Alternative Futures: Elder-friendly Communities for Iowa
Proceedings of the June 5–6, 2008 Roundtable
Perry, Iowa
Alternative Futures: Elder-friendly Communities for Iowa

Town/Craft, Perry, Iowa
June 5–6, 2008

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Executive Summary

Will You Still Need Me? Will You Still Feed Me, When I’m Sixty-four?
Susan Erickson | Iowa State University

Paul McCartney asked that question in a song he wrote when he was only sixteen years old. It is a valid question for the culture today, in a time of unprecedented demographic shift. The population is aging—never before has there been such a large elderly population. It poses a whole new set of problems for their communities. But perhaps it poses a whole new set of opportunities as well. The Town/Craft Center in Perry, Iowa held a roundtable session to explore the potential benefits of a focus on the elderly for community development.

It’s a curious concept, contemplating elder-friendly community design as an economic and community development tool. Community development has traditionally been oriented toward accommodating and welcoming families with young children, or business entities that translate to new jobs. Accommodating and welcoming the elderly is not initially an attractive concept. But perhaps it is worth a second thought.

Iowa State University Community Economic Development and the Town/Craft Center assembled a panel of experts from a variety of disciplines to consider the implications of designing to attract and accommodate an older population group. Community development targeted to this population group—retirees—boomers—the elderly—senior citizens—offers a unique set of problems and opportunities. The panel of experts that assembled in June 2008 agreed that there may also be a wealth of benefits available to the communities that work to welcome and accommodate this population group.

Mark Engelbrecht, Dean of the College of Design at Iowa State University, welcomed the group and shared some of his experiences as an architect and member of a firm that has completed 200 varied projects relating to retirement communities in 26 states. Engelbrecht stated that it is important that communities don’t look at their elder population as a liability but as an asset and a way for those communities to grow and thrive well into the future. He also said that no one has a perfect vision for how elder-friendly community design ought to work but we do know that the nursing home built at the edge of town doesn’t work. Communities should look at seniors as civic investments and work to incorporate them into the fabric of community life as a source of pride.

Tim Borich, associate dean of the College of Design and director of Extension Community and Economic Development, cited a few states—Michigan, Wisconsin, and South Carolina—where establishing elder-friendly communities has been treated as an economic development strategy and he questioned why this has not happened on a larger scale in Iowa.

Borich laid the groundwork for the roundtable discussion with a presentation of demographic changes in Iowa. Using data from both Woods & Poole Economics, Inc. and the U.S. Census, he
shared some dramatic information showing the aging of the population as well as migration patterns, particularly as these relate to age and ethnicity. Economic impacts related to retirement communities have not been studied in depth. Some studies have indicated that a senior couple moving to a town has the same economic impact as one to two new manufacturing jobs. Borich posed these questions to the roundtable participants for discussion: Can Iowa create places as destinations for retirement? Do these communities have to be urban? Can a rural setting of a few thousand people provide a holistic approach to a senior community?

These questions led to a general discussion that focused on the elder population cohort and their income levels. Discussion centered on policy that might encourage or discourage maintenance of Iowa residency, such as income-tax policies. We acknowledged there are many areas open for research, such as migration trends related to age, income, presence of other family, and health. Further investigation of these questions will be valuable in determining which population groups would be most open to community development efforts.

Peter Butler, assistant professor of landscape architecture at West Virginia University, and I continued the overview session from the community design perspective, summarizing our research on elder-friendly community design. I began by presenting the importance of physical activity in our daily lives. Physical activity has largely been engineered out of daily life at home and in the community at large. This is a contributing factor to escalating levels of obesity, diabetes, cancer and other health concerns. Implementing principles of healthy community design can contribute to higher levels of physical activity and, therefore, more positive health outcomes and better quality of life, not just for elders but for all residents. At Iowa State University, we have developed an “Elder Friendly Community” assessment tool that focuses on analyzing quality of transportation, shopping and services, housing, and recreation and cultural activity. Using this assessment, Butler and I identified elements of elder friendly community design that benefit all sectors of society. These elements include walkable neighborhoods, accessible and smaller infill housing units constructed near downtown shopping districts, availability of sidewalks, and access to trails.

Butler was the lead investigator of our research. He spoke about the historic forms of small towns and how those forms have affected development patterns that we see today. Historical forces related to consolidation of retail, recreation and schools have pushed development patterns to the edge of towns. These forces have created some unintended negative consequences, such as the community becoming more automobile-friendly than pedestrian-friendly. This in turn makes the community more difficult for those with limited mobility, such as the elderly and those of limited financial means.

Bill Morain, Tom Morain and Ruth Smith, engaged residents of Lamoni, Iowa, spoke about Lamoni and why they are interested in pursuing elder-friendly community design as a community development tool. A question-and-answer session followed that focused on the realities of instituting this type of community development. Community leaders spoke about economic realities of dealing with demographic changes, lack of tax base and the need to create links with schools—of any level, from preschools up through universities.

I concluded the overview by facilitating a discussion of a new concept—playgrounds for the elderly. A few examples have been built around the world, but this concept is so new that there is not much information available about it. Participants joined in this discussion by talking about elders’ wishes to interact with other age groups but also to have structured opportunities to escape from the noise and bustle of interaction with younger people. Engelbrecht commented that all development should focus

1At the time of the roundtable, Peter Butler was a senior lecturer in landscape architecture at Iowa State University.
on three core concepts: security, simplicity, economy. Groff added that elders are not a uniform group and that any community development such as recreation facilities should include amenities that appeal to a wide range of ages and abilities. Kostelecky urged the group to be aware that exclusively older-adult communities don’t work from a psychological perspective. No answers were found to finish this discussion session, but many salient points were raised.

The day concluded with tours of two typical small Iowa towns to help assess the real needs on the ground. The session resumed the next day with experts from various parts of the country to help us think conceptually about the ideas we had discussed the first day.

Robert H. McNulty, founder and president of Partners for Livable Communities, was the keynote speaker for this event. He gave an inspiring overview of the potential for re-thinking the way communities are designed. McNulty cited several examples from around the country and urged us to think about issues of disability, housing equity, vulnerable elderly, civic life, health and the economy. He closed by encouraging us to be aware that the immigration problem, if we solve it, is our greatest asset.

Chanam Lee was the next speaker. She is a landscape architecture professor and researcher from Texas A & M, and studies healthy and active living communities. She focuses her work on a simple triad of built environment, lifestyle and health. Lee presented an overview of the low levels of physical activity and poor nutrition evident in the population today and the way a more walkable community might positively affect health conditions and quality of life.

Subsequent discussion yielded thoughts about transportation for utilitarian purposes and transportation for recreational functions. We agreed that a culture change is necessary to change lifelong habits of driving wherever a person wants to go.

Linda Cronk, Michigan State University Extension, and Dona Wishart, Otsego (Michigan) County Commission on Aging, shared their experience in working with Otsego County to become a certified Michigan Community for a Lifetime. They worked to develop a process in Michigan to certify communities. They emphasized the importance of developing an effective process and working with engaged and supportive community leadership teams.

Becky Groff, elder services consultant, followed with some final information about AARP. 2 AARP has recently developed a report to the nation on livable communities, about creating successful environments for aging. Report findings indicated that people who are highly engaged with their communities are more likely to age successfully. Another important finding was that people are less involved and are aging less successfully in communities in which features such as transit, sidewalks and trails are rated poorly by residents. Groff urged us to address accessibility in housing and transportation. She also shared some best practices examples from around the nation.

After input from these experts, we discussed how our varied disciplines might work together to promote community development that serves the older population demographic. Dan Broshar, ISU Extension community development specialist, facilitated the conversation. He divided participants into two groups and asked us to consider the future of elder-friendly communities in Iowa. The first group identified social, spatial and technological marginalization as important issues facing the elderly. That group also talked about strategies for elderly-friendly development, focusing on the need for a holistic, inclusive plan. The second group talked about how economic conditions affect

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2At the time of the roundtable, Becky Groff was the associate state director of AARP in Iowa.
the elderly, and how those situations can be turned into opportunities. They then discussed the
challenges posed by regionalization and the need to involve the business community in development
efforts.

After the two days of the roundtable discussion, participants were changed. Each one had come to
the table with a valuable set of skills related in one way or another to the theme. Each person's set
of skills had been challenged with new ideas and new opportunities to consider. However, I believe
each person was also newly motivated to use those valuable skills to work for better quality of life for
Iowa's aging population. And I believe we were newly convinced that Paul McCartney's challenge was
made directly to each one of us—to consider how we might use our skills to answer his question—

Will you still need me? Will you still feed me, when I'm sixty-four?
A center formed by an alliance of the College of Design at Iowa State University, ISU Extension Community and Economic Development, and Hometown Perry, Iowa, Town/Craft is committed to the pursuit of ideas and strategies that strengthen small communities and powered by the proposition that creative, concerned action—inspired by a shared vision—can lead to the restoration and sustenance of our townscape.

Housed in refurbished historic buildings across from the restored Carnegie Library in Perry, Town/Craft combines the resources of the cultural studies of Hometown Perry, Iowa, and the multidimensional outreach network of ISU Extension and students, staff and faculty of a nationally prominent school of design into a comprehensive vehicle for envisioning a sustainable future for Iowa towns and surrounding landscapes.

Town/Craft intends to pursue its mission through a series of conferences, projects, exhibits, publications and consultations that will focus on the various challenges and opportunities that face the historic culture of our small communities. The Alternative Futures: Elder-friendly Communities for Iowa Roundtable, held June 5–6, 2008, in Perry, looks at Iowa’s aging population as an opportunity for economic growth, as well as a catalyst for creating communities that support healthier and more active lifestyles for all age groups.

Finally, Town/Craft is a venture that welcomes the widest possible diversity of perspectives. The center expects to include the knowledge, wisdom and creative energy of the arts, sciences, liberal studies, politics, economics, entrepreneurship and, most importantly, the real and virtual citizenry of our Iowa towns as it pursues its mission.

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Linda Cronk
Michigan State University Extension, Otsego and Crawford Counties

Linda Cronk, MA, CFLE, is the Michigan State University Extension director for Crawford County, and Family and Consumer Science Extension educator for Crawford and Otsego counties in northern Michigan. Cronk's professional background has been focused on lifespan human development education, including early childhood and school-age parent education, aging issues education, family resource management education and community development. Prior to returning to her home state of Michigan, Linda worked as an Extension educator for the University of Minnesota Extension in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Becky Groff
Elder Services Consultant

Most recently as the associate state director for community outreach with AARP Iowa, Becky Groff coordinated AARP Iowa’s national community service programs. She worked with volunteers and staff to develop and implement new community service initiatives and respond to emerging member issues. Prior to AARP, Groff served four years as executive director of the Alzheimer’s Association Greater Iowa Chapter. Earlier in her career, she was the founding Director of Wesley – Methodist Adult Day Services, a cooperative venture between Iowa Health System and Wesley Retirement Services. Groff also served on Governor Culver’s Task Force on Alzheimer’s Disease (2007), the Iowa Flood Recovery housing subcommittee (2008) and the National Advisory Committee for CARF Aging Service Networks accreditation program. She has given numerous training and education seminars on related issues at the state and national levels. Groff has a BA in Social Science and Communications from Simpson College. She is an occupational therapy assistant and has a certificate in rehabilitation facility management.

Chanam Lee
Assistant Professor, Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning, College of Agriculture, Texas A&M University

Chanam Lee has engaged the issues of community design on multiple levels. Her research involves the design and planning of the physical environment promoting activity-friendly communities and investigating land use and development policies. As a collaborator on a regional scale, Lee worked with a coalition in Brazos Valley, Texas, to create the Brazos Valley Building Healthy Communities Coalition, which seeks to link smart growth and active aging principles in rural and urban environments. This project won a Commitment Award in the area of Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging from the Environmental Protection Agency in 2007.
Robert McNulty
Founder and President, Partners for Liveable Communities

For more than 30 years, Robert McNulty has thrown his skills and energies into civic invention, arts and creativity, and agendas of social inclusion to benefit the communities of America and abroad. A coalition builder par excellence, he formed Partners for Livable Places—now Partners for Liveable Communities—in 1975, the first organization of its type in American history. Partners is a national leadership nonprofit working to improve the livability of communities by promoting quality of life, economic development and social equity.

Donna Wishart
Executive Director, Otsego County Commission on Aging

Currently serving as executive director of the Otsego County Commission on Aging (OCCOA), Dona Wishart provides leadership to the Otsego County Michigan Communities for a Lifetime project. As a steering committee member for the project, she is passionate in finding opportunities to “raise awareness, cause discussion, and move citizens to action” through projects that will make Otsego County a community where generations can age in place successfully. Wishart is a graduate of Michigan State University. She has worked at OCCOA for 16 years during which she has provided leadership for many innovative programs and services, including a barrier free fishing pier at the Otsego Lake State Park that has provided enjoyment to people from all walks of life and across generations. Wishart takes pride in the project that “provides possibility” and “removes barriers” for persons with disabilities.
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Susan Erickson and I began working on this project last summer. We completed a literature review and started to write about elder-friendly community design. There are a lot of programs happening nationally—some of them that come to mind are the program in Michigan (we have some representatives here from Michigan), the program in Florida and the program in Minnesota. But Iowa didn't have much going on. So we are considering writing an Extension publication related to elder-friendly community design. We thought one of the great ways to start that off and to create a synergy around that subject would be to have a roundtable like this.

This summer two students, Lisa Bates and Courtney Long, and I were completing two design projects in Lamoni, Iowa, and Polk City, Iowa, as part of an elder-friendly community design project. It's really a pilot program in terms of how we are going to be able to assess elder-friendly community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in small-town Iowa. We are planning to develop a publication that will help communities plan for 2030—thinking about the retired baby boomer population and issues of resettlement. From what we've seen so far, people want to move back to Iowa. People want to age in place in small towns in Iowa. They are thinking about the quality of life these rural towns provide, the resources they provide. Our assessment is beginning to identify some of the existing things to facilitate aging in place, [as well as] opportunities for further development and planning for aging in place in Iowa's small towns.

So welcome. We are very excited about this roundtable. It's going to be a great couple of days. Today we are going to have some [comments] from Mark Engelbrecht of the College of Design and Tim Borich from Extension Community and Economic Development. Susan and I are going to talk a little bit more from the landscape architecture perspective in terms of how we're defining healthy community design and elder-friendly community design and the type of assessment we're working on. We'll show some examples of the two communities that we're working with and some of the assessment that we've already completed.

In the afternoon we are going to be having a great lunch at the Gortz House in Grimes and hopefully tour a little bit if the weather [permits]. We will be looking at the actual small town form of the typical Iowa community in Grimes and then on to Polk City. So thank you very much for coming.
I am very pleased to be here. I thought I would take just a minute to introduce the concept of Town/Craft, since you are involved in a developing institution that we hope, over time, will resonate with a number of the issues of smaller communities in our state and beyond. We had the idea in the College of Design, with some of our friends here in Perry and in Extension Community and Economic Development at Iowa State, to come together around something called Town/Craft because we had the idea that some of these issues, such as the one we are addressing today, elder-friendly communities, actually involves a kind of craft. It involves assembling a set of experts with diverse backgrounds and diverse perspectives to bring new thought and new energy to some of these ideas. So that's what the roundtable concept is all about. It's a way of bringing you around—well it's not a round table, unfortunately, but imagine one—to contribute and respond to ideas and prospects that are set around a particular theme. This is the third roundtable that we've had. The previous roundtable, approximately a month ago, involved the small town and the emerging bioeconomy. It assessed some of the new vectors that were impinging upon the small communities relative to the emerging dynamic bioeconomy. So it was, in a sense, a fact-finding roundtable. And of course these roundtables are carefully recorded and ultimately will be published.

This is the first roundtable that actually begins to attach itself to one of the prospective themes for the development of our network of small communities. There are many of these [themes] and of course this is just one. The idea that communities don't look at their elder population as a liability or something that is simply a matter of fact or residual experience, but look at it as an asset and a way to grow and thrive well into the future, is important to us.

It's something that I must say; I'll just take a brief detour here. It resonates with me personally. To my surprise, I'm also one of these elders all of a sudden. We're all involved in that rather interesting process. More than 40 years ago, as a young architect right out of Iowa State University, I had the chance to encounter my first project in Ames, Iowa, which was one of the first full-service retirement communities to be designed and constructed in the state, named Northcrest [Community]. This quite unusual community was one of the first that was comprehensive in its array of services, including housing, healthcare, dining, recreation and so on. We had developed a pretty elaborate master plan, and it has now built out to more than 200 units. But the first phase was only 24 units. The board of directors that was powering this project—some faculty members on the cusp of retirement—was our client, inspired the design and then moved in. So I've had a rather interesting baptism to this whole process. In fact we knew our clients so well that in the first phase, we didn't even include an elevator, because those who were going to move into the second floor thought that the stairs would do them good for their exercise. Of course, we planned for it in an addition later on and they've got one now and, more importantly, an array of services and facilities that encompass the developing needs of seniors who are gathered together in these communities, including assisted living, skilled nursing, now even hospice, and facilities for those dementia and Alzheimer's.

Well, what's interesting about this is that you never know about how these things are going to happen. That project started me on a path with my firm, which has completed 200 of these projects in 26 states. We've built the equivalent of 20,000 dwelling units. And all within this comprehensive idea of the retirement community.
So that’s my background in this whole thing. I’m proud to say that one of our projects starred in a movie lately, *In Her Shoes* with Cameron Diaz and Shirley MacLaine. The retirement community that they were banging around in was one of our designs. It actually came out pretty well. Not as well as Cameron Diaz of course. So we’ve walked down this road a long way.

I want to say that I’m simply bringing that experience to our two days together here but also some questions. I saw the other side of this whole issue when I was growing up in a small community. Waverly, Iowa, is where my family is from, three generations of Engelbrechts up there. I lived through this whole process with my parents, as many of you have, in this small community of 6,000 people with a very vibrant college at the center of it, Wartburg College. I watched this whole experience personally, and I couldn’t help but wonder over time about the prospects of taking what we have learned about these services and environments that are so necessary to our seniors and incorporating them into the larger communities, instead of focusing on these discrete environments that we’ve been involved in so many times. So that’s what I’m interested in.

I don’t know how this is going to work. I do know that the nursing home at the edge of town doesn’t work. We need to begin to think about all of the investments we have made in these small communities relative to our seniors as civic investments. They might somehow be parlayed into a more welcoming and effective environment that is not only a source of pride and employment, but that also gives a community a particular thematic center line about which to chart its future course. So that’s why I’m here. I’m not really an expert, but I have a lot of interesting questions, I think. I’ll be very fascinated with how we parse this through these two days.

This is a great opportunity for Town/Craft. This is one of the first of the roundtables that begins to get involved with a creative, innovative set of ideas. I mentioned earlier that we have partners in this venture and of course one that’s very important has to do with the town of Perry, and the institutions that have been developed and that have come and gone and come again within the town. That is an interesting story in itself and someday when we are old and gray—tomorrow maybe—we’ll chart this history, and it will be an interesting one. Bill Clark has been very important player, not only from the perspective of the community but from that of Town/Craft and the College of Design. He serves to our great pleasure and benefit on the Advancement Council with the College of Design, which is the group that actually helps me and the other officers of the college chart the course ahead and maneuver the occasional bumpy roads that we encounter.

Thanks for coming, and thanks for indulging my reminiscences. I’ve been out of practice now effectively for 15 years and am about to re-enter, so in a sense this has been kind of an opportunity for me to re-engage an old professional interest that I hope will develop some more interesting new ideas.
I want to welcome every one of you on behalf of the community of Perry and our Town/Craft center. I’ve had a chance to meet many of you already this morning and I want to say again a hearty welcome. Some of you have come a long way and we want to make sure [during] your time here in our community, as well as the communities that you will see later today, that you feel welcome and you know that we are greatly appreciative of you being here. I’ve had an opportunity to be involved with [Town/Craft] from the beginning and it’s a very exciting project that is still developing to some degree. These design forums and community visualization that are going on are part of Town/Craft, and they go hand in hand with what the Extension folks are already doing through their visioning and community visualization. Symposia and roundtables like this, publications like Peter [Butler] talked about this morning that will come out of Town/Craft, and studio and exhibit work that is and will be on display are all part of what Town/Craft is.

The tagline for Town/Craft is: “A center for ideas and strategies to strengthen small communities.” All of us are interested in that. Obviously this facility and the vision around it, some of which Mark [Engelbrecht] shared with you a few minutes ago, are just a small part of the research and outreach already taking place and that will take place more in the future. I’ve heard Mark say on many occasions that towns just don’t happen. It is with great appreciation on behalf of this center of Town/Craft that we look back to the vision that Mark had for bringing together organizations doing similar kinds of things. I am the past president of Hometown Perry, Iowa, a museum with the purpose of celebrating and advancing the understanding of small communities in America, their history, and the belief that you could, in fact, advance the revitalization of a community or you could build the capacity of a community through its history. Our work with Iowa State University and with Dean Engelbrecht at the College of Design, and with the community and planning folks at Iowa State University Extension has led us to what I believe is a great partnership, funded by the Ahmansons through Hometown Perry, Iowa. A $750,000 grant helped with the renovation of this facility, along with an in-kind contribution from Iowa State University College of Design. The dean's vision about how all this could come together to advance the small community in the rural Midwest, as well as communities within large towns, was the idea and the synergy has started to be created. It’s our hope and goal that Town/Craft becomes one of the top places in the country to think about how small town futures can be advanced—as Tim Borich likes to say, to play with ideas and strategies and then bring them to fruition. So our roundtable today is just one of many we hope to have in the future.

As Dean Engelbrecht mentioned in his comments earlier, one of the things that we hadn't anticipated was that our primary funder for the hotel and museum project decided to withdraw. It left us in a unique position, but in many ways it made Perry almost a clinic, because what we said we are going to do in Town/Craft is very much in the forefront of what’s happening here in Perry. The hotel, which was a world class hotel right here in Perry, Iowa, has been closed for a year and a half. One of my personal charges in the asset distribution was to sell the hotel. I’m happy to tell you that it has been accomplished. We have completed due diligence and we are now in the countdown toward closing. At this point I can say only that it's Perry Hotel, LLC, but I will say that it is a fine organization that runs about 27 hotels, and they know how to do it. They are very excited about working with Town/Craft, Iowa State and other organizations. In addition, last Monday night, the city council voted five to zero to not only buy the building on the corner, which was renovated for a central complex for
the city [administration], the school administration and the chamber to be on the same corner, but also for a collaboration between the community and the county to run the museum across the street. The museum is one of the finest renovations of a Carnegie Library in the country. So we are starting to see the kind of development in a small community that really needs to happen. Obviously the Ahmansons gave us a great push toward that, but now the community is stepping up. In addition, I should say that the community stepped up to help with the financial piece, the development package, so that the hotel could be sold. So that's a little bit about where we are right now.

We are very grateful that you're here and thank you for coming. If as a local host I can be of any help to you during the next couple of days please call on me to do so and we'll do our best.

Tim Borich
Iowa State University

Again let me welcome everyone here this morning. Our hope is to begin to play with this idea of a small town as a retirement destination, basically, as an economic and community development strategy. Michigan, Wisconsin and South Carolina specifically come to mind as places where [establishing elder-friendly communities] has been treated in local rural communities as an economic development strategy. I don't know why this really hasn't happened in Iowa. I know Mark [Engelbrecht] has talked about some of his work in the town of Washington, and we see a little sprinkling of this here and there, but a holistic focus on transforming your community to a place where people would want to retire hasn't really happened. It's picked up in a few places, but I'm not sure it's really a conscious decision as a development strategy. So that is the question before us: Is that a logical thing to do? If so, what are some of the dimensions and characteristics that the town should consider as part of this [strategy]? What is the scope? We can't address total feasibility, but we could probably say whether or not it is a dumb idea.

As associate dean in the College of Design and director of Extension Community and Economic Development, I come at this [topic] from a couple of different angles. One is obviously the outreach extension angle and the things we could be doing with communities to help guide them down this path, this new direction. Secondly, from a collegiate standpoint, it's an interesting research discussion. There are more things we could be doing on the research side to investigate what's happening in Iowa with our seniors and the potential related to that economically. I think, and I'm not overstating this, the traditional view in the small town is that the seniors are looked upon as a demographic occurrence that we can't do much about. A little bit of negativity [exists]. They are [perceived as] a drain on the community, taking up housing that we could use for younger families, taking up a lot of services, and tending to impede economic development by the way they vote, and so on and so forth. I don't think I'm overstating it. We've tried to bring this idea up in a number of communities and have sort of gotten laughed at. Who wants to have a senior community? It is as much a cultural issue, I think, as it is a development issue.
Overview Sessions

Iowa’s Changing Demographics
Tim Borich

The Environmental Small Town Iowa: Some Questions and Conclusions
Susan Erickson

Iowa Small Towns: Historic Forms
Peter Butler

Perspectives from Lamoni
Bill Morain, Tom Morain and Ruth Smith

Playgrounds for the Elderly
Susan Erickson

This summary is transcribed from taped recordings of presentations; therefore, errors, omissions and mis-statements may have occurred.
Iowa’s Changing Demographics

Tim Borich | Iowa State University

I thought it would be good to start out the day with a discussion of Iowa’s changing demographics. Of course, the key question is: Why is this germane to the future of Iowa? My goal is to make that clear. We had a session here at Town/Craft with some Extension program leaders not too long ago, and one of the speakers was a senior economist from Woods & Poole [Economics, Inc.]. In addition to the data that I will present here, more raw data is available from Woods & Poole’s 2007 projections. In general, we look at what’s going on in Iowa using both our census data and projections.

Iowa is becoming more ethnically diverse. Large numbers of Latinos are migrating into the state and becoming a larger percentage of our population relative to what it traditionally has been (figure 1). We are becoming older, we are aging as a population. We have more commuters. I don’t know whether $4 gas is going to affect commuting habits, but when I travel to small towns today, one of the key issues is that people commute 40 to 50 miles. We need more jobs in place in our communities more than we ever did. We’ve had cheap housing, but that set up commuting patterns related to employment throughout much of rural Iowa. So many of our rural communities here are more like “exurbs”—if I can use that term—to the larger communities than they are like the old “ag-dependent” rural communities. In essence, those dynamics have changed in part because of cheap gas and cheap housing. The question is: Will that continue?

Iowa ranks among the top three states in terms of the number of two-income families. In some cases its more than two jobs per person or per household. The percentage of the population consisting of two-income family households is very high in Iowa.

Figure 2 is an interesting graph. It shows projections of the migration patterns in Iowa between 1995 and 2000 by age group. We need to look at these two spikes. In essence, we have people in the 30 to 49-year-old group and the 5- to 24-year-old group migrating into Iowa. What does that say? It indicates that people of childbearing age move into Iowa with their children. That’s why you have these two spikes.

Now when those kids go to Iowa State University to get their degree what happens? I always ask my students this question: How many of you plan to stay in Iowa once you get your degree? Out of 30, I’m lucky to get three to raise their hands. So they leave the state. We have a large percentage of people in that age group between 20 and 30 basically, and if you look at 25 to 29 you can see we have dropped by about 8,000 right within that five-year period. So it spikes down.

The 50 and older age groups are probably most germane to this discussion, once we begin thinking about retirement. Usually when we reach 50, a number of us start looking for a place to retire. This may apply to baby boomers, even those who haven’t yet hit
retirement age. So we start to see out-migration all the way from 50-year-olds to about 80- to 84-year-olds. When they get older than 85, they start moving back. I think that when the family or the spouse is gone, Florida or Arizona don’t look so good, and we start seeing some migration back to Iowa at that late stage in life.

Figure 3 shows in- and out-migration by county of seniors from 55 to 69 years old. From where are they leaving and to where are they going? We think of places like Polk County. For those from out of state, Polk County is where Des Moines is located, Black Hawk County has Waterloo/Cedar Falls, Linn County has Cedar Rapids, Johnson County has Iowa City, and Scott County is where the Quad Cities are located. In virtually all of Iowa’s metro areas, people in that age group are not moving in; they are moving out. During that five-year period, more than 1,300 seniors moved out of Polk County. My guess is that many of those folks are mobile and have capital that they are taking with them. These people are probably in the top five to ten percent of the income scale, and they have the ability to move wherever they want to live.

Note, however, what is happening in the southern two tiers of counties in the state. These counties tend to be considered the poorer part of the state, in terms of agriculture, with less population. This area is a very rural part of the state. Land values tend to be lower here. We’re starting to see migration into that area. I’ve seen it, for example, in Lamoni. So that seems to be a trend. We also see some migration into western Iowa. The dark green area on the map is the Okoboji area with Iowa’s Great Lakes. There are a lot of amenities there, recreation and fishing, and so on. Many lake front properties are available, if you have the money to buy them. We’re starting to see migration into that area as well. The trout streams, state forests and other recreational areas in Northeast Iowa are also a tourist destination. In summary, Iowa’s urban areas are experiencing a net loss of elderly population, while many of the rural areas are actually seeing some net gains. Not all but some of them are. I don’t know if that’s the case nationally or not.

The dimensions of Iowa demographics are also changing over time (figure 4). The urban population is growing overall. Almost half of the state’s population is living in metro Iowa. The majority of Iowans have always lived in non-metro areas. That should change by the next census. Our farm population continues to decline. One of the things our economists worry about with the new bioeconomy is the further loss of farms and farmers. The price of agricultural land is skyrocketing. That trend will continue. The pink line on the graph shows small towns and rural non-farms. People living in rural areas and not farming. That has continued to grow over time.

Figure 5 shows commuting trends in Iowa between 1990 and 2000. I have no recent data to apply. I don’t know what’s going to happen at the next census, but these data indicate an increase in commuting. In small places with populations under 2,500, roughly three-fourths of residents work someplace else. We get a
By 2000, that pyramid is starting to take the shape of a rectangle a little bit. That’s the national population. That change in part is because of this bulge [at the baby boomer generation]. It’s distorting it. The baby boomers are having fewer children. We are seeing that trend nationally as well. The baby boomers are the bubble that’s coming up through the population pyramid and are going to be retiring. I think 2010 is when baby boomers start turning 65. So that’s a year and a half away.

This is the distribution of Iowa’s population during 1940 (figure 7). Even then, birth rates weren’t that great in Iowa. And now look at that in 1950 (figure 8). What happened? The guys came back from World War II and had all of us. The baby boom continued through the 1960s but began dropping off in the 1970s (figures 9 and 10). Between 1970 and 2000 the bubble created a lot of commuting back and forth to small towns. In medium-sized places, you see the rate drop under half, and it is even lower with the metropolitan cities. We always think of a lot of commuting as going on in cities, but actually there is less of it there than in the rural areas. So we are very much a commuting population.

I want to talk about population pyramids. Figure 6 shows the number of people in the United States over time by age distribution and gender. Of course as you grow older the tendency is to die, which is why you have fewer people 85 and older than people under 5 years old. The natural population in this type of graph takes the form of a pyramid. Notice the relatively even distribution between male and female at the turn of the century.

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Figure 7. Population distribution in Iowa by gender, 1940.

Figure 8. Population distribution in Iowa by gender, 1950.

Figure 9. Population distribution in Iowa by gender, 1960.
by baby boomers moves up in the age groups (figures 11–13). Now there is a “boomlet” [ages 0 to 19 in the year 2000 (figure 13)]. It’s us having children. The boomlet echoes the baby boom going up the chain. I also want you to look at the top of the chart. In the 1940s there is nobody older than 79. But as we move through time, the top of the chart becomes higher. Isn’t that something? The last time I looked, Iowa ranked about third in longevity. We live a long time here. There are more [people older than 79 in Iowa and they] live longer than in most states.

Let’s look at projected population (figures 14–15). This is the market we are talking about. These data are from a 2007 Woods & Poole report that used 2004 data. The dynamics of the male to female ratio are changing from previous populations. In 2020, the baby boomers are getting into the higher age groups. Look at how much the number of people 65 and older has changed. Remember how small that was back in 1950, and how that’s going to be changing in terms of the dynamics of the population.

Another dynamic is the number of births compared to deaths (figure 16). Notice the birth rate versus the death rate. We are not quite re-creating ourselves here in Iowa. The number of births is shown in red. I’m going to be spending the summer in Italy teaching, and the birth rate there is so low that in 200 years they are predicting there may not be a population
in Italy. The birth rate there is less than 1 percent. The death rate in Iowa is an indication of an aging population.

Figure 17 shows Iowa’s population by birth year. Figure 18 shows the same of our minority population, which is growing. Woods & Poole is projecting that by 2030 almost 10 percent of the population will be Latino. So this is becoming more significant. Right now it’s about 4 percent. Figure 18 is more of a natural pyramid that you would expect.

I mentioned earlier that Iowa ranks high in terms of jobs per capita, which is indicated in this graph (figure 19). The gap between the U.S. jobs per capita and Iowa’s jobs per capita is a reflection of the two-income households. We have more jobs per capita, more jobs being taken up per household.

We look at elder-friendly community in terms of market. What’s out there? With our demographics, are elder-friendly communities something we should be looking at in terms of a potential market? Woods & Poole is projecting about 3.3 million people in Iowa by 2030 (figure 20). Right now we are at 3 million. Our trend over time shows an increase in total population, except that we lost about a generation in the 1980s. I showed you in figure 2 the spike down

![Figure 12. Population distribution in Iowa by gender, 1990.](image1)

![Figure 13. Population distribution in Iowa by gender, 2000.](image2)


Figure 16. Births and deaths in the state of Iowa, 1940 to 2000. Source: Iowa Department of Public Health.
of the 20- to 30-year-old population. That downward spike was much worse in the 80s, when the farm crisis hit rural Iowa. The urban areas were affected as well, because the John Deere and Caterpillar facilities, and a lot of the industry related to farming and agriculture, had major layoffs. So the 1980s were not good for Iowa. This [dip in the population in 1990] is a reflection of a net loss in population. So you can see where the trend would have been if we hadn’t lost that generation. The total population dropped in the 1990 census, but then the trend picked up again.

In 2000 the population in Iowa is just a little over 2.9 million, over 3 million by 2010, and by the time we reach 2030, there will be 3.3 million people in Iowa according to Woods & Poole’s projection. Now where [are those people] going to come from? That’s an increase of more than 300,000 people from 2000 to 2030. They are going to come from two groups. We mentioned one: Latinos. About half of that increase is going to come from the increase in the Latino population according to Woods & Poole’s projections. When the Latino population increases from 4 to 10 percent of the total population, it’s going to be reflected someplace.

Another big chunk of the population increase is going to be caused by the increasing numbers of elderly in the population, if I can use that term for those 65 and older. The closer I get to that age, the more I’m not sure that’s elderly. We will have roughly 460,000 thousand people age 65 and older in 2010, and in 2030 we jump up to something like 630,000. The top quarter of the age cohorts we looked at are growing, and those age groups are going to be a significant percentage of our population growth. Look at the difference between 2030 and 1970 (figure 20). You
can see the 65 and older population will take up a much larger percent of our population in 2030.

Having said that, I assume that these data also assume that there is an out-migration of seniors from Iowa. The model should have picked that up, as models do. So, in theory, you can probably increase the number of people age 65 and older in 2030 from about 630,000 to almost 800,000, if we were just to hold our own in terms of migration. Not only are seniors increasing as a percent of our population when the concept of all migration is incorporated; a significant percentage of them will also be leaving the state when they retire.

So whether or not there is potential for an elder-friendly community market, I don’t know. But at least the people are there. There is potential in the context of that age cohort, and there’s going to be growth. Even before the baby boomers hit retirement age, Iowa already has an older population. We typically rank in the top five states in terms of the percent of the population that is 65 and older, and we are first or second in terms of the percent of the population that is 80 or older. As a percentage of the population, those age groups are going to increase in Iowa, and they are already very high.

So the question is: Why are we here? Can Iowa create places as destinations for retirement? Research out of [University of] Wisconsin and Clemson [University], and by economists in other locations like Arkansas, shows that—and I’m going to be conservative in this statement because I’ve seen higher numbers—every senior couple that moves to a town has the same economic impact as one to two new manufacturing jobs. So we know that there are some economic implications. Seniors tend to shop locally, they tend to require more services and they also tend to show up with a lot of capital in the bank. So we know that there are economic benefits in the locations where this is taking place.

My second question is: Do these communities have to be urban? Most of the retirement communities that we talk about are either in or in close proximity to metro areas. Some are not. Can we look at a more holistic approach within rural settings, where we have scope and scale of a few thousand people? Can we create senior communities from scratch? Can we build senior communities and the surrounding services on an existing environment, in the proper scale? That’s a fascinating issue. We’ve got many assets in place. There are issues surrounding this—health, transportation and design, you name it, and I’m sure not all of the towns in Iowa are going to be able to market themselves as elder-friendly communities. But can some communities make this work as a development strategy? As Bill [Clark] mentioned, this is our playground here for the next two days. It’s an idea to play with. I know there is a lot of expertise around this table. We can raise the questions and come up with a few suggestions and answers.
Subsequent Discussion

This section is an edited transcript of the question and answer session immediately following the presentation by Tim Borich.

Mark Engelbrecht: Does anyone have any analysis of information about the resources and assets of the elders?

Tim Borich: I haven’t seen that specifically in terms of individuals. What I have seen is for locations where seniors have moved in, input-output analysis basically looking at economic impacts. And that varies; I’ve seen a lot of variation. I’ve seen equivalences from one-half a job to seven or eight [jobs] in some case. My guess is that relates to the amount of capital and the wealth being brought into the communities by those migrants. You are going to have some variation in that. We do know that there are positive net economic impacts, but I haven’t seen [an individual level] of analysis. Not that it doesn’t exist, but I haven’t seen it.

Steve Bolie: Do we know where the in-migration to counties is coming from? Is it in-state, out-of-state? Is it international?

Tim Borich: We don’t know. Those are just basically raw data coming from the census. We talk about the need to do research on some of these things. I just don’t know, and I don’t think anyone else does in terms of Iowa.

Becky Groff: I’d have to say that too. Some of the work that AARP’s done nationally [says that] people really don’t move. That’s kind of a myth, and it relates to Kyle [Kostelecky]’s presentation a couple of weeks ago from the Iowa Family Study, which indicated the percentage of movement within the same towns, within the same time and within the same state. I find your statistics interesting in terms of whether people really move or whether they are more like John, moving from Sioux City to Polk City.

Tim Borich: Could be within the state, could very well be.

Becky Groff: I think that distinction is important, because if people are leaving the state, there are probably some policy implications to that. Why they are leaving the state and why they are coming back. It would be important to understand that within the context of migration, in or out, and the impact on the community.

Tim Borich: I know we have had bills in the legislature talking about tax structures related to seniors and so on and so forth. Again that’s going to point to policy debate. Can we afford to give breaks to seniors to keep them in the state?

Kent Zimmerman: I want to pick up on Becky’s point. Is there any data that would suggest that when seniors leave the state they are in fact the ones that have the capital, that they going for reasons that we really don’t understand? We really haven’t done much to attract them back, so the fact may be that the people who are actually staying, or in-migrations, are economically disadvantaged. It’s kind of one of those questions, to my way of thinking. You get an answer to that, and you say, “OK, what does it now take to attract or keep those people here so they don’t leave to begin with?” Or does that mean we would be left with another senior poor group?

Tim Borich: The people left behind.
**Kent Zimmerman:** Yes, I think there are some real interesting issues to [address] when you talk about how to deal with that. You will have to have the data to do it. Probably to justify it.

**Kyle Kostelecky:** Just to share a little bit of data. I don’t know if it will answer Kent’s or Mark’s questions. A couple of things, some of the stats Becky’s alluding to: We know that for folks who are 65 and above in Iowa, 42 years is the average time they have spent living in their community, 44 years is the average time they have spent living in their county, and 65 years is the average time they have spent living in the state. OK. They really don’t move very far. Economically, the average income for those folks is about $34,000 but the range is $500 to $900,000 with the lion’s share of them being on the lower end. There is 17 to 22 percent, depending on how you look at the numbers, below the poverty threshold. So it doesn’t answer your question, but it leads to where you are going.

**Kyle Zimmerman:** And I would suggest that the more economically well-off are the ones who are leaving, and that’s pretty clear when you look at it demographically.

**Tim Borich:** But that’s a bit of a myth, I think, in some rural communities that seniors are poor.

**Tom Morain:** What constitutes living in Iowa, in terms of where the snowbird is located?

**Tim Borich:** I don’t know. I think it’s where they declare residence. For all I know some of these folks are spending six months in Iowa and six months in Arizona. I don’t know.

**Tom Morain:** What’s the tax or the economic impact of where you declare residence in terms of Iowa versus other states?

**Tim Borich:** I don’t know. Is there an attorney in the house? I think where you declare residency is where you would pay income tax. As an example, let’s say you had a place in the Black Hills where there is no income tax and you declared residency here, you would be paying income tax here.

**Tom Morain:** Is there a factor of people who are living in Iowa half the year not showing up, or people who are on the rolls only being here for half a year?

**Mark Engelbrecht:** That’s a very interesting question, though, as to how the data might relate to those who are coming and going. I assume that [the people represented in the data] are residents, somehow, or taxpayers in the state. We have many [snowbirds] who live in my building. Sometimes in the winter it’s spooky because so many of them are gone to Florida or Arizona. I expect that that’s a phenomenon that affects any community.

**Tom Morain:** I’m sure it’s an economic asset. The one’s who are moving back and forth are the ones with the assets.

**Lisa Bates:** My question is, is that going to change? That’s what that age group is doing now, but is that what people are going to be doing in the future? Are people still going to be moving around? There have been some studies saying that boomers don’t want to move south. They don’t want to leave their families, they want to be closer to grandchildren, and all these different reasons that they won’t, maybe, leave the state.

**Tim Borich:** We have seen some literature, and we know we can’t treat this group as a block. No matter what we do in Iowa, some people just can’t stand the climate and will move south. You know that’s just the way things are. And some people want to live in an enclosed community of [similar] people, preferably with large gates, and a very closed society. Some people just want that for their retirement. But others, other cohorts within the seniors, want a mixed community. They don’t want to be isolated from other generations, and they typically
worry about things like safety and scale, traffic, and things like that. So you know this is not a universal market. That’s what I’m trying to say. There are subcomponents to the market.

Becky Groff: I think the other thing is that the census data support the idea that with each decade, people are poorer. So 75-year-olds are poorer than 65-year-olds, and 85-year-olds are poorer than 75-year-olds. So that has to have some other economic impact as well in terms of how we slice and dice things to get a conclusion.

Tim Borich: And if we are going to do this, who do we market to?
We are going to talk a little bit about community design. For some of you that's a comfortable thing to talk about. For some of you it's a great mystical thing, and you wonder what it is all about. So we are going to talk about what community design is, who or what it is for and what an elder-friendly community is. Can you measure that? For some reason, especially in the world of academia, things seem more real if we can attach numbers and facts and figures to them. I don't think we can always do that, but we'll see what we can explore.

In the past, communities were designed for people instead of for cars. In the early days there were no cars yet. That's one of the reasons older cities in Europe look so much different from cities in Iowa. There were no cars yet, so we were designing for people—a little bit for horses, I suppose, but mostly for people. Well, today we are designing largely for cars, and we forget about designing for people. That makes it difficult for many of us if we go to a strange city. Some people get that knotty feeling in their gut of, “Oh I have to figure out how to drive here.” And our cities are impossible for some elderly.

I just want to say that, hopefully, we are not going to have the esoteric vocabulary discussion. I know that's important, but it's not what's going to be important for the next two days. I hope everybody can accept many vocabulary terms for those who are, what did somebody say the other day, chronologically gifted. So we designed these great neighborhoods, but we forgot about walking. I think perhaps a hidden blessing of $4-per-gallon gas is to make us think about these things in a better way.

Another thing that's happened is that we have engineered physical activity out of our daily life. There are all of our modern kitchen appliances. There's even an automatic scrubbing thing to help you wash your dishes. I'm not saying any of these are bad, but just stop and think about how much physical exercise we don't do any more because of labor-saving devices. Wringer washing machines, the old muscle-powered lawn mowers: there's a lot of things we don't do by our own physical strength any more.

This picture says it all (figure 1). The photo caption is even pretty funny: “Levester Johnson takes his dog, Armani, an Italian Cane Corso, out for a morning jog Monday in Akron, Ohio. ‘I was lazy this morning,’ Johnson said. ‘I’m on the way to the gym myself. I wanted to make sure he got in a workout before I left,’ he said.” It doesn't look like Mr. Johnson is in a very walkable place either. Figure 2 shows people on an escalator to go to the gym. I'll lay money they're going to get on the stairmaster when they get inside.

Figure 3 shows a chart over time of people who have no leisure-time physical activity. My understanding is that this means people that report not even 10 minutes per week of leisure-time physical activity. There's a little bit of change over time but not very
much. The point is, this chart goes back 20 years, and for all those years we’ve been beating people up with public education campaigns about the importance of physical activity. It looks like the campaigns are not having their desired effect, doesn’t it?

What about Iowans (figure 4)? The green bars show the percentage of people who get the recommended level of physical activity, which is thirty minutes [per day], five days a week. The dark blue shows people who get an insufficient amount of physical activity, less than thirty minutes five days a week. The light blue shows people who are inactive, which means not even 10 minutes of physical activity in a week. Among people age 65 and older, 26.9 percent get no physical activity.

Is some of that because of the way our communities are designed? How much of this reduction in physical activity levels is tied to community design? The lesson here is, make it easy to walk. Walking is always a good thing.

What is an elder-friendly community? Here is one definition: “Places that actively involve, value, and support older adults, both active and frail, with infrastructure and services that effectively accommodate their changing needs.” So how do we involve, value and support older adults? One thing we have to do is change our perception of what it means to be an older adult.

We have to change our communities. In England, there are “elderly people” signs, similar to the signs we see for children at play around schools in our country (figure 5). They put these signs in areas which have higher populations of elderly or where there are care facilities. This isn’t really how we want to show our concept of what older people are.

We have to change our communities. A method that has been used in other places is doing community assessments to help communities measure how elder-friendly they are. There are lots of good tools available. In this project, Peter [Butler] and I are interested in the unique conditions in Iowa communities with populations of 1,000 to 5,000. We’ve looked at four general categories: transportation, which would involve driving and walking; shopping and services; housing; and recreation and cultural activity.

Elder-friendly community design considerations are important because they enhance the community for just about everybody. If we are thinking about ramps or we’re thinking about walkability, putting sidewalks in, that’s good for everybody, not just the elderly. Most of the things we talk about will benefit many people, not just one population segment.
I'm not going to go through all of the questions we use to evaluate these communities, but I will tell you about two points. Access to trails and recreation facilities seems to be very important for seniors. It is also important for older adults to provide volunteer services and to receive volunteer service. That seems to be a really important thing that maybe you wouldn't think of at first.

We were able to reach some conclusions about what kind of community design features we might want to encourage and about real costs of different kinds of development. I think access to good food is really important. The whole grocery store thing is a big can of worms, but it is best if you can have access to a grocery store. If you can't do that, think about a farmers market, which also provides some of that same stuff. Maybe there's a model in there where you could bring more kinds of food into the farmers market than just fruits and vegetables.

Think about walkable communities. The town I live in has some really nice infill housing where they've taken down older houses that are really not viable anymore and divided the lots into two units of different ownership. And this development is within walking distance of town. I looked at one particular four-unit condominium. From there, you can walk down to the lumberyard, up to the bank and over to the post office; get a hamburger over here at the bar; go to the restaurant, and to the grocery store; stop in to the senior center; get a book at the library; and come back home. To do all of that, you only had to walk four tenths of a mile. Many people can do that. If the sidewalks are good, you could do that with a walker.

What kind of better health options might we see if seniors could walk that easily in their communities? What if you could access all the really important services without getting in your car? Your medical outcomes might be amazingly good if you got that much exercise several times a week. But we know from the slides I showed you before [figures 3–4] that people aren't getting that much exercise.

OK, think a little bit about how this could dovetail with the kind of work you all do. We have a great variety of expertise around the table. I hope I've given a few of you maybe a lightbulb moment to think about. Plan for people. Plan for physical activities. There are lots of policy concerns; maybe we've turned on some new thought processes for you. Connectivity is so important. As Mark [Engelbrecht] said, having the nursing home at the edge of town doesn't work. You've got to be able to connect to things in town. Think about neighborhood covenants. Those are becoming very popular now so that we have clean, sterile, homogeneous neighborhoods. But if you can't get out there and garden and if the covenants say you can't hang your laundry out to dry, maybe those weren't such good covenants after all. We took away some energy saving, we took away some physical activity, for what? So you don't see your neighbor's towels hanging on the line. Was that a bad thing?

Access to trails is important. Wouldn't that give you a good feeling? Wouldn't that make a town a good place to live? Figure 6 shows a model of two different kinds of development. In both cases, points A and B are the same distance apart. The left-hand model shows a curvilinear street pattern. To get from A to B...
by the roads takes 1.3 miles. In the grid model on the right, you go a half a mile. So consider the real cost of development. What does it cost you in gas, in physical activity, in need for a new kind of housing? If you live in a house and the grocery store is far away, you might have to move to a different kind of housing as you age. You might not have to do that if you if you live within a block of the main street. There are all kinds of ancillary costs that we maybe don’t think about. As a bonus, the whole green, sustainable thing is becoming very much in the mainstream consciousness now. A lot of these ideas are not only good for seniors for aging in place and for active living; they are also better for our environment. It’s a good thing. It’s also a nice look. It gets people more interested.
Iowa Small Towns: Historic Forms
Peter Butler | West Virginia University

I want to provide a little background on the development of small towns in Iowa and to think about the physical form of communities. Living in Iowa and teaching landscape architecture, we think a lot about small-town community forms and how those forms have evolved over time. What were the influences that created the physical landscape of a small community? For example, a town may happen at a crossroads, or it may happen at protected harbors. They respond to the environment. Primarily in Iowa, we see towns that developed and linked to the railroads.

Colo is an example of a town in Iowa where the railroad was there and the town developed around it. The historic Lincoln Highway is here and U.S. 30 is here. So you see these patterns recurring (figure 1). Dubuque is an older city that developed on the Mississippi River (figure 2). It is more of a French form. It’s following the natural form of the river. You can see the shifting of the grid here. McGregor, Iowa, another river town, really responded to topography in its form and its layout (figure 3). We think about the physical form and the components of those towns in Iowa in terms of a model, in terms of what we could call a “typical” community. Then we focus on particular communities once we understand that typical form.

In the 1850s when many of the railroad towns were established, their spacing related to access to markets and production. Where there was more production, there would be more towns along the railroad. The towns were also important for servicing the steam engines. These railroad towns share many of the same components. We have various facilities right in the core of the town. So the downtown is dominated by an industrial core. The businesses that were developed could sustain the entire community along the main access of Main Street. You rarely see a town square...
in a town developed by the railroad. Instead there was a depot and a depot green where you would have chautauquas, community festivals and different markets. It was a place of culture and recreation at the center of the community. Many of the depot greens have now become parking lots. There are typical spatial relationships to the railroad. You can see the town of Colo is laid out parallel to the railroad or perpendicular (figures 4 and 5). It is a very basic form. I think we’ll see that form repeated in Grimes today when we visit there for lunch.

Because of the dominance of the railroad and industry at the core of the town and because of the commercial development on the main axis related to the railroad, we see a lot of the civic buildings—the churches, the schools, the parks, the courthouse—spread out to the margins of these communities. They are sort of scattered sporadically throughout the small town.

Now we are going to talk a little bit about Lamoni and Polk City. One of the things we’ve been looking at is the historic evolution of these towns, the physical form that’s remnant from these historic evolutions, and the potential for working within that context to develop elder-friendly community design. Of course, in the 1850s these were all walkable communities. They were very dense. The commercial core was on the main axis, industry and business were at the center, and residential neighborhoods evolved around that core. We can see in Lamoni in the 1930s the railroad corridor is coming in from the east and heading up north. It's a very dense community (figure 6). Not much has changed in the year 2008 (figure 7). Of course, there is more development on the fringe. It's greener. In the center of town, again, the railroad is the main axis (figure 8). The central street axes really form the community. Today we see a trend of taking those rails and making them trails, which they have done in Lamoni. But much of the buildings have remained, and the structure has remained. Some of the buildings are functioning, some of them are obsolete, and some of them have been reconditioned. But there still are the bones of those railroads existing in the small towns, including Lamoni.

Next we’ll look at observed patterns and consolidation. We are consolidating everything. We’re consolidating our retail, we’re consolidating schools, and we’re consolidating our recreation, so everything is spreading to the edge. Susan [Erickson] and I are trying to be careful not to be sprawl bashers today. But when thinking about elder-friendly community design, density and services, having a centralized spatial organization makes sense. We’re not really bashing sprawl or this new development that’s happening on the edges, because that’s the nature of the shifting economy and tastes. We are looking for new opportunities for elder-friendly community design within that context.
For main streets generally there are two different strategies. Historic preservation is one approach. Many main streets are neglected and underutilized. Again the economy is shifting out to the edges, and that shift is really driven by transportation. Of course the railroad was the core for establishing the town. Automobiles became common in the 1920s, resulting in the growth of the roads. The roads stretched outside of towns in the 1940s and the interstate system was created in the 1960s. Development now is happening perpendicular to interstates, on that axis from the interstate to town. We now see the big box interchange zones and the regional mall concept.

Looking at AARP literature and the work that’s been happening in Michigan, there is a list of destinations that are critical to facilitate seniors’ daily needs, places where they shop or visit either daily or weekly (table 1). One thing that we have been doing is mapping these resources, these destinations, in small communities and looking at how they fit into the overall structure. We look at how they have evolved over time from the center to the margins. We look at where people are living and the different housing options. But we focus on the main components and critical destinations for an elder-friendly community.

Looking at Lamoni, we can see that the railroad has become a recreational trail, shown in green, an extraordinary asset (figure 9). The historic town core is highlighted in yellow, and it shows the historic development pattern from the 1930s. Again it is a walkable community. The circle in the center shows a

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<th>Critical destinations for seniors</th>
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quarter-mile radius in terms of walkability, so a round trip would be a half a mile.

In Lamoni there’s been a bit of suburban development on the edges of town, which is shown in the red, and the industry, which is marked in purple, is shifting to the edge of town as well (figure 9). So these are not necessarily walkable communities. One of the things we can take from what Susan showed about suburb development is that suburbs are very walkable, but they are very insular as well. We can’t walk to services, but we can walk for exercise. In terms of walkability, though, we are focused on walking to reach destinations.

The development along Highway 69, which shifted main street businesses, is shown in light green (figure 10). The grocery store that was downtown is now on the highway. Subway is moving from Main Street out onto the strip. Then we have the retail interchange zone developing to the east. Shown in orange, it has a welcome center, hotels and restaurants. Again, businesses are being sucked out of town out to the interchange area.

Crown Colony, an independent living facility, and the nursing home right nearby, are shown in white. Some of the critical destinations in Lamoni are also shown here (figure 11). There is the health center, Hy-Vee grocery store and a bank, all in red. The yellow squares are our churches. We have cultural destinations. Graceland University, shown in blue, is a really extraordinary cultural resource for the community. We have a theater and other recreational resources. Graceland provides a lot of those recreational services to seniors, but the parks are spreading out a little bit. There is quite a nice central park right downtown. It’s not very accessible, but it is at the center of the community.

Here’s our walkability radius again, this time centered around the nursing home (figure 11). Mark Engelbrecht said earlier that we’ve got to stop building these facilities on the edges of town. But it’s interesting to note that in Lamoni many critical services have developed on the edge of town. They are not so much a phenomenon of Main Street anymore. We have the grocery store on the edge of town and a bank and a church within...
this radius. The pharmacy and the library are still downtown. There is a lot of potential for this area to become a redevelopment node if we were to shift some of these businesses out to that area and make it a more walkable community to reach those destinations.

The white dotted lines here are conceptual. There is no path from the independent living facility to the bike path, in green, at this time. Actually, a gentleman we spoke with in the focus group meeting there would drive his motorized wheelchair onto the county road to reach the trail. We are identifying a lot of the gaps and issues in these communities and thinking about mobility, circulation and meeting the daily and weekly needs of the community by connecting to the critical destinations.

In Polk City we have a different story. It is not a railroad town but instead it is sited on Big Creek, shown in blue (figure 12). We can see its interesting orientation. As landscape architects, we love to think about how that community was first platted and its relationship to the natural environment. That main connection of Big Creek is there with the core community and the axes of town, marked in green, at an angle. It is very walkable down the middle of town. The second layer of development, highlighted in yellow, happened in close proximity to the downtown community. Then there is this extraordinary amount of suburban development, in red, on the edges of town. Those developments, again, are walkable and insulated, or insularly walkable.

In Polk City there is a new node of different services developing in the northwest. The high school, which would be a cultural destination, and the library are out on the edge of town, and there are churches being established on the edge of town.

We want to understand that these suburban developments or these outside-of-central-city developments are happening, and we want to look at how Polk City may be adapting to facilitate some of those critical destinations in these particular nodes that aren’t downtown. In figure 13, the larger white square represents the nursing home and the smaller white square shows affordable housing, sited in a residential area.

The critical destinations of the same types that we saw previously are also indicated (figure 13). The cultural and recreational destinations, including parks, are shown in green. The area around the nursing home is not very walkable. It’s difficult to portray this lack of connectivity in a plan view; there’s quite a bit of topography here that becomes another issue in terms of seniors accessing those critical services. The affordable housing is very close to many of these critical services, which is a real asset and an opportunity.

Polk City has been doing a lot of planning about connectivity in developing trails and sidewalks. Figure 14 shows the most recent plan from Snyder and...
Associates that was developed for the town. They are thinking about this stuff. From just a first glance, you can see that the community really is making a strong effort to connect to the culture of downtown, the critical services of downtown, and the extraordinary recreational opportunity of the Neil Smith Trail, shown in red. So that connectivity is starting to happen in Polk City. In doing our assessments we are not being primarily critical, but we’re instead looking at real strengths of different projects that are occurring in different communities.

Here are those quarter-mile-radius walkability circles again (figure 15). We are thinking about the siting of that nursing home, about the new opportunities and the connection with the trail system, and about the siting of the affordable housing. We can also think about where different types of new housing could potentially be developed. We can look at how connections to downtown could happen, or about how that northeast node could be further enhanced with other services that could then bring those suburban residential neighborhoods into a core node that would supply some of those critical services.

So that’s part of the analysis that we’re looking at in our two communities this summer. We’re hoping to develop a typical model in performing these analyses. We would like to create a tool for communities do assessments of themselves, and we want to provide different planning strategies for future enhancements and opportunities.
Perspectives from Lamoni

Bill Morain, Tom Morain and Ruth Smith | Lamoni, Iowa

Bill Morain: I was struck by the difference between Lamoni and what we saw at Polk City. You have to understand that Lamoni is 70 miles and 50 years south of Des Moines; there are some differences. Lamoni is unusual in that it has the highest percentage of PhDs per population of any city in Iowa. It’s primarily PhDs and cattle farmers. Sometimes it’s a little difficult to get the right mix when you are trying to bring everybody together in a community like this.

We have 2,444 people, according to the 2000 census, but a thousand of those are college students. They don’t pay taxes, and they don’t own property, and it makes those of us who are taxpayers have to do a great deal. There are some things the city cannot do. When the city built those bike trails, we did that almost exclusively with grants and private contributions. The city could not contribute more than $6,000 to a half-million-dollar project. So there are some real difficulties.

I’m so envious of the new housing that I see in other places, because we are struggling with declining enrollment in our schools. That concerns me somewhat. When I look at the fact that we are working toward elderly housing, I begin to ask myself how many of those people will be bringing kids into our schools. We made a presentation to some members of our community about the fact that we were looking toward elderly housing. A couple of college students who were there were basically saying, “Elderly? You’re looking at elderly? We’ve been trying to get fast food and a bowling alley, and now you’re looking at an entirely different population from us?”

There is a wonderful new book called Boomer Consumer.1 It’s excellent because it talks about ten rules for marketing to the new boomer class. One of the things the authors talk about is how boomers like to refer to themselves. They don’t like elder, they don’t like senior, they don’t like mature, they don’t like gerontology or any of those others. It is in part because they are a very heterogeneous group. Some of them are grandparents, and some of them have young kids. They are a very heterogeneous group, they’ve always been in charge of everything, and they don’t like to be called elders. If we’re going to make this idea fly in Lamoni, we’re going to have to come up with another name. But the authors of Boomer Consumer couldn’t come up with another name, so I don’t know what we’re going to call it. The name has to be more inclusive than elder if it’s going to fly in Lamoni.

Lamoni does have an interesting history and background. Most of southern Iowa was populated by southern migration that came up. Lamoni was a piece of the Yankee migration that came and plunked itself right down in the middle of it with a religious bent. In Leon, the county seat, they call us the Holy City. I like to say Davey Crockett met Ichabod Crane in Decatur County. It’s difficult to bring all of these pieces together. But there is a strong community spirit in the city, and there is a lot of volunteerism that goes on. Our bike trail, all five and a half miles of it, was built almost entirely with volunteer labor.

We called it our senior men’s bonding group behind the paver with trowels in our hands. We paved five and a half miles of it that way, and the community has really bought into it in a big way. As Peter Butler talked about, there are more planned changes to build off that bike trail, and I think those ideas are going to be very attractive.

Lamoni is basically a company town based on Graceland University. There is no other comparable piece of industry. There is cattle farming and a very large sale barn, but we are dependent upon Graceland University. I’ll let Tom Morain continue from here.

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1Thornhill, Matt and John Martin. 2007. Boomer Consumer: Great Falls, VA: LINX.
Tom Morain: Probably our biggest market for senior-friendly population growth is Graceland alumni. They feel a strong community tie, and there are alumni who have expressed an interest in coming back and participating in our campus community. They might be there for part of the year and then forsake us through the glamour months of November through February. But there is a strong possibility of appealing to alumni. I've been interested in looking through that lens.

For alumni, it is a personal tie: I'm coming back because I know people who are already there, and I will make do with facilities around me because the social connection is strong enough to make we want to come. Someone else mentioned that people want to be by their grandchildren. For Lamoni, the college community and the church community is that same social network that would draw people back.

I think that's what starts the migrating process. Then the question is whether they can get enough of what they need to make life pleasant to justify the move back. But it starts with that social connection. I've tried to think of how we could make that appeal if we didn't have that social connection. Getting people to choose Lamoni out of all the other places they could retire would be a very tough sell. Bill mentioned Lamoni's very strong volunteer spirit. That grows out of that same sense of community.

I would like to toss out a couple of ideas related to our tours. In both communities we were talking about how to get people back downtown, about how to revitalize the downtown. In those communities I would ask, why? What is the significance of revitalizing the square or Main Street? I think it's because that's where community traditionally happened. We should also ask that question about Lamoni: Is community developed in the downtown, or could community be developed somewhere other than the retail sector? For Lamoni, I think the key to getting and retaining seniors would be to strengthen that community bond. We want to get people to say that the community is their family, in addition to their biological family or whatever else. Those personal connections are what is going to sell Lamoni.

I'm going to turn this over to Ruth Smith, and then we'll answer all your questions.

Ruth Smith: I would just add a few things. I think one thing Lamoni does really well, and I would be interested in knowing what other small rural Iowa towns are doing, is that we're starting to really see the value in what our older folks—elders, or seniors, whatever you want to call them—can contribute. Bill Morain talked about the group that helped with the railroad trails project. He was serious. We had some people out there, including a lot of retired folks, really putting in hard labor to get that job done.

As retirees become more visible and contribute more, they begin to gain a lot of respect. That's when you start changing minds about creating elder-friendly environments. This isn't the only project, either. They are called on to work and fund lots of projects in Lamoni. I'm not sure an elderly-friendly community could be successful without that element of involvement. The rest of the community needs to be receptive, of course. It's a two-way street.

The other thing about our area that astonishes me, and maybe it's a kind of farmer mentality, is that our older folks are proud people. They will stay in their homes for as long as they can. They hate to give up their family farms, and they hate to give up their cars. Maybe this is statewide, and maybe it is different in urban and rural areas; I don't know. When we talk about creating an elder-friendly environment, the people who we are trying to provide for have to be receptive to it. If they are so proud and independent that they are going to be digging in their heels no matter what services we provide, we will probably need to rethink the plan. Maybe the baby boomers will be different, but I have a feeling they are going to be as independent as ever. So it is important to keep them in the loop, through the planning, implementation, re-evaluation, re-assessment and re-planning. I don't see any success unless we put the ball in their hands, so to speak, and really allow them to be a critical part of the process.
Subsequent Discussion

This section is an edited transcript of the question and answer session immediately following the presentation by Bill Morain, Tom Morain and Ruth Smith.

Kyle Kostelecky: I just wanted to make the argument, although I’m probably ill-informed, that I don’t know if Main Street is the only way to develop a community. I don’t know if you were honestly asking that question, if there are ways to do that. I do admit I may be ill-informed; I don’t know this. But some experience I had up at the University of Northern Iowa, when I was on the faculty in the gerontology program up there, may be relevant. Somehow I got drafted to help create a vision for a retirement or older-adult community associated with the university for faculty and staff and alumni to come back to, much like you’re talking about with Graceland. What the university very carefully did over a number of decades was buy up all the land just south of the university as it became available.

I don’t know where they are in the process, but the idea was to build a residential area exactly adjacent to the university. That area is what brought the alumni back and kept the faculty and staff there when they retired. They loved the environment of being in the university, and that provided them culture and the other things Tom Morain mentioned. It even provided them some retail, the way some universities are developing their bookstores and all those other things these days. The campus is probably a mile and a half from downtown, which in Cedar Falls is a very dynamic Main Street, too. As part of the development of this residential area, they were going to have transportation available to get people to the retail units. There was a downtown and also a mall sector that was probably closer than downtown. So their idea was not to build up Main Street and put housing next to it. That’s a completely different environment in Cedar Falls and used maybe for different purposes. Instead they want to take the people that they are trying to attract back and put them right next to the place that they love the most.

Tom Morain: Yes, Graceland is thinking of creating housing. It would be close to campus, and it would be located based on proximity to campus, not in terms of downtown development model.

Kyle Kostelecky: It is because of those relationships. I think that’s why I’ve been asked to the table today. I don’t understand a lot of the housing stuff and the community stuff, but I do know you can’t have any of that without relationships. I try to drill that into the heads of everybody I talk to that you can have all this other stuff but if you don’t have that relationship connection you’re not going to get what you’re looking for.

Mark Engelbrecht: I couldn’t agree with you more. I think that UNI is proceeding with this project, as many universities are because universities have frequent land development and an impassioned alumni base. University relationships, as we know, are some of the strongest relationships that are made in a lifespan, aside from family of course. Second might be your relationship with your town, the place where you grew up. If they combine, that is ideal. It seems to me that in Lamoni—I’m looking at the aerials because it’s been a long time since I’ve been through there—this is a town that can be navigated regardless of where that housing might be put up. So it seems to me that the first step, which you have taken obviously, is to sit down with Graceland and say, how can we partner in this, not only in terms of where the housing might be built but in terms of services. I looked at the aerial, and these connections can still be made. The whole town, from one border to the other, is not extensive. It seems to me there would be very good ways to make this happen.
Tom Morain: We don’t see getting around in Lamoni as an issue, but questions come up sometimes in these discussions about how elder-friendly communities relate to downtown revitalization or making sure that people can get downtown. Maybe the question needs to be how we can get seniors to the necessary services regardless of where those are. In some cases, people are trying to build up a downtown that worked once but is no longer the focal point for the community. We need to think about how to get seniors to where they need to be rather than beginning with the assumption everything has to work for downtown revitalization. That question came to me in terms of Grimes and, to some extent, in terms of Polk City: If you have your population going off to the edges of town, and this isn’t a rhetorical question, what are the advantages and challenges of getting seniors to have access to the downtown square as opposed to putting your services close to where the seniors are going to live?

Gary Heuertz: I don’t think that part of it has been identified. In response to the comments from all three of you, I’m saying that the expectations of the people that live in Lamoni are pretty well known and their goals are pretty well known. In Polk City, our residents’ expectations are beyond our capabilities at this time. They expect a lot. A lot of them are moving in from other areas of the state and to get those people who have moved in recently to be a part of the community is difficult. Their backgrounds, where they came from and their education levels are quite diverse. So I’m setting saying that I’m envious of you because there are things that you have that I wish we had.

Tom Morain: I’ll trade you some community spirit for tax base.

I’ve got a question before we get to a different point. It seems to me that Iowa’s small towns, for at least 150 years after their first formation, were child-centered. Iowa was settled in family units, and we had children from the very beginning. The focus of the communities was concern about the welfare of the children in those communities. The attachment to the communities often comes through the children’s activities or the preparation that goes into making those institutions that deal with children successful. When you have communities that are aging and a larger percentage of the population no longer has children in the schools and no longer is tied to the community through children, that changes the nature of the sense of community. I’m wondering about the fact that in creating senior-friendly communities we don’t have that factor of having them tied to the community through the youth institutions. Is there a substitute for that? Is there a way to build community without the child factor?

When [Gary Heuertz was] talking about getting people together [in Polk City], he said there is an American Legion lobster thing where they do come together but that doesn’t have an institutional memory five months later. A girls basketball team that won the tournament in 1952 has a lasting impact. How do you generate a sense of community memory, a sense that we are part of the same set of stories, that we share a common identity as residents? How can you do that? Can you incorporate new seniors into the sense of, “This is my community and not just where I’m living for the moment”?

Susan Erickson: Really good question. Nothing tugs at our heartstrings like “let’s do it for the kids.” It’s all tied up in hope for tomorrow and for the future.

Linda Cronk: I think, too, you bring up a good point because we are about to embark on something we’ve never done before. For 150 years we’ve been child-centered. Now, in some cases, not all, we are going to focus on how we can become a place for the elders or the older adults and what that looks like. I don’t think we have a pattern that tells us that. We’ll be creating it.

Tom Morain: I think most towns have been retail-center-oriented. If we go into the future saying, “Success is defined by the revitalization of our retail section,” I think in some cases we are looking at a model that is long gone. If we say, “How can we provide the services?” that’s a different question than saying that we’ve got to do it through revitalization of our downtown.

Linda Cronk: How do we provide services, then? How do we provide opportunities for civic engagement?
Gary Heuertz: From the time I could walk or reason, I guess I’d say, there was always something I wanted to go for. You know, I wanted to always improve myself or go somewhere. I always had this vision that I wanted to do. I wanted to see something, whether it was a new car or higher education or what. Then you get to a certain age, and I don’t know what that age is, but you sit back and say, “Well, what else is there to look forward to? What can I continue to do?” What I’m getting at here is that I think that, whatever we do, senior citizens have to have something to look forward to within the community. We need to build something or do something. There’s something you want to see and not regret going there because I’ve reached a certain age. It’s something I want to retain. I don’t know if that makes sense to anybody.

Bill Morain: It’s entirely new because there are models, Sun City and others, that are designed exclusively for the elderly. We’ve heard so many wonderful things about Lamoni, and I agree with all of them. From my position as president of the school board the thing that frightened me most is the continued declining enrollment. That is due to a variety of factors. Lamoni has only one quarter of the footprint for our school district of the county. Lamoni being what it is, it has more expensive housing than other places in Decatur County, which is the 99th county for personal income in the state of Iowa. So people do commute to get to the college, but they live in areas where it costs less to live. As a result, the school population is dwindling—slowly, but it is still dwindling. We have 116 Amish kids who live in the county, and none of them attend the public school. You multiply that by $5,300, and you see how much is taken from the table there. And we have quite a number who home school, so we are in a bind. We know what happened in Russell, and we are a little concerned that somewhere down the line we are going to be facing reorganization. That would be with a larger school district, probably in the center of the county in Leon. Without a high school in the community, we are facing what every other community has done when it loses a high school, and that is to dwindle. People live by their schools and commute to work. So that’s the thing that scares us the most. Without a high school in the community, it will be extraordinarily difficult to recruit young families to come and take positions with the faculty at Graceland, which is our bread and butter in for the community.

So if we are looking for some elderly residents, it’s got to be tempered by that issue of still maintaining a school in the community, because it remains the center of family activity there. Without a lot of jobs and all our retail just barely hanging on in the face of the big boxes and the Internet, without the jobs and with it an hour away to get to Des Moines, it’s a really scary situation. We’ve got to make sure that the development that we do remains attractive to young families and is not so oriented towards the elderly that we end up doing ourselves in.

Mark Engelbrecht: I can only personally understand this whole idea of an elder-friendly community as a strategy for sustaining a community. It can’t be free-standing. The reason you are doing it is that it’s a way to get kids. Because you’re providing new people who require new services that require new, younger people to come in to provide them. So it doesn’t make any sense as a free-standing strategy to me. The only reason you would do it is to sustain your community, which is also one thing people rally about. They rally about their towns, and that is one of the principle vehicles for building a community. So I look at this as something that can only be understood as a strategy to keep the school in Lamoni. It’s the only way it makes sense. Otherwise, it’s all going to go away.

Bill Morain: The other major problem we have is lack of capital. We do not have that sector of the population that can make major contributions to activities. You don’t go to the local business people to ask for contributions. You’re too proud to do that because you know they can’t give.

Mark Engelbrecht: I understand that. If you are able to attract some alumni who might be interested in returning, they will probably bring some capital with them.

Bill Morain: We do have a president of the board of trustees at Graceland who does have some means, having been a principal attorney for the plaintiffs in the asbestos cases.
Peter Butler: In the economic development cases studies that we’ve looked at, where people were developing retirement communities or making their communities more attractive to folks who were retiring, the developments would happen and create jobs, the tax base would get stronger, the schools would be built up and the families would move in. So all of these things are very much interrelated. I think in this planning that we are doing this summer in the two communities, we aren’t going to solve everybody’s problems. But it will be an important and significant component of a larger plan that will be a part of other community’s strategies.
Playgrounds for the Elderly

Facilitator: Susan Erickson
Program Coordinator, Partnering Landscape and Community Enhancement (PLaCE), Iowa State University Institute for Design Research and Outreach

This section is an edited transcript of a discussion facilitated by Susan Erickson on the topic of playgrounds located in parks that are designed specifically for an elderly population.

Susan Erickson: I have a fun idea I want to take the pulse of this group about. Something I’ve seen in the literature a few places, in three places in Europe, and that’s all I’ve seen: A playground designed and oriented for an elderly population in a park. This is in a city park, so it’s a public place, and it’s a playground scaled for elders. I don’t mean a piece of exercise equipment planted in a park. This is stuff that is oriented for play but will also offer some of those physical-activity kinds of things that improve our health outcomes. Anybody think that’s a cool idea? A dumb idea? I’d love to know what people in this group think about that.

I know it includes things about balance and stability. Of course, it’s well designed so you’re not going to fall and break your hip. I saw a little report from an older person who had participated in a study where they enticed people to come out with some kind of benefit. The study asked them to come out and try this three times and see what they liked. The person reported that it felt kind of silly at first, but then when friends came and they all tried it, they really liked it. They said it was fun and their mobility and strength did improve. That’s about all I know. I’d love to look into the idea further, but I just thought this would be a great group to see if you think it’s interesting, or if you think it’s dumb.

Gary Heuertz: When I was down in Florida at one of the retirement areas I tried shuffleboard. I mean, it’s serious. You don’t mess around with shuffleboard. But also I saw a thing that might work in our area: Every home in this senior-citizen building was connected to a waterway. They all could walk down to the waterway, and most people had a boat. I thought that was pretty nice.

Susan Erickson: Well, every church basement that I know in Central Iowa that was built between 1900 and 1950 has a shuffleboard laid into the linoleum tile there.

Becky Groff: Susan, I think tomorrow we are going to talk about walkable communities for a little bit, and I think one of the premises there is that what is good for the elder, with some of these basic principles, is good for all. That if you have good connectivity and walkways to central services, it’s good for kids and families and older people. The Safe Routes to School program has that same philosophy. Maybe getting into this elder-friendly box is not a box we should go in. Because you can’t sell it, necessarily. But we can talk about what makes a community a livable community for all ages—I think that is some proprietary name—a livable community for successful aging. The principles would be good for all. The multi-use housing would be good for all. Having a complete-streets philosophy is good for all. So you create it for the greater good, but it’s adapted to the benefit of the diversity in the community and the reality of the aging in the community. It seems that, perhaps, you would be able to philosophically bridge this distinction between the young and old, and between the different strata you have in a community. I’ll talk about that a little tomorrow. It’s not rocket science. Elements of it have been talked about all day long, and probably will be talked about tomorrow a lot.

Bill Morain: I think that’s something: an all-age community. I think you could sell that.
Ruth Smith: I [agree with] what Becky's saying. They don't want to be called elders, let alone anything to do with disability or any problem set. [So if they think it's made especially for them,] you know they aren't going to go there. A special playground? No way. I would say no. But a playground for everybody in which you can play even if you have an inactive leg or wheelchair or whatever? That's cool. They'll like it.

Courtney Long: I was thinking about the WALK-AROUND playgrounds. They have one in Lamoni where you can go to different areas and do exercise equipment or something like that. They have one for balance and one for crunches. Something like that.

Susan Erickson: You know, crunches are not play for me.

Dona Wishart: Adding to what Becky said, tomorrow we're looking forward to telling you about our Michigan Communities for a Lifetime. That is another way of naming the project, but we will still be looking at the same assets for communities from other levels. That is the name that we grabbed onto in Michigan, because what is good for one generation is good for all generations. So we look forward to sharing that with you tomorrow, too.

Tom Morain: I've got an exception to that, probably, and that's coffee. We don't think of that as a child's drink. There is a book, an essay, on the differences in restaurants in Iowa, and it had a paragraph on why lattes and cappuccinos don't sell well in small-town Iowa. It's because when you get to a table and you have a coffee cup, you can stay there as long as you want. If they say, “Can I warm that up?” and you say no, that's the signal that you are going to leave the conversation. If you say, “OK, just fill it up,” that's your ticket to remain in that conversation. We now have a coffee shop that is wonderful in that it allows people to drop in and stay as long as they want; as long as they've got that coffee cup there. That's their ticket. If you have a can of pop, when your pop is done, then you're done. If you have a cappuccino, when you've finished that you really have no other excuse to stay at the table. But with coffee, “Yeah, heat it up for me” says that I can continue to stay there. So in my park there's a coffee stand someplace that allows people to just get a cup of coffee and sit down, and then they are automatically part of that conversation without having to be invited. They are a part of that group by virtue of the fact that they haven't finished the coffee cup, and that is such an Iowa distinction. But, boy, when I read that paragraph I said, “That's true.” The coffee groups can stay for two-and-a-half hours if they want to, or for just half a cup.

Dona Wishart: I think that the asset you're pointing out is connectivity, and we would totally agree with that, the importance of connectivity.

Linda Cronk: And we don't want children drinking coffee.

Gary Heuertz: I was talking with one of the Polk County Supervisors about this about four or five months ago, and he was giving us some advice. It was absolutely what you were talking about, Mark, that businesses would build up around [an elder community] and support it [see discussion starting on p. 42]. It was exactly the same concept he had. He said, “Gary, if you're going to do it, make sure it's transparent.” In other words, have the senior citizen area, but make it transparent. Don't make it look like [a place where seniors] have to go. I think from the discussion here today there may be some truth to that.

Mark Engelbrecht: The only caveat to that, again, is that there are some characteristics that are unique to seniors, characteristics that they prize and do not want to share with the larger community. So it's not so easy as to simply say, “Oh, well, they are all just like us.” Those include characteristics about shared life experiences, age, things that have happened that they all know about so they don't have to explain to the person across the table about something that happened in 1945. There are physiological issues; questions about whether they will be able to move; issues about security; nervousness that's exaggerated, on issues like weather, for instance. There are defining characteristics. They are not ominous or onerous, but this is an aging segment of the population.

They have found, just with their pocketbooks across the country, ways to inhabit environments that are specifically, and I think too specifically, designed for ameliorating these needs. That's where the comprehensive retirement community comes from. It isn't something that was foisted on anyone. It's not something that
someone put a gun to your head and said you’re going to move into this. There is this withdrawal; we know that 20 percent of the [elder] population reside in these communities, and we know that probably twice that many wish that they could. I’m not arguing with the issue of including all in the community. What I’m saying is that we do need to be sensitive and realistic relative to some of these special realities that set in over a life span.

**Ruth Smith:** You know, you talk about retirement communities and kind of the separation there. I think that what rural Iowa, including Lamoni, Polk City and others, has to offer is a lot of the reason that people seek that; we have it naturally.

**Mark Engelbrecht:** You’re on to it: security, simplicity, economies. Yes. And that’s why we are here. That’s why I think it’s interesting to look at these communities that have been designed in fences to see what is so attractive that we could actually replicate, or is already replicated, in a small community. I believe there’s a lot there. It begins with this whole question of security and knowing who your neighbor is. This is really important, and that’s something that someone in the suburbs of Columbus, Ohio, finds by living among people just like them.

**Ruth Smith:** I’d like to make one more comment about the playground question. I think there are probably a lot of more dependent individuals out there, elders and otherwise. Maybe a certain amount respect needs to be [paid] to particular circumstances. Maybe they don’t want to mix with the general population. Maybe it’s because of whatever disability they are dealing with, and we’ve all seen enough of that to know that there’s some tough stuff out there. They really need to get outside and enjoy the sun and enjoy the fun, right? But to be in the mix of the general public, I don’t know. There probably are lots of people who prefer to have their own playground in that way. Maybe there needs to be enough variety to meet the needs of a variety of people.

**Linda Cronk:** I was just going to say that, in terms of life span development, I think the study of human development and the third stage of life is relatively new. We tend to lump people together: OK, once you hit this mark, then you’re all old, and you can all just do whatever you do. I think we need to look at it as a sort of the reverse of childhood. The needs of an infant are not the same as the needs of a 15-year-old. We need to accommodate that in our communities. We need to figure out what those needs are across time. So maybe when I first get to your community, I want to be civically engaged and do this and that because I’m an early elder, or an early older adult. And then, as time passes my needs change. Maybe we need to have that same notion of community development that is progressive, or you might want to think of it as regressive, but it changes through time. I think that our thinking about, or maybe our unconscious assumptions about, aging are just becoming conscious right now. We haven’t really studied human development in the third phase of life for that long.

**Bill Morain:** Mark, I would agree with what you’re saying, but the thesis of Boomer Consumer is that the old paradigm has changed and will be changing as the boomers get to that stage. Because the boomers are a much more heterogeneous group than my generation. I guess we’re the quiet generation. Tom’s a boomer. You know, 70 is the new 50. These are people are not about to slow down. They have a very different orientation with the notion that 65 is a joke. “I’m not 65; I’m really 45. I’m feeling good, I’m doing all these things, and I’m on my bike every day.” It’s going to be very, very different. I think [we should not] establish a notion that we should create communities that are appropriate for what used to be called elderly and leave out the changes that are going to be there when boomers get there, and are trying to do things very differently. I’m not saying we are doing that, but I think we need to account for that enormous change. All the research on boomers shows that they are a very different group from what came before.

**Mark Engelbrecht:** Absolutely, and, of course, the group we are incorporating into retirement communities now used to be living with their families and never got into a retirement community; that’s changed. Even though 70 is the [new] 50, there’s going to be a 90, and there is probably going to be a 120. We are on the same page here. I’m just saying there are these changes that are going to be inevitable regardless of where you start.

**Kyle Kostelecky:** You asked earlier, Tom, and I think it was answered eloquently, about what the older adults are looking for and what makes them different and why would they want to have an older playground or a coffee shop and not let anybody else in there. What we are hearing is that those things that make them
unique and different and the desires that they have are psychological, relational, connection kinds of things. “I experienced World War II”; “I experienced the Korean conflict”; male and female both experienced that; “I experienced having the county home economist come into my home and tell me how to use my toaster that I just got as a wedding gift.” Nobody else has experienced that before.

Finding ways to engage older adults in communities and to have them come back to communities, I think, is more simple than trying to figure out the other things that boomers are going to want when it comes to retail and leisure-time activity and volunteer opportunities and those kinds of things. We need to understand that there is this cohort of culture out there that has been told by their parents, “Come join me in Arizona because you know that I’m going to be still alive at 98; you can come move into Sun City with me. We’ll live across the street from each other and we’ll be buddies again, and then you can take care of me when I die.”

We know that those exclusive older-adult communities don’t work from a psychological perspective. Many of you know this, but what’s the cohort with the largest suicide rate in the country? Not only who they are but where do they live? It’s men who live in Sun City. It’s the largest suicide-rate area in the country. There’s a reason behind that. That exclusive closed-door attitude—I’m going to be with everybody my own age only and I’ll be technologically proficient; I’ll take my grandkids on a video monitor because that’s as much as I can handle—that doesn’t work. It absolutely doesn’t work. So we’ve got to figure out ways to do this.

I think about my in-laws who moved from a four-level house in suburban Denver to Fountain of the Sun in Mesa, Arizona. When they were grandparents they had this four-level house in Westminster, Colorado, and they were active, and everyone else in the neighborhood had cozy coops and all sorts of other things. They moved to Fountain of the Sun, and all of a sudden they’re going to the doctor more than they are doing anything. And they were in their 50s. They met the eligibility criteria to move in, so on my father-in-law’s birthday they packed up the rider and they moved in to Fountain of the Sun. They aged 50 years overnight. Now they don’t live there anymore. They moved away. Now they have a home in Grand Junction, Colorado. Because it just aged them. They thought they would love it, but it didn’t work out for them. They didn’t find the psychological connection, because there were other things going on. The people that lived in Fountain of the Sun were 20 years older than them physically and psychologically. It didn’t quite work, and they had nobody else to draw from. A boomer might be living in a four-level ranch or a condo or an apartment or a ranch that’s universal design. Boomers are living in all those different houses today, and they are going to be living in all those different houses 20 years from now. We need to be aware that that’s where we need to be going.

Kent Zimmerman: So are we really talking about creating boomer communities and not elder-friendly communities?

Kyle Kostelecky: Well, first of all, we don’t want to call them boomer communities because pretty soon the boomers are going to [resent being called boomers]. And I’m a boomer. We need to create sustainable lifelong communities that have all that stuff but have sections so that there is a playground where a bunch of three-year-olds can go scream their heads off and that’s OK. Then a bunch of older adults can get on the great big swing, you know a bench swing where eight of them can just sit there and talk about what it was like in the farm crisis in the 1980s or whatever. The communities have to be sustainable and lifelong but have pockets for specific places for people to meet and congregate and talk about what work was like today, what the grandkids were like today and what preschool was like today.

Ruth Smith: I love that. I’m with you on that: the intergenerational kinds of activities, where you are doing a balanced mix of time with your peers and with others. I think Lamoni is coming around to that, and I think that we are talking about the health of our elders there. We’ve got after-school programs that are looking at how to connect with Crown Colony, the retired folks. How do we bring that together? There are churches in town that do intergenerational worship services where the intent is to bring them all in. For a certain part of the year, and it tends to be the summer session, you bring all ages together and get a real good, healthy mix. That might leave out the nursery folks; there might still be a nursery class. I guess the point is that it’s not just good for the elders. It’s good for the mentorship of the young people too. For the grants that I’m referring to, of course they
understand that it’s good for the elderly, but they are thinking about youth development. They’re thinking about how to create healthy youth who are well-connected with elders.

*Kyle Kostelecky:* So you have three stands in the park. You’ve got the coffee shop with the never-ending coffee cup, you’ve got the Slurpee stand on the other end, and then you’ve got an ice cream parlor in the middle because everybody likes ice cream.

*Peter Butler:* Don’t forget the beer tent.

*Kyle Kostelecky:* Oh, yeah, for the 30-somethings.

*John Calhoun:* No, beer gardens. Elders want beer gardens.

*Peter Butler:* I’d like to say that during the focus group meetings we went through sort of a feeling of deep regret. We were kicked in the teeth for using the word elder-friendly. But I think that the conversation that it starts is a good one. Nobody likes that word, and we are obviously going to have to go fishing for another term here. “Communities for a lifetime” is excellent, but that’s been taken. Nobody likes the elder-friendly community term, but the discussion that comes from that controversial word is a good one. In Native American culture an elder is 16 years old, and maybe we could sort of spin it that way, but we won’t.

I think we should wrap the discussion up for the day. I think it was a really good start to the roundtable. I think that a lot of the issues that we’ve been thinking about in the terms of community design and Town/Craft have been truly informed by everyone’s personal experience and personal expertise. I really appreciate everyone’s honest and personal participation. It’s been really fascinating. Thank you so much.
Keynote Speakers

*Partners for Livable Communities*
Robert H. McNulty

*Healthy and Active Living Communities*
Chanam Lee

*A Grassroots Effort...to Become a Michigan Community of a Lifetime*
Linda Cronk and Dona Wishart

*Livable Communities: Creating Environments for Successful Aging*
Becky Groff

This summary is transcribed from taped recordings of presentations; therefore, errors, omissions and mis-statements may have occurred.
Partners for Livable Communities
Robert H. McNulty | Partners for Livable Communities

Let me just provide an overview of Partners for Livable Communities, our relationship to this issue of aging, our relationship to community planning, and importantly, to economic development. Partners was founded in 1977 out of the National Endowment for the Arts, a very strange birthmother. Nancy Hanks, a unique woman, was a long-term associate of three of the Rockefeller Brothers and I was the assistant director of the architecture and design program, giving grants to communities and schools to use the design as a community asset. Nancy thought that after seven years of giving out grants that we should form a collective of the best talent in America that would help communities use designing and planning and landscape to create more livable communities.

In 1977 some 32 national organizations, including the American Society of Landscape Architects, AIA [American Institute of Architects], Norton Planning Association, and American Society of Planning Officials, came up with the name Partners for Livable Places, and we became a colleague of the endowment. We tried to let communities know about the talent available that could help create a pleasant community through landscape planning and design that related to goals that most often transcend pleasantness: jobs, equity of opportunity, sustainability, regional cooperation and leadership. We’re the group that took the tools that you frequently use to teach and put them to work as a frontline resource dealing with the problems that communities face.

About every decade a community faces a new challenge. In the 1970s, Chattanooga, Tennessee, was the most polluted city in America in terms of water. Twenty years later it was a model of sustainable development for the United Nations. So no matter what your problem is, given one decade you can turn it around. No matter how bad you are, you can turn it to success. Or no matter how good you are, you can fail in the next 20 years if you are not on top of issues.

We were the group hired to train the new leadership agenda. So Partners is a civic group. We changed our name in 1993 from Places to Communities because we were approached by a very colorful politician in Tennessee, a white populist who was elected by the black vote of Memphis, Elvis Presley’s best friend, who said, “Bob, you need to deal with the other half of livability for people where the glass is half empty, and in Memphis we are the perfect laboratory. We have the highest adult illiteracy rate in America, we’re the second poorest urban area, and Dr. King was assassinated in our community.”

So therefore you could call Memphis, and these are his words, “dumb, mean, and poor.” And what can you do for dumb, mean, and poor people in a livable community? So we decided at a retreat in Memphis during an international barbeque cook-off, which was a good reason to get everyone on our board to come to Memphis, that we would redefine livability around “people plus place equals community.” We would look at the people who felt they had been left out of opportunity: by discrimination, lack of educational opportunity, chronic poverty, poor health or other issues.

Today we are funded principally by the banking industry, although they are in a bit of a recession right now. We’re funded by the Ford Foundation; we have a major contract with the Ford Foundation on Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), its former rural poverty program. We use amenities to design landscape quality of life as assets to build up communities and individuals. We also have a joint venture with Northwestern University’s ABCD Institute. Some of you may know John McKnight and John Kretzmann [ABCD co-directors]. Their
philosophy of asset development has basically changed the way that the World Bank, United Way and community foundations help communities move forward.

What are we involved with in aging? In 1994 we had a retreat funded by the Lilly Endowment that asked the question: What are the issues that would severely affect the livability of America? Our colleague Lane Marshall, who was the long-term dean of the School of Landscape Architecture at Texas A&M, wrote a book in 1983, for which he asked me to write the forward, about demographic economic shifts in American society that influenced the professional landscape. I urge all of you to find that book because I just reread it about two weeks ago and he predicted the aging demographic shift that would test landscape architecture professionals as to whether they were up to the challenge of reinventing their relationship to their [clientele]. Not a single word on design, but a 150 pages of demographic changes that the American community should anticipate and how design professionals should readjust to their constituency. It's called Action By Design.1

So, in 1994 we had a retreat sponsored by the Lilly Endowment at the IUPUI [Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis] campus in downtown Indianapolis. We were advised that the greatest challenge to livability in America would be the aging of our population, and that Partners, as a group that had never done anything on aging, but that had a broad livability group of mayors and governors and county execs on our board, should take up the cudgel saying, “America, it's time that you retrofit and rethink your definition of livable community to support the continued desire to live independently as long as possible in homes, neighborhoods and communities.” So we immediately announced that and thought that we were very brave, and no one paid any attention.

The health care and aging community said, “Who are you? You’ve never done anything. You’re not qualified to participate in this arena.” The architects and designers said, “This is not an issue because it’s not yet on our radar screen for profit.” Not a single local government official said, “This is not one of the top five issues confronting my electorate, and I get re-elected every two to four years; therefore I’m not going to get out in front on an issue that has no constituency.”

So about every three years we put out a proclamation that livability was being challenged by a demographic shift. That it would take 20 years to readjust your community. That it is a long march but let us start with a simple journey. And almost every three to four years no one paid [any attention]. We finally got a break through a health care conversion foundation in Howard County, Maryland. We entered a joint venture with a national association of area agencies on aging and did a preparatory conference [on the question of whether or not] there is a blueprint for aging in place for the American community. We had the Secretary of State of Florida, Linda Hood, serve as our keynote speaker and she was immediately attacked by someone in the audience who claimed that Florida's health care budget for mental illness was inadequate and she was unqualified to speak, which shows the divisiveness of our political agenda.

We persevered and we came to a relationship with AARP, which is truly the giant resource that is changing this field. We came to the attention of our long-term colleague, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, which suggested that we do some ground work. We advertised for 10 communities that wanted to re-invent themselves around livability by defining “aging in place” as a key element of a livable community, rather than a set-aside for people with disabilities or for minority concerns. We recruited 10 communities, worked for four years with them, and tried to take this into the broader arena, so that the publisher of the newspaper, the chairman of the bank, the head of the community foundation, and the United Way saw this as a community issue and not a health care issue.

Then we came to the attention of the MetLife Foundation, which asked us to be its national partner and gave us more grants. [In that role] we traveled across America doing workshops every two months, alerting the American community that the older citizen is a valuable asset to the future of our communities. We told people that it is time we addressed removing any barrier so that older citizens could fully participate, as long as they choose, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the community.

So that’s why we, as a non-health care group, a livability group, after a torturous journey, are now standing on top of your issue.

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There are five key elements that have brought elder issues to the forefront of the discussion about livable communities.

1. **AARP**
   One, obviously, is AARP. Mr. [Bill] Novelli [AARP chief executive officer] will be leaving perhaps in a year or two. AARP will be a multi-billion dollar enterprise with the largest membership in America. It is truly a benevolent resource that is doing its best to inform, through its livable community agenda for the state coordinators, that there's opportunity—not difficulty—but opportunity ahead to retrofit and rethink that ability to eliminate barriers.

2. **Removal of barriers from housing**
   The second element is that the disabilities movement is finally beginning to realize that they can establish a joint venture with the aging-in-place lobby to create a united front that removes barriers for housing and sociability and visibility and opportunity. I think technology will be creating smart buildings that will allow you to monitor your mother's health [from] 2,000 miles away to make sure she takes that pill and gets out of bed; you will know that she turns the stove or the heat off. There will be a whole new wave of technology in buildings that will support not only people with disabilities, but our older relatives who need to be monitored regularly.

3. **Global demographic shift**
   Of course the demographic shift of the world is a factor. America is not alone in the aging of population. Japan probably has the highest average age and they are now beginning to discuss opening up their immigration patterns or rely on robotics for health care. And that is a topical debate. It's probably going to go to robotics. In China, a German firm is building 60,000 units of elder housing in downtown Shanghai. The Chinese are now aware that with their one-child policy, there is not a family to go to. A whole configuration of elder housing is going to be needed for the new middle class in China. And obviously every European community is faced with the dilemma of immigration, citizenship and an older population. Italy and Spain, particularly, are below sustainable reproduction rates that will even keep their populations at current levels. So we are in a global agenda of aging.

   [This demographic shift] will affect urban planning, health care delivery, almost every aspect of life. You know that it's becoming a popular issue when Tim Russert goes on TV and talks about what it takes to keep Big Russ active in the community in Buffalo, and when Anne Curry documents the loss of her father and what it took to keep him active in Portland, Oregon.

4. **Profit incentive of marketing to older Americans**
   The *Wall Street Journal* has discovered profit. The boomer generation is now being defined as the healthiest, wealthiest, wisest, longest-lived people on the face of the earth. True? Who knows, but the *Wall Street Journal* is selling supplements every quarter; it's doing special retirement issues. It is advising us on how to spend our wealth and suddenly there are products. Where once the social service side of aging was seen as the least important portfolio, now suddenly it is becoming the greatest profit incentive imaginable for creating goods and services.

   There is still a divide south of Orlando. There are 35 new gated communities where no one under 19 is allowed to spend more than one month a year and everyone is in golf carts, versus the husband and wife in their mid-70s who are principal economic development consultants around the country. The *Wall Street Journal* just did a profile on this couple, who sold their house in the East Bay, moved into the South Market area, live in a condo, and say it's fantastic. They claim, since they are consultants for housing developers, that the housing developer does not know the market for housing for older, upper-income and middle-income people in America. They are still building single-family homes or gated communities when they should be building urban clusters in urban settings.

   So there is a great divide between the wisdom of the housing developer, who really uses models from the past without taking any risk, and our need collectively to help create new visions of housing in clusters within existing centers, which allow for sustainability, green development, mobility without automobiles, and pedestrian access to culture, business, health, commerce and a variety of other things. Transit development has been looked at by some, but that takes a fairly dense infrastructure to develop.

5. **The vulnerable elderly person**
   The last the one, which most people forget, is the truly vulnerable elderly person. The poster child for that, who is coming of age, is the Vietnam veteran with mental health, alcohol and drub problems. That's going to be the homeless person on the street who is
going to be the elderly poster child for the abused and the neglected, and the person whom no one is dealing with.

These, for me, are the five movements that are making this a key element of civic life—no longer just aging life, no longer health care life, but civic life. There are some interesting opportunities. Most of you have probably heard of Richard Florida and the “creative economy.” Michigan Governor Jennifer Granthome has embraced it under her Cool Cities Program. There are hot cities and there are cool cities. But the whole idea is how we attract the young, the restless, the talented the people to move to a community and be part of this hubbub of creativity and e-commerce. Richard totally left out people over 50 with creativity; he never mentioned anyone other than the 18–34 set.

A headline in The New York Times from Saturday, May 31, 2008, reads: “Job Surplus Grows in Iowa, Workers Are in Short Supply.” OK, what are we doing about the creative economy? What are we doing to attract talented, older people to move to Iowa? What are we doing in terms of all the chambers of commerce and business development and manufacturing associations that paid Richard Flora $50,000 to talk about the young and restless, when we should be talking about the old, mature and reliable as a value system? Are you looking at how you can eliminate barriers to drawing a full pension after retiring from one job, while continuing to work? Maybe have flex time or job sharing to continue working? If the new 70 is 50, then there should be the opportunity to work for another 25 years, instead of mandatory retirement at age 65.

One of the top magazines in America read by government leaders is called Governing Magazine, which is owned by the St. Petersburg Times, which also publishes the National Journal. Peter Harkness, editor and publisher of Governing Magazine, is vice chairman of my board, and he’s being forced to retire next month because they have a mandatory retirement age of 65. Isn’t that insane? Why do we have mandatory retirement ages in a time when there are shortages of talent both in the government and in the private sector? The National Association of Manufacturers is now attempting to get its membership to come up with flex and job-sharing plans so that they don’t lose the talent, particularly in this critical shortage of skilled labor.

So there is a whole host—the medical community, wellness, health, health care—anything that we can do that promotes wellness. Just last week, the American College of Sports Medicine released a study of the major areas in America where there are indices for wellness and fitness. It’s funded by WellPoint/Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation as a preventive way of saving their resources.

There is a huge movement that would relate to walkability, complete streets, diet and the anti-obesity agenda that fits into the partnership in terms of aging. Some health care facilities are going through asset-based community development. They are going through redesign with a group called Project for Public Spaces (PPS) founded by Fred Kent, who worked as one of William H. Whyte’s research assistants on the Street Life Project, a very influential study done in the ’60s. These facilities want to become wellness centers rather than illness centers. They want to have public markets that promote quality foods. They want to have arts councils in them. Tuskaloosa, Alabama, has a cancer facility [DCH Cancer Treatment Center] that has its own arts council with performing arts programs inside the cancer facility.

It’s time for re-imagining different institutions. The Atlantic Philanthropies is a major funder. The profits from all the Duty Free Shops in the world go to one individual, and he set up a major fund, which he is liquidating the corpus of in 10 years. He just gave $4 million to a group call Libraries for the Future to reposition every library as a hospitality center for the older citizen to meet younger people and have technology transfer, so that I can learn how to take cell phone pictures of my grandkids. Is a library for growing people or shelving books? There are five library systems now that are building affordable elder housing adjacent to or on top of the library, so that the library can become a social center. Think of every institution in your community—be it a museum, a YMCA, a library, a community college or a university—that could re-imagine itself as the most hospitable place in town, accommodating the needs of older individuals and fostering their sense of socialization, stimulation, health and wellness, and business leadership. Just think of the challenges of getting those institutions to re-imagine themselves as hospitality centers of excellence that relate to the older citizen. Is it still seen as a valued asset in the social, political and economic life of that community?


Let me focus a bit more on the economic issue. I was in Mississippi in 1964. I’m from Berkeley, California, so you can imagine what my image of Mississippi is. You can imagine it was my first visit and I was scared to death. But Governor Haley Barber said Mississippi’s future is to attract retirees to the new automobile jobs. He said that two retirees are equal to one high-rate auto manufacturing job. He identified three elements of Mississippi’s future: town centers that are historic, attractive and have a rich arts council that animates them and creates vitality and activity; attractive design and entryways so that people know they are coming into an interesting community; and a lake in every county with a boat ramp so people can go fishing. Now I don’t know if you need the lakes, but imagine this is Mississippi, with all its difficulties, with all its poor health standards, all its low-wage jobs, and the governor just got re-elected saying two retirees are equal to one auto job in a major manufacturing facility. And what we need to hold those retirees, to attract them from other states, is attractive town centers, rich arts and culture, gateways and recreation.

Utah currently has the lowest age demographics of any state. They thought they were recession-proof, but because of the recent downturn and the fact that so few retirees have gone there—unlike Wyoming, Idaho and Nevada—their economy is suffering. So the governor formed a new cabinet to attract retirees to Utah. Retirees are a steady income. They bring resources that don’t vary as much through an economic downturn. Therefore, you need retirees to balance your economy so that you are diversified, just like the governor of Mississippi said.

As I mentioned, the National Association of Manufacturers created a task force to explain that the mature worker is a valuable worker, and we need to redefine work, work standards and work hours. We need to restructure so there is no penalty against drawing your pension and still working full time. Maybe Iowa could be a leader in taking a look at work. How do you remove barriers to continue to have talented people work as long as they choose?

Wake Forest Business School did a study in which they found that America’s population 20 year from now will be exactly the same in terms of age as Lakeland, Florida. What change to the retail mix change will facilitate adjusting to an older population? They found out that if a community could understand and support that retail mix change, then it would not experience the boom and bust cycles in the downtown with an older population. You would be able to anticipate what sorts of goods and services would be in demand as the population ages.

Perhaps business schools or Extension programs could look at the demographics of a community to determine just what changes to the retail mix would allow you to perhaps anticipate some stimuli or some incentives needed to keep abreast of those issues as your population ages.

The metro region today is seen as the competitive brand around the world. It’s no longer the state; it’s no longer the nation. It’s the Stuttgart area of Germany competing or complementing the greater Indianapolis area in terms of automobile manufacturing and technology. The chairman of my board [Richard C.D. Fleming] is the [president and chief executive officer] of the St. Louis Regional Chamber and Growth Association (RCGA), which covers counties in Illinois and Missouri. He said that the overall brand of the region is the focus of the marketing agenda, which is to attract not only talent but capital, by convincing graduates from the higher education systems to stay in the area after graduation and raise a family and prosper there.

I’m convinced that the overall brand of a region in a changing world will be: Can we remove barriers to a livable community that impede anyone from feeling that they have been aged out of or aged into full participation in the life of that community? So talent for design, talent for planning, and talent for economic development will begin to create a definition of the St. Louis area. That’s what my board chairman wants: the best community in America to live your full span of lifetime activities. This community can support the young person being nurtured, the educational goals of a person from primary to graduate school, the working family, the mature family, and the end of life. And that brand will be a marketing strategy that will bring capital and talent from around the world.

[Gene Deprez], the head of business development for IBM [Global Location Strategies] is on the Partners board. He has just taken a position in Sheffield, England, to manage the creation of a new London in northwest England. It would be anchored in Sheffield, where they want to create three million new jobs that will take the pressure off the southeast. What’s he looking at? He’s looking at arts and culture, design, heritage, and accommodating youth and older people in a way that becomes a marketing message that something unique is happening in the Sheffield area.
Last year Mankato, Minnesota, was working with Minnesota State to develop a vision of the future. They had the Mayo Clinic, which is a health care provider, and the university sit in to discuss the possibility of becoming the most attractive community in this part of America, including Iowa and Minnesota, with an offer of life learning and wellness and re-inventing institutions such as libraries, the YMCA, and museums as great places. That’s the definition of their 20/20 vision. [The community formed] a joint venture with the university, with the health care community, and with their institutions to make [Mankato] the hub of intellectual ferment, talent, pleasantness and good design that would welcome you to move there. So I’m here to market Mankato and urge that you all leave this town and move there for your retirement years.

Every town that has a college. Whether it’s a community college like in Larami, Wyoming; whether it’s a small town with an extraordinary school like Grinnell [College, Grinnell, Iowa] or Coe [College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa]; or whether it’s a university, you have the best anchor for the community that can put aging to work in an economic development strategy. If The Wall Street Journal is right [about the baby boomers], I’m 68 so I’m part of that generation that is healthier, wealthier, and wiser than any group in the history of the world. I’m still working. I’m traveling. I’m a consumer. I’m still learning. I want to be connected to talented young people, education, stimulation, diversity, interesting groups and that can all be found, more than anywhere else in America, in college towns.

I don’t care whether it’s a community college, a small private liberal arts school or a great university, a college is the natural magnet that forms a joint venture with the municipality to do a strategic plan that opens enrollment, provides athletic tickets, builds housing options, and encourages diversity. To me, that’s going to be the future of retirement opportunities for any community that has a community college. I use the term community college because I worked in Cheyenne with Senator Sampson, who said, “Bob, the community college is our education institution. It’s the one common thing we have. It is our anchor.” So a community college, as well as a four-year college, can become that institution.

I am going to close with this: Right now, Iowa is in the midst of the immigration problem, along with [the rest of] America. The immigration problem, if we solve it, is our greatest asset. If we could solve the immigration issue, any community that offers hospitality, any community that offers learning opportunities—through its library, its community college, its museums, its YMCA—to help immigrants to speak English, to understand how to do a business plan, and to help them gain assets to go into business, is going to be a growth community.

The Brookings Institute did a projection of population growth in America over the next 30 years and showed that most of the growth will be going to the high-growth areas of which Iowa is not one. However, it said that any community that went out of its way to receive newcomers and help them into the economy and the culture just might have that stake of their future, because 60 percent of all new small businesses in America in the next 30 years will be formed by people who weren’t born in this country. Three of the Fortune 50 firms in America were formed by immigrants. It’s projected that six of the next Fortune 50 firms in the future will be formed by people who came to this country as immigrants. If you help them and support them, perhaps they will power your economy. So if immigration is a question now, think of it as America’s longest-term asset. Communities that use their cultural resources, their arts councils, their libraries, their chambers of commerce, and their colleges to ameliorate some of the challenges and the “us-versus-them” feelings, are going to be creating an infrastructure of value.
Subsequent Discussion

*This section is an edited transcript of the question and answer session immediately following the presentation by Robert McNulty.*

Rand Fisher: Bob, given what you said about college towns, are there some examples across the country where you think they’ve gotten it right or are on the cusp of that?

Robert McNulty: Let me use a few. Clemson University of South Carolina. Clemson University has a university partnership with a health care provider with a full spectrum of independent living, dependent living, nursing home, and hospice on campus with buses to athletic games, tickets to the best football and basketball games, access to the library, and open enrollment for all the courses. The goal is to have these individuals so enamored of Clemson that when they pass away, Clemson replaces their existing alma mater as the source of their donation for the endowment fund, which is a very valid thing.

Boden College in Maine has built retirement housing on the edge of its campus with the same structure. So think of what your options are. San Jose, California, decided to build its new public library on the campus of San Jose State University to symbolically take down the walls between the university and downtown and to make their citizens see the campus as part of their life, not just where young people go. Anything you can do that diffuses the gap between “us” and “them” and changes “us” into “we” is going to be a tremendous asset.

Ohio State University has a nonprofit that provides business subsidies to keep traditional businesses alive, so they don’t go under because of student pressure for fast foods or liquor stores or other things. Michigan State at one point tried to move its museum off campus into the downtown so that it could create a destination in the downtown. Unfortunately, that was overruled by the chancellor—I think foolishly.

In Waterloo, Ontario, the University of Waterloo goes to communities and says “We have faculty that we are willing to move into your downtown as a major tenant, for veterinary medicine, law and optometry. Then they ask, “Could we put together a joint venture and see if we can get economic development [support] from our central government or our provincial government to help us take over two blocks of your downtown as our veterinary medical school?” Very few American universities have shown the creativity of decentralizing part of their campus and moving it into a historic town center of a region to add vitality and life to the educational process, which leads to housing, which leads to small business, which leads to jobs, which leads to a story in *The New York Times* saying this is a great place to visit, which leads to someone deciding that maybe they can retire there.

In Battle Creek, Michigan, we worked with Calhoun County to come up with a way in which the vacant buildings and the economic development in downtown Battle Creek could, in fact, with investment in accessible elevators that were amortized over a ten-year period, become elder housing that would re-anchor the population in downtown Battle Creek. Northwest Michigan College University Center in Traverse City, Michigan, is wired in so that you can attend every university in Michigan from one location in Traverse City.

I work in Marquette, Michigan. Marquette is this wonderful community that has more snow per capita than any city in America in terms of inches. It used to say that its cold climate was its negative, but we pointed out
that Finland had as cold a climate, but they are the cell phone innovators of the world, and therefore coldness had nothing to do with talent. Marquette is now using all of its resources and says that it is the greatest place to grow a business and a family, and that Northern Michigan University is a superb school that won the NAA State Hockey Championship some years ago. So it's up to your creativity. What could you put together?

*Bill Morain:* One of the other areas that people talk about to make livable communities is the need for a vibrant gay community. We also know that a less tolerant group in the population toward the gay community is the elderly. Do you see a conflict here in communities that are trying to be all inclusive with respect to the cluster housing and so forth?

*Robert McNulty:* I'm working with a gay and lesbian housing developer in Santa Fe and in Florida, and she is developing inclusive communities for the gay community without barriers to the non-gay community in certain settings. So she has come up with a structure, and the first community opened in Santa Fe. I would say that the days of that being a difficulty are fading fast, the more we see the creative economy. Richard Florida's creative economy concept, which has gained the adherence of most of the business leaders in the world, says that the key component in the creative economy is the gay index, the acceptability of diversity rather than a factor of prejudice with in the community. The creative economy preached by Richard Florida has a key component of tolerance to gay values as a lifestyle that's important to the future competitiveness of communities around the world.

*Bob Bourne:* The thing I heard here earlier is about the middle-class retiree [whom] you're trying to attract. I was wondering if you've done any work with the service workers, and blue-collar employees who are paid below-average wages. They don't have a lot of resources. Do you see them staying where they are or moving, or communities catering to them, or what?

*Robert McNulty:* I mentioned the poster child for the truly vulnerable elderly was the aging Vietnam vet. On *The Wall Street Journal,* side the truly rich and product-driven elderly are the boomers. The people in the middle are left out in terms of those two extremes. Generally, housing price is the major factor. Let's say I come from Westchester County, New York, and I want to leave my acre and a half. Westchester County has the highest property taxes in the state of New York and the highest land values, particularly close to the Long Island Railroad or New Haven Railroad stops. Where am I going to want to move to? I'm probably going to want to move to a quality-of-life community that has lower land costs than I am used to, so that I can afford a type of a lifestyle. There are a number of areas, such as Mississippi. Mississippi is not exactly a high land cost location. That's why Governor Barber says we need town centers, we need recreation, we need rich arts and cultural lives to attract you to move from higher land cost areas with your retirement. Let's hope the housing market recovers in five years; then people could move to Mississippi with a lot lower investment.

*Bob Bourne:* There are people living in-home in Iowa and Mississippi. Do you see them moving in retirement?

*Robert McNulty:* Well, they might move to places with a lower land cost. For the first time ever, out-migration of elders to the Sunbelt areas has stopped. People are moving away from high land cost areas to low land cost but they are going to states adjacent to Westchester County; they are moving to Vermont or New Hampshire. They are not going to Florida. How you retain those individuals—with what support or subsidies or values—is really your own decision in each community. There is a new concept called worker housing. Once the worker stops working, what incentive do you have to support [his or her] ability to stay in your community? That's your individual goal to decide.

I work in Australia a fair amount, in Queensland. We're taking those sugar towns that are no longer sustainable because the sugar harvesting technology has moved to the third world, we are taking the old clinic that served the sugar workers, and we're doing Extension programs through the University of Queensland. We are attracting retirees from more expensive communities in Melbourne and Sydney to move into these sugar towns, because there is good health care, there's life learning, the climate's good, and the land is about one-fifth the cost of where they are coming from in terms of housing.
The question is: What are you willing to do to help those individuals of modest means continue to be a vital part of your community?

Peter Butler: From working with the two communities [Lamoni and Polk City] for the past few weeks, the question that arises is moving from the single-family residential to the nursing home. There’s nothing intermediate there for a person of potentially lower means. So is that community initiative to develop housing that’s not public housing or low-income housing as we have it today, but is another option where people could live independently before moving into that next step of the nursing home? In Polk City yesterday, we heard about the condominiums, which would be great intermediate-type housing in Polk City but they’re way too expensive for a middle-class person to afford, so there aren’t those options now.

Robert McNulty: Let me give you one twist on this that is innovative. Pasadena, California, built elder-friendly subsidized housing, but the criteria to get in were you had to be an artist over 65 and they had to review your portfolio. Now artists are normally, unless they are famous, living in fairly modest means. Most of them have never been able to buy their own facility. Therefore, wouldn’t it be a unique way of getting national attention, if you say that downtown next to the library—with the library re-imagined as the intergenerational gathering place in our community—we are going to have elder artist housing with work space adjacent to it. Now that’s the sort of synergy that design and planning talent creates: a product that creates a buzz, which creates visibility, which creates people saying, “I have to go see this place.”

Rand Fisher: Your comments this morning left me in a little bit of a quandary as to this notion of a cradle-to-grave region, if you will, and aging in place versus this notion that we are a country on the move. People are told they are going to move seven times, they are going to have nine jobs in four different career arenas or occupations. You often see that we are a nation on the move. So how do we square that?

Robert McNulty: I think we are moving less.

Rand Fisher: So you think there’s a sea change coming?

Robert McNulty: There’s a metaphor that I heard [up in] Traverse City, where a woman said, “I want to walk across the street to see my grandchildren. Not spend carbon miles flying in an airplane over 3,000 miles.” If energy, family and intergenerational relationships can be restored, it would predicate that we hope to move less. Pennsylvania has a great educational factory, but it has the fewest students who go to school and then come back to work there. Almost every state that has that problem asks: How do we get people to stay in the communities where they went to school so we can create jobs and opportunity?

Pittsburgh Medical Center just recently [started a program in which it puts up a $100 million in support for any graduate of the public school system in Pittsburgh who goes to college and comes back to take a job in Pittsburgh.] That program was begun in Kalamazoo. Communities are doing whatever they can to say, “If you like it here, there’s no reason you shouldn’t be able to afford a home here or not be able to get a job here. Why don’t we welcome you back in some way so that you can stay here if you want and you have the opportunity to be a long-term citizen rather than a frequent flyer?”

Becky Groff: One of the other things, and I don’t know if it’s an opportunity to scale, but I think it’s a consideration, is that because of housing here and because of the relative low cost of long-term care, when people who live on a coast are looking at a parent being here, they talk about moving them. It’s not feasible to move a parent there; they can’t get the care. People come back here to provide care to aging family members who are people of some means with some mobility and some intellectual capital to be able to invest in a community. I think of one of our new volunteers in Rock Rapids, Iowa, who has a PhD and came at first to care for her mom and then her dad had a stroke. She said, “I love it here and I forgot how wonderful the state is, but what am I going to do with a PhD in Rock Rapids, Iowa?” I don’t know how many of those [there are]. I know there’s a bunch of them down in Lamoni.
It's another way to think about an asset, how our aging is an asset. We're inviting people to come back and go to work in Iowa. There's going to be a big thing at the Kennedy Center next week to bring what you call the young, vital and edgy back. How can we bring reliable people of economic means back in terms of meeting some of that kind of need? Maybe it's too much of a major movement, but it is a consideration in terms of marketing and appeal to coming back to Iowa.

Robert McNulty: I think you said it better than I did: that older individuals are assets if you [incorporate them] in[to] every aspect of our life. Whether it's [in terms of] social service, health care, economic development or transportation planning, [we] need to do a strategic plan say how can we imagine using this talent as an asset. The easiest example I use is the arts council. Almost every community has an arts council. The state of Iowa has an arts council. None of them in America have a strategic plan on how they can reach the fastest growing audience, which is the older person. What services do they have to adjust to reach the older person, so that the talent of the artist, the socialization of the arts event, and the mental stimulation relate to the quality of life of that audience, which is the fastest growing segment of their entire population? Not a single one has done a strategic plan—you see, this is a value. They bemoan the loss of the younger audience and not congratulate the gain of the older audience. The stupidity of that is amazing.

Tim Borich: When you talked about less movement, I think the classic idyllic lifestyle viewed by many seniors is Arizona, Florida, more isolated, with a separation of the generations. You would be living in a community of people like you, your age and background. And now in Traverse City and in some of the other communities you mentioned, do you see this as a movement [to] what I call intergenerational retirement, being more of a broader community as opposed to being isolated within your age group?

Robert McNulty: There still is a segment of the market that will find the gated community, no people under 19 allowed to spend more than 30 days a year there, golf cart-led, segregated lifestyle valuable. I’m saying that’s a declining percent of the population and that that market will shrink and shrink. There is a great need for housing choices and settlement options for the percent of the population that is over 50 and does not want that as part of their life.

Peter Butler: You mentioned the lack of developers’ vision, still thinking about that single-family home or apartment buildings. Have you seen any movement with that?

Robert McNulty: I did a workshop two weeks ago with the National Association of Home Builders and AARP in New Orleans, and there wasn’t a single developer there presenting anything other than age-restricted communities. It was all age-restricted communities. It is amazing. So I would say that any form of urban combination of stimulation and education that attracts some shopping and walkability to some medical services is going to be a product that can attract a growing number of people who still see their lives as John Gardner said: “When you turn 65 you still have one-third of your life ahead of you. What are you going to do with that one-third of your life?

John McCauley: Robert, I have a comment I would like to say about aging. In our conversations yesterday I was starting to hear and see and feel some things that I had a hard time articulating. It seems to me that we have a sense here that we have an “if we build it, they will come” mentality in our conversations about attracting and keeping older adults in communities in Iowa. And to me, there’s also a “build it or retrofit it and they will stay” strategy in which we build on what we already have, and that has to be a vital part of our strategy. If Dr. Mary Yearns [professor, Iowa State University Department of Human Development and Family Studies] was here she would talk about retrofitting houses to help older adults remain independent, and then connecting them with the existing network of services so they don’t have to move, and so they continue to contribute to their communities economically through vitality, volunteerism and so forth.

Robert McNulty: That’s exactly what we are preaching. You should have the choice to stay as long as you choose in your own home, in your own neighborhood, in your own community. If for some reason, by finance, ability or disability, or loss of a loved one, you need to leave that traditional home, there should be other options
within the community that will allow you to stay as long as you so choose. And when you are going into that final phase, you may wish to move a thousand miles away and be close to your daughter or your son.

John McCauley: The community design has to be holistic then. We need to think in terms of strategies for a lifetime.

Robert McNulty: The full life span, the full life span. And retrofitting is the right word because it doesn't take major capital. It takes restructuring of our mind set to see what small elements allow for retrofitting. I was working in Rochester, New York. We had an EPA grant to try to relate aging to smart growth. We had a workshop in a low-income, African-American neighborhood. There were two ladies from the neighborhood who said that the senior center was across a six-lane road. They had never gone to the senior center because the cross street with a traffic light was a quarter mile down the way. Therefore, they could never walk fast enough to jaywalk and they could never walk the half a mile or so in their strolls. They have never gone to the senior center. Now things like that need to be solved on a small scale.

Rand Fisher: Bob, I think your comments were really helpful to this group because I think you have taken us beyond design to an array of policy. When you mentioned the college community, it wasn't that they just put up a welcoming residential design; they reinvented every policy and procedure of the university to be welcoming and encouraging. I think as important as physical design can be—we all work at being attractive,—there is something well beyond that that needs to be open in terms of communities being friendly or unfriendly.

Robert McNulty: Well again you've said it better than I could. I've always preached that design is the demonstration project and that once you've got people committed to an open discussion of how a community can remove barriers, the demonstration program, which keeps the momentum going, involves a talented designer to take a place and to make that place or that center friendly, so that everyone says, "My God, that's what we are talking about. We need to do this in more places and we need to engage the talent of more designers to make our community a good place."

When I was picked up yesterday by Peter [Butler], I told him that the successor to William H. Whyte, who wrote The Social Life of [Small] Urban Spaces,1 is a small nonprofit called Project for Public Spaces in New York City. They have this model called Powers of Ten, and I told him maybe we should lower it down to Powers of Five. Each community could do a strategic plan to eliminate the barriers to the older person for a full life, then select five institutions and bring in the design and landscape talent to retrofit those institutions both inside and outside to create centers of excellence as a demonstration of their commitment to be a great community for everyone. That Power of Five could be the library, the museum, the college, the city hall and the police station, which you could use [to demonstrate] that we do care and we will use the talent to show that we care.

John McCauley: Yesterday I was struck by our conversation after we took a short tour of Grimes and some of the observations about the sidewalks, for example, as something that could be repaired, extended and so forth. Disconnect [exists] between low-income housing and the downtown, even though they are only a couple of blocks apart. I think those are smart things. In rural America, our finances are stretched. A small town like Grimes is lucky because [it is a] border community of a larger city and [it has] some economic growth. What about the towns that have a stretched tax base and can't increase property taxes, and every time you put something on the ballot, the older voters are the ones who shoot it down? We talk about the economics. The urban planning is smart and makes a lot of sense, but where is the money coming from?

Robert McNulty: There are those of what we call "curmudgeonly communities" that have an older population [that deems] any improvement to recreation, schools or certain transportation services as a tax increase on them and therefore, they will vote it down. Then you have other communities that have only school-age kids and families. The school systems are broke. What you need is a balanced community that has some retirees and some active young families, so that you don't have everyone going to school in one generation and don't have everyone retired in one generation, so that everyone has a sense of a common future in that community being

a living, vital place with people coming in and out of the system. In Martinsville, Virginia, and in the tri-state areas of Kentucky we did some focus groups among these curmudgeonly elderly who voted down all these school things. They said, “Well, nobody asked us. Why can’t the school be a community school where there is an elder fitness center in the school? We might vote for that. Why doesn’t everyone do strategic planning about what we need as opposed to what you need, so we can work together to come up with a bond issue that we were part of setting?” So, again, it goes back to a plan that has multiple benefits that is done cooperatively, rather than a levy, which makes older people feel once again that the school district is taking their resources and not engaging them in any way in the benefits of their work.

*Unknown Speaker:* I’m glad you brought up the educational aspect. I sat in on the governor’s task force about the impending labor shortage and one of the big concerns there was losing our young people and not having high paying jobs and having wage erosion. So I’m wondering if education should not play a huge role to promote intergenerational interaction. Getting elderly people involved in the school mentoring students and then economists …giving our students the idea that there is profit for business opportunity from the aging population. So maybe the entrepreneurial student will stay in the state because now they recognize that they don’t have to leave to earn a good living. So it seems like there has to be more involvement in our educational system to promote that interaction between the generations.

*Robert McNulty:* Certain counties in Indiana (I was the state speaker at their state forum some years ago) require that in primary school that there be a class in local history taught by someone over 65. This is an amateur [who] comes in and the [class] they walked us through was a World War II veteran [who] was teaching 4th graders about what war was. It was quite moving to the kids and the man. And they said that it formed a bond and a linkage between the generations that was unsurpassed.

*Tom Morain:* For many years in Iowa, one of the key points was that all children had to learn a list of famous people who were born in Iowa and moved somewhere else.

*Robert McNulty:* Well maybe that somewhere else could be moved. But anyway you have the greatest writers and programs in the world. There’s got to be some way of weaving the talent that you have that stimulates young people and old people to learn from each other.
Healthy and Active Living Communities
Chanam Lee | Texas A & M University

Today I’m going to be talking about healthy and active living communities. I look at the built environment as a setting where a lot of civic and other social activities can happen. It’s not a sufficient condition, but it’s often a necessary condition to have interesting, safe places to engage in these activities. So I’ll talk a little bit about why healthy and active living communities are important from public health, transportation, urban planning and landscape architecture design perspectives. We’ll look at how the built environment relates to physical activity and health. And we will look a little bit at the empirical evidence: what we know from the findings, what we can learn and how we can translate these ideas into strategies. I’ll also give a short introduction to some activity that’s happening in the Brazos Valley area of Texas.

There is a simple triad that I stick to: built environment, lifestyle, and health. My work focuses on the relationship between environment and lifestyle: why these relationships are important; why we are looking at the community and the environment; and why we are interested in learning about design and the environment, and the right way to support a healthy, active lifestyle. We do know that we have health problems, mostly chronic health conditions. And with the aging population the burdens of chronic diseases are likely to increase in the future.

Among not only older adults but children across all ages, we have increasing rates of obesity. It’s not only an inconvenience; it’s killing people. Obesity is the number two killer as of 2000, but it will be catching up to the number one, tobacco (Table 1). According to an article published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, our next generations may not live as long as previous generations because of a disease called obesity. It’s a controversial argument, but I think it has some sense. We are experiencing obesity as an epidemic. These maps show that the obesity rates in the United States starting in 1985 (figures 1–5). The darker color indicates the higher rates of obesity in the states.

Iowa is catching up you see. Figure 5 shows where we are [as of 2006]. For the first time between 2005 and 2006, the increase slowed down a bit, but obesity rates have not stabilized yet. Epidemiologists had predicted that this would flatten out like other chronic epidemic diseases in the late ’90s, but that never happened.

That’s what triggered the alarm that something is happening. Even the health care industry is starting to look around. What’s happening? What’s triggering the trend? The trigger is not in our genes. It might be in the environment. We might be encouraging people to lead unhealthy instead of healthy lifestyles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actual cause</th>
<th>1990 No.</th>
<th>1990 %</th>
<th>2000 No.</th>
<th>2000 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>400,000</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>435,000</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor diet and physical inactivity</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>400,000</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol consumption</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>85,000</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microbial agents</td>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toxic agents</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>55,000</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor vehicle</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>43,000</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firearms</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29,000</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual behavior</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illicit drug use</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>17,000</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,060,000</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1,159,000</td>
<td>48.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data are from McGinnis and Foege. The percentages are for all deaths.

Older adults are not an exception to these trends. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 80 percent of older adults have at least one chronic condition and half of older adults have at least two. One out of five has disabilities related to chronic disease. So it is important to prevent these diseases if we can, and to think about whether environment plays a role in it. Figure 6 shows types of chronic diseases including heart disease, hypertension and cancers. A lot of these diseases are related to environmental conditions. Asthma is related to air pollution, and many cancers are related to physical activity level, which is related to environment and lifestyle.

This leads us to the second thing in my triad, the built environment. It looks like there is something going on. We are not building our communities in the right way.
way to support healthy living. Figure 7 is an aerial photo of my own city, College Station, Texas. What are the most obvious elements in this photo? The big-box shopping mall is a very common typology in the urban suburban and small community settings. When you get a highway to a parking lot, these structures are very dominant elements taking up a large proportion of the land area. These big-box types promote automobile accessibility and ease of parking at the expense of everything else. People who live adjacent, in student housing or family housing, can probably walk there. This is major arterial road, but it is very unsafe. Once you walk there, there is this humongous parking lot to walk through and there is a highway right there. Two years ago, four students got killed crossing the street to get to the mall on their lunch hour. A lot of these issues are happening and this is a very common typology that we have.

Figure 8 shows Daegu, my hometown in Korea, as it was in 1990 compared to as it was fifteen years later, in 2005. You can see a huge development pattern and changes in the urban landscape. Being aware that these things are happening, and the speed at which they are happening, is very crucial. You can see the mountain areas at the urban fringe. We are right at the edge of the urban-rural boundary, but even high-impact, high-density developments are occurring right at the fringe area. That means that the impact on natural systems and other negative consequences are going to be more serious. So these types of development patterns create the kind of environment where it is easier for people to rely on sedentary forms of transportation than on moving their bodies. This kind of automobile culture seems to engineer activities out of our daily routine. For example, at one time Los Angeles had a drive-through church. In a way humans are born that way; we like convenience, easy life.

That brings up the third aspect we will look at, our behaviors. From 1960 to 2000 you see the reliance of automobiles increasing dramatically from about 67 percent to close to 90 percent, while active forms of transportation are all decreasing (figure 9). When you look at physical activity levels based on different age cohorts beginning at age 45, the most active group is 45 to 64 years old. From there, you can see a pattern of decreasing physical activity in each successive age cohort (figure 10).
Sometimes the threshold for “older adults” is not clear. Some say 55 years and some say 65, but I think commonly it is 65, although some agencies are using 55 as well. Thirty-eight percent of adults age 55 and older are sedentary, especially women. Half of women age 75 and older are not active at all.

Today I’m going to focus on active living, but I also want to bring up the subject of food and how it’s related to the environment. When you have more supermarkets, you have more access to fresh fruits and vegetables, and you’re going to be more likely to consume them. Cheadle et al. (1991) found that fruit and vegetable intake was positively associated with the number of supermarkets in African-American neighborhoods. Morland et al. (2002) found that each additional supermarket in a neighborhood increased fruit and vegetable intake for African Americans and white Americans by 32 percent and 11 percent, respectively, and that wealthy neighborhoods had four times more supermarkets than low-income neighborhoods. Zenk et al. (2005) reported that the average distance from each home to the nearest supermarket was 1.1 miles farther in the poorest neighborhoods than in the richest neighborhoods.

When you look at the suburban small-community typology, it is also much easier to get to fast-food and chain restaurants that might sell unhealthy food options than it is to get to healthy food outlets. Block et al. (2004) found that in New Orleans, Louisiana, a high density of fast-food restaurants positively correlated with low household income and with high percentage of African-American residents. Many studies are showing that if you live in a community where there are more healthy food options, you are more likely to consume healthy foods. So accessibility and environmental issues play a role in what people eat.

So what do we know? As a researcher I try to find the evidence that’s reliable then make it applicable to different settings in different communities. But, having said that, different communities with different

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population profiles will have different problems. Generally, by using this evidence-based approach, you can learn from other communities' experiences and mistakes. Instead of wondering whether what we are doing works, by using an evidence-based approach we can have a foundation of what we know works. Relevant evidence is not always available, but there is more than what you might expect. There are things being tried in different states in the United States, and even beyond the U.S.

Evidence can come not only from empirical research but also policy research, policy case studies, development case studies and community assessment efforts going on. There are many different types of evidence we can use, and by using this information you can probably develop a strategy that is likely to lead to better, more effective solutions.

Earlier we talked about economic development. Where does the money come from to make these differences? We have worked with some of these small communities, by using our survey results and our community and environmental audit results we have the hard data to let us say, “OK, on this street a lot of people are killed because you don’t have crosswalks,” or “This street has a high crime rate because you don’t have lighting and surveillance capacities.” Instead of saying that one of our children is killed or an adult is killed in an intersection, we can give them longitudinal data that show the facts that this level of accidents or crime is much higher than what is expected at this level of population density. Those hard data make it easier for communities to get funding from different resources, federal or state government agencies.

Many communities have used such data to secure the funding to improve infrastructure, educational programs and other areas at the community level. There are many federal programs and research communities trying to help tackle these issues of active living, physical inactivity and sedentary lifestyles. A lot of tools are available, for example, Active Living By Design [a national program of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation] is more community-based design case studies, as well as some of the research community results. If you search on Google, there is a lot of research available out there, not only the empirical research but the tools, like walkability audits, that you can use to assess your communities.

I will now present some of the empirical evidence relating to physical activity, but focusing more on walking (and somewhat on biking) as an activity that can be promoted through the built environment more effectively and that fits readily into everyday life. There are many benefits to walking as a physical activity compared to going to gyms or other structured activities. Walking is a more accessible activity. One might ask, “Is walking enough to bring health benefits?” The answer is yes. Even walking 10 city blocks and even 20 to 30 minutes of walking, can bring significant health benefits and maintain your heart and metabolic fitness. In one study, walking more than 10 blocks every day resulted in a 33 percent reduced cardiovascular disease risk (Sesso et al. 1999).6 We know that lifestyle interventions such as walking and bicycling are more cost-effective and tend to bring more long-term lifestyle changes than structured interventions such as sports, exercise programs and health-club activities (Dunn et al., 1999; Owen and Bauman, 1992; Sevick et al., 2000).

I did some assessment comparing the amount of walking done by younger adults to that of older adults (table 2). These data are from random samples collected in home interviews. We had about a 31:

Table 2. Purposes and amounts of walking by older versus younger adults

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Walking purpose</th>
<th>Younger adults (n=311)</th>
<th>Older adults (n=127)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avg. weekly minutes of walking</td>
<td>Avg. weekly freq. of walking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>107.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL:</td>
<td>151.8</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Seattle survey, excluding “no walking.”

percent response rate. We had 638 respondents—a pretty representative sample. When you look at age cohorts, you might consider the different types of walking. Walking for leisure, walking for transportation purposes; there are different strategies we can use to promote different types of walking. One criterion is the reason that we are walking. Older adults tend to do more recreational walking than walking for transportation. Older adults also do more recreational walking than younger adults do. Our study showed that older adults walked recreationally about three times a week.

It is also important to consider how far people are willing to walk (table 3). This has policy implications for land use and zoning, for what zoning mixture and level of compactness should be promoted. The distance people are willing to walk varies depending on where they are walking to. The distance you are willing to walk to the grocery store might be different from the distance you are willing to walk to a park. There are some variations, but not that dramatic; the range is from 0.4 to 0.6 miles or so. Table 4 shows the number of minutes that older and younger adults reported that they walked to grocery stores and other retail facilities. For example, people are willing to walk up to 15 minutes to the grocery store. Actually, older adults are willing to walk longer than younger adults, even though it may take longer for them to walk the same distance. Yesterday we had a discussion about the bags involved in a grocery store trip. In our survey for adults who actually walked to the grocery store, they only had 1.5 bags per trip on average. In retail other than the grocery store, people are willing to walk a little longer, probably because there is no need to carry items.

With GIS [geographic information systems], if you have the starting and ending locations, you can do a network analysis to find the exact distance from people’s homes to these destinations. We did that for younger and older adults, and, when you see the objective distance, older adults were willing to walk longer to their destination (table 5). We did surveys and some policy studies in Texas and in other cities, and have confirmed that it’s not that older adults are less willing to walk or are willing to walk only shorter distances. Rather, it’s related to time and many other issues, but our data show that older adults are just as willing to walk.

The destinations are a little different by age cohort (table 6). The destinations shown in pink are favored by older adults and the blue ones are favored by younger adults. So you can see the patterns. The most dramatic differences are with drug stores and religious institutions, which are favored by older adults, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. How far do people walk?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walking to (n=608)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery stores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail-service facilities (excluding Grocery Stores)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking or jogging trails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks, areas near lakes, creeks, or waterways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gyms or fitness centers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4. How far do people walk? Older adults (65+) compared to all adults (18+)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you walk to the grocery store, about how many minutes does it take?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many bags of groceries do you normally carry home from the grocery store?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you walk to these other retail or service facilities, about how many minutes does it take?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

--- 69 ---
with video stores and fast food, which are favored by younger adults. So when
the younger adults become older, will they change their destinations?

I think our findings for recreational walking are important, too. When you talk
about recreational walking, everybody talks about trails and parks, but when you
actually ask people, streets are often the most popular places for recreational walking. A study in
Australia, a few studies in Atlanta and one in Baltimore showed that streets
are one of the most popular places for recreational activity. They are followed
by parks, trails and the gym. Older adults are more likely to use the mall
for walking (table 7).

We also asked about what could help people walk more. What kind
of environmental facilitators should we focus on? There are other factors,
but we are going to focus on the environment facilitators. Older adults
reported that having more benches or places to rest would help them walk
more, and longer crosswalk signals. Those were less frequently reported
among younger adults. What’s encouraging is that these are easier
interventions, putting in benches and crosswalk signals. The traffic signals
may require more engineering, but these are things that can be feasibly
done in our environment (table 8).

Even when using more complicated modeling,
involving rigorous analysis in which you control for
all the sociodemographic variations, the results still
show that the environmental factors were important.
First I will talk about sociodemographic correlates
for older adults, people’s perceptions and attitudes,
and the visual quality—when you walk if there is
something beautiful and interesting to look at it is
very important. For both younger and older adults,
dog ownership was important. We do know the issue
is that if you have a dog you are more likely to walk,
so we are arguing that, instead of trying to change the

---

| Table 5. How far do people walk? Older adults (65+) compared to all adults (18+) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                                 | Older adults (65+) | All adults (18+) |
|                                 | N  | Mean | Min | Max | N  | Mean | Min | Max |
| Walk to the grocery store       | 29 | 0.41 | 0.10| 1.23| 280| 0.36 | 0.00| 1.46|
| Did not walk to the grocery store| 74 | 0.53 | 0.05| 1.49| 328| 0.56 | 0.00| 1.86|
| Total                           | 103| 0.49 | 0.05| 1.49| 608| 0.47 | 0.00| 1.86|

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6. Destinations to which older versus younger adults walked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Younger adults N=213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older adults N=65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-fast food restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Café or coffee shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast food restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theaters and movie theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry cleaners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious institution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7. Places that older versus younger adults used for recreational walking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Younger adults N=311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older adults N=127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gym</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mall</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
environment and build sidewalks, give everybody a dog. That works and it’s cheaper.

There are cultural issues, too. We just finished a study on the Hispanic population. For them, dogs, especially stray dogs, were the top barrier to walking. They are saying that they don’t walk because there are too many unattended dogs. So depending on the sociodemographic cultural profile of your community, some of the same factors can be barriers and facilitators at the same time.

When we looked at sociodemographic correlates of transportation walking, there were no variables that were important only for older adults (Table 10). The variables in [green] are important to both older and younger adults; the ones in [regular type] are important only to younger adults. Environmental correlates for transportation walking are shown in Table 11. Sidewalks were not significant to younger adults, but older adults thought they were more important.

We also looked at destinations for transportation walking. Only church and the grocery store were important for younger adults, but for older adults, retail stores, restaurants and transit, access to bus services were all important, too. So there are some differences and similarities in terms of the things you can do to promote active living, especially walking, in these communities (Table 12).

So with these empirical studies that we have done we can report some general findings. Older adults engage in more recreational activities. Food-related destinations such as restaurants and grocery stores are very important to older and younger adults, and drug stores and religious institutions are more important to older adults. Lack of good lighting was reported as a barrier. Interesting places to walk are important, as are benches and longer crosswalk signals. Streets have more importance than parks and trails for older adults’ recreational activity.

We are talking about things we can do to promote active living among older adults, but there are generic conditions that are required for all age cohorts. One of the things that we did was to summarize these environmental dimensions around the three Ds and R: destination, distance, density and route. There are so many variables to think about, and having these larger

---

Table 8. Perceived environmental facilitators to walking by older versus younger adults

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitators to Walking</th>
<th>Younger adults N=264</th>
<th>Older adults N=86</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good lighting at night</td>
<td>1 57.6</td>
<td>1 55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closer to other interesting places to walk to</td>
<td>2 54.9</td>
<td>2 50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closer to or more walking trails/paths</td>
<td>3 54.2</td>
<td>5 41.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting architecture or landscape to look at</td>
<td>4 52.7</td>
<td>3 45.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closer to park and recreation facilities</td>
<td>5 45.8</td>
<td>4 44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closer to shopping places</td>
<td>6 44.7</td>
<td>6 37.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More trees along streets</td>
<td>7 38.3</td>
<td>8 27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benches and other places to rest</td>
<td>8 28.4</td>
<td>6 37.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer crosswalk signals</td>
<td>9 20.8</td>
<td>8 27.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Sociodemographic correlates of recreational walking by older versus younger adults

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Older adults N=127</th>
<th>Younger adults N=311</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk outside their own neighborhood</td>
<td>2.873 0.054</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward physical activity</td>
<td>1.934 0.005</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting architecture or landscape to look at</td>
<td>2.957 0.056</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived traffic congestion problems of the neighborhood</td>
<td>1.534 0.075</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog vs. no dog</td>
<td>5.217 0.079</td>
<td>2.244 0.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female vs. male</td>
<td>2.177 0.007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
constructs helps somewhat.

To promote walking and active living, we first have to think about destinations, places to go to. Even if you have beautiful sidewalks with tree-lined streets, if there is no place to go to, its impact will be limited. Sometimes if the streets are in horrible condition, but the destination is particularly attractive, people will manipulate this "hostile" route to get to that destination. Attractive destinations vary depending on the population, but food-related destinations seem to be the top attractive destinations for walking. As for distance, people are not going to walk beyond 0.5 miles or so, no matter how attractive the destination might be.

Density is a generic condition. When you look at a lot of transportation urban design literature, density always come up as a correlate of walking for physical activity. When you have large lots and a lot of vacant land, it creates a very different context than a fairly dense environment. Even single-family small lots, with a lot

| Table 10. Sociodemographic correlates of transportation walking by older versus younger adults |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
|                                                               | Younger adults | Older adults   |
|                                                               | N=311          | N=127          |
| Transit user                                                 | 2.960          | 4.026          |
| Perceived neighborhood type                                  | 6.942 <0.001   | 5.672 0.004    |
| Walk outside their own neighborhood                           | 3.920 <0.001   | 3.442 0.012    |
| Traffic problems of neighborhood                              | 1.509 0.036    |               |
| Perceived traffic congestion problems of the neighborhood     | 0.692 0.082    |               |
| Vehicle miles traveled                                        | 0.684 <0.001   |               |
| Married vs. never married                                     | 2.769 0.014    |               |
| Female vs. male                                               | 0.447 0.029    |               |

| Table 11. Environmental correlates of recreational walking by older versus younger adults |
|----------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
|                                        | Younger adults | Older adults   |
|                                        | N=311          | N=127          |
| Residential density (log units/acre)   | 0.541 0.095    |               |
| Mean slope within 1 km area from home  | 1.223 0.008    |               |
| Distance to closest restaurant (log-feet) | 1.637 0.062  |               |
| Distance to closest daycare center (category) | 0.537 0.000  |               |
| Route directness to the closest office (category) | 1.322 0.006  |               |
| Length of sidewalks within 1 km area from home (mile) | 1.284 0.099 |               |
| Number of street trees within 1 km area from home | 0.998 0.073 |               |

| Table 12. Environmental correlates of transportation walking by older versus younger adults |
|----------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
|                                        | Younger Adults N=311 | Older Adults N=127 |
| Distance to closest grocery store from home (feet) | 1.000 0.044 |               |
| Route directness to closest church from home | 1.028 0.034 |               |
| Total bus ridership within ¼ mile area from home |               | 0.046 0.022 |
| Number of retail centers from 1 km area from home |               | 0.123 0.044 |
| Distance to the closest restaurant (log-feet) |               | 0.025 0.030 |
| Distance to the closest park              | 1.001 0.097   |               |
| Distance to the closest bank              | 0.996 0.008   |               |
of buildings and people and activities going on, create more of a vital environment for walking. Route qualities, whether there are sidewalks and crosswalks and things like that, are also very crucial. Those are the generic factors that you want to look at to create a more holistic environment that supports walking and active living.

So once we have the results of these empirical studies, as researchers how do we translate that into something non-researchers, especially policy makers and communities, can use? One tool we use is creating a map aid to work with the city people to help them allocate funds to improve pedestrian infrastructure. An example is shown in figure 11. Cities always have limited funds, especially for non-motorized transportation infrastructure. By doing this kind of map you can see where the more walkable areas are. The map shows the probability of walking. So controlling everything equally, if you live in the light green area there is a 60 to 70 percent likelihood that you will be active and walking, but if you live in the dark orange area there is a 10 to 20 percent likelihood, depending on the environmental support that you have. Tools like that let community leaders see that, instead of putting your funds to improve conditions that are already good, you should look for little pockets of area with really poor infrastructure conditions for walking, and those would be your target priorities for your funding allocation.

Another tool that we developed to be used by community groups as well as policy makers is a very simple spreadsheet that can be used to determine a community’s walkability score (figure 12). All you have to do is fill in the yellow boxes with the number of stores and things like that, very simple items that we extracted from our data analysis. You put in the numbers, and then it gives you a score for each
condition and provides a potential strategy to improve it. When you move to the second tab, it will give you the overall walkability score.

Walkability audits and score sheets are available, but you have to be careful how you use them. Sometimes people develop these tools without empirical data or use data from large cities. When you try to apply them to small communities, it's not going to be as relevant. We developed these tools for suburban/urban communities, and we are trying to do another research project for small communities too. It is the kind of tool that can be utilized to help make decisions at the community and policy levels. We have also developed this simple tool that people can use to assess walkability. Some people have used this tool to assess walkability in different neighborhoods that they were considering moving to. It consists of a very simple checklist. So we developed different versions to communicate with different user groups, which seems to work OK (figure 13).

So before we look at Brazos Valley, I want to summarize what we’ve talked about already. I’ve discussed land use, destinations and distance, and the conditions that we have—site-level conditions—as well as land use and zoning and policy-level interventions. Yesterday, Susan [Erickson] brought up the issues of connectivity. You can see how the street network influences the connectivity and the directness of routes to destinations.

Not only the infrastructure but services are important. In small communities, formal public transit may not be feasible, but para-transits may be available. I think area agencies on aging are providing some of the transportation services, which are crucial in small communities. Pedestrian and bicycle facilities are important. Some curbs, such as a flat ribbon curb, are much friendlier to wheelchairs and bicycles. I saw sidewalks in Kansas that go nowhere and a sidewalk that gets narrower and narrower until it disappears. I thought it was outrageous that they would have conditions like that until I moved to College Station, and those conditions were all over. It’s a standard sidewalk installation condition, so I’m not surprised any more. The maintenance of sidewalks is related to funding available to the city. A city has limited funding, not only to install non-motorized transportation facilities but to maintain them and to enforce traffic laws.

We have looked at recreation facilities, although our study showed that they are not as important as more informal facilities like streets. If the recreational facilities are located close to more residential areas they seem to work really well. Not only just having a park but what kind of park seems to be important. Parks with a trail, a playground and things like that seem to be more successful than parks without those amenities.

Many studies have pointed out that visual quality is really crucial for walkability. Even as a landscape architect, I can see that without the trees this environment would be very different. So different types of elements and conditions are needed. Sometimes there is actually nothing wrong with the infrastructure conditions, but the visual quality is poor. You go on and on and on and there is not much to see; that’s always a problem because, being human, we need a certain level of visual stimulus to stay interested in what we are doing. But then on the other hand, you can have too much.

We talked about older adults reporting that having places to sit is very important. Note that without the benches these would be just pass-through corridors.
(figure 14). With a bench they can be places for people to pause, sit and rest, and maybe engage in conversations. That's why we refer to the built environment as settings to provide opportunities for those kinds of activities. If there were no bench, nobody would be sitting there, and people would be just walking by without any activities occurring. Lighting conditions are very crucial.

Another thing that we talked about is the social environment. It closely relates to the built environment, but sometimes the built conditions are not as supportive. It seems like the culture is there but for other reasons. Maybe not so many people own cars or there is no public transit, the streets are too narrow, there's no parking there are many external conditions that may promote active transportation in different settings.

There are many other external conditions that may promote active transportation in different settings. When I go to Korea, for example, I would never drive because parking is too expensive and it takes three to four times longer to drive. There are other motivations for me to walk or take public transit. So it's all interconnected, and the bad news is that there is not a simple story or simple solution that's going to solve the problem for everybody.

Having said that, without safety nothing is going to work. Safety, safety, safety. I know a place where there are two bus stops but no crosswalk. I saw a couple that spent three to four minutes just crossing the street. Other places have no sidewalks, or there are crosswalks but they are strangely designed. Without safety, it just is not going to work.

We are talking about walking and physical activity. It's great that people use streets. It means that even streets have multiple purposes; you don't need additional money to create a park or something else that is not there. But the problem is that streets may have conditions that might not be safe for human health. Street corridors have a high level of auto emissions, dangers from traffic, crashes and things like that. Things are going to have to be designed well to support physical activity walking along these street corridors. But nonetheless, the streets may be our best chance to promote walkability and active living.

Brazos Valley is a seven-county rural area of Texas, and we wanted to promote active aging in the region. There have been a lot activities from the school of rural public health going on in the area. I’ve been partially involved in them, and today I’m going to tell you about this little coalition that we are starting to develop, the Brazos Valley Building Healthy Communities Coalition. We have the Texas Healthy Aging Network and the CDC at the national level helping the aging network as well. So I’m involved in that. At the local and state levels, we wanted to create this initiative and bring the coalition together. The purpose was to bring the stakeholders from the community, the public sector and researchers together around the topic of healthy aging. Like Iowa, Texas has many small communities that are not doing great economically, but they are starting to get the message that there is demand for creating elder-friendly conditions.

We brought this group together, and we wanted to go for the Environmental Protection Agency Aging Initiative Award for Excellence in Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging. We thought that it would be a great motivation for us, to get recognition at the national level and then get the group excited to go for the next step. That was something that we did last year. Luckily we got the Commitment Award. There are two different levels, Achievement Award and Commitment Award, and we knew we were not at the Achievement level yet. The Achievement Awards were given to the Atlanta Regional Commission in Georgia and the City of Kirkland, Washington. When you look at these communities, they are the leaders at this level. They are especially known for smart growth. The purpose was to bring the healthy aging component and the smart growth component together, so the award recognized that synergetic effort. These communities have many levels of public and private sector efforts and a lot of exciting initiatives going on. They well deserve these awards.
Brazos Valley was one of five communities recognized for the Commitment Award, and we are very excited about that. The award got a lot of promotion, and that created community interest and awareness, which is the first step. We pointed out several of these projects and used them to sell our community as activity-friendly. We pointed out our downtown development project in Bryan, Texas. Bryan has a very small Main Street, and we have a project that renovated the downtown corridor. We also have a mixed-use and open-space development around the Wolf Pen Creek area in College Station, Texas. We used some of those projects to demonstrate our group's efforts toward building healthy communities.

The coalition is just one of the many efforts and groups that are trying to promote active aging and smart growth for communities. I think there will be more synergetic and long-term efforts going on in the future. I think the long-term benefit for us was the establishment of the coalition itself. We have regular meetings and [are] setting up an agenda. It's very good we got the award, but we need a long-term agenda for the coalition in terms of what we are going to do and where we are at in the local community.

The coalition did encounter some challenges; it didn't go as smoothly as we thought it would. It took a long time to bring in the stakeholders. We had to do a lot of talking because not too many people would even know what you meant by smart growth. So we had to sell the idea, to show what smart growth is for and what it is going to do for each of the stakeholders. If they didn't see any direct benefits to their own interests, it was difficult to bring them together. We are going to be working continuously to find funding and to seek opportunities to promote awareness at the local and regional levels. We have a lot to do.

Cathy Liles is the project director at the Learning Network for Active Aging, and she has more information. There are many coalition members, but Cathy would be the best person to talk to for more information about the coalition efforts. She can be contacted at cliles@tamu.edu, and the Learning Network for Active Aging can be accessed at http://www.LNactiveaging.com. Cathy helped me develop my slides, too, so I have to give her credit along with Marsha Ory.

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Subsequent Discussion

This section is an edited transcript of the question and answer session immediately following the presentation by Chanam Lee.

**Tom Morain:** When I was first married, my wife and I lived for a summer in a small town, Jefferson, Iowa. It has a courthouse square in the middle, and the major shopping is all around the four sides. I think that is typical of many Iowa towns. I remember one of the first times we drove uptown, we drove to the east side of the square and parked and went in and got something. I went back to the car and was going to get in because we had to shop on the north side of the square. My wife, who grew up in Kansas City, objected. Of course when you get a parking space in Kansas City, you die there because you want to save it. And I said, “All my life this is what you do.”

What could you do in a town where parking is abundant and the expectation is you will drive to your next spot? In Lamoni we have a Main Street, and there is a coffee shop about halfway down the block. I think if I'm more than halfway down the block on Main Street I'm going to get in my car and drive to the coffee shop rather than walk around the corner. If we put down new sidewalks everywhere in Lamoni, I don't think I would walk any more than I do now. I think small-town people are oriented to driving up to the door of where we want to go, and we can do it.

**Chanam Lee:** I don't think it is only in small towns. I think to a certain extent a lot of U.S. towns are that way. My town, too. Just to cross the street you get in the car. One thing that I know that worked is to charge for parking. People will not like it, but they might get used to it and it would give good revenue to the city. You could use that money to improve conditions and do something for commonly valued amenities. I don't know what a given community's priorities would be, but the committee could figure out what they would want.

**Tom Morain:** In Lamoni, you would pay more to hire somebody to monitor the meters than you would get out of it.

**Susan Erickson:** Or, if you look out in front of the building here, along the street there's a sign that says something about, for a healthier Perry it is only 300 steps to the City Hall. So that's just a little encouragement. For me personally, when I started studying this stuff, I started saying to myself, “Hey, wait, it doesn't make any sense to get in my car to go just down the street.” That's what I always do, but I need to re-examine how I do that. So for me it's been an educational process.

**Tom Morain:** But I can't think in Lamoni of any way to approach this as a design question.

**Susan Erickson:** Well, $4 gas might have a lot to do with it too.

**Tom Morain:** Well, yes, I thought about that. I would be willing to pay it. Right now if you said I had to plunk down 35 cents to not walk over here I would say, “I'll do it.”

**Susan Erickson:** Even after all of these things we've been telling you about your health? All these things about cancer and obesity and such?
Tom Morain: Yes, I’m walking over to the coffee shop where I’m going to have a cinnamon roll and all this stuff that’s not good for me.

Driving and ease of parking is so engrained into most small towners, anything that prohibits that is going to create such a row in the community. If it’s voluntary and I want to walk, that’s fine. But if you are forcing me to walk or even making it easier for me to walk by design, I’m trying to think how that would affect me and the people I know.

Chanam Lee: I totally see that. I do not think you have to promote transportation or utilitarian walking everywhere and for everybody. In certain conditions like that, you may have to give up on utilitarian walking and instead, through education and promotion, focus on recreation walking. You can focus on having a culture of walking around the neighborhood after dinner or purely recreational walking. But then you need to make a way to have those activities become part of people’s daily routine. That would be easier than to try to have people walk 10 more steps by reducing parking spots. The environmental approach is just one tool, and it’s not going to take care of everything. If we build it will they come? They may, but if we don’t build it we know they won’t come. So if it’s an option, if it’s there, if just 1 percent of your population wanted to utilize it, I think that’s a beginning point. If one or two people started to walk on the downtown streets, they might create a walking culture. People might say, “I will just walk with you too.” You have to start from somewhere, and maybe just start with recreational walking and just see how that might encourage more walking.

Bob Bourne: I would have to go along with that because I’ve walked to work or ridden the bus or rode my bike all my life. I’ve driven to work maybe 200 days in 40 years. Some of it is cultural, and some of it is design. Since I retired from CyRide [Ames bus company], I have been using my bicycle for all my trips in Ames except when it’s raining. I wrote a couple of letters to the editor. The editor of the Ames paper is really pro-bicycle. I threw a challenge out this spring and told people how to calculate their greenhouse gas emissions. If I ride my bike 1,800 miles, I save one ton of greenhouse gas emissions. I got quite a few comments from people. I got some phone calls and letters from people who took me up on that challenge. And I think that’s the cultural part of it. I think it’s possible to do that culturally because if you go back 30 years ago, everyone in this room would be smoking a cigarette. Now no one does. There’s been a huge cultural change around the acceptance of cigarettes. I think we are at the beginning of a cultural change toward walking.

I’m going to a seminar in two weeks about transit, and I have a walking component in that. The research that I have, which is now about 10 years old, says that 90 percent of people will walk 500 feet for a purpose. Not point A to point A, but point A to point B to accomplish a transportation function. Fifty percent of people will walk 1,000 feet, and only 10 percent will walk 2,000 feet. Two thousand feet isn’t very far. So some of that has to change culturally. There’s no advocate for walking, and there’s no advocate for bicycling. You’ve got traffic engineers that build your roads and bus people that take care of your buses. There is no Department of Walking in any city. It’s an afterthought for traffic engineers. They have to do it. The bicycle advocates are the ones who want to ride on the bike paths dressed up in their fancy clothes and ride 50 miles. Those are the bicycle advocates. There is no one that advocates for bicycle transportation in the community. So structurally you have to have that. No city has that and no county. The Iowa Department of Transportation does have a person who does pedestrian and bicycling within the DOT. She’s all by herself and kind of ignored, but at least it’s a step on the part of the DOT.

The design issue I have found in riding my bicycle is that I can’t lock my bicycle in a lot of places. Target has a bike rack, and K-Mart has a bike rack. You go to downtown Ames, and you have to chain it to a light pole. There is no physical place to chain your bike. You want to chain up your bike because there’s all kinds of screwballs who will hop on it and take it away. I’ve got the two baskets on it, so I can carry two gallons of milk and my 1.5 bags. I’ve seen a couple of people in Ames on three-wheeled bicycles. They are elderly people, 65 or 70. I always bicycle at 8 miles an hour. That’s my top speed. These people go into Fareway [grocery store] now with these three-wheel things, and there’s no place to park them. We don’t have a design element around common places like grocery stores and the drug store. At Hy-Vee [grocery store] downtown there is no place, not even a light pole, to chain up. So I think that’s a design issue that has to be brought up within the municipal thought process to incorporate that. When you do your streets you’ve got to have a wide enough place for
[three-wheeled] bicycles in an elderly community, and there should be two or three of them at Fareway. You need to accommodate two or three of them.

All the bike racks are an afterthought. Half the time they are those portable ones that are just thrown down some place where the janitor doesn't want them. It's not incorporated. It's not in the mind set, not in the concept, and if you want people to use bikes you've got to get employees to have some sort of incentive to do so. I am seeing a lot more bicyclists in Ames. Bicycling for a purpose. I'm seeing people without helmets and [with] plastic bags. I know they are relatively lower-income because most of us have helmets and stuff. Lower-income people have bags and baskets when they are riding to the grocery stores. So I think it is changing, and I think it has to be monitored. Even with the gas prices and such, you aren't going to price small-town Iowa into bicycling. The reason you have two-hour parking here is because the business men would squawk otherwise. There probably were meters at one time, but business people would have to pay to park. This psychology is there, and you are not going change this business psychology. You have to make business strong, and bicycling and walking are two ways to get to [and patronize] businesses. But it is the distances between the housing areas and the activity [or business] that will affect it.

Bill Morain: But Tom does make a point. Small towns are different. If you see someone walking in a small town and you are driving your car, it's rude to not stop and offer them a ride. If they turn you down, it's like thumbing their nose at you. In the city if you stop and offer someone a ride, they're going to pull out their Mace. It's a very different culture in small towns.

Chanam Lee: Exactly. In my town, if you walk, are going to be caught by a police officer, [because] they will think you are in trouble or that your car broke down or an emergency happened. One thing that was a very culturally shocking was that when I went to renew my license for the first time [in College Station] there was a big poster that said “You Drink, You Drive, You Walk.” I literally did not understand, coming from Seattle with the walkability advocates, and after living in Texas only a month or so, it just didn't make any sense. Now I [understand the poster] very, very well. As a researcher and a designer of the built environment, I think it is a design area that relates to the last point—safety issues. For those of you that want to walk and bike, we ought to make sure you are not going to be killed by automobiles or injured because of the cracks [in the pavement] or lack of lights. So I think that is the minimum that we need to do. But many communities, especially small communities, do not even support that minimum level of accommodation.

We are not thinking about supporting it but accommodating for those who want to utilize those healthy, active, clean, modes of transportation. I think that mentality has to change, but there are a lot of barriers to doing that. It will take time. Long term, we will have to change the culture, and it will take a long time. I do not have an answer for it, but I think starting with elements of safety and education, small interventions for community-based programs, is a strategy. There are other resources at the larger state or county level that you can utilize. Or technical assistance programs: There are more programs that are being implemented to support small communities that are interested in doing these kinds of promotion efforts. So starting from there, one step at a time. I don't think there is big answer to that question.

Mark Engelbrecht: I have a question on the Brazos Valley project. How many communities are involved? Is it countywide, or is it many counties?

Chanam Lee: The larger recognition program effort involved seven counties. For this particular program, we only used Bryan/College Station within Brazos County, a one-county area. One thing that we also did was house this program under the Council of Government, so we have this political umbrella to oversee the long-term coalition community. That is something that has happened as well. This is part of a multilevel effort.

Mark Engelbrecht: And it's a particularly interesting one for this state. Regional issues are complex.

Chanam Lee: Right. We've got this seven-county area. One county is urban; we call it urban but still, the largest city would be Bryan/College Station, which has a combined population of 200,000 people. The other six counties are all rural, very small communities with just a few thousand people. Having our agency reaching out
to multiple communities, I think, is one of the advantages. It lets us do some pilot testing in one community and apply that to other communities. We can have a more systematic approach to developing strategies that are going to work for the kind of typology that we have in Texas small towns, instead of having piecemeal, separate efforts going on at the local level.

*Peter Butler:* So what are benefits that you have seen from that larger-scale coalition? Are there benefits in terms of when you are approaching national federal government entities for funding or assistance? What are the benefits of that regional coalition, beyond the existence of a coalition?

*Chanam Lee:* Another thing that is applicable to what Robert just mentioned is that this is a college town. Of course, they don’t have a college in all seven counties, but the main urban county has Texas A&M, which is a major academic institution and has become a big partner in this effort. The university probably has that kind of outreach and impact for the entire state, but, because this is happening at the regional scale and the seven counties form a proximal region, we can have more physical contact and meetings to implement the outreach program. That was a big driver. Also we wanted to bring in partners not only from the policy makers but also from the local communities and local leadership. We could not have reached that really deep, multilayered cooperation with a much bigger area. We thought that the seven-county area was small enough to have that kind of depth of cooperation but also had the spread to have enough political support. We also have the seven-county Agency on Aging and other government and private entities at that level that we can connect to the transportation people and the public health services. So it was a good unit for us to get started. Among the efforts that are going on, some are happening small and local in one community, some are in two cities, some are in one county. There are multiple things going on, not just everything happening at the larger scale.

*Peter Butler:* I can say from when Susan and I taught a class together and we were working with the seven-county region around the Iowa River corridor that just having that vision that included these seven counties got them together to decide that it was an important idea, and the bicycle trail out in that region has been very successful. And that was based on the watershed. You think about the Brazos River, conservation in the local communities and recreation, and that could be a real potential model for Iowa. The bike trail in Lamoni doesn’t go outside the town, but there is a rail that hasn’t become a trail. Think if that could go regionally, it could become a regional destination, and those sorts of coalitions could be created.

*Chanam Lee:* That’s a really good start, actually, to create regional collaboration, because a transportation network is natural assistance; it goes beyond administrative boundaries, so that naturally brings two stations together. Sometimes when we did the local meetings, some communities that were right next to each other did not know what the others were doing. Even just getting to know what’s going on can happen in collaboration, too, and that is something we thought was beneficial.

*John McCalley:* I would like to ask a question about the community coalition. One of the things you pointed out was the sense of time. It takes time to develop a coalition. I think that’s an important thing to explore in all of these strategies about community development and livable communities, or whatever term we end up using here. How long did it take to develop the coalition? What definition of benchmarks were you operating with? How long did it take to achieve certain completed items? Understanding that a lot of the success was the development of the process and a sense of an ongoing commitment to a conversation in which there is really no actual completed project, how did you define success? How did you define that you had gotten someplace that created a sense of vitality or vibrancy for individuals as well as the community?

*Chanam Lee:* Well, we were kind of modest in defining our success. Even bringing those stakeholders into the same group and coming to the discussion of the common agenda—we thought that was a good thing to start with. A lot of these benchmarks and the long-term agendas are currently being developed. Our first task was to go for the EPA award. Actually, we wanted to do it last year and it didn’t go through, so it took at least two years to get to this level. There are a lot of administrative hurdles. To get support from the mayor you have to go through six or seven different levels of approval processes, and they are not necessarily willing or familiar with this type of effort. There is a lot of education and talking in formal and informal settings. I think at this point a concrete result is this recognition. Everybody is excited about it and we have pretty good media exposure as
to what's going on. People are more aware of the issues, the agendas and what the communities are trying to pursue in creating activity-friendly, elder-friendly, smart-growth communities. At least the level of awareness, we hope, is increased.

In the future, it's going to be a more systematic effort, but it is very early in the development. I look forward to updating you about the next phases, and we've got the work group working on more concrete time lines and long-term goals and things like that. The current entity is now housed in the Council of Government. Before it was a very informal coalition, and now we have the political umbrella to keep us moving and tied together, so I think that was another success on our part. At least we are hoping that will go on. Cities are more excited now than before. When we first started they were skeptical, and many people were wondering whether this was going to be more work for them. Now even if it is more work they are willing to chip in and be part of it, so I think that is another achievement for us. I look forward to sharing the next steps when they come.
A Grassroots Effort...to Become a Michigan Community for a Lifetime

Linda Cronk, Michigan State University Extension, and Dona Wishart, Otsego County Commission on Aging

Linda Cronk: Thank you all for inviting us to come and share our experiences with the development of a grassroots effort to implement much of what you have already talked about here. We have seen some of the challenges that John [McCalley, see discussion starting on page 80] just mentioned: how you measure success and how slow the process can be. We certainly can appreciate what Chanam [Lee] shared with us as well.

Dona Wishart: Before we begin our presentation, we would like to give you a little tour of our community. Back in the 1960s our community, our Main Street, was dying. A group of people was sitting in our city hall saying, “What are we going to do?” Those leaders in our community at that time decided to go for a theme, to go for an architectural look. So Gaylord, Michigan, is an Alpine village. We also have a sister city in Switzerland in order to bring Gaylord not just architecture but people meeting people and collaborating across the world.

There is one structure that is reminiscent of the town center that you showed us, and that is our open-air pavilion. It is right in the center of our town. It’s used for cultural events, it houses our farmers market twice a week and it is a natural gathering place with many benches. It was and still is very controversial in our community. Folks haven’t quite decided if the cost of the investment was worth the outcome. We’ll see what comes of that.

Because we are the Alpine village and we have our sister city in Switzerland, we also have an annual festival. The festival brings 70,000–80,000 people to our small community. I will be telling you about the population here in a little bit, but our city population is 3,000–4,000 people. So you can see that is a grand influx. Once a year we dress up. Our husbands try to fit into their lederhosen again, and we girls try to fit into our dirndls. The theme idea and the festival have had an economic impact on our community and been a source of community pride.

In Michigan, automobiles really drove the economy. If you have been paying attention to Michigan, you know that is a hot topic these days. Our economy in Michigan is suffering because of the change in the automobile industry. Years ago there was a company, and many of you who are car buffs may know this, called the Gaylord Motor Car Company. There was a Gaylord car, and it is part of the festival.

Some of the experts were saying that we need an anchor in our community in today’s world. In the 1960s our leaders decided to do the theme and the architecture thing. In today’s time period in our community, we are looking for those anchors. One of our anchors is our University Center at Gaylord, which is also an M-TEC [Michigan Technical Education Center], a place where people can learn trades. Another thing I would share about our University Center relative to older adults is the fact that we are finding ways through programming to make that anchor part of the lives of older adults. For instance, I work at the local Commission on Aging, so a lot of what I do involves developing programs and services. Our Parkinson’s support group, our Alzheimer’s support group, and our staff meetings and training for our direct service workers take place at the University Center. They get to celebrate their building.

Beyond architecture and beyond those anchors, it’s really about people and community spirit and connectivity. We also have a very strong community spirit around volunteerism, which in today’s world is being expanded—if you have read any of the work of
Marc Freedman—to be called civic engagement.1 The
idea is that baby boomers are going to want to give
back even more in different ways to their community.
As an example, one of our volunteers makes sure
that our older adults can get to their medical
appointments.

Linda Cronk: Welcome to the Alpine Village. We will
share our experience in becoming an elder-friendly
community over the next [several] years. We figure
it is going to go on forever. This is a continuous
improvement process that we began in about 2005.
Just to give you some context, we’ll share who we
are. I’m Linda Cronk. I work for Michigan State
University Extension. I’m a family and consumer
science educator and currently the Extension director
in Crawford County. I am also the acting Extension
director in Otsego County because our previous
director has just retired and we are looking to replace
him. Gaylord is in Otsego County, and Crawford
County is immediately south of it.

Before I returned to my home state of Michigan, my
husband and I raised our children in Minneapolis.
I became an Extension educator for the first time,
working for University of Minnesota Extension. I
had just finished up my master’s degree in human
development and education, and I was beginning to
look at my interest in life-span human development.
I was in midlife. I’m one of the earlier baby boomers,
and nobody wanted to talk about all the physiological
and sociological effects of aging. Nobody wanted to
talk about that. All my girlfriends weren’t going to talk
about that yet. So I did my master’s thesis on some of
my experiences going through the transition of
midlife. That really sparked my interest in aging, and
I saw this denial of aging everywhere I went. I’m just
feisty enough, and so I said, “Wait a minute, we’ve got
to start talking about this.” That’s where my interest in
this comes from, and I brought that to my Extension
experience.

After a long story I became the cochair of the
Minnesota aging initiative through Extension. We
identified that issue earlier in Minnesota than we
have in Michigan, through Project 2030 and a lot
of different efforts that they are doing in Minnesota.
Before I got too far into it, we moved back to
Michigan because my husband wanted to do that as
he took early retirement. I came to Michigan State
University Extension and said, “Well, what are we
doing with aging in Extension?” They kind of looked
around and said, “Well, we do ‘Grandma’s Yellow
Pie Plate,’” which comes out of Minnesota (it’s a long
story). So I started to beat the drum that Extension
needs a voice in we how are going to age in Michigan.
We know that, because of the population decline of
younger people and because of the economy, we are
aging in Michigan at a higher rate.

Dona Wishart: I am Dona Wishart, and I actually
came to this project because in 2002 I was serving as
a governor appointee to the Michigan Commission
on Services to the Aging. Just a side point: I was
appointed by a Republican governor and retained
by a Democratic governor, so that tells you perhaps
a little bit about me. It might point to the idea of
“divided we fail” and how I feel about that. Whether
you are a Republican or Democrat, I very much enjoy
talking about the issues. I serve as director and aging
services specialist at the Otsego County Commission
on Aging, which in Michigan is part of the aging
network. Across this country, of course, we have the
Administration on Aging and each state has its state
unit of aging. Beyond that states may be different, one
from another. Almost all have Area Agencies on Aging,
but not every state has the system in Michigan where
every county also has a local commission or council
on aging. So we provide home- and community-
based care, and that’s my work life. I volunteer for
the Alzheimer’s Association, doing public policy in
Lansing, Michigan, and Washington, and with the
Parkinson’s Foundation, in part because I am a family
caregiver. My mother has Parkinson’s.

So that’s a little bit about me. Going back to the earlier
story about 1960, my husband sat around those tables
in those early days, and he truly is the new 50. He’s 70
but he acts like 50, and I can’t keep up with him. So
he is still actively involved in our festival. Well, that’s
a little bit about me.

With regard to our population, 20.5 percent of our
population is 65 or older, and 41.3 percent is between
the ages of 35 and 74. Those are some of the things
we are working on in our community and dealing
with the whole baby-boomer thing. I tend to call
myself a “boom-over.” Got over that 50 mark, and
now I’m just starting that second childhood.

1 Marc Freedman is the founder and CEO of Civic Ventures,
a think tank that focuses on achieving the greatest return on
experience; creator of Experience Corps, a nonprofit national
service program engaging individuals over 55 years of age, and
The Purpose Prize, an investment in older social innovators; and
author of the following books: Encore: Finding Work That Matters
in the Second Half of Life, Prime Time: How Baby Boomers Will
Revolutionize Retirement and Transform America, The Kindness
of Strangers, and On Purpose: Boomers, Work, and the Search for
a Calling.
Our community is really driven by tourism. In fact, some of you may have been scratching your heads saying, “I’ve heard of Gaylord, Michigan, before.” If you are a golfer and you watch ESPN2, you may remember the Par-3 Shootout that happens in Gaylord. We have about 35 golf courses in our area. So that’s certainly an economic stimulus for our community. Beyond that, we are very proud to be the local owners of a very good hospital. This is almost unheard of as an anchor in a community anymore, to have a hospital owned by a community. Certainly small manufacturing and the service sector benefit because of our tourism industry. That’s a little bit about our community.

Linda Cronk: For the rest of our presentation, we are going to tell you our story. This is what we were invited to do. We want you to see how we progressed through time: The early beginnings and beyond; the process, structure, tools and people who have been involved; the lessons we have learned; and the valuable messages that have come out of it. We are just at the beginning of this process. Both of us are so excited—and we were hoping not to get so excited we can’t focus on our presentation—because of all the things that we have learned. We want to talk about some of the things we would do differently as we look back, so that we might help other communities avoid the pitfalls that we have had to deal with.

We really value your questions. I also want to say that there are many tools, so if you get an opportunity to go to http://www.michigan.gov/miseniors, you will find all the tools and things that we are talking about in this presentation. We welcome your questions at the same time.

Dona Wishart: I am certainly not going to give you all the answers, with each community being so unique and each project being so different. What we will share is our story, and perhaps you can glean something that would fit nicely with your project and your community.

When we say that we changed the name of our project from “elder-friendly communities” to “creating livable communities,” that was not necessarily a new idea. There were many models across the country, and particularly in Calgary, Canada, that we looked at. The name really did become important, and we had very lengthy, great discussion about it. But we decided that in Michigan it would be called Michigan Communities for a Lifetime, and we would be saying that what is good for one generation is good for all generations.

We don’t mean that everything needs to be the same or serve the same group of people; however, if we look at the assets within the program that we are talking about, you will quickly see that those assets can be good for every generation and, therefore, for the community.

Early in our story, I was sitting on the Michigan Commission on Services to the Aging. The working arm of the group, the state advisory council, said that there were some models out there called elder-friendly communities and we ought to look at those and see what the idea could mean for Michigan. The governor wanted that to be explored, and so we began to do that at the Office of Services to the Aging. Because we believe in teamwork, and of course the state capital and Michigan State University are side by side, we quickly looked to our partners at Michigan State. They had already been thinking about this, too.

Linda Cronk: One of my colleagues on campus, Paul McConaughy, a program leader in Extension family and consumer sciences, had already been starting to look at what elder-friendly community development would look like. With his background in community development combined with family and consumer science issues from my end, we began to explore. We pulled together what we called the Michigan Vital Aging Think Tank, an ad hoc group, really. We needed to sit together and think this through. This was new territory. We didn’t have a road map already. The people at the table included representatives from the state AARP, Wayne State University’s Institute of Gerontology and Western Michigan University. We had a lot of people phone in to these meetings from Northern Michigan for awhile. The Elder Law of Michigan was also involved in the work group. I don’t have my list in front of me, but we had a large group of people coming from different angles who wanted to sit and think this through together. The Michigan Office of Services to the Aging and the Michigan Department of Community Health were also there. So we began to think this through. Through the discussions at this table, Paul began to put together the first draft of some of the assessment tools, which we will talk about a little bit more later.

Dona Wishart: The decision to pilot this out emerged from the Vital Aging Think Tank and from the Michigan Commission on Services to the Aging and from the governor. Two areas were selected: one was Otsego County, where Gaylord is located, and the other was North Ottawa County. Both are rural communities.
**Linda Cronk:** The choice of the pilot areas came from the synergy created by the fact that Dona was on the state commission at the time and I am the family and consumer sciences educator in Otsego County. It just came together.

**Dona Wishart:** Early on you might have heard me to say, “You want us to do what?” It felt to me like they wanted us to build a boat, but there was no plan, we didn’t know if it was going to sail and we didn’t know the destination. So I found myself thinking, “OK, how are we going to convince people to join in this effort when it is a project of building this type of boat?”

So as we tell our story, we might just take a moment for a bit of reflection and humor. In one of his more recent books about health care, Dr. Seuss makes light of all of the things that we go through for health care.\(^2\) We have some problems and we have to look at the whole self. So in our project we wanted to make sure we were looking at the whole project and all of the models that we could draw from. We wanted to recognize that every asset base that is suggested is important and that they are connected in some way. So we might have said about our community, “Oh my. The shape we are in.” It certainly was up for some help and some examination.

**Linda Cronk:** There is a wonderful report about the history and development of this project and how we drew from different assessment tools to become as comprehensive as we could but still be feasible. That report is on the Web. What we came up with were 10 areas that communities needed to focus on:

1. Walkability/bikability
2. Supportive community systems, which means services are in place, etc.
3. Access to health care and all that comes with the wellness aspect of that
4. Safety and security, including physical, mental, emotional and financial security
5. Housing availability and affordability
6. Housing modification and maintenance, including universal design and the capacity to keep up with housing or make arrangements to do so
7. Transportation
8. Commerce and how the changing demographic can affect business and retail success
9. Enrichment, connecting folks to the cultural and intellectual opportunities within the community
10. Inclusion, both including people and encouraging volunteerism, leadership roles and civic engagement.

So who will steer the boat that we are building when we don’t know where we are going and we are building it as we go? At the local level, Dona and I took on a cochairpersonship. At that point in time I was the family and consumer science educator there, and Phil Alexander, who has since retired, was the county Extension director. Fortunately his area of expertise is economic and community development and tourism, so it worked out great. We pulled him in and said we needed his expertise to help us form ourselves, to get the leadership going and to help bring his perspective on economic and community development in this area so that we could move forward.

**Dona Wishart:** Part of our plan was to develop a leadership team. In other words, we wanted to find volunteers from our community who would be interested and excited about this and who could be encouraged to volunteer their time, effort and areas of expertise to the project. These folks who got involved are not very different from people in your community. One of the people on the leadership team, Mary, is a township official and probably on 10 different boards; she gets things done. You probably have someone like that in your community. We wanted to be sure that we connected with many networks of people, because awareness was the key. We wanted word of mouth to spread the story, so Mary was important. The team also includes a local law enforcement person. He actually has connections to the Michigan state police and to our two other local law enforcement agencies. Two other ladies on the team are really concerned about housing and design. One of them works for the housing authority in our community, and one has a private business.

In our community it was really easy initially for us to count our successes and to point out our strengths. It was a little more difficult to say, “You know what, we do not have enough affordable housing and what are we going to do about that?” The local architect who designed our town pavilion also joined the team. He has been instrumental in helping us learn as a leadership team about universal design and what that means. We also have the adult protective service agent in our community sitting on our leadership team, because the assets that we were looking at really were...
going beyond design. These are just a few of the team members, but the point is that we selected people who had active networks in the community. We wanted the word to spread about this work, and we knew that we would have to gather more people to join us, so we wanted to use those networks. We also consciously tried to find diversity in our community around areas of expertise. Quite frankly, in our community we don’t have a lot of ethnic diversity, so we tried for diversity with gender, age and area of expertise so that we would have the people, resources and power that would move this project forward.

**Linda Cronk:** So what about teamwork strategies? We were pulling these people together who are used to working on teams, but they weren’t a team themselves. So we wanted to make sure that we could move forward this boat that still wasn’t built. We wanted to create some structure. We wanted to create a consistent process. We wanted these people to come together as a team over time and cross-fertilize their ideas outside of their areas of expertise so that we could make it richer. I’ll talk a little bit later more about the details of that, but we structured it in such a way that they felt anchored within the team.

**Dona Wishart:** The team needed to be big enough and it needed to be growing all the time. So we looked at phases of our project. The steering committee, of course, was part of phase one, getting us started, developing our leadership team and all that goes with a community challenge. People come and go for a number of reasons, and you have to bring new people in and keep them connected and engaged.

In phase three we tried to assure the leadership team, who had given much time and effort, that we were going to bring more people in to help them and that these committees were going to grow. We wanted them to know that it wasn’t just a special group of people that had the opportunity to be involved, but that this could be a growing, ongoing process. It was very important to recognize, honor and appreciate all the resources available. Our resources included the communities that were a step ahead of us, providing models for what we wanted to do; the people in the state of Michigan who brought important encouragement, support and expertise; and those very networks in our community that let our commissioners, city council and township associations hear about this and be involved.

**Linda Cronk:** We dealt with bringing the right people together, and we told them that they were part of a larger effort and that we were going to bring in the larger community. The challenge at first was that we had only these draft tools and the Michigan Vital Aging Think Tank and the state commission wanted us to pilot this project. One of the ambiguities that we had to address was that we didn’t have a final product and we couldn’t just move through a set process. We had to help develop the process.

We had two dimensions to our conversation. One was about the draft tools. Do these tools work for a community? The other was about the fact that we were also doing this assessment and moving through the process that we were building. It was a real challenge, and I think it brought us ultimately closer together. It made this leadership team feel like they had contributed beyond this community by helping develop a process that can be replicated in other communities. It was definitely a challenge. We helped revise, update and suggest improvements to the tools, which you can find on the Web site.

The assessment tool itself was compiled mostly from other assessment tools into a more comprehensive one. We also assembled forms for developing action plans out of those assessments and PSAs for marketing. We have work plans with a chart of what to do each month and who is going to do what. We also helped with the application itself. We helped with a report on the history and development of the project. We worked with the tools and helped develop them at the same time.

We also developed a process to work within the community. How are we going to pull this group of people, who are used to being leaders in their own realms, together to help them move forward? Dona was really instrumental in pointing out that we needed some consistency. We need a process and structure that is the same every month. We only get together once a month, and you know how easy it is to lose the momentum of a group.

A week and a half prior to each month’s meeting, we get an e-mail reminder that the meeting is coming up. The agenda structure is the same every month. We meet at exactly 2:30 p.m. at the University Center, and we guarantee that people will be out of there at 4:00 p.m. We move through a process every single month so that people can get comfortable. They don’t have to worry about what’s happening within this team development. We take that on. That frees them up to go out and create the committees that use the assessment tool and apply its findings. Later I’ll go
through what happened each year, but also we did a strategic planning process after we got through our assessment and knew what project we wanted to do.

As I mentioned before, we did the assessment on 10 dimensions. Two members of the leadership team focused on each of these aspects, and one or both of them and went out and did that part of the assessment. From those results, we determined what was strong and what needed to be done in the community. Ultimately, we determined that we would move forward first on five aspects: supportive community systems, access to health care, safety and security, availability and affordability of housing, and housing modification and maintenance. We chose those issues partly because they needed to be dealt with and partly because, at this fledgling time in the development of this process, those were the areas where we could succeed.

What happened in year one? We got started. We got started, and we formed around this idea that we had to pilot this tool and we had to move this boat forward before it was completely built. We determined the asset committees. Who wanted to explore housing? Of course, Brad Butcher wanted to as the architect and Alice Yeoman wanted to as the housing and urban homes association representative. Mary King from the hospital wanted to work on access to health care. Those partnerships were fairly obvious. Each committee took one or two of those aspects, and they went out into the community and worked on doing the assessment tool. We utilized the assessment tool out in the community from October 2005 to September 2006. We also created an early version of the Web site.

In year two, after we had gone through the assessment tools, we figured out our strengths and what we were going to work on next. Then we created committee action plans. On safety and security, for example, we had to ask several questions. What are we going to do about safety and security? What aspects of safety and security are we going to focus on? How will we operationalize that? Who should work with us? The two committee leaders who took each asset found a couple more people in the community who wanted to work on that issue. For safety and security, Jody Schlaufman from adult protective services, the retired chief of police and the current chief of police wanted to first focus on financial exploitation; they wanted to build a Triad.\(^3\) It wasn’t about the built environment, but it was about financial exploitation of older adults. So they developed their committee membership. Then we went through a strategic planning process to make sure we were on track and to figure out how we were going to operationalize their ideas. Each committee went through a similar process to come up with a plan of work.

Then we began to transition from planning to action. Work on the project plans began in year three. At the same time, at the beginning of year three, we did focus groups and more surveys of community elders and other people who had an interest in the issues of aging. We also compiled general input from the community resources and leadership team to make sure that we were honing this project correctly. So throughout year three we used the initial assessment and additional information.

Dona Wishart: We are in year four right now. This year we got to a point where we said that we needed to transition from all this planning and assessment work to some doing. We felt that if we didn’t get to some doing pretty quickly, these leaders were going to fall away. Each of the prioritized asset committees had identified a weakness or a concern in the community. With the number of older adults in our community, the safety and security Triad, which Linda mentioned, wanted to focus on financial exploitation. Of course, financial exploitation is huge in our world today. The committee wanted to have a project that wouldn’t cost a lot of money but would enhance life in our community for older adults around those safety issues.

Our housing group, which included our architect, assessed the design aspects of the community, but they wanted to do something early on that could begin to brand the project to some degree. They are working on creating a resource that would easily point folks to housing options and amenities in our community. It is a simple project, but it is something that they could do for the community at this early stage.

Our supportive community systems asset group focused on the fact that our community used to have a welcome wagon program. It was a volunteer program to welcome people who moved to our community, and we are clamoring to get people to move to our community. Without such a program, who is going to welcome them? How are they going to get connected

\(^3\)The National Association of Triads is a cooperative effort of law enforcement agencies, senior citizens and community groups focused on reducing crime against older adults. www.nationaltriad.org.
and feel a part of the community? Unfortunately, the welcome wagon we had in the past was a wonderful volunteer lady who has since passed on. So this asset group said that we need to re-establish our welcome wagon. They decided that it needs to be modernized and that it needs to be a Web-accessible newcomers’ network that has that a friendly-people component. The committee wrote a grant that just recently got funded, and our newcomers’ network is alive. The network is kicking off this year with events where people will have an opportunity to meet their neighbors.

Access to health care was a concern. We are very proud of our hospital, but, working in the aging industry, I often saw older adults ending up in the emergency room, perhaps inappropriately, and then not having a way to get home. Or they would get home but end up alone, still not feeling well. Transitional care is one of the new buzzwords in the health care industry. This group wanted to look at the transition for older adults leaving the hospital, between the hospital door and their home door, or even into their home. Where is the support system? Where is the transportation option? Where is the immediate care option, not 10 days later when a social services group might have time to do an assessment, but right away? We are looking at transitional care and examining parish nursing, which is still alive and well in this country in some but not all places. We would incorporate the faith-based community through parish nursing.

All of these things were chosen as early projects. They are a little removed from design, which is our larger focus here, but these assets are connected. They need to be connected in vital ways just like people need to be connected. We wanted to have some early, doable projects.

We’ve done a lot of talking about design and community and walkability. We have a group of people who participate in our Walking Wonders program. They are our friends in our community, our older adults, and they would ask you to think about walkability. Where can we walk safely in our community? In the winter, when we have 150 inches of average snowfall, obviously the answer isn’t outdoors. The Walking Wonders hop on a bus, and they do their walking in local churches or they go to our county Sportsplex complex. The program was developed and expanded because they were asking us where they could safely walk when bad weather came. Just so you know, one of the Walking Wonders is my mother-in-law, 98 years old and just recovering from hip replacement surgery.

So with our assessment process, the questions to ask are: Does your community have a walkability plan? Is that part of the design? Are sidewalks in good condition in highly pedestrian areas? Do sidewalks have curb cutaways, and what are intersections like? Are residential facilities targeted to older adults required to have sidewalks connecting those retirement communities to the anchors of the community? Those are the kind of questions that were posed through the assessment tool. When we look further ahead, our goal for any Michigan community of a lifetime is that walking ought to be a practical, viable option for older adults. The community’s improved streets and sidewalks ought to ensure that everyone can safely walk, whether they are young or old or have strollers, walkers, wheelchairs or even, perhaps, Segues. This has obvious health benefits, as research and evidence have pointed out, and we ought to be able to get to those anchors in our communities.

*Linda Cronk:* So that’s where we are now. It was slow, but because we were a pilot we wanted to take it slow and steady and make something substantial. We wanted to learn from what we were doing, to hopefully help other communities avoid having to struggle and move as slowly as we did. We continue to build the boat. We’ve got it so that it has a complete hull now, I think. We are looking forward to the future. We feel now that we have to raise some more community awareness. We have leaders that get it, we have their committee members who get it, we have focus groups that get it, and now we need to go back to the county commission, the township association, the city council and the newspaper. We have to start to say, “Look at what we’ve already accomplished with nothing, with just the motivation and good will and enthusiasm of the people in this community.” We have to begin to put forth that idea that if we don’t pay attention to this, Gaylord will not thrive, Gaylord will start to wither, much like other communities in other places that haven’t paid attention to the fact that older Michiganders are staying here. We need to be there for them.

Only 20 percent of people 60 and older are requiring any services. [Older adults] bring their resources, they bring their richness, they bring their wisdom here, and we need to be able to welcome that. Often we think about the stereotype of the elder as someone who needs something, and we know that is not true. Gaylord is the kind of community that can latch on
to the elder-friendly idea. This is a unique group of people who are willing to try new things. I also work in Grayling, which is 30 miles south, and I brought the same notion to the city council and the leadership there. The city manager at the time said, “You know, I don’t think we want to do that.” I said, “Why don’t you want to do that? You have one of the highest rates of older people here of any community around here.” He said, “I don’t really want people to know how unfriendly for elders it is to live here. I think that would really be a detriment.”

So you have some communities who are willing to challenge themselves. This guy didn’t even want to touch it. He’s gone now, by the way. I think we need to be aware of the fact that some communities are insecure enough that they can’t afford to look at these issues. But Gaylord is not one of those communities; Gaylord is willing to move forward.

We are in the process of developing a marketing plan. We want to increase awareness and support in the community. We want to position ourselves for grant money so that we can take on larger projects. We’re going to strategically plan our next phase. We will be taking back much of what we have learned at this meeting so that we can increase the capacity to look at this in other dimensions. Then we want to prepare for additional projects to enhance our ability to age in place.

_Dona Wishart:_ In other words, you just became a part of our leadership team and our network, and we are looking forward to more focus on design. I would just briefly mention that in our community we do have independent living for older adults, we do have an assisted living facility and we have long-term care facilities. They are not in the same complex, though, and they are not connected. They are largely isolated and out of sight. So when we discussed the importance of people being connected to the community, I was very saddened by that.

On a personal note, my mother was living in independent living in my hometown because I was her family caregiver. She just recently moved to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where she could have a campus environment and have assisted living. She will need long-term care because she has Parkinson’s Disease, and living there will keep her from having to face another huge move. So I am very concerned about design and the concept that isolation leads to loneliness and depression in older adults. It happens in every community. So what would we do differently, Linda?

_Linda Cronk:_ One of the things that we talked about is that we would engage younger people to be a part of the leadership right away. We don’t want to segregate it so only the old folks know a lot about elder issues. We want to begin to educate younger people. We want to break down that wall that we have built that says, “Well that’s all about those people but not about me.”

We want to help everyone understand that if you are alive, you are aging. The first time I said that to people, they were insulted. I thought, “Are you in so much denial that you don’t realize that a live person ages?” Because we have such issues around aging as a culture, we want to bring young people in right away so that they embrace the positive aspects of aging, they look forward to it, they do everything they can do to increase their vitality across their life span and minimize that frail, elderly, dependent phase of life. That’s what we really want in the long run. What would you do differently, Dona?

_Dona Wishart:_ I would also actively and immediately approach the disability community. As it turned out, the disability community came knocking on our door when they saw our articles in the paper and heard our radio interviews. They wanted to join us, help us, be part of this and bring their areas of expertise to our design needs and our community. So shame on us for not inviting them first, but they are part of our team now.

This process has been slow, and it will be slow. In our strategic planning, when we put a time line up on the wall with benchmarks, one of the things we said was that there is no end to the project or the time line. In the end, this is about raising awareness about assets that make our community livable. Really what we want to do is raise awareness about aging issues, have discussion, let it lead to action and, ultimately, have continuous quality improvement for all generations. As my Grandma Thomas would say, “Good, better, best: Never let it rest, until the good is better and the better is the best” in our community.
Resources for Preparing Communities for Boomers


Subsequent Discussion

This section is an edited transcript of the question and answer session immediately following the presentation by Linda Cronk and Dona Wishart.

Rand Fisher: Have you thought about any measurements or metrics that you can account for or report? I know so much of this is just a sense of accomplishments and how people feel, and it's kind of a blink of the eye in one respect. Are there some things that you have thought about to quantify and measure the improvements?

Linda Cronk: I'm hoping that we can engage people at the university who will do that work. We want to do the ground team development, and we would like them to get on board and help us with that.

Rand Fisher: Have you thought about what those might be, health and wellness, or —

Linda Cronk: I have some preliminary thoughts about it, but there are so many variables in the community and, because of the pilot, I really haven't talked about it a lot. I haven't personally honed that enough that I feel comfortable talking about it.

Dona Wishart: One of the things that as a steering committee we have on our time line for the next three to four months is another strategic planning session. As a steering committee, what are our next steps to hold this group together, to reach new benchmarks, to broaden awareness and those kinds of things? One project that has come alongside this, we just recently received an aging and technology grant that will fund some research in our community about socialization and whether technology can enhance socialization for older adults via e-mail and blogs and things like that. So we have funded research that we are just beginning. In fact, in the last two days while I have been here, I have been getting tons of e-mails asking for applications to lead the project.

Linda Cronk: That project comes through Michigan State University's School of Social Work.

Rand Fisher: You mentioned that one of your top strengths was your hospital and health care system. Are there some really special things in health care [that are available through the hospital]?

Dona Wishart: From a program standpoint, yes. Often the hospital and their staff are fully engaged in work groups and program development related to services for older adults and health care. For instance, our hospital partnered with Blue Cross Blue Shield on a special walkability plan, and that raised a lot of awareness in that community about the health benefits of walking. They coordinated all the paperwork and the sign-up to be part of this walking program. They also evaluated participants' improved health and all of that. As an anchor for health care, especially working with commissions and councils on aging and our older adults, yes, hospitals are a very important connection.

Linda Cronk: I've just been trained in the Kettering Foundation's National Issues Forum public deliberation format, and I would like to do a public deliberation in Gaylord around these issues so we can richly inform our next steps. I just finished the training, and I would like to frame some issues and see if we can't take what we've started and deepen it and broaden it.
Dona Wishart: The other challenge before us is our leadership team. They have grand ideas for much bigger projects that would be much more expensive, so in our strategic planning we are going to have to take a hard look at finding resources to fund better design in our community.

Tim Borich: In 10 years what is this going to look like?

Linda Cronk: Ten years from now my hope is that we have a very strong partnership between the Office of Services to the Aging and Michigan State Extension through our community development group to create a community development initiative about how we roll this program out into communities across the state of Michigan. That’s something at the state level that I would like to see.

Dona Wishart: And at home what I would like to see is improved health for our older population; increased connectivity to the community; more viable means of transportation in order to accomplish that; and that this leadership team, both current members and new members, will be generating timely new ideas for the future of aging in America.

Linda Cronk: I’d like to add one more thing. My deeper goal is that we turn our attitude around and uncover our hidden assumptions about aging so that we can see, appreciate, and go forward with the positive aspects of human development in the third phase of life, and not be so age adverse in our culture.

Tim Borich: The marketing that you are developing, who’s the target?

Linda Cronk: I think we have more than one target. I think we have to address the larger community leaders, we have to position ourselves for funds for grants, and we have how to show what we’ve accomplished and what we are capable of. I think we want to begin the discussion about how aging isn’t all bad at the local level. I personally would like to go to the elementary school and talk about aging. I think we need to educate ourselves about what aging is really about throughout the life span.

Dona Wishart: In my estimation, the goal of our marketing plan would be that everyone in our community would know about the Michigan Communities for a Lifetime project, that we are actively involved in it, and what aspects of a community have been identified by researchers as being accordant with good health. Again, it is an awareness building that would help us all age successfully, or perhaps with more vitality.

Tim Borich: At Iowa State I’m hearing that the focus in a large measure is on aging in place, and that deals with something here. Is it part of your idea that people will say, “Boy that looks like a neat place so maybe I should retire there”?

Linda Cronk: I think that is another aspect of it. I think we would like to see that in our northern communities. You know that right now Michigan is in such terrible shape, and that might create some complication. But for the folks who are retiring downstate, many of them would like to move north. In the whole northeast side of the state, almost everybody worked for GM and Ford. We want to make it appealing to come here and age in place. You can do this successfully and you can do it up north.

Dona Wishart: Our community has been one of the fastest-growing communities in Michigan over the course of the last five years.

Tim Borich: So who has been moving? Is it the retirees?

Dona Wishart: It is the retirees. We also see a lot of working folks in our community who are caregivers. When the long distance caregiving isn’t working, they are bringing their parents home to our community. In part, that is because they feel strongly about the community spirit and the level of senior services available. We have a whole range of home- and community-based services that support the idea of hanging on to independence and well-being.
Mark Engelbrecht: Is there a core group of senior citizens that you talked with?

Linda Cronk: Not frequently but when we first started the project one of my best friends in the world was Anita Davison. I have known her since I was nine. I grew up in Clarkston, which is down in the north suburbs of Detroit. She lived next door. She taught kindergarten, my mother taught first grade, and her daughter was in my class. So she is my second mom or third mom. She formed a group call Platinum Gals. These are all widows, and they needed each other in this network because a new widow might not know how to get home modification done or handyman kind of stuff. But the network of widows knew who to call. She is on our committee now. She's such a vibrant person and always willing to go out and do, and she pulled this group together and they continue to grow. The youngest one is 52, and the oldest one is 97. When we were first getting this going, I asked the Platinum Gals to come and do a focus group with us to help us form the direction that we wanted to take. Subsequently we’ve had focus groups where some of those women were included.

Dona Wishart: I have an added thought to that. Our agency has three or four hundred volunteers who are older adults that we are working with everyday and who are very willing to share their thoughts and opinions about all of our programs and services. So we have that connectivity with those volunteers for conversations.
Livable Communities: Creating Environments for Successful Aging
Becky Groff | Elder Services Consultant (formerly with AARP)

In our communities we need to have a sense of safety and a sense of security. How can we create a feeling that our community will be there for us as we age? That is the challenge that we’ve spent the last day and a half talking about, and some of us have spent much longer than that.

Months ago, some of you said to me, “Why does AARP care about this now?” Well, 2008 is AARP’s fiftieth anniversary. It was 50 years ago that our founder Ethel Percy Andrus started AARP. Her original focus was on retired teachers. She had been a school principal, and she went to visit a retired teacher in a small community. She found the teacher living in a chicken coop. She said, “What’s wrong with this? She has given a lifetime to our community and to our children. What is this?” Ethel Percy Andrus in 1961 unveiled the first design for an accessible home at the White House Conference on Aging. So a focus on livability is nothing new for AARP, but it is repackaged in a different kind of agenda because the storms are coming. The time is now. There are many factors that are coming together.

Let’s look at the key findings from our Beyond 50.05 report.¹ It’s a report to the nation about livable communities and creating successful environments for aging. It presented some findings about what you have to consider when planning. After that, I’ll discuss what AARP is doing now and then some factors for consideration.

What is a livable community? A livable community fosters independence and engagement of residents in a civic and a social life through affordable and appropriate housing, supportive services, a range of mobility options, access to volunteer opportunities and physical accessibility.

The first key finding of Beyond 50.05 is that people who are highly engaged with their communities are more likely to age successfully. Some of this seems obvious, but it is true. Community engagement results in successful aging. There need to be social opportunities for neighbors, whether at the coffee shop or somewhere else that has that connectivity. People need to be able to have access to enjoyable social encounters, volunteer service and civic action. They need to be able to participate in religious and political activities, belong to groups that are fun and meaningful for them and engage in a variety of physical activity.

When we look at how you balance community engagement and successful aging, you can see that people who report they are more satisfied with life a majority of time also report a high level of engagement in their community; people who report an ability to make choices about how things affect them as they age report a high level of engagement in their community; and other positive factors show a similar correlation (table 1).

People who are 50-plus report that they volunteer because they want to help other people, they enjoy the activity, they want to make the community a better place to live, they want to be with people they enjoy and they want to work with people who share the same ideals (figure 1). These are the kinds of things that we can pay attention to in our communities.

Of those who serve community organizations, a high percentage are affiliated with their religious organizations. Many also participate in social service organizations. There is a variety of ways that people serve their communities (figure 2).

The second key finding of the Beyond 50.05 survey was that poor community features are linked to

¹Beyond 50.05 – A Report to the Nation on Livable Communities: Creating Environments for Successful Aging is available for download or purchase at: http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/beyond_50_communities.pdf.
Table 1. Correlation between successful aging and community engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of respondents who “strongly agree”</th>
<th>Level of engagement</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with my life the majority of the time</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to make choices about things that affect how I age</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been able to influence others’ lives in positive ways</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a high quality of life</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to meet all of my needs and some of my wants</td>
<td>78%</td>
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Figure 1. Reasons that persons 50 years old and older volunteer (n=716). Question: Please think about the last time you decided to take on a volunteer assignment. I’m going to read you a list of reasons people give us for volunteering. Please tell me if each of these reasons was very important, somewhat important, or not very important in your decision to volunteer. Source: AARP/Roper Public Affairs and Media group of NOP World, Beyond 50.05 Survey, 2004.

Figure 2. Types of organizations for which persons 50 years old and older volunteer (n=1,005). Question: First, have you volunteered for any ________ (insert group type). Source: AARP/Roper Public Affairs and Media group of NOP World, Beyond 50.05 Survey, 2004.
lower levels of engagement and lower indicators of successful aging. People who don’t rate their communities well in terms of transit, sidewalks and trails, for example, have lower levels of engagement and successful activities. We want to see access to things like swimming pools and places to walk. People want to enjoy the amenities that are there.

People want to stay. People really do want to stay in their local communities as long as possible. It looks like with each decade that desire increases (figure 3). Why do people want to stay in their communities and in the same locality? It’s about family. They may not want to have them in the same house, but it’s about family, and it’s about friends. It’s about good shopping and access to services and it’s about being able to be safe where you live (figure 4).

Why do people choose a particular neighborhood? It is about the design of the neighborhood and about being near friends and relatives. It’s about the house itself and that it might be convenient to people’s jobs or to the volunteerism or activities that they are involved in (figure 5).

The Beyond 50.05 report also found that people whose homes don’t meet their physical needs are less likely to age successfully. We can look at this first in terms of the numbers of people who want to stay in their homes as long as possible. High percentages of people want to stay in their homes as long as they can (figure 6). Based on a presentation that Kyle Kostelecky did at the Governor’s Conference on Aging in May 2008, 80 percent of the people in one study who were 65-plus owned their own homes, and 35 percent of them lived alone. Older Iowans have lived in the same town for an average of 44 years, in the same county for an average of 48 years and in the same state for an average of 64 years.

If people want to stay in their homes, though, there is this huge mismatch between the reality of staying in that home and how well that home will help them age successfully. Kostelecky reported that, of those who reported that they could stay in their homes for 10 or more years, 16 percent had no bedroom on the main floor, 48 percent had no laundry on the main floor, 63 percent had no grab bars in the shower, 74 percent had no wheelchair access, and 86 percent had no grab bars in the toilet. These houses are not going to work for people to age successfully.

When they do choose to move, the reasons that 50-plus people give are that they wanted a better

![Figure 3. Percentage of respondents who strongly agree or somewhat agree with the statement “What I’d really like to do is remain in my local community for as long as possible.” Source: AARP State of 50+ America Survey, October 2005.](image)

![Figure 4. Reasons that persons 50 years old and older want to remain in the same local community. Source: AARP State of 50+ America Survey, October 2005.](image)

![Figure 5. Reasons that persons 50 years old and older choose a neighborhood. Source: AARP analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Housing Survey, 2003. (Not shown are unidentified reasons categorized as “Other.”)](image)
house or apartment, that they wanted to own their home instead of renting, and that they got a new job or transfer (figure 7). I think the reason that is most staggering or meaningful for us, though, is the one on the bottom of figure 7: health reasons. Health reasons are why many people have to move.

Another finding of the Beyond 50.05 survey was that lack of affordable housing can make it difficult for people to remain in their community. Housing expenses are an average of about 32 percent of people's costs (figure 8). It's a big consideration.

My dad lives in Spirit Lake and has an income of about $19,000 a year. His house insurance doubled this year, and it was a problem. He didn't tell me it was a problem. I only found out when I called the insurance company to pay his premium for his Christmas present and they said, “How fast will that check be here?” What happens when housing value or insurance is going up for someone who is on a fixed income? Housing costs are a big consideration because they are a major expense.

The Beyond 50.05 survey found that people who don't drive have significantly lower levels of outside interaction than people who do. Figure 9 shows the rates at which people miss events. Clearly, drivers don't miss them as often as non-drivers. But, you know, it only starts with events. People start by missing something for the grandkids or another event. But they also start having trouble going to the doctor or the grocery store. We see that when people start to care for themselves and their driving ability starts to drop off, how much more critical transportation becomes to their ability to survive in the community. Non-drivers have to walk or find drivers, which is hard to do (figure 10).

As long as I've worked in the field it has been death, taxes and transportation. Transportation has always been a huge issue that it seems like we don't make any movement on. We are a car-reliant society. I tried to call our driver safety coordinator last night so I could get this quote exactly right. I might be off a little bit, but I'm not too far off. The average man outlives his driving ability by six years, and women outlive their ability by ten years. We have also found that the majority of people do drive even after 75, after they have outlived their ability to do that (figure 11). When we look at the percentage of people in our community who are car-dependent and the number of people who shouldn't be on the road, it is of some concern.
That connects to the final key finding of Beyond 50.05, that mobility options allow 50-plus non-drivers to stay connected to their communities. Among people 50 years and over, non-drivers have about half the outings of drivers (figure 12).

Based on these findings, planning really does have to be a part of the solution. This work that we are talking about can only happen with intention. It doesn't happen by magic; it must happen with intention. So planning is absolutely critical.

I like this quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Society is always taken by surprise at any new example of common sense.” Part of what we are talking about really is common sense. If you look at it in an organized and intentional way, it’s not rocket science; it’s not high-class stuff. The kinds of barriers that are often encountered in all aspects of planning relate to land use, housing, transportation, cooperation and communication, public education and involvement, and leadership.

These findings allow us to make some major recommendations. In moving toward livable communities, land-use solutions really have to include an integrated approach to land use, transportation and housing decisions. Those three things have to be looked at together. Mixed-use development is also important, as is investing in communities through revitalization and targeted public infrastructures.
Community engagement can be encouraged by promoting social involvement in volunteer organizations and community facility planning. Dona Wishart mentioned Marc Freedman’s book *Encore.* It really says a lot, but one of the things he talks about is the fact that people who are approaching retirement or semi-retirement age, people who are 50, 55 or 60, have got another 35 years. So what do you do with that time? It’s a wonderful opportunity for people to do the job they have always wanted to do. It gives people a second chance. It lets them work in a different kind of way. It’s an exciting time, and we have to capitalize on it.

We need to promote design and modifications that help meet physical needs of older people. We’ve spent years trying to move and rebalance long-term care to make it so people can stay in their homes. We do that with meals and transportation, home health aides and nurses, and other aspects of our service delivery system. But paying attention to the house itself is really going to support that goal. Visitability is one of the concepts out there. It includes easy access, easy passage and easy use. How can a home work for a person regardless of what their needs or abilities might be?

Another major recommendation is to assure that there is an adequate supply of diverse and affordable housing. We’ve talked a lot about that.

We can look at some positive steps to enhance mobility options. Those include public transportation, organized private transportation, walking and bicycling, and specialized transportation. That’s not a new list of options, but we really continue to struggle with how to be creative in addressing them. Transportation has been a long-term issue.

Complete streets is a movement that is clearly catching on. There is a lot of discussion about complete streets that let people walk, bicycle and drive. The Iowa Department of Transportation is examining how they might incorporate a complete-streets policy. Johnson County, Iowa, has adopted a complete street policy, I think, and several other places have.

I’ve brought a variety of examples of what AARP is doing on the ground. I’d like to look at projects in Burlington, Vermont; Honolulu, Hawaii; Johnson County, Iowa; Linn County, Iowa; and central Iowa.

Burlington, Vermont, brought people together and said, “OK, what do we need in this community for successful aging?” Their work pointed to a number of things related to walkability. It was a huge issue. They organized volunteers who actually got out to the street corners and did a walking audit with the clipboard and looked at what they could do. They pulled

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Figure 12. Comparison of the number of daily trips made by persons age 50 and older who drive to the number made by those who do not drive. Source: AARP Public Policy Institute National Household Travel Survey, 2001.

The travel environment must be improved to support life-long driver education and safer driving. Iowa has been very progressive in terms of our roads and road safety under Tom Welch, Iowa’s state transportation safety engineer. We have added longer turning lanes, larger signage and a number of other things.

Welch has said that now it is down to driver behavior. How do we change behavior to improve safety? However, I think that there are also more opportunities in terms of crosswalks, longer lights and other improvements that could make it better.

AARP has a driver safety program, and this provides an example of how you can get the community engaged. In one of our communities there is a hospital that had an occupational therapist who is now a driver safety coordinator. She is also doing a car-fit program. That program looks at how people’s cars fit for them. Can they reach over? Can they see everything? Is the car too big? Is it too small? They will offer that and other programs on an ongoing basis as a way to try to address driver safety and family conversations around driver safety.

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together the Burlington Public Works Department as a key partner on the project. They now have a cable TV program that airs regularly where they talk to the public works director, a policeman and an EMT about issues related to walkability and safety. They also have developed a Web site with their information reports. They’ve got a number of resources up there for grants and connectivity. They are now broadening their focus from safe sidewalks into a broader look at how they can make Burlington a more livable community.

Hawaii had the highest pedestrian accident rate of anywhere in the country:

- 2006: 32 pedestrians killed (15 over the age of 65)
- 2005: 36 pedestrians killed (13 in crosswalks)
- 2004: 30 pedestrians killed
- 2003: 23 pedestrians killed

AARP decided to do a walk audit and invited people to participate (figure 13). They were overwhelmed by the response. Disability groups and a number of bicycle groups responded. They had never had a big enough voice to do anything about this. The state was putting in a new light rail system with 13 retail nodes. The project secured a state appropriation for over $500,000 to add pedestrian safety features to those 13 nodes. So this is pretty great.

Johnson County, Iowa, had put together a consortium on aging. It was a group of people that included university members, service providers and senior advocates. They did a great job of putting together a market analysis and a series of reports on successful aging. They wanted to figure out how to take it to the next step, so they came to AARP. AARP Chief Executive Officer Bill Novelli happened to be in Iowa City. I worked with them for about nine months on how to structure an event that was going to embrace the community and establish some priorities for successful aging.

That event has held in September 2006, and 124 participated in that planning process. It included the superintendent of schools, the head of University of Iowa hospitals, and had a broad spectrum of people. That group of people broke into four subgroups, and they each looked at a series of recommendations and established some priorities for those recommendations. They came back together and decided on three top actions for their livable community project. One was related to public health and activity; one was related to housing; and the third was about how to coordinate and consolidate information about aging services, access to services, access to programs, access to transportation. They have now been able to expand. They have added a workgroup specifically for transportation, and they are adding a 50-plus workgroup. They have a Web site up. The project was also able to find a place within the county government to house a staff person to keep all the parts moving forward at the same time. They did a great job.

The AARP chapter president from Linn County, Iowa, went to the AARP member event in Boston last year. She participated in a livable community discussion. When she came back she said, “We’re going to do this here.” She started calling people, and she got them in a room. She is doing it. She took the AARP’s Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide and broke it down into four or five groups. The guide is a relatively simple set of survey questions. Linn County is currently doing their community assessment. They are using existing data and existing projects that have been going on. There has been a really comprehensive study about a new senior center, and a new health clinic was just completed in the county. They are

pulling together information from those projects and existing data because they don’t have any money to hire someone to do a new analysis. Their goal right now is to get this assessment done. They are filtering through the questions to see what they don’t know. Then they will take that next step. They are hoping to have this part of the assessment done by the end of August, and I think they are going to do it.

There are a number of things going on in central Iowa. I have been working with Iowa Great Places. We have been working with the Iowa Department of Public Health and the Healthy Communities program. It seems to me that livable communities could be another dimension to the work Great Places is doing and that communities that want to be Great Places could consider people who are maturing. Great Places could look at adding that dynamic. So we’ve gotten together and talked. We’ve done some coaches training about a comprehensive planning process that communities can use. The coaches aren’t going to be coaching people through the process, but, as they are doing their reviews of communities, they are going to be able to look at how well communities got stakeholders together, how well they did their assessment and environmental scan, and how comprehensive they were in their planning.

We are looking at having 25 to 30 communities come together for a two-day training on community impact facilitation or participatory strategic planning. We want to bring those communities together because there are people who are already making good progress. They’ve already got some leadership, either through public health projects or through Great Places or through livable communities programs. We’ll see. We want to look at how communities can build leadership if they don’t have a riverfront, a waterfront, a big-name corporation or some other high-profile driving force. How can they create change and pull things together in their communities? We are hoping to do that in February 2009, and we are very excited about it. That will be one of four activities that happen through 2009.

A program called Rebuilding Together is also active in central Iowa. Rebuilding Together may not be active in very many communities, but what they do may be relevant. Rebuilding Together is a not-for-profit that does revitalization and energy efficiency improvements in homes of elders and persons with disabilities that meet certain income criteria. The Greater Des Moines area has a Rebuilding Together affiliate, and this year they did 44 houses. They had 1,100 volunteers and, I think, about 20 sponsors for those projects. They have an ongoing remodification program. But what they didn’t necessarily have were some skilled people who could help them be successful with that ongoing modification program.

To address that, AARP will be sponsoring a CAPS certification. CAPS stands for Certified Aging in Place Specialist, and it’s a program from the National Association of Home Builders. The people who are certified are generally developers, home builders, a few architects and some interior design people, but there are not a lot of them around. In our small towns those people are important, but there are a lot of other people that should be CAPS certified. For this scholarship, we’ve got two plumbers from the Plumbers and Steamfitters Union. They are committed to building ramps at no cost and are pulling their apprentices in. I’ve also got one physical therapist and two occupational therapists from a major home health agency. We’ve got two of the spec writers from one of the local housing finance organizations. These are folks who ought to know about basic accessibility and universal design features, and they don’t have the certification. We are very excited about that.

We are also doing walk audits in central Iowa. You’ve heard a lot about those. In May 2008, the Iowa Department of Economic Development’s Smart Economic Development Conference brought in a guy to talk about complete streets, which I thought was great. From that we have eight different groups that are really interested in looking at doing walk audits in their communities. We are very excited about how we might be able to support those efforts.

Figure 14 shows the urgency of these issues. Every time I see this graphic again, it scares the heck out of me, and I’m not sure why. The storm is coming here. These are counties where over 20 percent of the population is age 65 or older. Now there are 34 such counties, and by 2030 there will be 88 such counties. It’s sobering.

There are several issues we have to consider in looking at Iowa. One is the age of Iowa’s housing stock, and Mickey Carlson is all over that. It’s an issue. Another is the dependence on cars for transportation all across the state in rural communities. We also have severe shortages of health care professionals in terms of access to health care services.

There is a lack of consolidation of our economic base. What’s really happening? Where’s the work? Where
are the people? We have to consider the shrinking access to critical services because of those kinds of disparities and the distribution of the economic pie. In terms of the workforce, 50-plus workers are really part of the solution and not part of the problem, but it’s a huge issue to consider. Average income levels are also important. We talked about the range of average incomes, but, as Kyle Kostelecky said, the average income per year is something like $34,000 for people over 65 [see discussion starting on page 27]. That is part of our reality base even though we have people who are in much higher income brackets as well. Finally, attitudes towards aging are an important issue, and we have talked about that a lot. It’s not only the attitudes of aged persons themselves but the attitudes of our communities towards persons who are aging. Nancy Henkin from Community for All Ages, a program of Temple University’s Center for Intergenerational Living, presented five lessons learned from a very similar kind of work: Improvements can’t happen all at once; you have got to find a common ground; you have to be intentional; you have to consider the cultural context of the community; and you have to build leadership. How do you create continuity amid all the political forces and everything else? How do you build leadership to keep things moving and rolling forward?

References


The Future of Elder-friendly Communities in Iowa

Facilitator: Don Broshar
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The goal of this facilitated discussion was to consider the future of elder-friendly communities in Iowa. The facilitator divided the participants into two groups and asked them to identify issues, opportunities and strategies for developing such communities. The following section contains the edited summaries from each group.

Summary of Group One Discussion, presented by Peter Butler

We had a good discussion. We lost our focus a couple of times but we gained it back, and I think we came up with some really good summary ideas and potential vision of how this whole thing could unfold in the near future and the distant future. We identified several critical issues.

The first was bias toward the aging and the loss of extended family. That relates to the traditional form of life and how care happened within the family. That’s a societal issue, really.

The aged are also marginalized spatially within the community. People saw that as a critical issue.

The Internet and isolation from the Internet were identified as an issue. We think we are very connected. Are we connected to our community? What is community? Is it the people we’re blogging with online or is it the people next door? That was given as a reason for lack of mainstream physical activities and the normal daily exercise regiment activity.

Connections and familial relationships, again, are another critical issue. Who’s coming back to Iowa? Why are they coming back? How do we facilitate those folks coming back to be with family and to retain those connections?

We identified this triangle: policy at the state level, design of communities and thinking about social shifts. How do we change or think about tweaking behavior patterns, how we behave in our communities or how we interact in our communities? Is it through a grassroots campaign? How do we develop leaders? Becky [Groff] talked a lot about that, going around the state developing community leaders to be advocates for these types of issues. Nobody is talking about them. How does that discussion start?

We are also thinking about not so much the elder-friendly community design but lifetime communities, all ages and multi-generational. We are not focusing on the particular age group this roundtable was organized around, but we knew that was going to happen and we are glad that the idea of elder-friendly communities has taken a back seat to lifetime communities.

Entrepreneurship is critical. Where is the money coming from? Who can design a business model around this concept? Who is going to be successful? Who’s going to make these things happen? Is it the government? Is it tax dollars? Or is it private industry, private entrepreneurship, businesses? How does that happen?

What excites us about the idea? I’m excited about infrastructure. I’m excited that our infrastructure is failing and is going to have to be rebuilt, but we are going to be able to rebuild it in a really interesting way. The idea of
inclusive design for all. I should tell you that I met with the DOT last week, and they are talking about design for all now as well. Surprise, surprise. So they are on board with that idea.

Retrofitting and rehabilitation will be important. What’s there? What are the bones of these communities? What gives these communities identity, history and tradition? How can that structure be maintained while also retrofitting for a new type of mobility and use?

We considered our available resources. An important one is folks with experience. We need a clearinghouse of information for this. Becky Groff has linked us up with a bunch of Web sites. The folks from Michigan have a bunch of information online. We have to know where that information is, access it and gain experience from the people who are already doing this type of work around the country.

The discussion is beginning, though. We need to get more age groups involved in the discussion. We need all generations involved in the discussion of livable communities. Helping people flourish and age successfully: that can be a real goal for everyone. How do we grow? How do we engage with our communities? How do we age successfully in place?

We discussed the idea of economic development in attracting seniors. That idea of two seniors equaling one manufacturing job was something identified as a surprising and exciting statistic.

We identified several concerns: There is not enough housing or intermediate housing. Developers are not going to build them, because it costs more to build a 1,000-square-foot house than it does to buy an old one. There is not competition there for developers to build this type of housing unit. On the idea of rehabilitating houses, how do you retrofit it to make it universally accessible? We have Lisa who is going to be the star. You can just cross that off, because Lisa Bates is going to take care of that for the state of Iowa.

Connectivity is a concern. How do you get to those core services? That’s a real concern. It is as basic as sidewalks or as complicated at shifting economies and tastes to the interstate. We need to look at transportation costs and efficiencies. Is it public transportation that brings people to their critical service destinations or is it private? How is that going to happen? That’s a real concern.

Tax dollars are a concern. Nobody wants to pay for this stuff right? Nobody wants their tax dollars going to this type of project. If we build value into it, if we create awareness, if we make it feel like everyone is going to benefit from these projects, that might be the strategy. Another overall concern is that we need people to invest in these communities, and we are not seeing that investment yet.

Who is trained? Who needs to understand these issues? We’re talking about county engineers, we are talking about contractors, we are talking about people who actually build in the physical environment, people who build homes, people who do remodeling of homes. They need to know so that they can do these things right. Education of consumers: Again, Lisa Bates will take care of that for us. If you are buying a house and you are 50 years old and you want to stay in your community for the next 30 years, you have to know what you are looking for in terms of housing, because it is important for aging in place.

The retail glue of the community is dissolving. People aren’t shopping on Main Street. That used to bring these people together with the triangulation of the pharmacy, the grocery store and people meeting each other on the street. What’s going to replace that in small-town Iowa? That’s a real concern.

We also discussed the implication for Iowa and goals to take away from the roundtable. How are we going to communicate these concepts and disseminate them? How are we going to build an awareness, build a sensitivity in community leaders? How is this message going to spread across the state?

We need a strategic plan for housing and community development at the state level. We need the governor involved, and we need the state government involved.
Regarding funding, we said we are going to write a book. The title of the book: *Iowa, for Mature Audiences Only*. In that book we are going to record success stories, case studies and best practices as they are in Iowa, because we can't relate to case studies from Seattle. They are wonderful, but people don't think they deserve them here. We need Iowa case studies. We need Iowa success stories. I think Bob was talking about the factor of ten or five. If we could get ten statewide, that would be a real eye-opener.

We discussed Great Places and the idea of integrating the livable community design into the Great Places program. We also need to train leaders at the local level.

How do we measure success? This is a problematic issue. I think the university and Extension might be able to think about measuring and quantifying success.

Looking at complete streets and rebuilding infrastructure, we need to consider how that can happen in a sustainable way to create the kind of connectivity we are hoping for.

We need to frame statewide goals, we need to keep them simple. Have a vision, break it into strategies and attack the problem. It's fun to be idealistic like this isn't it?

Where are the rural folks? Where are the people who live on the farm? Where are they in this discussion? They need to be in this discussion as well, because they have some real political clout and they have a lot of property tax money they are paying. So where are those folks in this discussion?

We want to flip the idea of the brain drain. Let those young people go. They are going to come back to raise their families. Let them go for five or ten years. They are going to get married, have kids, and come back for the schools. Bring in the aging population. Bring in the seniors, because they are a real asset in terms of community building and the work force. All those things we've been talking about.

*Summary of Group Two Discussion, presented by Susan Erickson*

We didn't follow the nice logical order of questions we were supposed to. We were thinking outside the box. So I'll just go into our ideas.

We started talking about Iowa's future. We talked about transportation poverty. I believe that in Lamoni if you have to go to the doctor sometimes you have to pay about $40 for transportation costs to get to the doctor. So there is poverty in terms of how much it costs, and there is poverty in that is just isn't available.

What are the impacts of fuel at $8 to $10 a gallon, or lack of access to any fuel? We thought that was information that would inform some future decisions. Maybe people would walk more. Maybe Tom Morain would walk from the east side of the town square to the north side of the town square. You can tell that this one has me just baffled, but more power to you. Maybe there would be more mass transit availability.

We talked a lot about taking existing situations and looking at them as opportunities. Compact communities may be perfectly positioned to thrive with high fuel prices.

We were looking for other positive factors. Seniors tend to shop locally. That's good all the way around. Technology may reduce the need to drive at times; you guys talked about shopping on the Internet and other things. You talked about working from home or working from an Internet-based place within a smaller community. Meghan O'Brien had looked at some information online about an existing program of evaluation, assessment and certification of your business as elder-friendly. I believe there are some local communities that are doing that.

We talked a lot about regionalization of services versus city-based identities. You have to have that critical mass to achieve basic services like a grocery store and many other things. Awhile ago, somebody was looking at just a way to assess critical services in your community, such as whether you can buy underwear in your community.
That was a way to assess if you have basic services there or not. If you don’t have a certain critical mass of population, maybe it’s just not going to work for you.

There is a need for local leadership. Savvy communities will become elder-friendly. There needs to be local engagement. It doesn’t work if somebody else comes from out of town and tries to start it up in your community.

Peter Butler: I forgot something that we talked about that follows on that. Communities that get on this training are going to be successful; those that don’t probably won’t be successful in the future. So we back that up.

Susan Erickson: Alright, good. It’s two-for-two so it must be true.

We should evaluate the assets that we do have in our communities and [those assets] become our menu of opportunities. The economist, Meghan O’Brien, says lots of economic opportunities are related to this whole elder-friendly community or community for all ages. There are lots of economic opportunities there. She had some new lightbulb moments today, and so she’s even more excited about this. Business starts would be possible, etc.

When 25 percent of the population is age 65 or older, will we have the critical mass of children to be able to have the excellent schools for which we are known? Good question. I’m sort of thinking that as more elders come, more younger people will come to provide services for them and maybe it will take care of itself, but that question was raised in our discussion.

Is consolidation of schools really a good idea when we look at all the factors—not just the short-term costs but the long-term costs as well? I’ll leave it at that because we could be here all night talking about that one. Related to consolidation of schools, we talked about when your community does lose its school, what deep implications there are for loss of identity, loss of common goals and common things you are excited about. If Lamoni beats Leon in basketball, football, soccer, you name the sport, it is a cause for community celebration. If Leon and Lamoni are in the same school district, what do we have to be excited about now?

Does elder-friendly community design need to be urban? We decided no. Statistics that we saw over the last couple of days really reflect the importance of being close to family and friends and the interaction with family and friends. It is very relationship-based.

Why are Iowans reluctant to see what’s good about ourselves? For some reason we just have a hard time celebrating that. Could we learn to sell our town? Could we learn to accept the premise that achieving elder-friendly communities might be a success and not a failure? I have a feeling that if you could see the dollars flow, then it would be deemed a success. As this group said, success and elder-friendly community development will be spotty. Those savvy ones that jump on the band wagon will succeed, but not everyone will buy into this. Can this become a planning strategy that will underlie development and not just a reaction to economic circumstances? Probably, if we put our minds to it.

A marketing and sales opportunity about small town development is that, real or not, there is a real perception of safety. This was being applied to Lamoni as a college recruitment tool, but it is also very much a factor for the elderly. Feeling safe is very important to the elderly, or whatever we are going to call them. So that is a marketing tool we can use.

Lastly, elder-friendly community development must involve the business community, not just us planners and background people. We’ve got to involve the business community—including real estate developers. They really were not at this roundtable, and perhaps they should have been. We really need to involve them as they are providers of a lot of the housing as well as some of the business stock for locations. So we need to include them as well.
Don Broshar: Thank you. We appreciate both groups and the hard work you did. Obviously from the results that are up here and the summaries that you just heard, there wasn't a lack of discussion in your groups. The last day and a half or two days have provided you a great opportunity to discuss something that most of you have some interest and passion for, and so I appreciate your willingness to summarize this for us and give us some things to work from. One last thing I would like to challenge you with: as you leave today at the end of the session, I'd like for you to begin to reflect on the experience. When you came in yesterday morning or whenever it was that you joined the group, what were you expecting and what were you thinking about? As you leave today, what were you experiencing? Just do some reflecting on that as you are driving home, or flying home, or walking home, or whatever you are doing. I'd appreciate it if you would give some reflection on that.
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