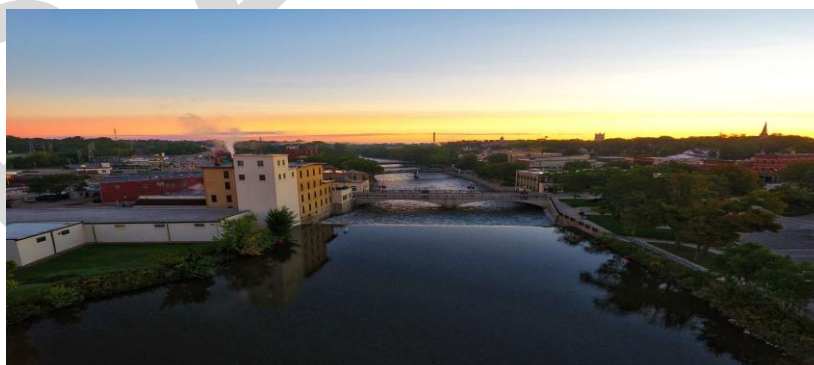


# Age-Friendly Northfield: ACTION PLAN

FEBRUARY 2019



# Letter from the Mayor

*(To be inserted later)*

DRAFT

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# Executive Summary

*(To be added later)*

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# Introduction

Age-friendly communities have been called good places to grow up and grow old. They deliberately consider the well-being of residents at every stage of life, especially older age, and recognize that cities have a big role to play in helping us all fulfill the tremendous potential of aging.<sup>1</sup>

With that in mind, Age-Friendly Northfield is delighted to share this action plan with the community.

Like many other places, Northfield's population is aging. In 2010, 19 percent of residents were 55 or older; by 2030 that will rise to 32 percent.

Historically, government at all levels has simply not considered the realities of longer life spans as they planned housing, transportation, and healthcare systems.<sup>2</sup> That is slowly changing, but not yet at necessary scale.

**The WHO/AARP program is the global leader for age-friendly communities. The network of cities is growing with impressive speed, with more than 300 members in the U.S. and more than 700 around the world.**

Local level action is very important. Community leaders in Northfield saw the importance of this work, organized a grassroots effort, gained city support, and in 2016 joined the World Health Organization (WHO)/AARP Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities.

Now led by a cross-sector Steering Committee of community residents and professionals, Age-Friendly Northfield follows the four-stage process laid out by WHO/AARP. This includes developing a three-year action plan based on the findings of a community assessment of older adult needs.

That action plan is now complete and will be implemented from 2020-2022. The plan specifically addresses four broad issues—or domains—that older residents (aged 50+) who completed the survey indicated are in need of the most urgent attention: Housing, Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, Health and Wellness, and Community Information.

Teams of community leaders with special expertise or interest in each domain will be formed to refine and implement each domain's goals and strategies. Those teams will also lead plan implementation.

Northfield is a vibrant, progressive city noted for, among other things, civic-minded residents who are actively engaged in bettering the community. It is also home to an uncharacteristically high number of nonprofit organizations and healthcare providers for its size. These are other features that make Northfield well-equipped to take on the work of becoming an age-friendly community—a place where older adults can “live in security, enjoy good health and continue to participate fully in society.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Lawler, Kathryn. “Go Big or Go Home,” *Public Policy & Aging Report*, 2015.

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<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization

# Age-Friendly in Context: Portrait of Northfield

The City of Northfield sits on the Cannon River in scenic southeastern Minnesota. Less than an hour from Minneapolis-Saint Paul, Northfield is a (big) small town—population about 20,000—with a distinct character and defined sense of place.

Northfield is a vibrant city with an engaged citizenry and progressive sensibility. Residents and city leaders have worked diligently to preserve and strengthen its unique community identity and local economy. Unlike many other small towns, Northfield's downtown remains an active hub with historic buildings, nearby historic homes, thriving businesses and restaurants, and riverfront parks and open space. The city, at residents' urging, has shunned most residential and commercial development on its fringes in favor of infill development and increased density inside the city.

Northfield is also characterized by its commitment to environmental sustainability. Residents have voiced their strong feeling over the years that natural resources be protected and preserved—natural areas, farmland, recreational areas, and wildlife habitat. This aligns with a desire to use environmentally sustainable practices such as clean energy and green building.

The Cannon River plays a defining role in Northfield's past and present. The city was established in the 1850s along the Cannon to take advantage of hydropower that could be used to mill wheat grown on surrounding farms. This local industry drove Northfield's economy and growth. The Malt-O-Meal plant, now part of POST Consumer Brands, has manufactured cereal in Northfield for more than a century and remains a fixture in the community, as well as a large employer.



The river flows through the city, adding to the charm of Northfield's downtown, and waterfront paths, parks, and bridges allow residents to enjoy its natural beauty. The Cannon also provides many outdoor recreation opportunities. Locals and visitors take great advantage of canoeing, kayaking, swimming, hiking, tubing and fishing on the river, and area businesses that support these activities contribute to the economy. The city offers more than 35 public parks and recreation areas, including some with extensive access to the Cannon River.

Carleton and St. Olaf Colleges—two

esteemed liberal arts schools—call Northfield home. Their 5,000 students account for about 28 percent of the local population. As such, they are a defining part of Northfield’s community fabric, economy, housing, transportation, and retail. The colleges provide opportunities for residents to attend world-class music and cultural events, lectures, classes, and other educational and enrichment activities. Students, faculty, and the schools at large are very much a part of the community but also a world unto themselves, making them a source of ever-changing vitality. However, like most college towns, Northfield must continually navigate the dynamic forces that exist between the schools and the city.

Quality healthcare is readily available and a notable community asset. Owned by the city, Northfield Hospital & Clinics is a local independent health care organization that serves the region, including the southern suburbs of the Twin Cities. Both the famed Mayo Clinic in Rochester and the Twin Cities’ abundant healthcare services are an hour’s drive away.

Northfield is also well served by an unusually high number of nonprofit organizations for its size. This is evidence of its culture of engagement and collective desire to better the community. Local leaders report that improved coordination and communication between nonprofits, however, would improve their effectiveness and help them use resources more efficiently.<sup>4</sup>

Like many other places, Northfield’s population is aging. In 2010, 19 percent of residents were 55 or older; by 2030 that will rise to 32 percent. The growth among the oldest residents, aged 85-plus, is also worth noting. That demographic will increase from 1.7% to 3.8% of residents between 2010 and 2030. While they may sound like small figures, it will amount to more than 400 additional people in this age group, many of whom will likely need some degree of assistance.

Also like many places, Northfield’s population has been diversifying. While still predominantly White (88.5%), more than 8.7% is Hispanic, 3.5% Asian, and 2% Black.<sup>5</sup> Close to 9% of Northfield’s 65-plus population lives below the poverty threshold (though there is a fairly large margin of error).<sup>6</sup> This is higher than Minnesota’s statewide rate (7.5) but lower than the national rate (9.5).

For older adults, Northfield is ahead of the game in many regards. *Money* magazine in 2014 named it the “Best Place to Retire,” and Kiplinger Personal Finance in 2017 published an article titled, “Why Northfield, Minn. is a great place to retire.” They noted features like the city’s abundant parks and natural recreation areas, arts and cultural offerings, community festivals, affordability, an active older adult community, and the

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<sup>4</sup> Coffin, Dangor, Ehlenfleht, et al. A Strategic Analysis of the Northfield Nonprofit Sector. May 2011.

<sup>5</sup> US Census Bureau. ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

<sup>6</sup> 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, US Census Bureau.

perks that come with being a college town. The Twin Cities are a 45-minute jaunt up Interstate 35, putting metro amenities within reach, as well. Indeed, 98 percent of Northfield residents aged 50-plus say they feel it is a good place for older people to live.<sup>7</sup>

FiftyNorth (formerly the Northfield Senior Center) is an important hub for many older adults. It has more than 1,800 members and sees 300 people a day in and out of the center. With leadership from its members, it has evolved over the years to provide impressive breadth and depth of programming. It views older age as a time to learn, grow, be active, and enjoy life. In 2000 it marshaled the resources and partners to construct the Northfield Community Resource Center, which houses FiftyNorth, a warm-water exercise pool, fitness center for older adults, and other service agencies. FiftyNorth is an important voice for advancing older adult concerns in the city and has been a driving force in developing Age-Friendly Northfield.

Many other community assets and organizations provide a strong baseline age-friendliness. Their efforts, individually and together, will contribute significantly to advancing Age-Friendly Northfield.

The **Beautify Northfield Coalition** (BNC) is a group of local organizations including Northfield in Bloom, The Roundtable, Northfield Garden Club, Master Gardeners, Arts and Culture Commission, Environmental Quality Commission, City of Northfield, Chamber of Commerce, Northfield Arts Guild, and Save the Northfield Depot. BNC is committed to ensuring that Northfield's public landscapes, gardens, and historic buildings are aesthetically pleasing, well cared for, and reflect the community's pride in its built and natural environments. It is convened and facilitated by Northfield in Bloom.

The **Cannon Valley Elder Collegium** offers high-quality liberal arts classes for area residents aged 50 and over. Many instructors are retired college faculty and public school teachers, and classes range from literature and music to science and philosophy.

The **City of Northfield** has been a partner in age-friendly efforts from the early stages and continues to support and act on its commitment to this work.

The **Community Action Center** has served Northfield for 50 years, helping more than 2,500 people each year with housing assistance, gas vouchers, and groceries, among other services. It operates the Food Shelf, which includes delivery to residents who need it; the Nutrition Assistance Program for Seniors (NAPS) program; and a weekly meal open to the public.

The **Eldercare Committee** has met regularly for years to share information and experience concerning care of older patients. Active and retired doctors, nurses, parish nurses and others from Northfield Hospital, Allina and the Mayo Clinic

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<sup>7</sup> The 2017 AARP Age-friendly Community Survey of Northfield, Minn. Residents Age 50+



participate in the committee in a spirit of collaboration and ongoing improvement of elder health care in the community.

The **Northfield Advanced Care Plan Action Committee (NACPAC)** is a subset of the Eldercare Committee. Based out of Northfield Hospital & Clinics, the group includes trained facilitators from Allina, FiftyNorth, Northfield Retirement Community, and ThreeLinks who encourage and help as many people as possible to create an advanced care plan.

**Kildahl Park Pointe** is a senior housing cooperative that promotes active adult living. It includes 51 units, with more than a third of its space dedicated to common areas.

**Laura Baker Services Association** provides housing, educational and support services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. They serve people throughout a lifetime and also offer support for family members of individuals with special needs.

**Mill Stream Commons** is an assisted living community with studio, one- and two-bedroom apartment rentals. Located in downtown Northfield, it also offers respite care for short-term stays or caregiver relief.

**Neighbors United** is a nonprofit advisory and advocacy group that works to empower Northfield's immigrant and refugee communities and bring visibility to the issues they face.

**Northfield Hospital & Clinics** is municipally owned and well-known for its quality care. It also runs the community's Meals on Wheels program, conducts support groups, provides home care services, and houses a long-term care facility.

The **Northfield Housing Redevelopment Authority** works to provide a sufficient supply of adequate, safe, and sanitary dwellings in Northfield. It strives to create affordable housing opportunities and strengthen neighborhoods, partnering with other organizations, such as the Cannon River Community Land Trust, to implement affordable housing initiatives in the community.

**Northfield Retirement Community** is a faith-based housing community that offers independent and assisted living options as well as memory care, short-term care and skilled nursing. It includes a café open to the public as well as congregate dining, in addition to many other services. NRC is the largest senior housing facility in Northfield, with more than 250 units.

**Northfield School District** operates high-performing schools and is the city's third largest employer.

**Three Links Care Center** provides a range of services to older adults who need assistance. *Home Care Link* offers in-home services to provide everything from help with household tasks to skilled nursing. *Vital Link* adult day services brings people to Three Links to socialize, enjoy a meal with other participants, take part in a range of activities, and receive services, as well as to give caregivers a break during the day. *Transitional care* services help people recovering from surgery or injury.



**Village on the Cannon** is a condominium for active, independent seniors. The 46-unit community overlooks the Cannon River and is within walking distance to downtown. Units range in sizes from studios to large two-bedrooms. Amenities include a library, community room, exercise room, guest suite, and underground parking.

### *Livability: How are we doing?*

AARP recently developed an interactive online Livability Index that measures the livability of every city and neighborhood in the country. Northfield earns a 61 out of 100 on the index, which weighs livability<sup>8</sup> across seven categories: housing, neighborhood, transportation, environment, health, engagement, and opportunity. Each category is scored from 1 to 100 based on a set of indicators. Communities are scored by comparing them to each other. (For context, Rochester earns a score of 64, Faribault 54, Red Wing 63, St. Peter 60, and Saint Paul 65.)

This is not necessarily the final word on Northfield’s livability, and some of the measures are imperfect. But as the first and only such tool, the index provides a useful whole-city perspective on a range of community features.

Northfield receives above-average marks across the board, with its highest ratings related to access to and quality of local health care. It also gets high marks for its low

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<sup>8</sup> AARP defines a livable community as “one that is safe and secure, has affordable and appropriate housing and transportation options, and has supportive community features and services. Once in place, those resources enhance personal independence; allow residents to age in place; and foster residents’ engagement in the community’s civic, economic, and social life.” This definition makes livability quite synonymous with “age-friendly,” yet not all definitions of livability are specifically inclusive of older adult concerns, and the terms are not always used interchangeably.

crime rate, parks access, safe streets, drinking water quality, low traffic congestion, high voting rate, limited income inequality, opportunities for civic involvement, and high school graduation rate.

The city does less well related to public transit services and air quality (from local industrial pollution). The college student population skews certain measures—such as age diversity of population and availability of multi-unit housing.

Northfield actively supports livability and continues to anchor many of its plans on those principles.

### *Alignment with the City of Northfield's Strategic Plan*

During the same months that Age-Friendly Northfield was conducting its community needs assessment as a basis for its own action plan, the city was developing a new strategic plan for 2018-2020. That plan is based on extensive community engagement and an internal assessment of the city's work, culture and operations. It focuses on six strategic priorities determined to be of greatest importance to the city.

Age-Friendly Northfield's action plan aligns with and reinforces priorities laid out in the city's strategic plan and is intended to help the city further these shared objectives. Two of the strategic plan's six priorities explicitly apply to older residents: Affordable Housing and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion.

**Affordable Housing** includes an aim to create more affordable housing in general and more senior housing units specifically. It also notes an initiative to create a senior housing plan, which Age-Friendly Northfield would be well-positioned to help inform.

Under **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion** the plan includes "Increased transit options for all" and "Improved access to City services for all demographics." Age-Friendly Northfield could also support the city as it works to advance these efforts.

As the city carries out its strategic plan, AFN's expertise and resources related to older residents could also help the city further its Economic Development and Infrastructure priorities. Further, when the city develops its next comp plan update, AFN could help inform and advise on common goals and their implementation strategies to ensure that age-friendliness is incorporated into this important document as well.

### *Moving Forward*

As Age-Friendly Northfield shifts into implementation mode, community members are invited to join this initiative. Every new perspective and set of experiences around the table enriches the work. And as author and ageism expert Ashton Applewhite writes, "We are all either old or future old." This work will impact us and those we care about, whether sooner or later. We all deserve an age-friendly community.

## Northfield's Path to Becoming Age-Friendly

Age-Friendly Northfield's roots extend deeper than the origins of this initiative. The city's ethos of caring for others and citizen-driven community improvement provided a ready foundation for the work, including specific efforts that support older adults and have been underway for years.

However, a specific seed for Age-Friendly Northfield was planted through an effort related to dementia-friendly communities, which promote greater understanding and support of people living with dementia and their families by engaging and educating cross-sector organizations and the public. Northfield received an ACT on Alzheimer's grant in 2014 to support becoming a dementia-friendly community, joining a network of 33 ACT communities statewide. Key staff from Three Links, Rice County Social Services, Northfield Retirement Community, FiftyNorth, the Chamber of Commerce, Northfield Hospital EMS, and the City of Northfield were actively involved in this work.

When grant funds expired, a handful of initiative leaders hung on to explore continuing in some capacity. They researched other models and approaches to community-wide efforts that support older residents and landed on the World Health Organization/AARP age-friendly program, impressed by the research-based fundamentals, credibility of its leaders, and the program's scope.

The city—through changing administrations—supported the work and agreed to submit the official application, which must come from a local government's mayor, with agreement that it would be a citizen-led effort with city support. On [date], City Council officially approved joining the age-friendly network.

A Steering Committee was formed and community outreach efforts undertaken. Key leaders had experience in organizational development as well as an understanding of how to effectively engage this particular community. They also knew that any such initiative would have to be based solidly on research and strong leadership, because the work would be scrutinized and hard questions would be asked by experienced community members who have seen initiatives come and go.

Soon thereafter the Steering Committee undertook initial work according to the age-friendly program framework. AFN conducted its community assessment of older adult needs in 2017 and 2018, and used what it learned to develop this plan. (See the "How the Plan was Developed" section for more details.)

# The Value of Age-Friendly Communities

## *The Need and the Thinking*

Age-friendly communities respond to two facts. First, population aging is changing our communities, and a response is required. Second, older adults must be deliberately included in community planning—not only because of population aging but on principles of inclusion and the fact that communities where residents can stay independent and active as long as possible are a win for all.

The ability to age in place is often considered a goal and achievement. Yet a shift in thinking has occurred in this space. The American Planning Association and others now think in terms of “aging in community.” This might include remaining in one’s own home, but more importantly, “the concept is focused on building vital communities that engage people of all ages and abilities in a shared, ongoing effort to advance the common good.”<sup>9</sup>

This stands in contrast to the potentially lonely endeavor of aging in place—where the emphasis is on the dwelling itself rather than the many other factors that determine our quality of life. Aging in place is a simpler and more concrete concept and perhaps easier to achieve, yet aging in community is almost certain to produce better results.

The challenging aspects of the aging population are compounded by changes wrought over the past six or seven decades. We have made ourselves car dependent and largely designed routine physical activity and social interaction out of our neighborhoods and cities. Further, rural communities must address challenges related to residents dispersed over large areas away from services and resources.

A helpful way to think about age-friendly cities is whether our communities *enable* us to live with independence and dignity as we age, or whether they *disable* us through a lack of housing and transportation options, necessary services, opportunities for social connection, and so on.

Common perceptions and ideas about getting older have not kept up with modern aging. Lifespans are considerably longer, generational attitudes about aging have evolved, and people are living “younger” lives at older ages. Research has shown that negative stereotypes about aging affect how we live in very real ways.<sup>10</sup> Ageism—stereotyping and discrimination on the basis of a person’s age—actually shapes policies related to older adults, and our own perceptions of aging influence our health and even how long we live.

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas, 1996.

<sup>10</sup> American Society on Aging. *Generations*, Fall 2015.

Well-known development psychologist Erik Erikson wrote of Western societies, "Lacking a culturally viable ideal of old age, our civilization does not really harbor a concept of the whole of life."<sup>11</sup> We usually accept our perceptions as reality, but not all cultures regard older age as something to be dreaded and denied. In fact, respect for elders is a traditional part of many cultures.

- In many Indian families, older adults are the heads of household. They are supported by younger family members and contribute by helping to raise grandchildren and providing highly-respected advice on important family matters.
- East Asian countries such as Korea, Japan, and China have special holidays for a person's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday to celebrate longevity and the beginning of older age. In those cultures, elderly parents often live with and cared for by their children and families.
- Language also conveys cultural attitudes. The Hawaiian word *kūpuna* refers to elders in a spirit that respects their knowledge, experience, and expertise. In Japanese the suffix *-san* is often used with elders as a term of respect and veneration. Filipinos have various terms and customs built into their language for the purpose of showing respect for older people.

While such attitudes and practices are not customary in the United States, age-friendly communities play a role in helping to redefine perceptions of aging and what it means to grow older.

*"Inclusion" includes age!*

In all our focus on diversity and inclusion, age is commonly overlooked. Many cities and organizations are working to ensure that they represent the people they serve—taking into account race, ethnicity, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, and religious affiliation. This is right and important, but sometimes lost in the equation is age and ageism. The experience and perspective of older people must be and explicit part of these efforts.

For cities, this means deliberately including older adult concerns in planning, policies and services. It often requires taking a big step back to identify assumptions and prejudices, and to rethink how older adults are perceived and included. As the WHO points out, "Ageism limits the questions that are asked and the way problems are conceptualized and is hence a major barrier to developing good policies."<sup>12</sup>

**"Ageism limits the questions that are asked and the way problems are conceptualized and is hence a major barrier to developing good policies."**

**-World Health Organization**

<sup>11</sup> Erikson, Joan M. (1997). *The life cycle completed*. NY: Norton.

<sup>12</sup> World Health Organization. <http://www.who.int/ageing/features/faq-ageism/en/>



Older adults are often bundled into a single category known as “seniors” and to some extent regarded as a group separate from the rest of the community—senior center, senior services, senior housing, etc. All of these functions and services are critical, but modern aging requires that we also go beyond the old paradigm—to the benefit of all.

And today, older adulthood can now span four or even five decades. It serves no one to lump 60 with 75, 85, or beyond.

### *Economic Contributions*

Wise cities recognize older adults as crucial to local economic development. This dimension of the aging population is often overlooked or misunderstood. Older adults help drive local economic development in critical ways:

- As a group, older adults hold tremendous power as **consumers**. People aged 50-plus now hold 51 percent of purchasing power in the US.<sup>13</sup> While some older adults have limited means, as a group this cohort wields huge purchasing power and creates demand for retail, services, and recreational opportunities. Moreover, Northfield’s older residents tend to favor and support local businesses.
- Older adults comprise an increasing share of the **workforce**. By 2019, workers aged 55-plus will make up 25 percent of the workforce.<sup>14</sup> (In 1994 that figure was under 12 percent.) Their experience and institutional knowledge are valuable assets to employers.
- Older adults’ work as **volunteers** is worth *billions* of dollars in the US. A quarter of people aged 55 and older volunteered in 2015. The yearly economic benefit of this service to the nation was valued at \$75 billion.<sup>15</sup> This is especially relevant in Northfield given its highly engaged residents. Older people also make significant philanthropic and charitable financial contributions, many of them locally.
- Increasingly, older adults are **family caregivers**. They care for spouses and partners, grandchildren, and others, usually for free. This can reduce or delay the need for public services for older adults who need assistance, and provide more younger adults the chance to work because they have affordable, reliable childcare.

A 2015 research report summarizes it this way: age-friendly communities are “economic engines, strong contributors to local tax base, more efficient users of infrastructure investments, and critical components to curbing healthcare, transportation and other high cost drivers for employers, local governments and local agencies.”<sup>16</sup> This speaks to the direct and indirect economic benefits that result from making age-friendly changes to the physical and social infrastructure of our communities.

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<sup>13</sup> Miller, Shelagh Daly. AdAge. “Adults 50-Plus Now Dominate All Consumer Spending” <http://adage.com/article/aarp-media-sales/adults-50-dominate-consumer-spending/301391/>. November 18, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> National Council on Aging

<sup>15</sup> Corporation for National and Community Service, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Ball, Lambert, Lombard et al. The Value Proposition of Age-Friendly Communities, 2015.

# Introduction to the Action Plan

## How the Plan was Developed

Age-Friendly Northfield created the action plan using guidelines provided by WHO and AARP. Developing and implementing the action plan are core parts of the age-friendly program's broader five-year, four-phase process (see Table 1).

According to this process, member cities must conduct an assessment to learn about community needs. At the core of this assessment is direct input from older residents, as well as from professionals who work with older adults in various ways.

**TABLE 1: WHO/AARP AGE-FRIENDLY PROCESS**

<b>YEAR 0</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Apply to join the network with a completed application and a mayoral letter of commitment.</li></ul>
<b>YEARS 1-2 Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conduct an assessment of the community's baseline age-friendliness.</li><li>• Develop an action plan based on the assessment findings.</li></ul>
<b>YEARS 3-5 Implement &amp; Evaluate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Implement the action plan.</li><li>• Monitor indicators for progress.</li></ul>
<b>YEAR 5 AND BEYOND Continual Improvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evaluate action plan progress to refine strategies, identify new or additional priorities, build on what's been accomplished, and continue the work.</li></ul>

Age-Friendly Northfield used a survey to gather feedback from residents aged 50 and over. A paper survey was mailed to 1,000 residents, and an online version was available in several places. About 460 responses were received and analyzed. Students and faculty from Carleton College assisted in the process. The survey instrument was developed by WHO/AARP and was organized around eight age-friendly domains. (See more detail about this process in the [Livability for All: The 2017 AARP Age-Friendly Community Survey of Northfield Residents Aged 50+.](#))

For numerous items under each domain, respondents were asked to rate how important a particular service or feature was in the community, and then to rate to what degree that service or feature is presently available in Northfield. The difference between the importance and perceived availability was defined as gaps.

The AFN Steering Committee and students from Carleton College's Center for Math and Computing worked together to analyze the survey findings. After particular study of the



most significant gaps, the Steering Committee identified the top four priority domains and determined to focus on those issues in its first stage of work. Those domains are:

1. Housing
2. Health & Wellness
3. Community Information
4. Outdoor Spaces & Buildings

Action around the other four domains—Transportation & Streets, Social Participation, Inclusion, and Education Opportunities; Volunteering & Civic Engagement; and Job Opportunities—will be included, but less fleshed out.

Once the priority domains were determined, the Steering Committee wanted to supplement the survey findings with input from local professionals working in those respective fields along with other residents who wanted to give additional input. They organized eight Listening Sessions, one for each domain, with facilitated interactive discussions. Listening session participants reviewed the survey findings and added their own perspectives and expertise to the needs and opportunities surrounding each domain. These dynamic conversations added depth to the survey findings and shed light on concerns and opportunities that were not addressed in the survey.

A group of key city staff also met with a consultant to learn more about the fundamentals of age-friendly communities and to examine their own work through an aging lens. Although some staff have worked closely with AFN from the start, discussion with the broader group helped further align the work of the city with the thinking and objectives of AFN.

As it developed the action plan, the Steering Committee incorporated especially effective report elements found in other cities' plans and engaged a consultant to undertake the writing itself. The goals and action items under priority domains were developed by domain teams, which will also lead their implementation. Steering Committee volunteers developed the Domain Action Charts to be used as the initial Domain Action Team Work Plans.

# How to Read This Report

Developing an age-friendly city requires involvement and commitment from all sectors in the community. This plan reflects engagement of current partners and outlines how others should be involved. Age-friendly communities go beyond senior programs and services for frail elders—although those are both critical. The new paradigm must work toward a simultaneous shift in attitudes, policies, and system-level thinking about how to integrate the needs of all community members as they move into older age.

## 5 GUIDING PRINCIPLES<sup>17</sup>

The following broad principles apply to many or all of the eight age-friendly domains. They reflect important dimensions of life in our community and our relationships with each other. AFN leaders will bear these principles closely in mind during plan implementation.

### 1) Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

As we recognize age as a fundamental part of diversity and inclusion, we similarly recognize that race, ethnicity, and culture are fundamental—and increasingly relevant—to developing an age-friendly Northfield. Like many communities, Northfield's population is becoming more culturally diverse. The work of Age-Friendly Northfield will reflect active attention to the cultural and linguistic dimensions of our changing community to ensure that all residents are respectfully and deliberately considered and included in the work.

### 2) Generational Interdependence

The lens of age-friendly communities is broader than older residents. Age-Friendly Northfield understands that the needs of all ages and generations are important and intertwined. Age-friendly communities recognize that the most effective services, programs, and infrastructure benefit the young, old and in-between either directly or indirectly. They also work to cultivate a sense of connection and community across generations.

### 3) Clear and Consistent Communication

Communication emerged repeatedly as a concern across all domains throughout Age-Friendly Northfield's community needs assessment. Given its importance and applicability to all aspects of the work, Age-Friendly Northfield will treat communication as an independent domain as well as a high-priority overlay of all other efforts.

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<sup>17</sup> This section was inspired by the City of Boston's Age-Friendly Action Plan. We have borrowed the principles they identified and redefined them according to Northfield's context. We are grateful for the excellent model Boston's plan provided.

#### **4) Combat Ageism**

Negative perceptions of aging are engrained in our culture and have very real consequences. Age-Friendly Northfield's work will be imbued with a commitment to reframing aging—shedding the notion that reduces aging to decline, and promoting a culture that appreciates aging as a time for continued growth, exploration, and contributions to the community.

#### **5) Creative Partnerships**

To find and sustain better solutions to older adult concerns, Age-Friendly Northfield will help forge new partnerships and strengthen existing ones. Creative partnerships are required across sectors and will involve a rethinking of how the city, nonprofit organizations, public agencies and other community institutions work together (or not). With an unusually high number of nonprofit and service organizations in the community, Northfield is well-positioned to uncover new ways to work more effectively and efficiently together.

## 8 Domains Defined

This report is organized by WHO/AARP's eight domains of livability that underlie our age-friendly framework. While each domain was treated independently in the community assessment and in this action plan to some extent, Age-Friendly Northfield recognizes that they are deeply inter-related. Improvements in one area will result in improvements to another. Similarly, problems in one will lead to problems in another. For example, better transportation options will improve social connectedness, while deficient housing will negatively impact health and overall well being.

- 1) **Housing:** Most people want to remain in their own home and community as they age. Doing so is possible if housing is designed or modified for aging in place and a community has affordable housing options for varying life stages.
- 2) **Health and Wellness:** At some point, every person of every age gets hurt, becomes ill or simply needs some help. While it's important that care be available nearby, it's essential that residents are able to access and afford the services required.
- 3) **Community Information:** Age-friendly communities recognize that not everyone has a smartphone or Internet access and that information needs to be disseminated through a variety of means.
- 4) **Outdoor Spaces and Buildings:** People need public places to gather — indoors and out. Green spaces, safe streets, sidewalks, outdoor seating and accessible buildings (think elevators, stairs with railings, etc.) can be used and enjoyed by people of all ages.
- 5) **Job Opportunities:** Why does work need to be an all or nothing experience? An age-friendly community provides ways older people can (if they choose) to continue to work for pay.
- 6) **Transportation and Streets:** Driving shouldn't be the only way to get around. Public transit options can be as expansive and as infrastructure dependent as a train system or as targeted as a taxi service that provides non-drivers with rides to and from a doctor's office.
- 7) **Social Participation, Inclusion, and Education Opportunities:** Regardless of a person's age, loneliness is often as debilitating a health condition as having a chronic illness or disease. Sadness and isolation can be combatted by the availability of accessible, affordable and fun social activities.
- 8) **Volunteering and Civic Engagement:** An age-friendly community provides ways older people can (if they choose) volunteer their skills and be actively engaged in community life.

## TOPICS OF INTEREST

Similar to the five Guiding Principles described earlier, these topics of interest must be recognized as issues that cross-cut most or all domains and touch the lives of many Northfield residents. The goals and action items included in this plan include an awareness of these issues, and many include direct or indirect benefit to people experiencing social isolation and those living with dementia and their caregivers.

### **Social Isolation**

Social isolation has become a serious public health concern. Its prevalence and impacts are driving a great deal of attention to this issue. In addition to the trouble human element of this fact, a 2017 report from AARP and Harvard University revealed that a lack of social contacts among older adults is associated with an estimated \$6.7 billion in additional Medicare spending annually. There are significant human and economic costs tied to social isolation, and the work of age-friendly communities must reflect this.

### **Dementia**

The aging population and longer lifespans have resulted in more people living with dementia. This disease has been described as more a social condition than a medical one given the stigma and isolation that often accompany it. Family caregivers need attention and compassion as much as their family members or friends living with dementia, as the practical and emotional realities take a serious toll on them as well.

### **Climate Change**

Age-Friendly Northfield recognizes that older adults will be particularly hard hit by the negative impacts of climate changes. While the oldest old are most vulnerable to more extreme temperatures, weather events, and air pollution, anybody with mobility or other physical limitations and more restricted access to resources—which includes many older adults—will have a harder time avoiding negative impacts of climate change or coping with changes that can't be avoided.<sup>18</sup> In Northfield, climate change has contributed to extreme heat and cold, “mega-rains,” flooding, and tornadoes. Actions that address climate change impacts in Northfield will be incorporated into the work of Age-Friendly Northfield where it makes sense.

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<sup>18</sup> “Older Adults and Climate Change: Vulnerability and Health Effects,” *Generations*, Winter 2009-2010. American Society on Aging.

## ORGANIZATION WITHIN DOMAINS

For each domain listed above, the report includes the following sections. They define what we learned about needs and opportunities in Northfield, which organizations will be involved in finding solutions, and how we will measure our progress.

***We Are...*** highlights Northfield's current efforts in each domain to give context for how strategies laid out in the action plan will complement or build on existing age-friendly activity.

***We Heard...*** describes what was learned through the community needs assessment, which included the survey of residents aged 50 and older and listening sessions with professionals working in the various domains. The assessment findings informed development of this action plan.

***We Envision...*** describes, for each domain, how we aspire to make Northfield a better community for all older residents by being more deliberately inclusive of their preferences and needs.

***We Will...*** lays out goals that have been set under each of the four priority domains. Under each goal are noted specific actions and timelines, as well as partners and resources necessary to carry out those actions and indicators for measuring success.

## Next Steps

Implementation will be led by domain action teams and overseen by the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee organized domain teams of professionals from fields related to the respective domains. The action plan will be implemented over the course of three years—2020 through 2022—with specific timelines attached to actions under each goal.

# Housing

## ***We Are...***

Northfield offers a variety of housing options for older residents across a spectrum of needs—including independent living, assisted living, secured memory care, and skilled nursing care. Adult day centers, respite care, and end of life care are also available. Several of these options include services, such as chore services, home care, personal care, medication management, therapy, meals, housekeeping, and life enrichment activities. Numerous organizations that provide this housing were noted earlier in the report, and two new senior housing communities are also being constructed: The Benedictine Community, which will offer independent and assisted living community, and The Family Residence, with assisted living and dementia care.

A number of efforts are underway to improve the availability of senior housing, including affordable housing, in Northfield. Several nonprofits are addressing the issue by raising funds and awareness. The City's HRA plans to build 20 new affordable townhomes on the Southbridge site to help meet the demand for affordable homes and is also exploring using Social Impact Bonds to support services for older adults and for people with mental illness. The City has also prioritized affordable senior housing in its 2018-2020 Strategic Plan.

## ***We Heard...***

- Survey:
  - Respondents indicated a need for trusted and affordable contractors and home repair services.
  - More housing options are needed for all income levels.
  - More homes should feature age-friendly design.
- Listening sessions:
  - The city should tie new business development to affordable housing and work to connect housing to transportation and services.
  - The community needs more affordable housing options for older adults. This includes senior housing as well as homes in the community where older homeowners can safely and comfortably remain through the availability of affordable maintenance and home services.
  - More memory care is needed.
  - Explore alternative housing models like homesharing.

***We Envision...*** a community that provides affordable and appropriate housing options and services to older residents of all income levels and at the varying stages of older age.

## ***We Will...***

*[Housing goals forthcoming]*

## Health & Wellness

***We Are...***Northfield residents are fortunate to have many quality health care providers and organizations at their fingertips in this relatively small community. The municipally owned hospital and clinics have a reputation for excellent care, including for older patients, and are an important resource for the community and the region. Allina Health Clinic's services include 12 specialties, and the renowned Mayo Clinic is in nearby Rochester. An array of fitness classes—from tai chi to Zumba to yoga in the warm-water pool— as well as classes on various health and wellness related topics are available at FiftyNorth.

### ***We Heard...***

- Survey:
  - Respondents appreciate the community's well-maintained healthcare facilities; the variety of health care professionals, including specialists; and the helpful staff at the hospital and clinics.
  - More affordable, well-trained and certified home health care providers are needed.
  - There is a lack of easy-to-find information about local health and supportive services.
- Listening session:
  - Affordable housing is the number one priority related to achieving greater health and well for older residents because of the fundamental nature of housing to wellbeing in the rest of our lives. Participants similarly noted transportation.
  - There is a lack of easy-to-find information about local health and supportive services.
  - An increasing lack of volunteers and staffing is a key concern.

***We Envision...*** a community where residents can easily find and access high quality and affordable healthcare services, and where affordable and appropriate housing and transportation options support older residents' health and quality of life. Community culture and services promote healthy lifestyles and preventive care, and the built environment is designed to encourage active living.

### ***We Will...***

*[Goals forthcoming]*



## Community Information

**We Are...** The LINK Center, located in the Northfield Community Resource Center, connects community members with information about resources in Northfield and the Rice County area. It offers a broad range of resources with a special focus on services for residents of color and low-income families. Other key sources of community information include the City of Northfield's website, FiftyNorth, Northfield Hospital and Clinics, and the Northfield Library.

### **We Heard...**

- Survey:
  - Community information should be delivered in-person to people who have trouble leaving home.
  - There is significant need for community information from one central source.
  - Information should be available in multiple languages to reflect ethnic diversity.
- Listening session:
  - There is significant need for community information from one central source; listening session participants also noted that it would need dedicated staff.
  - Information should be available in multiple languages to reflect ethnic diversity.
  - Wayfinding signage should be improved and more visible.
  - Homebound and isolated residents need better sources of information.

**We Envision...** a community where residents can easily both find and receive needed information about a range of services and community events.

### **We Will...**

Age-Friendly Northfield is already acting on this important domain. It has applied for a grant from Northfield Shares to develop a central online resource hub that would be staffed part-time. The website would include contact information and descriptions of the services and links to sites often accessed by older adults, their families, and caregivers when seeking help. This information hub would be in direct response to concerns raised through the AFN community needs assessment, which reflected a distinct lack of easily accessible information related to older adult services and resources. This project would also support work happening in all other domains.

**Goal 1:** Ensure that older adults and their caregivers have ready access to web-based information about services available to them.

**Goal 2:** Ensure that the Community Information Website for older adults is current and complete and that personal assistance is available for users of the site.

**Goal 3:** Address information accessibility needs of older adults without Internet access.

## Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

***We Are...***Northfield takes pride in its quality parks and green spaces, which are plentiful and readily available. The community is very organized in its attention to the city's public spaces, gardens and historic buildings, largely through the Beautify Northfield Coalition, a consortium of nonprofit and public sector groups that address this work together. The city's riverfront downtown has attractive and well-maintained historic buildings and public spaces.

### ***We Heard...***

- Survey:
  - More public restrooms are needed, including ones that are well-maintained, accessible, and open beyond normal business hours.
  - More seating/benches in public places is desired.
  - Separate paths for walking and cycling are preferable to shared paths.
  - More neighborhood watch programs are desired.
  - Sidewalks—their safety, accessibility, and overall condition—need to be improved
- Listening session:
  - Participants recommended that the city hire workers who have knowledge and experience with outdoor spaces, parks, and trails.
  - More public restrooms are a high priority and should be kept open beyond normal business hours.
  - More seating is needed along the Riverwalk and other open spaces.
  - Public spaces should be tested and redesigned for wheelchair accessibility.
  - Buildings should be updated with universal design features.

***We Envision...***a community where residents of all ages and abilities can safely and conveniently access public spaces and buildings, and where parks and green spaces are beautiful, well-designed, and suited to older adults.

### ***We Will...***

*[Goals forthcoming]*

## Age-Friendly Northfield Action Plan (Summary Tables)

ACTION PLAN FOR COMMUNITY INFORMATION								
GOAL # 1: Ensure that older adults and their caregivers have ready access to web-based information about services available to them.								
OBJECTIVE	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCES	ASSOCIATED ACTIONS/PARTY	MEASURES OF SUCCESS	ACTION YEARS		
<b>Create a centrally located, easily accessed and comprehensive web-based comprehensive information and referral system for older adult services</b>	Form an action development team charged with completion of goal action items and assessment	AFN Steering Committee	Providers of senior service agencies, businesses and organizations (see attached list). Funding from Northfield Shares grant		Action Team created	2020	2021	2022
	Develop criteria for web design, feedback mechanism, and listings	Domain Action Team	Other organizations providing services for seniors, Senior Linkage Line, web search		Criteria list developed	2020	2021	2022
	Advertise and hire web designer	Domain Action Team	Web design companies		Web designer hired and contract signed	2020	2021	2022
	Develop form for gathering provider information and disseminate form to providers	Domain Action Team	Providers of senior service agencies, businesses and organizations		Forms sent to providers	2020	2021	2022

	Develop website, beta test and modify site as indicated	Web designer	Providers of senior service agencies, businesses and organizations		Web site modified following Beta test feedback	2020	2021	2022
	Advertise and hire translator to work with web designer for the creation of a parallel Spanish language site	Domain Action Team Web designer	HCI LINK Center		Web site available in both English and Spanish	2020	2021	2022
	Develop marketing and communication plan	Domain Action Team	Marketing and communication companies, KYMN Radio, Northfield News		Completed plan is presented to Action Team	2020	2021	2022
	Launch site and marketing plan	Domain Action Team Web designer	Marketing and communication companies, KYMN Radio, Northfield News Providers of senior service agencies, businesses and organizations		Site is successfully launched	2020	2021	2022
	Develop a summative assessment plan to determine the community impact	Domain Action Team Web designer	Providers of senior service agencies, businesses and organizations		Assessment completed	2020	2021	2022

	Conduct summative assessment	Domain Action Team Web designer	Providers of senior service agencies, businesses and organizations		Assessment results match community impact goals	2020	2021	2022
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## ACTION PLAN FOR COMMUNITY INFORMATION *(cont'd)*

**GOAL # 2: Ensure that the Community Information website for older adults is current and complete and that personal assistance is available for users of the site.**

OBJECTIVE	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCES	ASSOCIATED ACTIONS/PARTY	MEASURES OF SUCCESS	ACTION YEARS		
<b>Create a funded position to maintain the community information website, coordinate with related agencies, and provide personal assistance to web site users as needed</b>	Develop a job description for outreach advocate that includes bilingual skills and knowledge of community	Domain Action Team	LINK Center City of Northfield		Job description created	2020	2021	2022
	Determine supervising agency and location for advocate	Steering Committee  Domain Action Team	LINK Center City of Northfield		Supervision and location of advocate determined	2020	2021	2022
	Recruit and hire outreach advocate	Steering Committee  Domain Action Team	LINK Center City of Northfield		Advocate hired	2020	2021	2022
	Set up coordination of web designer and outreach advocate to develop list of service provider information	Domain Action Team	Providers of senior service agencies, businesses and organizations (see attached list) Web designer Outreach Advocate		List developed	2020	2021	2022

	Develop financial agreement for on-going funding of advocate position by consortium of stakeholders	Steering Committee	Providers of senior service agencies, businesses and organizations City of Northfield		Funding agreement developed.	2020	2021	2022
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## ACTION PLAN FOR COMMUNITY INFORMATION *(cont'd)*

### GOAL # 3: Address information accessibility needs of older adults without internet access.

OBJECTIVE	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCES	ASSOCIATED ACTIONS/PARTY	MEASURES OF SUCCESS	ACTION YEARS		
<b>Develop information delivery system for home-bound older adults with no internet access</b>	Develop a short survey soliciting feedback from isolated and homebound older adults that identifies sources they use to obtain information on available resources.	Domain Action Team	Steering Committee  Survey results		Survey developed	2020	2021	2022
	Develop distribution plan for survey	Domain Action Team	Northfield Hospital, faith community, Rice County Public Health, Rice and Dakota Sheriff Depts., LINK Center		Surveys distributed	2020	2021	2022
	Analyze data and research best practices used by other communities to determine most potentially effective delivery systems	Domain Action Team	Rice County Public Health, Rice County Social Services, KYMN Radio, Northfield News, faith community		List of best delivery systems developed	2020	2021	2022
	Determine print format of website information by full document, service category, or language	Domain Action Team	Web designer Outreach advocate		Web site printable in different configurations	2020	2021	2022



	Develop training on the website for the sources of information identified in the survey.	Domain Action Team	Outreach advocate Northfield Hospital Faith Community Rice County Public Health Rice and Dakota Sheriff Dept.		Training completed	2020	2021	2022
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### MEASURE OF COMMUNITY IMPACT

We envision a community where residents can easily both find and receive needed information about a range of services within and close to our community. We have developed goals and actions to meet that need. The impact of these community information domain actions will be determined by a summative assessment that measures: 1) the number of website hits meeting or exceeding a predetermined number; 2) an average satisfaction rating of 4 out of 5 by users on a website embedded survey, and 3) a response by 90% of providers responding to a written survey of the website being very or extremely useful.

# Acronym Guide

AFN	Age-Friendly Northfield
HRA	City of Northfield Housing and Redevelopment Authority
WHO	World Health Organization

## Council of Champions

*(under development...)*

Age-Friendly Northfield is grateful for the contributions of the following people and organizations that enrich our community and informed this report.

- Listening session participants
- Survey participants
- Bill Armbruster, Senior Advisor, AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities,
- Joanne Binette, AARP Senior Research Advisor
- City of Boston, for its Age-Friendly Plan
- Dana Graham, Former Mayor of Northfield
- Ben Martig, Northfield City Administrator
- Northfield City Council
- Will Phillips, State Director, AARP Minnesota
- Mayor Rhonda Pownell, Mayor of Northfield
- Katie St. Clair, Professor of Mathematics and Statistics, Carleton College
- Scott Tempel, City Planner, City of Northfield
- Carol Trosset, Applied Education Research Consultant
- Steering Committee, past and present:
  - Pat Allen
  - Patrice Ciernia
  - David DeLong
  - Chris Ellison
  - Shelley Holden
  - CC Linstroth
  - Nan Just
  - Clare Mathers
  - Lynne Pederson
  - *Others – Nan getting complete list*

# Appendix

Creating an Age-Friendly Northfield

Livability for All: The 2017 AARP Age-Friendly Community Survey of Northfield, Minnesota  
Residents Age 50+

*[To be inserted later: Executive Summary; link to full report; link to survey instrument that was used]*

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