

# **MOBILITY FOR OLDER PEOPLE IN WATERTOWN: AN ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**PREPARED BY  
WATERTOWN FOR ALL AGES--TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVE FOR SENIORS**

**November 8, 2019**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Watertown for All Ages Transportation Initiative for Seniors was a one-year project to identify the transportation needs of Watertown's older residents and to develop recommendations to fulfill unmet needs. A Tufts Health Plan Foundation Momentum Grant funded Watertown for All Ages to implement the project. A complementary grant provided by the Watertown Community Foundation helped fund focus groups to inform the project team about older residents' personal experiences with transportation.

### **METHODOLOGY**

- Organized and consulted with an Advisory Committee comprising consumers, town government officials and representatives from town organizations
- Identified and catalogued mobility options in Watertown
- Convened six Focus Groups with 63 Watertown residents 60+ to collect first-hand experience from participants who live in all parts of Watertown; interviewed older people about their experiences driving and getting around without a car
- Conducted in-depth interviews with staff who coordinate transportation for older people in 11 nearby communities and with staff at state agencies knowledgeable about senior transportation, and prepared report on the findings from those interviews

### **WHAT WE LEARNED**

- Many older Watertown residents lack knowledge and awareness of existing transportation options
- They need and want more transportation options to get where they need and want to go in ways that are affordable (free or subsidized), accessible (can be used by someone with a walker/cane/rollator), convenient (curb-to-curb, on-demand, variety of destinations), and available to all (no eligibility requirements)
- Walking conditions in some areas are especially difficult for many older people
- No single agency or organization is responsible for all aspects of transportation for older residents

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our understanding of current transportation initiatives, funding sources, and the experiences of other communities, we focused on developing recommendations that would be feasible and likely to succeed. We recognize that implementing these recommendations requires careful planning, organizational structure, process and funding.

**1. Increase the KNOWLEDGE of older people about existing transportation options and how to use them**

In collaboration with the Senior Center, create and distribute a Resource Guide of available transportation options, and develop and deliver educational workshops.

**2. Increase TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS for older residents that are affordable, accessible, convenient and available to all**

Pilot a program to subsidize up to \$10 of the cost of a ride-share for older people, especially those who are vulnerable or isolated. We reviewed transportation providers and identified the Lyft Partnership Program and GoGoGrandparent so we could accommodate Smartphone and non-Smartphone users and avoid the need to provide staff to book and track each ride.

**3. Advocate for policies that would increase PEDESTRIAN SAFETY for older residents**

Create a Senior Pedestrian Advocacy Corps to advocate for policies related to pedestrian safety for older residents, in coordination with existing town initiatives promoting walking/biking.

**4. Develop a COORDINATED APPROACH to transportation for older residents**

Organize a Senior Transportation Advisory Committee of key stakeholders who will meet regularly to consult on and guide implementation of the recommendations listed above.

## CONCLUSION

A significant outcome of our research this past year is the engagement of town leaders and community members with us and one another in the goal of making Watertown more age-friendly by improving mobility for older residents. We learned that our Advisory Committee, Focus Group participants, and the many individuals we talked with are interested and enthusiastic about addressing the unmet needs we identified in Watertown. We are excited to build upon this momentum and to harness the energy into a strong group of advocates to help campaign for any future transportation initiatives that might be an outgrowth of what we have learned.

We encourage reading the entire project report for a full appreciation of our process, findings and conclusions.