

**Age-Friendly / Livable Communities
City of New Bedford, Massachusetts
Action Plan
2017**





Livable Communities are Great Places for All Ages

Executive Summary



It is my pleasure to present the Age-Friendly New Bedford Action Plan, the product of our city's collaboration with AARP, the U.S. affiliate of the World Health Organization's global network of Age-Friendly/Livable Communities.

Age-Friendly New Bedford's planning process represents a shared effort to improve our resident's quality of life. From health services to outdoor spaces to transportation and beyond, the plan is designed to enhance the satisfaction with life in New Bedford for residents of all ages. It will play a key role in meeting the future needs of our city.

The 29,538 residents over age 50 living in New Bedford represent 31% of the city's population, a number expected to increase significantly in the next decade. They are central to our city's and our state's economic and cultural vitality.

I'm proud to say we are a culturally diverse and inclusive city. We offer all older adults access to a wide range of social and support services through our Council on Aging.

Over the last few years we have improved food security for older adults by expanding access to healthful foods through education and community programs. We have experienced an overall drop in chronic disease rates, while collaborative efforts through the Age-Friendly initiative have already contributed to grant funding that expands mental and cognitive health outreach and enhances our public spaces. Our action plan augments these efforts by establishing a unique regional Law Enforcement Roundtable convened by the New Bedford Police Department whose aim is to explore policies at the intersection of public safety and public health that will enhance emergency response and reduces costs.

I want to thank my Age-Friendly advisory committee and the city officials, community leaders and residents who contributed to this plan. Our Age-Friendly/Livable Communities initiative will help keep the city's momentum going for years to come. It opens the door to greater funding opportunities that complement New Bedford's innovative spirit. I see its potential to unfold in a way that will make New Bedford an even better place for people of all ages, and a great place to age with comfort, security, and purpose.

Sincerely,

Jon Mitchell
Mayor, City of New Bedford

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Community Profile

Herman Melville in his novel *Moby Dick* characterizes New Bedford as “perhaps the dearest place to live” in all New England. Long called The Whaling City because of its standing in the 19th century as one of the world’s major whaling ports (and for a time richest cities), New Bedford even today sits atop the list as one of America’s busiest and most successful full-service port cities.

New Bedford lies on the South Coast of Bristol County in Massachusetts. Its coastal location conveys natural beauty to a city steeped in a colorful history of immigration and industry celebrated through its museums, architecture, and culture.

The 2010 U.S. Census records New Bedford’s population at 95,072, making it the sixth-largest city in Massachusetts and, with Fall River, one of the two largest cities in the South Coast region.



New Bedford very much reflects America's melting pot, with English, Scottish, and Dutch immigrants arriving in the mid 1600s. Many of the Irish and Portuguese arriving in the late 1800s found work in the whaling industry. As the city's manufacturing and textile industries grew, earlier arrivals were joined by Polish and other European immigrants. New Bedford today can also boast vibrant Cape Verdean and Hispanic communities.

The story of New Bedford is filled with historical figures every bit as fascinating as Melville's fictional Captain Ahab. Among them, the famed abolitionist and writer Frederick Douglass, who was one of an estimated 300-700 fugitive slaves living in New Bedford in the mid 1800s. Many arrived with the help of the city's early and active Underground Railroad. Renowned American artists such as Albert Bierstadt and Albert Pinkham Ryder also once called New Bedford home.

In keeping with its long cultural history, downtown New Bedford continues to bustle with galleries and shops. And while the city continues to look to the sea, its eye now is on renewable energy, a revitalized port, and job creation aligned with its future.

Today, New Bedford is governed by Mayor Jon F. Mitchell with an elected City Council of five At-Large and six Ward Councilors. The city's support for the Age-Friendly/Livable Communities initiative, in collaboration with AARP and the World Health Organization, reflects its understanding of the city's current and future needs. The first wave of the Baby Boomer generation, born in 1946, has reached age 70. They represent almost a quarter of New Bedford's roughly 95,000 residents. Most wish to age in place, in the city they love.

As these and other older adults continue to contribute to the city's history and economy, so too will the city continue to recognize their contributions by adapting to the changing needs of a population integral to the life of our city.

Some information above is taken from the following sources or sites:

City of NB 2014-2021: Open Spaces and Recreation, Department of Planning and Community development; <https://www.nps.gov/nebe/index.htm>; <https://www.teachervision.com/activity/new-bedford-ma-underground-railroad>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narrative_of_the_Life_of_Frederick_Douglass,_an_American_Slave



Mayor Mitchell at the Senior Center

Introduction to the Action Plan

The History (How the plan was developed)

In the spring of 2015, representatives and staff of the New Bedford Council on Aging and Coastline Elderly Services—the New Bedford-based regional homecare provider—met with New Bedford Mayor Jon Mitchell. Under discussion was New Bedford’s entry into the global network of Age-Friendly Communities launched in 2006 by the World Health Organization (WHO) to help cities prepare for their own and the world’s growing population of older adults and the parallel trend of urbanization. In 2012, AARP became the WHO’s institutional affiliate for the United States.

Mayor Mitchell embraced the Age-Friendly concept as a way both to help boost New Bedford's economy and enable older adults to remain healthy, active, and in their community and homes as they age.

On the city's behalf, the mayor then submitted a formal letter of request to AARP to join the Age-Friendly network. On October 16, 2015 a certificate of acceptance to that network was formally presented to Mayor Mitchell by Michael Festa, AARP Massachusetts state director, at Coastline Elderly Services' annual luncheon celebration. New Bedford thus became the fourth Massachusetts municipality to begin the Age-Friendly journey. Today there are 194 communities enrolled in the United States. The global Age-Friendly network currently includes 533 cities and communities in 37 countries covering more than 158 million people worldwide.

Mayor Mitchell also arranged for the support of all appropriate city departments, appointing New Bedford Council on Aging director Debra Lee as the city's Age-Friendly project leader. Age-Friendly efforts are coordinated through the COA in collaboration with Coastline Elderly Services with the assistance of Southcoast Health and other community partners (see page 29). The COA received funding from the Massachusetts Council on Aging Directors Association to assist with technical aspects of the initiative. AARP's Massachusetts chapter contributed funds for a consultant and provided a knowledgeable volunteer from its Executive Council to assist with the planning phase and implementation phases.

During this time, the Board of Directors of Coastline Elderly Services was in the process of reviewing and revising its mission. Board members recognized that the Age-Friendly New Bedford initiative was well aligned with its mission "to be a trusted provider of resources and services that support self-determination and community well-being." Coastline CEO Paula Shiner joined COA director Debra Lee to co-chair the city's Age-Friendly Advisory Committee.



The Process

The WHO/AARP Age-Friendly initiative entails a five-year commitment to a process occurring in three main phases: planning, implementation, and continual improvements. Continual improvements may occur beyond the initial five years.

The initial phase of the project began with recruitment of representatives from organizations invested in New Bedford's future who were willing to offer their expertise by serving on an Age-Friendly advisory committee. Monthly meetings of the advisory committee began in January 2016 with an assessment phase of the project.

Assessment was an almost two-year endeavor that included hundreds of surveys, several needs assessments, data analyses, and focus groups encompassing all New Bedford populations, including non-English speakers and the LGBTQ community. During this time the advisory committee held regular monthly meetings, involving input from city department directors and staff, and community-based organizations and volunteers. The advisory committee's primary goal was to learn from one another and to share planning agendas and ideas that coincided with the city's Age-Friendly efforts.

The assessment phase lasted through June 2017 and consisted of:

1. A comprehensive Age-Friendly survey sent to all New Bedford residents over age 50.
2. Focus groups held around the city, including at congregate meal sites and other locations where seniors gather.
3. Monthly communication with and for city department heads and other individuals and organizations working with older residents.
4. A review of the Coastline Elderly Services Area Plan needs assessment survey.
5. A review of the Southcoast Health system's Community Survey.
6. A comparison and assessment of the AARP Livability Indexes for 2015 and 2017.
7. A review of the City of New Bedford's Master Plan – 2020.
8. A review of the Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness in New Bedford.
9. A review of the South Coast Regional Transit Authority's Comprehensive Service Assessment.
10. An analysis of the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaboration Report.

Plan Implementation

Following the assessment phase and in order to complete its Action Plan, the Age-Friendly advisory committee convened seven distinct sub-committees involving some 40 participants, each knowledgeable within the domain to which they were assigned.*

The goal of these subcommittees was to align items for consideration within each domain with the research and assessments conducted in the planning phase. The sub-committees were made up of residents, local aging services and health providers, and representatives of city departments. In subsequent advisory committee meetings, action items developed in the sub-committees were presented, discussed, and ultimately approved for submission to the mayor and to AARP.

New Bedford's Age-Friendly Action Plan was completed in December 2017. Age-Friendly New Bedford will continue to work to engage residents, community-based organizations, and other interested individuals about this project on an on-going basis.

The New Bedford Age-Friendly advisory committee will continue to meet on a regular basis to oversee implementation of the city's Action Plan. Co-chairs of the seven domain sub-committees will function as domain lead and will monitor progress based on indicators identified in the plan. The Advisory Committee will report periodically to the community in order to receive essential feedback and to share progress. The action plan has just over 80 action items with an additional 20 items already set in motion. Each will be examined by posing three straightforward questions: Was a particular action item brought to the community? Was it what that community wanted? Did it help?

* Note that the Age-Friendly graphic on page 31 shows eight domains. The Advisory Committee had some discretion as to combining or excluding domains. The committee decided not to include the domain for Respect and Social Inclusion as the idea of this domain underlies the entire Action Plan and the attributes the domain represents are woven throughout.



Massachusetts AARP Director, Michael Festa, presenting Mayor Jonathan Mitchell with an AARP Age-Friendly Certificate of Membership

New Bedford Age-Friendly / Livable Community Action Plan

Domain 1: Aging in Community / Housing

Currently

Within New Bedford multiple organizations are already committed to promoting a livable community. For example, the community partners sponsor New Bedford Connect, a highly successful one-day event that brings together a wide variety of community volunteers, resources, and services for individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

New Bedford is an old city with a housing stock that reflects its history. The city has 43,291 housing units, 58 percent of which are renter-occupied. Over 51 percent of its housing stock was built before 1939. The older housing stock often brings with it challenges of lead paint and other health hazards, lack of accessibility for seniors and other people with mobility issues, and requires regular upkeep and maintenance.¹

The City of New Bedford's Department of Planning, Housing and Community Development (OHCD) is a resource for community-based programs, plans, and possibilities in New Bedford. In keeping with our mission to increase the city's stock of safe, decent, affordable housing, the OHCD has instituted a comprehensive Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy. The Housing Division administers a range of programs geared towards assisting folks with homeownership, rehabilitation, accessibility, and emergency repairs. Funding for these programs comes from both the federal government and state-wide programs, all of which are intended for households in low-moderate income ranges.

We Learned

As a mechanism to learn about the housing situation of older adults, questions were included in the Age-Friendly Survey. We learned that many older adults identified the need for rental housing as well as housing with services. Of those who completed the survey, 40% own their home, 27% live in public housing, 19% in private rental housing, and 5% live in a shelter.

¹ Strategic plan to End Homelessness in New Bedford August 2017 to July 2019



Alice Bonner, Secretary Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs; Mary DeRoo, Elder Affairs; Dr. Andrew Revell, U-Mass Dartmouth Paula Shiner, CEO Coastline Elderly Services, Inc.

Vision

We envision a city where an Age-Friendly environment and supports enable older residents to “age in place” and remain living safely in their homes and community.

Recommendation #1 Maintain a skilled workforce to support older adults and people with disabilities to age in their community

Action Item A: We will convene a workgroup to build strategies to maintain a skilled workforce to meet the needs of older adults and people with disabilities needing services.

Action Item B: We will support efforts of the community to provide training and employment and opportunities for potential home health aides, homemakers, and personal care assistants.

Recommendation #2 Promote options that provide housing stability and preserve tenancy

Action Item A: We will research options to support housing preservation services such as Fresh Start and in-home counseling for those at risk including veterans and those with behavioral health issues.

Action Item B: We will increase education about and referrals to the Fresh Start Program for community agencies and front-line workers.

Action Item C: We will investigate resources and create a tool for older adults at risk of losing housing due to pet-related issues.

Recommendation #3 Support housing for New Bedford's vulnerable older adults

Action Item A: We will partner with organizations to support the Homeless Service Provider Network Plan including the Tenancy Preservation Program, Catholic Social Services, and vocational rehabilitation programs.

Action Item B: We will seek housing options for older adults returning to the community from the long-term care system.

Action Item C: We will inform older home owners how to access existing home repair services and modification resources.

Action Item D: We will support and promote the annual New Bedford Connect fair for homelessness at the YMCA.

Domain 2: Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Currently

New Bedford is an urban center located along the Southcoast of Massachusetts. Over the past decade, the city has created a vision for its outdoor spaces and buildings to make New Bedford a more beautiful and welcoming urban center for all of its residents. A number of city departments and community organizations have completed numerous greenspace and infrastructure improvements to fulfill that goal, including a remodeled zoo, walking trails at Fort Taber, restored walking trails at Pulaski Park, and renewal projects in Clasky Common, and the Acushnet Heights District. New Bedford is home to more than 30 public parks, playgrounds, beaches, and recreational facilities scattered throughout the city's neighborhoods.

The city is enjoying the benefits of the remodeled Buttonwood Park Zoo and Riverside Park, and pier. The park boasts historic lighting, benches, new plantings, improved handicap accessibility, memorials, and walkways. During the summer months, a farmers' market is held every Saturday offering locally grown fruits and vegetables. The newly built Riverside Park, a brownfield superfund site left over from the former Pierce Mill, was reclaimed by the city and expanded into a 10.8-acre park on the Acushnet River. The expansion of Riverside Park, aided by an Urban Self-Help Grant in 2004, allowed the city to make vast improvements on the site that are now enjoyed by people

of all ages while protecting natural resources and providing greenways and streetscape enhancements.²

More recently, Mayor Mitchell announced the Blue Lane, a series of safe, designated walking paths directly along the waterfront open to all residents. The Blue Lane consists of the Harbor Walk and Cove Walk, and soon the addition of the River Walk (please see the map below).

Custom House Square, located in the heart of downtown New Bedford, was redeveloped in 2013. Once a parking lot, the space was transformed into an attractive greenspace which now hosts numerous events throughout the year and is open and accessible to everyone.

The city also recently passed a Complete Streets Ordinance ensuring all future infrastructure work will take into account all users: pedestrians, older adults, people with disabilities, cyclists, and others.

New Bedford 2020 is the master plan built on a civic engagement and provides us with a framework of goals and objectives that serve as a policy guide for the physical and cultural growth of our community—a means of translating our community's values into actions. Building upon the momentum of these efforts, the city strives to sustain and build constructive relationships between citizens, community groups and public agencies through organized and grassroots civic engagement efforts to achieve the goals set forth in New Bedford 2020.³

We Learned

The Outdoor Spaces and Buildings Domain includes public spaces such as parks and public buildings, as well as streets and the general “public domain.” In the 2016 Age-Friendly New Bedford Survey, older residents indicated satisfaction with aspects of navigation in their community with some examples indicated below:

- Street labeling (65%)
- Accessibility of walkways and buildings (59%)
- Availability of benches in public areas and along walkways (39%)
- Lighting along sidewalks and bicycle paths (22%)
- Timing of traffic lights and marked crosswalks (56%)
- Availability of maintained sidewalks (41%)

² City of New Bedford 2014-2021 Open spaces and Recreation Plan, City of New Bedford Department of Planning, Housing, and Community Services

³ A City Master Plan New Bedford 2020, 2010.



Vision

We envision New Bedford as a community in which people of all ages can safely and easily access the natural and built environment including public buildings, parks, and green space.

Recommendation #1 Ensure inclusion of the perspective and needs of older adults in public space design

Action Item A: We will appoint a senior advocate to attend community meetings and monitor infrastructure improvements made under the guidelines of “Complete Streets.”

Action Item B: We will map walking courses in parks and “Safe Routes to Parks” and identify available amenities including restrooms for public use, benches, etc.

Recommendation #2 Encourage participation of older adults in outdoor activities

Action Item A: We will promote older adult participation in New Bedford Parks and Recreation activities and host senior events and activities in parks and public spaces.

Action Item B: We will appoint senior advocate to Mass in Motion needs assessment planning process.

Action Item C: We will explore opportunities to involve all generations in school and community garden projects, and promote community garden tours.

Recommendation #3 Improve accessibility of public areas

Action Item A: We will continue to seek funding for benches and trash receptacles for the River Walk project.

Action Item B: We will seek resources for adult recreational equipment at Buttonwood Park.

Action Item C: We will participate in a “Walk Audit” to check for adequate lighting, curb cuts.

Action Item D: We will hold a public meeting to share results of a Walk Audit at Ashley Park and develop a strategy to make improvements.

Action Item E: We will promote the Bike Share Program to older adults.

Action Item F: We will seek to improve transportation to Buttonwood via SRTA.

Domain 3: Transportation

Currently

Public Transit: The **Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (SRTA)** serves 10 communities in Southeastern Massachusetts, including Acushnet, Dartmouth, Fairhaven, Fall River, Freetown, Mattapoisett, New Bedford, Somerset, Swansea, and Westport. The Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (SRTA) has been in existence since 1974. SRTA provides fixed route bus service to its member communities and has a Demand Response Service to meet the needs of the disabled who require transportation that is not adequately being met by regular bus service.

A Comprehensive Service Assessment (CSA) was completed in 2014 to identify areas for improvement for SRTA. In less than two years after the plan was written, SRTA made various improvements to enhance service capability with the goal of providing service that works for the customer.

SRTA extended service on Saturdays and expanded service to Sundays. Saturday service runs only until 6 p.m. and the demand response service is now also available from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. for those who qualify for this service. SRTA also extended service on weekdays which goes beyond 6 p.m.

There are nine routes, four in each city and the Intercity Route which concludes at 10 p.m. in New Bedford with a demand response service also until 10 p.m. This service ensures transportation to Market Basket. There are downsides because the service does not run past 6 p.m. and there is no fixed route service in Acushnet, however, demand response is available in both communities until 10 p.m.

SRTA also eliminated the zone fare system and implemented a free transfer, where passengers are afforded one free 90-minute transfer for their \$1.50 or \$.75 senior or disabled reduced fare. Additions also included an all-day pass, a one-week pass, and reducing the monthly pass from \$55 to \$40, and adding a student/senior/disabled monthly pass for \$28.

Pedestrians and Bicycles: Given the city's network of streets and sidewalks, many opportunities exist to expand upon pedestrian linkages between key sections of the city, such as the waterfront, downtown, historic, and recreational resources, businesses, and residential areas.⁴

Below are the recommendations published in the "Public Transit Needs and Perceptions: City of New Bedford 2011", a result of a survey conducted by the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth's Urban Institute.

- An extension of service on Saturdays and expansion of service to Sundays.
- An extension of service on weekdays beyond 6:00 p.m.
- An expansion of service to surrounding towns, such as Fairhaven and Acushnet.
- The provision of free transfers.
- The creation of new and more flexible reduced-fare bus pass options.
- The provision of additional information and the coordination of marketing campaign in several languages to promote SRTA's schedule and routes.⁵

⁴ A city Master Plan, New Bedford 2020

⁵ Public Transit Needs and Perceptions: City of New Bedford 2011; UMass Dartmouth Urban Institute

We Learned

Of those who answered the 2016 Age-Friendly Survey:

- 1) 20% were concerned about handicapped accessibility of walkways and buildings.
- 2) 66% were satisfied, 28% were neutral, and 6% were dissatisfied with COA and SRTA senior service. This may reflect that many people who took the survey use the service and are satisfied.
- 3) 57% agreed that public transportation is affordable; only 16% disagreed.
- 4) 34% were satisfied with the public transportation schedule, 16% dissatisfied, and 30% neutral.
- 5) 54% were satisfied with the public transportation schedule, 16% dissatisfied, 30% neutral.



Vision

A City of New Bedford in which older residents can have access to transportation that is affordable and safe, to travel where they want and need to go.

Recommendation #1 Improve older adults' knowledge of and access to cost effective transportation

Action Item A: We will educate older adults about ways to access public transportation including discounted fees, COA ID cards etc.

Action Item B: We will convene a working group to develop a strategy to inform older adults about public transportation, i.e. bus routes in relation to senior housing and senior centers, signage with senior rates.

Action Item C: We will advocate for collaboration and coordination of accessible transportation services.

Action Item D: We will provide the public with accessible printed materials in both Spanish and Portuguese and advocate for multi-lingual drivers.

Recommendation #2 Improve ridership confidence for using public transportation

Action Item A: We will develop a strategy to educate the public about safety measures for public transportation i.e. cameras, police presence, and driver training.

Action Item B: We will assess current training of transportation providers and their awareness of the needs of older adults and people with disabilities when using public transportation.

Recommendation #3 Advocate for expanding transportation resources

Action Item A: We will explore affordable opportunities for those needing assisted transportation beyond curb to curb.

Action Item B: We will research strategies to support out of area medical transportation.

Action Item C: We will continue to work with SRTA to expand bus routes and improve transportation for programming.

Domain 4: Community Support and Health Access

Currently

The Age-Friendly / Livable Communities Network works in partnership with organizations and city departments across New Bedford, providing information and resources to help older adults live in the community. The network supports a comprehensive system of care for older adults and their caregivers. The SHINE (Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Elders) and Community Mainstream programs are examples of participant-directed and person-centered planning. Both programs work to link elders to accessible and affordable health insurance, while the Community Mainstream program focuses on helping older adults determine their eligibility for public assistance programs, such as SNAP, circuit breaker tax relief, fuel assistance, MassHealth, Prescription Advantage, and Medicare.

Coastline Elderly Services (Coastline) and the New Bedford Council on Aging (COA) address many of the social and health related needs of the area's older adults. September 2016 through December 2016, Coastline collected data through focus groups and surveys. Thirty-one percent of older adults in this survey said they wanted to stay active with physical activity programs. To meet some of that need, Coastline funds the COA to provide exercise programs.

In 2015, Coastline Elderly Services and a network of community partners, the Community Cross Continuum Collaborative (4C), received a three-year grant from the Tufts Health Plan Foundation to improve access to healthful foods and explore strategies to reduce malnutrition in older adults. The grant supports programs that promote healthy living and disease prevention, and seeks to improve health outcomes for individuals experiencing chronic disease. Coastline Elderly Services offers several evidence-based programs, including Healthy Living for Successful Living in Older Adults, Matter of Balance, and Chronic Disease Self-Management.

Beginning in 2014, Mass in Motion took over the management of the New Bedford Farmers Market, tripling the number of vendors and making the markets SNAP/debit/credit accessible. Throughout the summer the market is held three days a week; a winter indoor market was opened last year twice a month, and will be open weekly throughout the winter beginning this year.



Mass in Motion coordinates city wide projects to promote good health including:

- Board of Health Policy for Farmers Markets
- Updated Community Needs Assessment
- Safe Routes to Parks at Ashley Park
- Zagster Bike Sharing

and collaborates with other city groups on:

- Love the Ave
- United Way South End Engaged
- Groundwork Southcoast
- Southcoast Bikeway
- Let's Move
- Greater New Bedford Allies
- New Bedford Fitness Challenge

A good example of care coordination is a program funded by Southcoast Health. They fund a Community Hospital Acceleration, Revitalization, and Transformation (CHART) team of 16 community health workers to engage and support 1,500 "high utilizers" of hospital emergency room services.

We learned

We learned a great deal from area residents through surveys, focus groups and needs assessments. Some of those interviewed indicated that even when people have good access to food they may make poor choices. There is need for education to make better food choices for better health. Also, respondents felt that more could be done to prevent and manage chronic conditions and better manage mental health.⁶

Over all, the data collected indicated the number one health care need was oral health. Fifty-one percent of participants said dental care was unaffordable. Forty-one percent also said they needed assistance with vision care expenses. Twenty-six percent of older adults spoke about needing assistance in coping with diabetes, and twenty-one percent said assistance with hearing aids is inadequate. Almost eighteen percent of those surveyed said they could not afford the out-of-pocket costs for prescriptions drugs.⁷

Vision

Age-Friendly New Bedford will maintain a collaborative and coordinated array of services and supports that meet the health and social needs of its older adult population. Community supports include health promotion opportunities, dementia friendly systems, care giver supports, and access to health services as well as improved access to nutritious food and physical activity. We seek to enable our older residents to age safely and securely in their community.

Recommendation #1 Optimize Health and Wellness in the Community

Action Item A: We will expand the availability of evidence-based health promotion workshops such as *A Matter of Balance; My Life, My Health; Aging Mastery etc.*

Action Item B: We will seek resources and opportunities to improve the oral health of older adults; i.e. educate older adults about the importance of oral health and facilitate attendance at screenings.

Action Item C: We will appoint senior advocate to Mass in Motion needs assessment planning to increase integration of services and infrastructure planning for older adults.

⁶ Southcoast Health Needs Assessment 2016

⁷ Massachusetts State Plan on Aging, 2018-2021: Coastline Elderly Services, Inc. Focus Area Coordination

Action Item D: We will explore options for improving food security by increasing access to healthful foods, supporting older adult attendance at farmers' markets, and congregate meals, increasing eligible SNAP enrollments, and seeking expanded transportation and food delivery programs.

Action Item E: We will expand and promote free health screenings for chronic diseases to include a wide range of citizens with access to the Southcoast Health Mobile Van and the Greater New Bedford Community Health Center.

Action Item F: We will promote use of food security screening tools by institutional and community-based healthcare providers.

Recommendation #2 Promote Support for Cognitive and Emotional Health

Action Item A: We will convene a group to develop strategies to improve the health systems' capacity for early recognition of and response to Alzheimer's disease and other cognitive impairments.

Action Item B: We will explore and pilot opportunities for caregiver support and social interaction i.e. caregiver classes, culturally suitable *Memory Cafes*; free or discounted admission to events/movies for caregivers and individuals needing assistance.

Action Item C: We will provide training and education to members of the Age-Friendly Network to improve awareness of behavioral health concerns, including substance abuse with the support of the Tufts Health Plan Foundation, and funding from the BU CADER Institute.

Action Item D. We will promote awareness of programs to help older adults articulate plans for end-of-life care, such as MOLST (Medical Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment).

Recommendation #3 Enhance Older Adult Safety

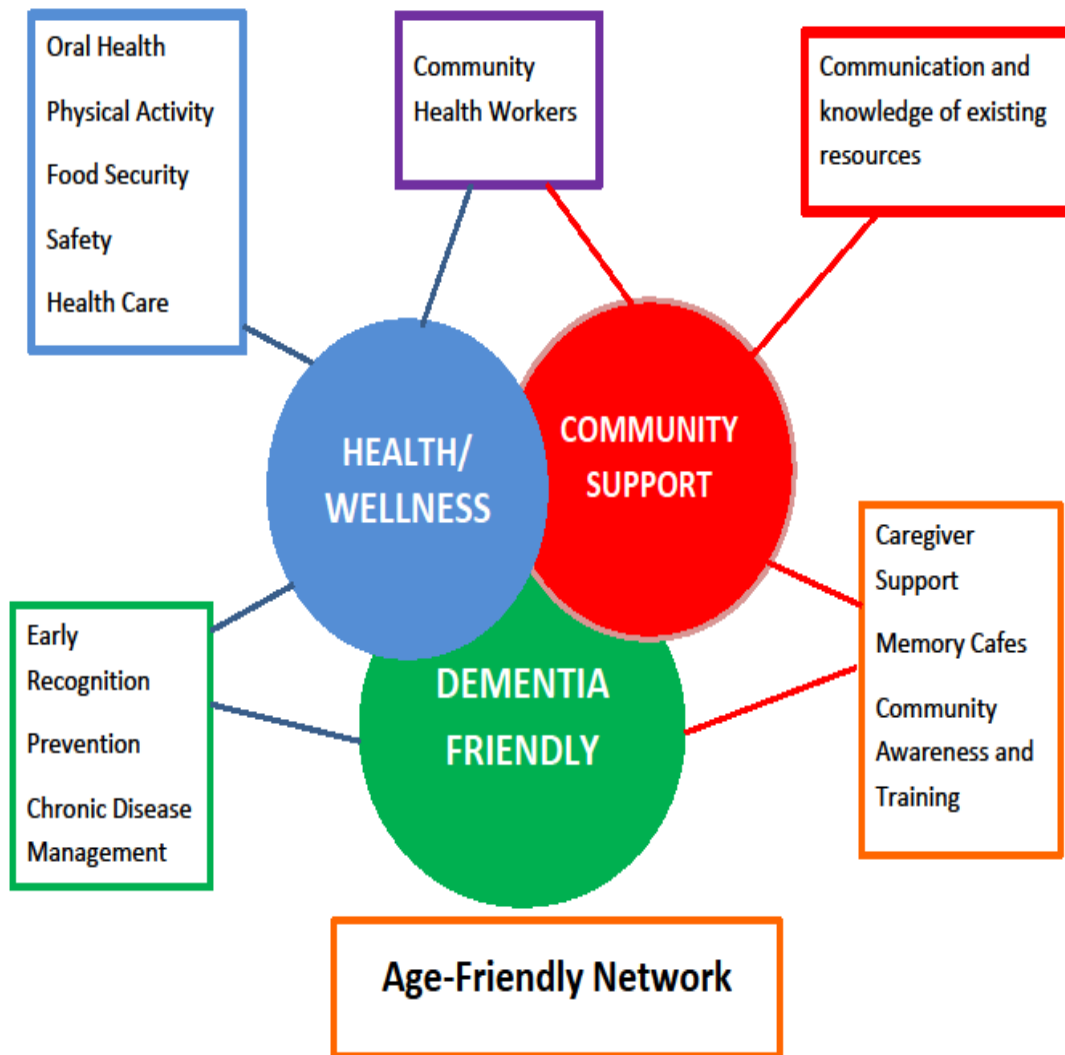
Action Item A: We will participate in the Law Enforcement Round Table to act as point of contact to improve the safety of older adults, to consider older adult concerns and available resources, including a system of wellness checks and issues of fraud and abuse.

Action Item B: We will convene a group to develop a strategy to train first responders, front line workers, and family caregivers about the Silver Alert law

including educational materials on home safety tips, wandering behavior, and issues affecting vulnerable older adults.

Action Item C: We will develop a strategy to improve community awareness of the issues including safety and social inclusion for the older LGBTQ community.

Action Item D: We will continue to support and participate in the Bristol County District Attorney Elder Abuse Prevention Conference and continue to highlight issues of financial abuse.



Domain 5: Social Participation

Currently

The New Bedford Council on Aging (COA) was established in 1969. The COA coordinates and provides services to assist older adult residents. Additional programs and services are developed as new needs emerge. The COA exists to enhance and enrich the quality of life for older adults. This is accomplished through four senior centers and a social day care center where seniors can access outreach services and social enhancement programs throughout the city.

Coastline Elderly Services established in 1977, has a successful history of establishing services that support self-determination and community well-being for older adults. Coastline has been a visible focal point and local leader on all elder issues. Coastline provides a host of services directly or through contracts indirectly which helps elders to remain in their own homes in the community.

About 3 years ago, Coastline held a focus group with some LGBTQ elders to ask them how the community could better meet their needs. They overwhelmingly requested a forum to meet with other seniors, socialize and perhaps enjoy a meal. The Fairhaven COA agreed to host a monthly "supper club" with nutrition support from Coastline. Additional funding was provided by the Lipsky Whitaker Foundation that enabled the club to enjoy other social activities. Today the supper club has about 35 older adults that regularly attend the monthly dinners as well as the social activities, trips, educational events and intergenerational programs.

New Bedford has also become known as the hub for arts and culture in the Southcoast region of Massachusetts. Since 1999, monthly AHA! Nights have become an extremely popular event, drawing in residents from throughout the region to downtown New Bedford to learn about and celebrate the city's culture, history, and art.

We Learned

Of those surveyed for the Age-Friendly New Bedford Survey, 70% consider *Senior Scope* a preferred source of information about programs, activities, and services in the community; 82% felt well informed about what to do in the event of a weather or other emergency; 83% indicated there were opportunities for them to participate in community activities. A significant number, 61%, expressed satisfaction regarding recreation opportunities; 60% were satisfied with how activities are communicated to older residents, including information about the activity, its accessibility, and transportation.

options.



Vision

Improve the inclusion of New Bedford's older population in programs and opportunities, specifically those at risk for social isolation due to socioeconomic status, English language abilities, physical or mental health impairment, or other social factors that increase the risk of social isolation.

Recommendation #1 Create and promote a network of social engagement opportunities for older adults

Action Item A: We will engage partners to develop and support senior supper clubs and add additional evening offerings, i.e. dinners and speed meeting for older adults including LGBTQ and not English speaking older adults.

Action Item B: We will initiate a partnership to develop intergenerational exchanges and programs as ways to pass along knowledge and experience.

Action Item C: We will inform and encourage participation of older adults in parks and recreation programs, i.e. Saturday walking in the park, activities with the YWCA and Boy's club.

Action Item D: We will encourage participation in *Aging Mastery* a 12-week program on topics pertinent to the aging process.

Recommendation #2 Promote intentional learning and partnerships that support a culture of an Age-Friendly and inclusive community

Action Item A: We will partner with community agencies and businesses to train clergy, first responders, regional COAs, and others in contact with older adults to improve awareness of and response to behavioral health issues for older adults.

Action Item B: We will organize a workgroup to provide training on LGBTQ cultural competency to promote social inclusion and access to aging services.

Action Item C: We will partner with area councils on aging to maintain and expand outreach to socially isolated elders.

Action Item D: We will encourage older adults of all cultures to be involved in community activities, i.e. neighborhood associations, formal and informal groups, and city agencies and planning.

Action Item E: We will make information about opportunities for social engagement and resources available to Native Americans, including the Wampanoag Tribe.

Domain 6: Civic Participation and Employment

Currently

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) places older adults in positions at local nonprofits to gain on-the-job training, support, and job-seeking skills. The Foster Grandparent Program is a sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Services and has been hosted at Coastline Elderly Services for the past 32 years. The program places seniors in elementary classrooms, child care centers, and other youth-based organizations to mentor and assist children throughout the community. Foster Grandparents receive a stipend for their time and commitment while benefiting from the impact they make in each child's life daily. The Nursing Home Ombudsman Program matches volunteers with an area nursing home. Volunteers visit the nursing home on a weekly basis to listen to, mediate, and resolve resident complaints, as well as advocate for residents. All volunteers are trained and certified and visit the nursing home on a weekly basis. The Money Management Program

provides volunteers to help elders organize their bills, create budgets, write checks, and monitor their income and expenses.

We learned

Of those who answered the 2016 Age-Friendly Survey:

- A significant number of responders felt that there are not adequate employment opportunities available to older adults in the community.
- A large majority indicated that older adults are encouraged to volunteer and remain engaged in the community.

Vision

New Bedford believes that to be a healthy thriving city, it is necessary for older adults to have the opportunity to engage in volunteer and civic activities, and to participate in employment to the extent they desire. Older adults are a resource and it is important to involve them in citywide processes and encourage older and younger people alike to work together toward the end of improving the city's health and sustainability. Opportunities for civic participation and employment are needed if New Bedford is to continue to be a place that fosters a high quality of life for people of all ages and abilities.

Recommendation #1 Better connect older adults to employment resources and opportunities

Action Item A: We will develop a strategy to research and address barriers to employment for older adults.

Action Item B: We will create a list of existing training and skill development opportunities and conduct outreach to older adults seeking employment.

Action Item C: We will create a strategy to educate employers on the value of older workers, veterans, and those with disabilities.

Recommendation #2 Identify and promote volunteer and mentorship opportunities for older adults

Action Item A: We will develop a strategy to educate older adults and organizations on the importance of volunteers and mentors.

Action Item B: We will work with community organizations and city departments to identify needs and opportunities for volunteers and mentors.

Action Item C: We will create a comprehensive database of agencies and city departments seeking volunteer participation and mentorship.

Recommendation #3 Ensure the inclusion of older adults in civic affairs and development of workplace initiatives

Action Item A: We will increase older adult participation in civic affairs by having a series of forums/surveys.

Action Item B: We will explore efforts relating to workforce development including the 4C collaborative, Workforce Training Grant, Learn to Earn.

Domain 7: Communication

Currently

There are many modes of communication available throughout New Bedford. An extensive city website is designed to link residents to all aspects of city government and services. The New Bedford Council on Aging is part of the city's Department of Community Services and sends 17,000 pieces of news monthly and also has a Facebook page. *Senior Scope* is a periodical published ten months per year. In the 2016 Age-Friendly Survey, older adults identified *Senior Scope* as the means of communication most frequently used to get information on issues relating to older adults.

Having access to information when it is needed is essential. The Older Americans Act requires that all older persons and their caregivers have convenient access to information and referral services to help them identify, understand, and effectively use the programs of the human service delivery system. Coastline Elderly Services is one conduit for this information and it is the role of the Information & Resources (I&R) specialists to help people understand their problem and make informed decisions about possible solutions. They may advocate on behalf of those who need special support and reinforce the individual's capacity for self-reliance and self-determination through education, affirmation, collaborative planning, and problem solving. I&R Specialists are able to assist older adults and families get the information they need, such as health insurance counseling, caregiver services, service complaints, or finding a nursing facility or rest home.

We Learned

Of those who answered the 2016 Age-Friendly Survey:

- The most preferred methods of getting information about community programs, activities, and services are the newspaper, *Senior Scope*, and TV. 29% indicated that they use the internet.
- More than 80% indicated that they feel informed about weather and other emergencies.
- More than half were satisfied with communication about activities.

Vision

A city in which there is a system of effective communication to reach and engage people in the community of all ages, including older adults.

Recommendation #1 Review and determine best practices to better reach our aging population and increase awareness of existing community resources

Action Item A: We will partner with other agencies to identify ‘best practices’ to improve communication to the community about services and supports.

Action Item B: We will explore the creation of an “Age-Friendly / Dementia-Friendly” designation and best practices for elder friendly business areas.

Action Item C: We will collaborate to identify resources and best practices to enhance services for those with disabilities and coordinate with Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRC).



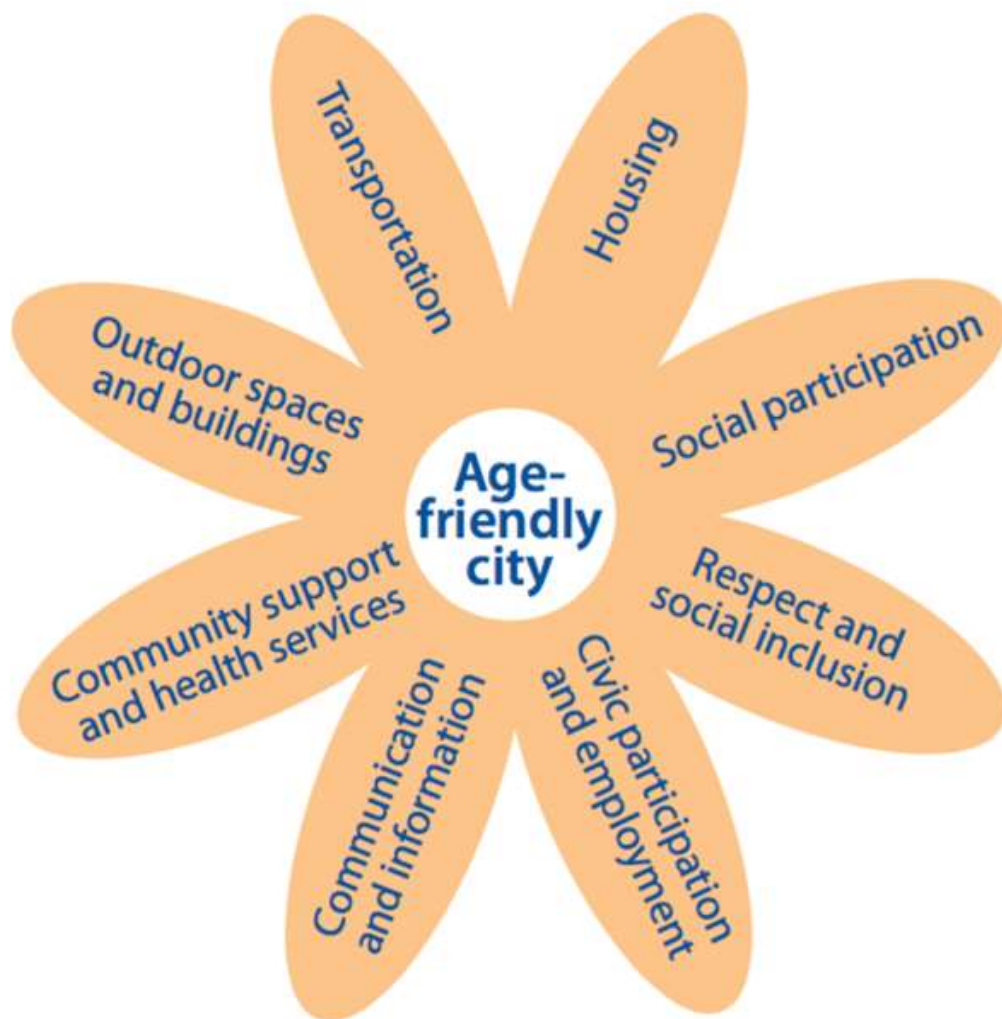
Recommendation #2 Develop a senior communication plan

Action Item A: We will develop a workgroup to explore expanding free computer and Wi-Fi lessons at the council on aging, libraries, and other public spaces. Promote intergenerational learning.

Action Item B: We will ensure that materials are print accessible and available in appropriate languages.

Action Item C: We will develop a workgroup to create and implement a public messaging campaign to increase awareness of the signs of early dementia.

Action Item C: We will coordinate with community partners to promote accessible communication methods to inform and link older adults to a centralized source of information and to help service providers and residents to identify assistance resources.



Appendix A: Age-Friendly / Livable Community Steering Committee Members and Supporters

Appendix B: Age-Friendly / Livable Community Action Plan 2017

