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Age-Friendly Community Needs Assessment And Action Plan

Summary

County of Perth and Member Municipalities

Produced by Liem Strategic Integration Inc. /

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Acknowledgements

The development of the County of Perth Age-Friendly Communities (AFC) Action Plan depended on the volunteer involvement of many stakeholders and members of the community who took the time to complete surveys and participate in focus groups and interviews. We are extremely grateful to all of those who contributed.

We would like to acknowledge the special contribution of:

- County of Perth

- Municipality of North Perth

- Township of Perth East

- Township of Perth South

- Municipality of West Perth

- South West CCAC

- Perth District Health Unit

- Alzheimer Society of Perth County

- Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance

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About the County of Perth Age-Friendly Communities Action Plan

Perth County is one of 540 communities across Canada that have taken steps towards creating an Age-Friendly Community (AFC) - one that is accessible and inclusive to the physical and social needs of older adults. In the fall of 2015, the County of Perth was awarded an Age-Friendly Community Planning Grant by the Government of Ontario, to develop a plan that will make Perth County more supportive to its senior residents as they age. The funding is for projects that result in planning, implementing and evaluating initiatives that contribute to the creation and ongoing development of age-friendly communities, based on the World Health Organizations' (WHO) eight Age-Friendly Community Dimensions.

This document presents the recommendations of the County of Perth Age-Friendly Action Plan (or road map) for stakeholders throughout Perth County, including the County, the Municipality of North Perth, the Township of Perth East, the Municipality of West Perth, the Township of Perth South, and service providers. The Plan will guide municipal and community service providers to work together towards the development and delivery of age-friendly infrastructure, services, and programs.

Plan Development Process

The County of Perth Age-Friendly Communities Action Plan was developed over a period of 12 months, in close coordination with the Perth County Age-Friendly Communities (AFC) Steering Committee comprising County and municipal councillors and staff, and agency service providers. The plan development process included a custom needs assessment that identified the gaps and opportunities for improving age-friendliness in Perth County's Member Municipalities.

The plan development process was executed using guidance provided in Finding the Right Fit: Age-Friendly Community Planning developed by the Ontario Seniors Secretariat.[i]

Age Friendly Principles for Perth County

Guiding principles were developed during the plan development process to help direct decisions and practices that will assist Perth County in becoming an increasingly age-friendly community. These guiding principles were established to inform age-friendly decisions and actions. The principles also provide an anchor for making decisions to address the needs of older adults.

- Support the creation of safe, accessible, and welcoming environments that are inclusive to the needs of older adults and persons with dementia.

- Provide quality services and programs that address the needs of older adults, but do not compromise other aspirations to support children, youth, or adults.

- Recognize the outstanding efforts and capacities of service providers who serve our communities and support an integrated, inter-sectoral, cross-agency approach to addressing key issues.

- Enhance and celebrate our community's assets, and utilize the assets, resources, and opportunities available to make it easier to implement collective action.

- Ensure older adults are directly engaged in the design, development and delivery of policies, programs and services

- Be responsive to the needs of older adults. Monitoring and evaluation will be undertaken to measure program and policy effectiveness in addressing emerging needs and issues.

The County, it's Member Municipalities, community agencies, faith-based organizations, and the private sector will work collaboratively to address the needs of older adults. Existing partnerships will be leveraged, where possible and appropriate, including service providers located in Stratford and St. Marys.

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings Directions

- Continue to support and facilitate the installation of accessible pedestrian crossing signals as per Ministry standards in each Member Municipality.

- Continue to undertake built environment improvements, to improve safety and physical accessibility of buildings, sidewalks, pedestrian pathways, public spaces, etc., particularly in urban areas and in older neighbourhoods in each Member Municipality, consistent with AODA public space standards.[ii]

- Incorporate "Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design" (CPTED)[iii] methods to exceed the minimum requirements of AODA, as standard practice, as part of the County's site plan review.

- Publicize existing locations of publicly accessible washrooms (municipally owned/operated) using prominent signage with appropriately sized and styled font. Consult with seniors to identify appropriate locations for wayfinding signage in each Member Municipality. Consult with publications that provide directions on accessible graphics.[iv]

- Develop signage to identify washroom operating hours in each Member Municipality.

- Identify other strategic locations in high use areas for barrier-free, gender neutral family washrooms (West Perth, North Perth, and Perth East).

- Engage the private sector to provide public access to washrooms on premises (West Perth, North Perth, and Perth East).

- Develop standards for providing wayfinding signage employing international and universal symbols, as well as tactile signs, to community landmarks such as parks, community centres, hospitals, medical centres, long-term care facilities

and retirement homes, and service agencies (West Perth, North Perth, Perth East).

- Install road and traffic signage that is visible and well-placed in each Member Municipality.

- Explore a partnership with OPP to undertake a "Crosswalk Awareness" event, which can be held bi-annually or annually through a coordinated approach addressing engineering and enforcement (West Perth).

- Establish pedestrian improvement reporting program in Perth East that enables the public to report needed improvements to sidewalks, curbs, pedestrian pathways, crosswalks, and other pedestrian information.

- Establish a program that enables the public to report potential locations for benches in outdoor spaces in each Member Municipality.
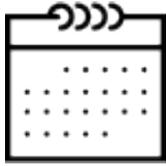
Housing Directions

- Engage senior levels of government to identify partnerships that will provide more financial support and funding opportunities to develop long-term care facilities and social housing, including that for older adults.

- Support the expansion of existing and prospective long-term care and retirement homes in Perth County.

- Support and undertake advocacy efforts to amend the Ontario Building Code to better integrate accessibility and universal design features in housing.

- Create an environment to make it attractive for private developers to provide adaptive housing that meets the needs of older adults, such as smaller units, multi-unit rentals, and condos in each Member Municipality.

- Work with local businesses (e.g., hardware stores, commercial suppliers) and service providers to develop and promote adaptive home renovations, and provide discounted materials and services to make it easier for older adults to age in place.

- Explore the development of programs to help older adults install home safety features. The United Way Elgin Grab Bar program, for example, works with a local pharmacy to provide grab bars to older adults to install in their homes.

- Adapt an existing toolkit developed by other Age-Friendly Communities to help homeowners retrofit existing housing to enable them to age in place (e.g., Safer Home Society in B.C). An adapted toolkit could also provide guidance to address older adult housing needs such as those used in some Anabaptist communities (such as dotty houses).

- Continue to support a tax amendment to improve the provision of apartment buildings, and remove of disincentives to absorb (rent or sell) multi-unit housing.

- Undertake targeted marketing to attract desired diversity in future residents, in partnership with other local communities. (e.g., Stratford is marketed as one of the 'top places to retire in Canada'[v]). Marketing can encourage private housing developers to provide small-scale infill projects that address a range of lifecycle needs, including demand generated by older adults.

- Explore the possibility of providing a Secondary Suites Municipal Fee Rebate[vi] program that provides funding assistance to homeowners to create secondary suites with affordable rents. Grants may cover application fees or the costs of upgrades to meet building and fire codes.

- Undertake on-going communication and engagement with housing providers and law enforcement to improve the safety of older adults living in Rent Geared to Income housing.

- Create and implement an awareness campaign that reduces stigma among older adults who ask for assistance and increase understanding of the availability of interim measures to maintain independence and support health and well-being.

Social Participation Directions

- Review distribution of programs/services for older adults by the full cost for the user to identify areas where currently offered no/low-cost services require additional promotion, and where differentiated seniors' rates could be instituted to provide and promote affordable and accessible recreation and leisure activities for older adults.

- Develop and promote messages that convey the importance of social participation to the health and well-being of all older adults, emphasizing that it need not be complex or involved (e.g., going for a walk with a friend, meeting for coffee, etc.). This can be communicated through a municipal newsletter, in partnership with service providers and community organizations, such as public health, primary care services, and church bulletins.

- Work with older adults to develop and deliver a variety of recreation, leisure, and educational opportunities through both structured and unstructured participation.

- Remove participation barriers and provide an inclusive environment for older adults with dementia through initiatives such as the Blue Umbrella program.

- Investigate approaches to increasing spaces in Adult Day Programs that meet the needs of older adults, particularly those with Alzheimer's and/or dementia. Adult Day Programs are administered by the VON in Listowel, Stratford, and St. Marys. There is also a need for increased capacity for overnight respite care. Collaboration should be undertaken with the South West LHIN to guide when on-site respite services and Adult Day Programs are to be provided or expanded.

- Support the local introduction or expansion of programs for those living with dementia and their care partners (e.g., iPod music program, Minds in Motion, Dementia Friendly Communities).

- Develop options to rotate programs across facilities within each municipality or in partnership across the County.

- Protect community gathering spaces such as Rostock Hall in Perth East, and Atwood Branch Library in North Perth, to continue supporting programs and services for nearby residents. The potential closure of any community gathering space should consider if there are other facilities accessible to existing users to which programming can be relocated either permanently or until such time as a new space is available.

Transportation Directions

- Provide education and awareness to potential customers regarding fee structures of agency transportation services.

- Improve customer access to agency transportation services throughout Perth County to optimize the use of available fleets of vehicles belonging to not-for-profit agencies and groups to transport older adults to a variety of destinations (e.g., medical, retail, recreation/social participation, entertainment, etc.).

- Review and build on relevant actions that have emerged from previous initiatives (e.g., The Road Ahead: A study of transportation needs across Huron and Perth Counties, March 2012; Huron-Perth Transportation Task Force).

- Initiate a 'call for volunteers' to transport older adults and develop a corresponding list of people who need transportation, to match drivers to those in need of rides.

- Explore the provision of tax incentives for taxi service providers to improve the provision of accessible taxi service.

- Explore Council and community support for a tax levy to fund coordinated transportation services that provide travel between communities, such as Mitchell, Listowel, Milverton and Sebringville to Kitchener, Waterloo, and Stratford.

- Work with relevant agencies (e.g., Alzheimer's Society) to undertake sensitivity training for drivers to understand the specific needs of, and supports for older adults.

- Explore options for improving safety upon arrival, through the services of an on-site attendant who can accompany transported individuals at destination points

(e.g., medical facility, community centre) from the door to their appointment, program, event, etc.

- Provide general education about the mobility and travel courtesies to consider in relation to older adults.

- Support safe driving for older adults through age-appropriate education and refresher programs (currently offered in St. Marys). Explore program provision at local libraries in North Perth, Perth East, and West Perth.

- Engage the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) and the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists to deliver a Carfit Program[vii] across Perth County to improve driver safety awareness.

- Establish a minimum standard of constructing sidewalks on one side of the street to support pedestrian mobility in existing and new developments. Updated policies for sidewalk rationalization standards to support the construction of sidewalks on both sides of the street, where warranted and feasible, will be further explored by each of the Member Municipalities.

- Improve snow clearance, particularly in downtown areas, and near shops and services, to provide a safe walking environment in winter months. This involves liaising with individual business owners or BIAs to ensure that snow clearance includes parking areas/spaces and access to destinations from these points (North Perth, West Perth, Perth East).

- Review snow removal operational standards, as per Ontario Ministry of Transportation requirements to provide safe access to businesses, senior-frequented facilities and seniors housing (North Perth, West Perth, Perth East).

Respect and Social Inclusion Directions

- Create a welcoming and inclusive environment for existing and new residents in Perth County through neighbourhood-scale activities, community events, and coordinated programming that includes the municipality, community groups, and faith-based organizations.

- Support the continued development of community hubs, Seniors Active Living Centres, and other community gathering places, to provide inter-generational learning, recreation and leisure programs, community and health services, and educational opportunities.

- Work with local realtors and organizations such as the Multicultural Association Perth-Huron to welcome newcomers to Perth County.

- Explore the development of age-inclusive playgrounds to support inter-generational activities for people of all ages.

Community Support and Health Services Directions

- Identify existing organizations at the Situation Table (21 currently) that can provide a voice for older adults. Work with Situation Table service providers to raise awareness of the issues and challenges facing older adults in Perth County.

- Support collaboration among agencies to work with Anabaptist communities in providing culturally safe information about where and how to access mobility assistive devices.

- Pursue opportunities for municipalities and other service providers to collaborate on initiatives to reduce fear among older adults in requesting or accepting help.

- Promote participation in South West Self-Management Health Literacy Course.

- Perth Member Municipalities should develop, or continue to develop, a list of local businesses and services that can provide home maintenance services and personal services. This information should be listed on municipal websites and promoted by health and social service providers (including pharmacists), and community support organizations.

- The County should engage with local businesses that offer, or have an interest in offering, mobile services. Addressing needs for home support services also creates economic development opportunities for the County to encourage and support entrepreneurship in seniors' services. Different forms of service models and pay-for-service strategies that incorporate subsidies should be explored The County should engage the LHIN, CCAC, Conestoga College, and Fanshawe College to support and to attract new graduates to Perth County.

- Develop additional spaces for adult day programs and respite care to support caregivers.

Communication and Information Directions

- Member Municipalities should engage with local library boards (North Perth Public Library Board, West Perth Public Library, Perth East Public Library[viii]) to communicate programs, services, events, and seminars on dedicated information boards.

- Develop an "older adult" focused municipal newsletter/newsletter section to publicize information about current events, services, and raise awareness about local matters and interests, etc. Special Editions may be integrated as part of a regular newsletter in the Community Connection Newsletter (North Perth) and the Township of Perth East Newsletter (PEN). Quarterly newsletters will need to be initiated in West Perth and Perth South.

- Strengthen ties with administrators of faith-based communities and churches as key communicators with/connections to their congregations

- Host a 'Community Information Open House' with representation from the public sector and not-for-profit services for older adults (e.g., recreation, health, housing, income support, police, etc.), and invitations to private sector services for older adults (e.g., pharmacies, mobility aids, home renovation products, etc.) as part of 'one-window/no number is the wrong number' model to facilitate access to information and services. Consider dedicating a standalone Community Open House day or plan to do something in conjunction with existing municipal events and festivals.

- Support the coordination of a Central Intake, "one window" support service number, which enables residents to access services provided by all community support agencies. This initiative is currently under development. The South West CCAC also provides coordinated access to information and referral to other health and social service programs and provides in-home services and eligibility for long-term care homes, adult day programs and assisted living services.

- Connect with isolated older adults through, for example, established networks, health and social service agencies, and health service providers (e.g., doctors, pharmacies). Front-line staff (community outreach) are valuable links to the community and can improve access to information among more vulnerable older adults. Communication about older adult programs, services, and awareness programs can be disseminated by Member Municipalities to community outreach agencies for distribution to front-line workers.

- Disseminate information about programs and services to Anabaptist communities, as appropriate.

- Enhance and contribute to information provided in Southwest Healthline about older adult events, services and supports. Provide on-going information to Southwest Healthline to publicize local events and services.

  Redesign the County website to include easy- to-find information about older adult services, supports, and resources, by age-friendly dimension. The County website will be undergoing a redesign in 2017.

Civic Participation and Employment Directions

- Provide information about volunteer opportunities and training opportunities through a coordinated volunteer centre, such as "I Volunteer Perth Huron".

- Develop volunteer recognition programs through established networks (e.g., Volunteers in Perth, I Volunteer Perth Huron) and with Perth area municipalities (community-wide volunteer recognition event).

- Seek collaboration with local secondary schools to encourage volunteerism among youth and to secure youth volunteers to provide assistance to older adults, such as computer skills development and home maintenance services.

- Expand advertising for volunteer opportunities that might be of interest to older adults via local media, church administrators, municipal newsletters, etc.

- Establish partnership involving County Economic Development, Conestoga College, and Partners in Employment to promote their services and bring in session speakers to churches, libraries, and other community gathering spaces.

[i]End Notes

Government of Ontario. 2013. Finding the Right Fit: Age-Friendly Community Planning. ccessed: http://www.seniors.gov.on.ca/en/resources/AFCP_Eng.pdf

[ii]Examples of design standards. Parks and Recreation Ontario (2014) Pathways to Recreation: Learning About Ontario's Accessibility Standard for the Design of Public Spaces. Accessed: http://www.prontario.org/index.php/ci_id/9179.htm

[iii] CPTED Ontario. CPTED Strategies. Accessed: http://cptedontario.ca/mission/cpted-strategies/.

[iv] Example of guidelines for barrier-free designs. Government of Ontario (2014). Guidelines for Barrier-Free Design of Ontario Government Facilities. Accessed: www.infrastructureontario.ca/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=2147492536.

[v] Canadian Automobile Association. Best Places to Retire in Ontario. Accessed: http://blog.caasco.com/local/best-places-to-retire-in-ontario/.

Moneysense. Canada's Best Places to Retire. Accessed: http://www.moneysense.ca/property/canadas-best-places-to-live-2014-top-10-places-to-retire.

[vi] Canadian Mortgage and Housing Program. Permitting Secondary Suites. Accessed: https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/inpr/afhoce/afhoce/afhostcast/afhoid/pore/pesesu/pesesu_001.cfm.

[vii] Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists. CarFit. http://www.caot.ca/nick/CarFitFlyer_English.pdf.

[viii] There is no library board in Perth South. However, a member of Perth South Council sits on the St. Marys Public Library Board.