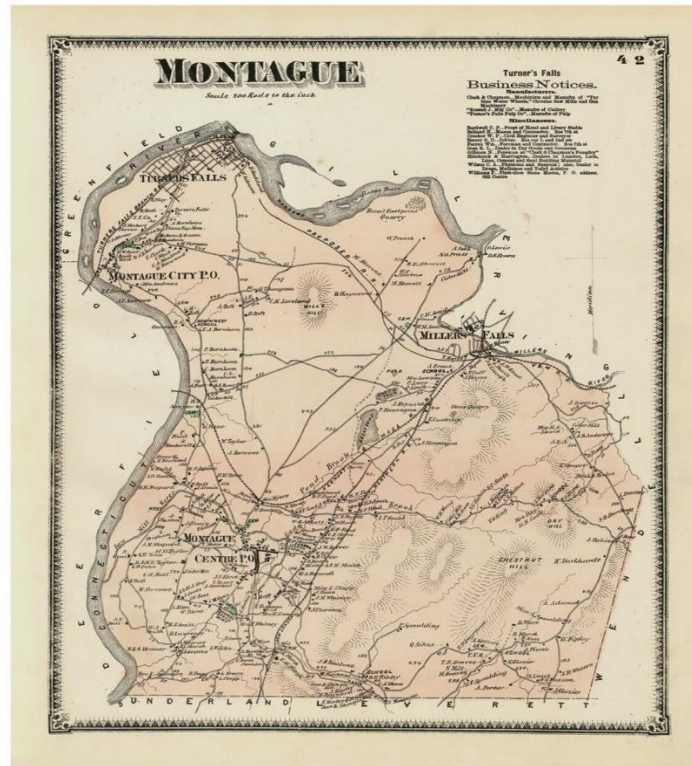


An Age-Friendly Town Benefits All Residents

Montague Mass in Motion Final Report 8/9/23



Submitted by: Colleen R. Doherty, Facilitator, Turners Falls resident

Committee Members and Contributors:

- Eileen Dowd - Turners Falls resident
- Caitlin Kelly – Library Director
- Eileen Mariani - Montague resident
- Gina McNeely – Director of Public Health (former)
- Ryan Paxton - Director of Public Health
- Maureen Pollock - Town Planner
- Roberta Potter – Council on Aging/Senior Center Director
- Roy Rosenblatt - Montague resident

Guest and Resource Assistance:

- Rachel Stoler - Community Health Program Manager, FRCOG

INTRODUCTION: Rationale, Purpose, Agency Collaboration

Older adults/seniors are certainly in the limelight at present. Numerous articles, initiatives, and programs provide us with a heightened awareness and focus on what it means to be “age-friendly.” Whether it be sheer demographics, the impact of social media, or an extension of equity and inclusion; international, national, state-wide and now local projects are embracing aging with unprecedented momentum.

-People worldwide are living longer. Today most people can expect to live into their sixties and beyond. Every country in the world is experiencing growth in both the size and the proportion of older persons in the population. By 2050, the world’s population of people aged 60 years and older will double (2.1 billion). The number of persons aged 80 years or older is expected to triple between 2020 and 2050 to reach 426 million. [WHO](#)

-Approximately 45 million Americans are age 65 or older. By 2030, that number will reach 73 million Americans. At that point, fully one in five Americans will be older than 65. By 2034, the United States will — for the first time ever — be a country comprised of more older adults than of children. A livable community is one that is safe and secure. It offers choices in where to live and how to get around. And it equitably serves residents of all ages, ability levels, incomes, races, ethnicities, and other backgrounds. Livable communities: enhance personal independence; allow residents to remain in their homes and communities as they age; and provide opportunities for residents of all ages, ability levels, and backgrounds to engage fully in civic, economic, and social life. [AARP](#)

-An age-friendly community is a place that makes it easy for older people to stay connected to people that are important to them. And it helps people stay healthy and active even at the oldest ages and provides appropriate support to those who can no longer look after themselves. LifePath’s Age-Friendly projects and surveys. [LifePath](#)

-Massachusetts’ Final report entitled [Reimagine Aging](#) provides a guide for others stating accomplishments in the areas of: community, information and communication, framing (from challenge to asset), age-friendly policies and practices, economic stability, and sustainability. Though this report was made available by a committee member after the last meeting, the content confirms that we were/are on the right track with our recommendations.

Adults over sixty years of age represent a sizeable population to be listened to and respected with regards to improving living situations both now and in the future. Age-friendly focus areas are not confined to “older adults” as the goal is to improve living standards for all residents.

***Everyone is aging. When we help an older person continue to live, work, and volunteer in our communities, we all benefit from their energy, experience and contributions. As we grow older, we want to be able to live as independently as we can, in cities and towns where our contributions are respected and valued and our changing needs are supported. [Age-Friendly Massachusetts](#)*

It is timely and encouraging that the Town of Montague elected to build on existing age-friendly projects by participating in the region-wide Mass in Motion project in the Spring of 2023. The Mass in Motion Age and Dementia-Friendly initiative is a collaboration between the Town of Montague, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), and LifePath, under the state-wide umbrella of the Massachusetts Department of Health.

The main objectives stated by FRCOG and the Town of Montague were very specific: Convene a work group for the purpose of identifying age and dementia-friendly:

-priority issues (concerns/problems), root causes (reasons why), strategies (possible solutions), implementation (how to), and resources (with the assistance from FRCOG).

THE WORK: Committee Composition, Meetings, Information Sources

The work group referred to as the Montague Mass in Motion (MMIM) Committee consisted of four town employees representing key offices related to the objectives: senior services, library, planning, and health. Of particular importance was the knowledge and thirteen plus years perspective of the Director of the Gill Montague Senior Center/ Council on Aging. Having first-hand experience addressing a range of issues facing older adults from securing housing, food, and health-care providers to how to dispose of furniture and fix back porch steps, acquainted MMIM members with the range of needs as well as critical resources for older adults. Four older adult community members, most with substantial longevity in and commitment to Montague represented “local experts” who are proven advocates for seniors. One committee member describes her background and passion with these words:

I feel deeply attached to the town and have lived here for 54 years. I have also been a member of Our Lady of Peace church in Turners Falls for over 50 years, giving me a broader sense of the whole community. I was also a founding member of Montague Catholic Social Ministries and a long-time board member. I also taught at Erving Elementary for 26 years! So now as I age on, and my friends too, we hope this initiative of Montague Villages keeps us connected to the end!!

Four meetings were conducted in accordance with the Massachusetts Open Meeting Laws, including posting of agendas and minutes to the town web site.

The main source of information initially utilized was the survey and report entitled: [Mass in Motion Age and Dementia Friendly Initiative in Montague, December 2022](#)

The report is the result of a comprehensive survey conducted by LifePath and was a useful starting point. Of particular importance and a solid frame of reference for the group was the graphic - 8 Domains of Livability provided by AARP.

The difficulty of obtaining a sizeable response rate for any survey is always a challenge, as seen in the Montague specific data having a response rate (88) of less than 5% of the older adult population. While the responses were reviewed and appreciated, the “local expert” committee members exercised a cautionary view of the findings, agreeing with some conclusions, but not all. Examples:

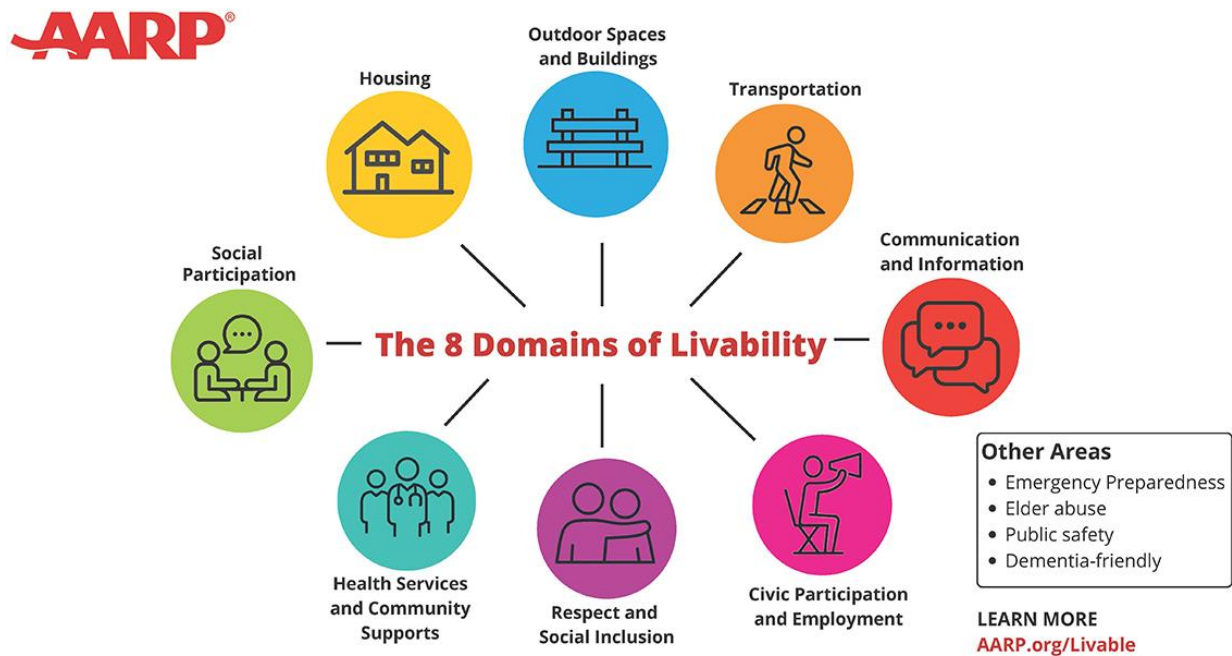
Housing: 83% reported that it was important for them to stay in their town as they age, and 84% in their home. This was generally agreed upon as accurate.

Tele-Health: 74% of respondents have used telehealth at least once. 72% had a good experience. 54% would prefer to see their provider in person. 67% found the

technology was not confusing to use. These results were regarded as questionable and may reflect an economic and digital equity divide. Perhaps the survey respondents had greater access to and familiarity with the internet and computer-based health systems.

DOMAINS OF LIVABILITY:

Upon discussion and review of existing information it appeared that the Domains of Livability would be the focus and lead us to the goal of identifying **priority issues, root causes, strategies, implementation, and resources** to support age and dementia-friendly priorities in Montague. In addition to the “domains” being comprehensive, sensible, and a solid basis for discussion, AARP LifePath, the Massachusetts ReImagine report and countless other age-friendly projects and reports utilize these areas.



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The committee decided to prioritize and focus on the four domains deemed the most important: ***Housing, *Social Participation, *Health and Community Supports, *Communication and Information**. As **social participation** and **social inclusion/respect** can be viewed as similar, both were included in discussions and recommendations. Individual members took the lead on specific domains of interest followed by a deeper, whole group discussion. These discussions were the main focus of subsequent meetings resulting in the chart of key recommendations.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS: Existing Positive Age-friendly Aspects in Montague, Domains Chart, Priorities

Though the specific recommendations are viewed as necessary to support Montague residents as they age, as well as useful for all Montague residents, it was important to acknowledge some positive aspects that currently exist, recognizing that there may be other projects underway, unknown to us at the time. The MMIM committee members recognized the following:

- *Newly formed non-profit Montague Villages (in planning stage)
- *The Town of Montague updated its ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan in 2018 and is making efforts to provide ADA improvements to areas identified in the plan
- *Pedestrian crossing safety features throughout town
- *Montague Reporter (important print information)
- *Centralized location of affordable housing
- *Council on Aging
- *Farren re-build – possible residence and/or resource for seniors
- *River Culture
- *Library delivery system
- *Bike Path
- *Discovery Center

DOMAINS Charts

Highlighted areas of the chart denote those items resulting in substantial discussion and of greater importance. The committee identified the following as **priority**:

- *Nurse position with some hours at the Senior Center
- *Increase capacity of Senior Center through creation of part-time Outreach Specialist or similar position
- *Education and Communication for Seniors via workshop series in all villages (see report for specific areas)
- *Transportation Improvements for seniors

Montague Mass in Motion:

HOUSING

PRIORITY ISSUE	ROOT CAUSES	STRATEGIES	IMPLEMENTATION	RESOURCES
<p>*Need more affordable housing for both low- and moderate-income seniors</p> <p>*Need additional rental opportunities</p> <p>*Need support for homeowners to remain in homes</p> <p>*Condition(s) of housing</p>	<p>*Lack of knowledge of multiple agencies involved in housing</p> <p>*High taxes</p> <p>*Lack of knowledge of resources to rehab properties</p> <p>*Lack of information on ADU's</p> <p>*Reluctance to question conditions for fear of losing voucher or getting evicted</p>	<p>*Affordable housing coalition info sessions</p> <p>*Education and outreach regarding zoning laws.</p> <p>*Understand two types of vouchers: traveling and stationery</p> <p>*Opportunities for towns to repair existing buildings</p> <p>*Promote CDBG 0% interest loans where applicable</p> <p>*AG receivership program for abandon buildings</p> <p>*Utilize ADU's in rural parts of towns where space is more available</p> <p>*Revamp older homes</p> <p>*Explore tax write off program for older adults</p>	<p>*Expand and promote information on housing rehab programs</p> <p>*Awareness of time-sensitive schedules as CPA has to be approved at annual town meeting prior to listing on ballot</p> <p>*Utilize Neighbor to Neighbor programs to support homeowners remaining in homes</p> <p>*Utilize HRA loan programs for 0% interest loans for home modifications that increase accessibility</p>	<p>*Housing rehab programs</p> <p>*Emerging and existing Neighbor to Neighbor programs</p> <p>*HRA Loan Programs</p>

Additional housing related information:

-Montague is at 9.6% affordable housing

-CHAPA = citizen housing and planning association

-SHI = subsidized housing inventory

-AMI = area median income

-CDBG = Community development block grant

-ADU considerations: parking, septic, size, owner occupied

Montague Mass in Motion:

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION/RESPECT AND INCLUSION

PRIORITY ISSUE	ROOT CAUSES	STRATEGIES	IMPLEMENTATION	RESOURCES
<p>*Social Isolation (Importance of establishing and keeping connections)</p> <p>*Degradation of communication and connections during Covid</p> <p>*Lack of programming for seniors or is it lack of communication?</p> <p>*Lack of usage of Gill Montague Senior Center from Lake Pleasant, Montague City, Millers Falls</p>	<p>*Limited public transit and lack of van service</p> <p>*Drivers do not assist with packages</p> <p>*People in rural areas not accustomed to using public transportation</p> <p>*Difficult for caregivers to go out *Hearing difficulty may impede participation *Sound systems in some buildings such as TFHS, town hall effects hearing*Lack of wheelchair accessibility at TF library for story hour and other programs</p>	<p>*Need to prepare seniors for not being able to drive</p> <p>*Fixed route buses are free</p> <p>*Educate and promote use of Response Demand FRTA Service, including use of app</p> <p>*FRTA presentation</p> <p>*Utilize MCTV for town meetings. Closed captioning??</p> <p>*Utilize Intergenerational programming at Senior Center and other locations</p> <p>Story hour at Farmers Market</p>	<p>*Support and utilize newly formed Montague Villages and similar Neighbor to Neighbor programs</p> <p>*Negotiations underway to have stop at Sunrise Village Senior apartments</p> <p>*Improve sound systems in buildings</p>	<p>Montague Villages (newly formed neighbor helping neighbor program)</p> <p>FRTA presentation including bus training</p> <p>*Grant opportunities for listening devices</p>

Montague Mass in Motion:

HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

PRIORITY ISSUE	ROOT CAUSES	STRATEGIES	IMPLEMENTATION	RESOURCES
<p>*Diabetes, bone density, high blood pressure, blood sugar levels</p> <p>*No direct service NURSE. (previous nurse went to every village)</p> <p>*No walk-in vaccination clinics. Must register on-line</p> <p>*Need clarity on HOW to recognize dementia</p> <p>*Hearing loss connected to depression and social isolation</p> <p>*Hearing problems for seniors as well as for younger population. (Good hearing can be related to confidence level)</p> <p>*Addiction</p>	<p>* Little if any screening for conditions. Lack of transportation for food, health care appointments</p> <p>*Some older adults do not utilize online resources</p> <p>*Lack of knowledge regarding resources</p>	<p>*iPad for online shopping</p> <p>*Nurse position needed with possible outreach in different locations</p> <p>*Walk-in vax clinics and workshops on how to access and use online resources</p> <p>*Education sessions on how to recognize and cope with dementia; support for individuals and families (through LifePath)</p> <p>*Educational programs on how to access hearing aids.</p> <p>*Hearing devices easily connected to phone (blue tooth).</p>	<p>*Request to devote set Nurse hours to needs of older adults, possibly at the Montague Senior Center</p> <p>*Schedule Vax clinics at Senior Center for call or drop-in appointments.</p> <p>*Develop workshops for online usage</p>	<p>*Footcare by Nurses. Monthly program at Senior Center</p> <p>*New 10 hr. town Nurse position</p> <p>*J. Fischer (Gfld.) audiologist develops individualized plans and has some walk-in hours</p>

<u>PRIORITY ISSUE</u>	<u>ROOT CAUSES</u>	<u>STRATEGIES</u>	<u>IMPLEMENTATION</u>	<u>RESOURCES</u>
<p>*Vision impairment</p> <p>*Lack of Primary Care Providers and Specialists</p> <p>*Medication Management</p> <p>*Problematic and lack of good seating, particularly on Avenue A in Turners Falls</p>	<p>*Lack of connection of existing services (continuity of care)</p> <p>*Medical professionals leaving area</p>	<p>*Support to manage medications</p> <p>*Need for comfortable, functional, non-metal benches as well as increase the number of benches.</p> <p>*Shaded areas are essential</p> <p>* An Age-Friendly town benefits all residents!</p> <p>*ALL town related initiatives must take aging into consideration</p>		<p>Health and Other related RESOURCES:</p> <p>*Community Compact, Community Health Inclusion Index, Community Block Grants (services and development), Dept. of Agriculture Food Systems Infrastructure Grants, MA Healthy Aging Collaborative Newsletter (funding opportunities), United Way, Community Foundation of Western MA, LifePath, Massachusetts AARP, ReImagine Aging: Planning Together to Create an Age-Friendly Future for MA</p>

Montague Mass in Motion:

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

PRIORITY ISSUE	ROOT CAUSES	STRATEGIES	IMPLEMENTATION	RESOURCES
<p>*Senior Center Website under-utilized</p> <p>*Senior Newsletter on back of calendar lacking large-scale distribution</p> <p>*Town of Montague website not user friendly and important information is difficult to locate</p> <p>*Limited viewers of town TV station</p> <p>*Not everyone can or wants to use the internet. PRINT form is the preference of many seniors.</p> <p>*Digital access and inequities exist among some older and low-income adults.</p>	<p>*Needs update and on-going maintenance</p> <p>*Lack of capacity to produce Newsletter.</p> <p>*Current staffing is one 21 hr. per week position.</p> <p>*Printing costs are high</p> <p>*Inertia and lack of participation are possible reactions to numerous modes of communication*Lack of computer usage and knowledge</p>	<p>*Need multiple forms of communication *LifePath weekly sections in recorder and online newsletter are useful</p> <p>*Town wants and needs to overhaul website</p> <p>*Select an effective communication channel and have everyone use it</p> <p>*Hire Town Communicator for print and online info.</p> <p>*Utilize key locations for announcements: Food City, P.O., Town Hall</p> <p>*Consider using Montague Reporter insert (only \$150)</p> <p>*Promote digital equity for older/low-income adults</p>	<p>*Increase staffing capacity at Senior Center, similar to other Franklin County centers</p> <p>*Montague Reporter readership is strong among seniors. Possible Council on Aging columns</p> <p>*Digital Equity grant proposal submitted</p>	<p>*Town of Montague</p> <p>*Village to Village resources to promote relevant information for seniors</p> <p>*Possible subsidy of Montague Reporter subscriptions from Senior Center</p> <p>*Digital Equity funding resources</p>

THE BENEFITS OF AGE-FRIENDLY TOWNS

Age-friendly communities only strengthen towns and cities for *ALL* current and prospective residents.

MMIM committee members put forth the following related statements:

****Aging populations are both economic and historical resources – tax base, local merchant and business supports***

****ADA compliance features/structures are utilized by the population at large - baby carriages, carrying heavy goods, post-surgery..***

****Safety, diversity, inclusion, embracing all ages and abilities create a welcoming and healthy town environment to attract and keep local businesses.***

In addition to the benefits of Montague becoming a true age-friendly town, MMIM committee members strongly recommended that:

****All town initiatives must take aging into consideration.***

Just as town planning and projects employ and include equitable and inclusive language and focus for all populations (including age), a more substantive look at and closer attention to “age and dementia-friendly” aspects is recommended.

Massachusetts is already designated as an AARP Livable Community/State. Montague joined this network in 2021 and the web site states that **Action Plan Highlights:** This community is in the process of creating its action plan. [AARP Livable Communities Map](#) Perhaps this information is dated and if not contents of the MMIM report could be useful.

***An “age lens” simply invokes consideration of all ages — from birth to death — in the design and current operation of programs, services and policies throughout our society. For example, having well-maintained walking paths in our public parks that beckon us to join friends for a meandering stroll or a metered power walk; access to transportation options for medical and social reasons; being able to receive legible information with adequate-sized font and lighting; volunteering possibilities that don’t require extensive planning or preparation and service staff and professionals that treat us with respect and dignity. [Next Avenue](#) – How to make a community more age-friendly*

MMIM committee members express our thanks to the Town of Montague for allowing participation in the Massachusetts Mass in Motion initiative and look forward to continued improvements for older adults and all residents in our community.



Roberta Potter, Ryan Paxton, Eileen Mariani, Eileen Dowd, Rachel Stoler, Roy Rosenblatt, Maureen Pollock, Colleen Doherty, Caitlin Kelly (not pictured)