



Observations and Recommendations for the Watertown Comprehensive Plan Update - 2022

Watertown for All Ages (WAA) is a grassroots organization working to make Watertown an “age-friendly community” and improve the livability of Watertown, Massachusetts for residents of all ages and abilities. (See: <http://watertownforallages.org/age-friendly-communities/>)

We are pleased to offer responses to three key questions posed by the consultants who are seeking input from community stakeholders to develop an updated Comprehensive Plan for the City of Watertown.

1) What is the City doing well to meet the needs of Watertown’s older residents?

The Watertown Senior Center is the primary agency focused specifically on meeting the needs of older residents. With a small staff and facility it offers a wide range of programs and services, including a shuttle bus for limited shopping and occasional social/cultural trips; a variety of presentations and participatory programs, information and referrals on social services issues; SHINE advisors on Medicare; exercise programs, and more. Many residents avail themselves of the municipal parking lots parking pass that is administered by the Senior Center.

The Watertown Free Public Library circulates large print editions and audio versions of books; provides access to computers and printers; hosts free programs such as early evening movie showings; offers weekly one-on-one technical support on using electronic devices and offers delivery of materials to homebound people. A new bookmobile will bring library services closer to people’s neighborhoods. In addition the library serves as a convenient venue for meetings and programs offered by various community organizations and for services that benefit older residents which are provided by other City agencies (such as Health Department vaccination clinics).

Many other key City agencies that provide vital services to the general public (e.g., Fire, Police, Health, and Public Works Departments) capably provide various types of valuable assistance and support of particular importance to older residents. Also of note are the Housing Authority’s collaboration with the Watertown Community Foundation to provide food assistance to low-income residents in its senior housing buildings, and amenities developed as part of the Safe Streets Initiative.

2) What could the City do better?

- Improve communication to the community at large, as many older people are unaware of the services, support and engagement opportunities that already exist.
- Increase the budget to support staffing of the Senior Center for expanded hours and to develop a wider variety of programs directed to specific audiences (e.g., younger older

adults age 60 – 75, males, immigrants, people interested in the arts or personal growth); increase publicity and outreach to engage a more diverse constituency

- Ensure pedestrian safety and encourage walking by improving sidewalks, enhancing snow removal, providing benches and other amenities. Implement a formal traffic calming program for neighborhoods to request an evaluation of traffic conditions and application of a variety of traffic calming tools including reducing speeds, signage and signals, road configuration and surfaces to create slower speeds. Prioritize the implementation of pedestrian recommendations in the Bicycle and Pedestrian plan.
- Increase indoor and outdoor physical activity programs designed specifically for older people through the Recreation Department, the Senior Center, and the Health Department’s LiveWell program. Solicit input from residents as to the types of activities and hours of operation that are wanted, and whether transportation to attend is needed.

3) What new opportunities should the City consider?

- Increase transportation options, especially for lower-income residents (e.g., subsidized micro transport for door-to-door services); seek collaborations with corporate and regional organizations to provide transportation services and integrate transportation options for older people in a local transit network.
- Recruit a dynamic Director of Senior Services with a strong and creative vision for how to engage and serve a broad range of older residents.
- Design a new Senior Center (a likely part of a redevelopment Master Plan for the parcel on which the current Center sits) that will include expanded meeting spaces; making technology and exercise equipment available in the Center for older people to use; food preparation and kitchen space; dedicated physical activity space (current Senior Center has limited use of shared gym); space for outdoor programs and opportunities for gardening and community events.
- Through more active promotion and more diverse programming attract more people to avail themselves of Senior Center activities and services.
- Establish closer collaboration between the Senior Center and other town agencies and organizations in the community whose activities affect or could involve older adults.
- Develop an inter-agency task force to design and support innovative intergenerational programs and volunteer opportunities for older adults.
- Establish partnerships with organizations and agencies to expand affordable housing opportunities that support aging-in-community for Watertown residents. This may include new development, funding for home safety and accessibility modifications, home sharing arrangements, and more.
- Identify innovative ways to decrease social isolation and promote civic engagement among older residents. Learn from other communities, both in MA and across the nation, about the innovative things they are doing to reach out and serve the wide range of needs and interests of older adults.
- Protect and revitalize town squares and work with new developments with the goal of having a healthy mix of community-oriented everyday retail establishments and City services available in comfortable walking distance (so-called “15-minute neighborhoods”). Incorporate local transit nodes for these retail and service centers into an overall transportation plan for the City