

Design for Aging in Place



Background

Definition

Design for aging in place involves designing the built environment to be usable to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of special needs or age.

Communities have the opportunity to develop a better understanding of locally specific aging experiences, specifically the obstacles and constraints presented by the built environment. An aging-sensitive community provides housing alternatives, a transportation system and a land use pattern that enable all residents to maintain healthy, independent lives even as their needs change. Aging-sensitive planning is also called universal design.

Health, equity and sustainability considerations

Strategies to promote aging in place put an emphasis on increasing access and options for all residents, regardless of age, health, or income. According to the American Planning Association, “communities built to address the needs of older persons and families are communities that can serve all residents well. Livable communities have physical and social features that benefit people of all ages. When a wide range of needs is addressed, families and individuals have the option to stay and thrive in their communities as they age.”

The central Puget Sound, like the rest of the United States, has entered an aging trend. The number of senior citizens is predicted to double to 23 percent of King County’s population by 2025. Seniors who remain in suburban homes often find themselves in communities designed for families with young children

70% of seniors are living in the same place they celebrated their 65th birthday.

and cars. Daily activities such as going to visit friends, shopping, and other needed services can be challenging without a private vehicle and limited public transit.

Older adults are living longer, which means they are more likely to have disabilities, need additional services and require modified homes during their lifetimes. Increased medical costs, longer life spans, and limited savings mean that up to 90 percent of seniors will outlive their individual savings.

An aging population presents many opportunities for local jurisdictions. Seniors pay taxes but often do not require schools, have low crime rates, support the arts and cultural activities and are often active in civic and volunteer activities.

Program and Policy Examples

Program examples—How is it used locally?

Programs promoting aging in place can take many forms, including:

Affordable Housing. These efforts include incorporating universal design in new construction and remodeling, making strategic investments of public funding to expand the supply of affordable housing for seniors, and encouraging the creation of new types of supportive housing that creates a wider range of choices for all seniors.

An accessory dwelling unit (ADU) is a small, self-contained residential unit built on the same lot as an existing single family home. They can be an effective way to add variety and affordable rental housing stock to existing single family neighborhoods. ADUs can be a great option for allowing residents to age in place or live with or near family and caregivers, providing a flexible way to address family needs for additional housing. Washington cities and towns with populations greater than 20,000 are required to plan for ADUs in single-family zones ([RCW 43.63A.215](#)). The Puget Sound Regional Council’s [Housing Innovations Program](#) (2013) provides more information and best practices for ADUs.

Elder Cottage Housing Opportunity, or ECHO housing, is a portable, fully accessible cottage that is placed on the lot of a single-family home to provide accommodations for an older person. The ECHO house is removed once it is no longer needed—often because the senior resident has found a permanent home. It is not considered a permanent addition to the housing stock. The City of Portland, Oregon, amended its [zoning ordinance](#) to allow for ECHO housing.

Senior housing developments include adult care foster homes, congregate housing, and assisted housing. These types of housing differ from the traditional nursing homes which provide primary care for seniors once their needs increase to the point they can no longer stay at home. These new types of developments often do not conform to existing zoning code and are considered multifamily rental housing or medical institutions. Age-sensitive design should work to integrate these new housing forms through zoning and site planning standards that relate the housing to the surrounding neighborhood and transportation system. Diane Y. Carsten’s [Site Planning and Design for the Elderly](#) (1993) outlines strategies and policy tools to better incorporate senior housing developments into a community.

Local comprehensive plans can also help to promote diverse housing options for seniors. The City of Tukwila’s 2012 [Comprehensive Plan](#) calls for the “promotion of available, quality housing options at all price points to support social diversity and ensure families and individuals can remain in Tukwila as life circumstances change.” This includes expanding opportunities for assisted-living options for seniors that are neither low-income nor in-home care.

Coordinate Transportation. Transportation efforts work to improve mobility and access to public transit. [The King County Mobility Coalition](#) facilitates the coordination of King County special needs transportation to better serve the community. See the [Special Needs Transportation](#) resource guide for more information on transportation for aging populations.

In addition to improving access to public transit, local jurisdictions can also improve pedestrian areas to make them more accessible to seniors. Many pedestrian areas, including sidewalks and crosswalks, are not designed to accommodate seniors. Design improvements include: making pavement more even and smooth, extending the time pedestrians are given to cross the street; constructing bus bulb-outs that bring

the passenger to the bus; and decreasing the speed of cars. New York City's Transportation Alternatives report [Walk the Walk: Connecting Senior Pedestrian Safety to Seniors in New York City](#) (2009) includes an overview of the barriers to senior pedestrian safety and recommendations for policy and plan improvements.

Promote Healthy Living. These efforts include improving access to healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity. [The Farm to Table Partnership](#) connects senior meal and childcare programs with local farms. The partnership's goal is to increase the health and well-being of vulnerable populations by making fresh produce more affordable and accessible.

[The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program](#) works to increase aging populations' access to fresh fruits and vegetables while supporting local sustainable agriculture. Baskets of fresh produce are delivered to homebound seniors and include information on unfamiliar foods, recipes, and information about the farmers. Additionally, each summer, one-time market vouchers are provided to 2,000 low-income seniors.

Most senior centers provide opportunities for fitness, volunteerism, and lifelong learning for anyone over the age of 50. The [Seattle for a Lifetime: City Goals for Older Adults](#) (2010) outlines the role of senior centers and the City of Seattle's policy and goals for older adults. There is also a [comprehensive list of senior centers in King County](#), listed by city. The City of Renton's [Golden Opportunities](#) brochure includes information on opportunities and activities at the Renton Senior Activity Center.

Age-Friendly NYC has launched a pilot program to develop [Aging Improvement Districts](#). To create an Aging Improvement District, the concerns and suggestions of older adults in a specific neighborhood are brought together with the leaders and resources of local businesses, non-profit organizations, city officials, cultural, educational and religious institutions to think strategically to make no- and low-cost improvements. Improvements include adding benches to nearby parks to allow seniors to socialize and rest, and working with local businesses to offer clearly posted senior discounts.

Existing regulations

[The Aging and Long-Term Support Administration](#) is part of the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. The administration provides programs, services, and resources to adults who need care.

[The State Council on Aging](#) was established under [RCW 43.20A.680-690](#) as an advisory council to the Governor, the Secretary of Social and Health Services, and the Office of Aging. [The Washington State Plan on Aging 2010-2014](#) sets objectives and goals for the state, including: strengthening home and community based services; and implementing evidence-based healthy aging programs.

Area Agencies on Aging were established under the [Older Americans Act](#) in 1973 to respond to the needs of Americans 60 and over in every local community. By providing a range of options that allow older adults to choose the home and community-based services and living arrangements that suit them best, AAAs make it possible for older adults to remain in their homes and communities as long as possible.

The [Washington Association of Area Agencies on Aging](#) provides an overview to local area agencies. [Aging and Disability Services](#) is the Area Agency on Aging for Seattle and King County. Aging and Disability Services plans, coordinates, and advocates for a comprehensive service delivery system for older adults, family

caregivers, and people with disabilities in King County. The agency is a division of the Seattle Human Services Department and works in partnership with King County and United Way to: improve the health and quality of life for seniors and adults with disabilities; connect seniors and adults with disabilities with helpful resources; and provide help and support for caregivers.

Aging and Disability Services also developed the [Area Plan on Aging for Seattle-King County](#) (2014), a plan that outlines steps to: improve health care quality for older adults and adults with disabilities; address basic needs; improve health and well-being; increase independence for frail older adults and adults with disabilities; and promote aging readiness.

Implementation

Opportunities for funding

Funding and resources to promote aging in place are often tied to other work. For instance, developing senior housing options can be linked to affordable housing funding and development levies. Improving pedestrian access for seniors can be linked to pedestrian safety initiatives and Safe Routes to School.

Considerations for local implementation

The World Health Organization's [Checklist of Essential Features of Age-friendly Cities](#) is a tool for a local jurisdiction's self-assessment and map for charting progress towards more age-sensitive design.

Partners for Livable Communities' [Community Report Card](#) helps local leaders and residents to think about their community's strengths and weaknesses in age-sensitive design.

Resources

Age-Friendly NYC's [Tools and Resources Page](#) (2014)

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) [Livable Communities Resource Page](#)

American Planning Association's [Multigenerational Planning](#)

[The Northwest Universal Design Council](#) (NWUDC)

MRSC's [Impact of Demographic Changes on Local Government Resources Page](#) (2013)

Partners for Livable Communities' [Aging in Place Initiative Aging in Place Technical Assistance Guide](#) (2011)

Senior Housing Study: [Age Wave Maxes Out Affordable Housing](#), King County 2008-2025 (2009)

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's [Residential Remodeling and Universal Design](#) (1996)

World Health Organization's [Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide](#) (2007)