearing impairments to ensure there is understanding about the devices or assistance needed.	<i>Facilities Dept [MOD grants]; DAAC</i>	<b>High</b>	<i>Equipment in place</i>
10.3	Develop programming with UMass and local schools to encourage intergenerational interaction and support.	<i>Senior Center, UMass</i>	<b>Medium</b>	<i>Intergenerational programs in place</i>
10.4	Support expansion of parking near the Bangs Center	<i>Planning, DPW</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Parking study completed</i>
10.5	Collaborate with Amherst Media and other senior centers and local cable access stations to offer online and hybrid meetings and social and fitness programming that can be accessed online or re-broadcast on cable access TV	<i>Amherst Media, Senior Center</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Online programming available</i>



10.6	Establish a Memory Café and other activities for people with dementia and their caregivers (adult day programs, creative arts/music, intergenerational connections, outings/group activities, respite care). Meaningfully engage people with dementia in developing programs and services whenever possible.	<i>Senior Center</i>	<b>Completed</b>	<i>Regular memory cafes in place</i>
10.7	Work with library to train staff and provide programming for people with dementia.	<i>Senior Center, Library</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Library programming in place</i>
10.8	Provide information about accessibility of facilities and transportation options for community meetings and events.	<i>DEI Office is working on this</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Accessibility information in place</i>

Employment & Civic Engagement Goals & Actions				
<b>Goal 11:</b> <i>Provide opportunities and assistance for older adults who want to work and volunteer in the community.</i>				
Action		Lead Entity/ Partners	Priority Level	Metrics
11.1	Expand opportunities for property tax work-off in exchange for hours worked. Market volunteer opportunities broadly.	<i>Senior Center, Amherst Neighbors, Library</i>	<b>High</b>	<i># of opportunities; # of participants</i>
11.2	Develop intergenerational skill building/mentoring opportunities with the Senior Center, community groups and local schools, e.g. youth teach elders about technology or other current studies, while elders teach youths about careers, life skills, etc.	<i>DEI Office, CRESS, Senior Center</i>	<b>Medium</b>	<i>Intergenerational programs in place</i>

11.3	Connect people with volunteer programs through RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program) for volunteer opportunities outside of the Senior Center.	<i>RSVP, Senior Center, Amherst Neighbors</i>	<b>Medium</b>	<i># of volunteer programs; # of participants</i>
11.4	Develop a policy for translation and interpreter services as well as outreach to non-English speakers to ensure inclusion of all residents in public discussions.	<i>DEI</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Policy in place</i>
11.5	Consider implementing an Age and Dementia Friendly business certification program using the Age Strong Boston checklist as a model.	<i>Senior Center, CoC</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Business certification checklist and program in place</i>

## Public Safety Goals & Actions

**Goal 12:** *Ensure the safety of all residents, including older adults and people with dementia, through multi-sectoral partnerships and programming.*

Actions		Lead Entity/ Partners	Priority Level	Metrics
12.1	Work with the Triad Program partners (Police, Fire, Emergency Services) to develop a database/registry of people living with dementia or other health concerns and encourage people with dementia and family members to register for this list.	<i>Senior Center, Police, Fire, CRESS</i>	<b>High</b>	<i>Database/ Registry in place</i>
12.2	Ensure that regular trainings are available for all emergency personnel on recognizing the signs of dementia and how to communicate with people with dementia.	<i>Alzheimer's Association; CRESS</i>	<b>Medium</b>	<i>Trainings offered; # of people participating</i>

12.3	Continue to educate older adults about what to do in case of emergency.	<i>Police/Fire; Emergency preparedness committee</i>	<b>Medium</b>	<i>Programs or guidance on what to do in case of emergency</i>
12.4	Post information on the Triad (SALT) program on both the Senior Center and Police Department websites to educate residents about the File of Life and other important documents. Encourage residents to keep their File of Life documents updated regularly.	<i>Fire Dept., Police Dept., Senior Center Anne Burton</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Information posted</i>
12.5	Continue to collaborate with law enforcement, Amherst Senior Services and CRESS to coordinate calls from older residents who need regular check-ins or have safety concerns.	<i>Senior Center, CRESS</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>	<i># of people served</i>