

## **Healthy Communities Task Force Meeting Notes March 10, 2016**

### **Welcome, Patty Elkis**

Patty Elkis, Director of DVRPC's Planning Division, welcomed attendees and introduced the topic of the meeting – Creating Aging-Friendly Communities.

### **Welcome, Val Arkoosh**

Dr. Val Arkoosh, Montgomery County Commissioner, DVRPC Board Member, and Co-Chair of the Healthy Communities Task Force, emphasized the need to focus more on health than health care. She encouraged attendees to raise these issues in every community and to work collectively to reduce the need for health care.

### ***Presentations***

#### **Amanda Lehning, PhD, MSW - Creating Aging-Friendly Communities**

Amanda Lehning, Assistant Professor at the University of Maryland School of Social Work, provided an overview of her research on creating aging-friendly communities. She first defined this term as a city, town, or neighborhood where older adults are supported in their needs and priorities. She then went on to categorize those needs and priorities into three buckets: mobility and the built environment; social engagement; and health and social supports.

Developmental needs and priorities within mobility and the built environment include:

- Affordable and accessible housing;
- Walkable neighborhoods and proximity to stores, services, and amenities; and
- Transportation.

Developmental needs and priorities within social engagement include:

- Safety;
- Social participation; and
- Social contact.

Developmental needs and priorities within health and social supports include:

- Health and wellness;
- Social services and supports; and
- Supports for informal caregivers.

Dr. Lehning provided the background for why there is a focus on creating aging-friendly communities. She explained how the “Baby Boomers” are getting older, and with the increasing population of older individuals there has been a decline in family and social support systems, inadequate long-term care policies and services, an increase in aging-in-place, and a mismatch between older adults and community infrastructure.

In order to tackle the challenges that the aging population face, Dr. Lehning provided her approach to developing aging-friendly communities. The approach involves commitment, capacity, collaboration, consumer involvement, and comprehensiveness.

Dr. Lehning discussed her research into planning models that include aging-friendly initiatives. These results showed that few approaches thus far involve cross-sector collaborations and community development initiatives. Her research revealed many challenges to aging-friendly communities efforts such as fuzzy conceptualization and definitions; lack of methodological evaluations; concerns about allocating financial and human resources in a time of fiscal constraint; concerns about equity; and ensuring meaningful participation of older adults.

### **Karin Morris, Lessons from German Marshall Fellowship on Age-Friendly UK Efforts**

Karin Morris, Associate Director, Planning at DVRPC, shared insights from her visit to the UK, where she studied Age-Friendly efforts.

She explained how Manchester is at the forefront and is very progressive in age-friendly efforts, particularly because the Mayor was an early adopter. Manchester developed a plan entitled “Age-Friendly Manchester” that has highly accountable timeframes.

Karin described how there is greater inequality in London, given its status as a global city and the high cost of living. Some initiatives in London include the London Older People’s Strategies Group consisting of 400 organizations that lobby the Mayor and the Greater London Authority on aging issues, the London Plan which includes targets for the amount of senior housing each Borough should build long-term, and a recent progress report entitled *An Age-Friendly City: How Far Has London Come* which found that London has made great progress in improving the public realm and transportation for older adults. Additionally, London aspires to be the world’s first dementia-friendly capital.

Karin went on to describe in detail two of the eight domains of age-friendly communities, outdoor spaces/buildings and transportation. Karin provided examples of how cities used public spaces and buildings to foster an age-friendly environment. These enhancements range from widening sidewalks, to embedding places to sit as part of the traditional street infrastructure (Resistant Sitting Project), to assessing the availability of public toilets, to senior playgrounds, to incentives for businesses to become more age-friendly by providing seating, restrooms, and a friendly welcome to older adults. The age-friendly supermarket example came from Germany and involved wider aisles, lower displays, less fluorescent lights, carts that become seats, and a magnifying glass attachment for the carts.

Karin emphasized how transportation can be considered a “place”. She first explained the importance of physical access to transportation, and highlighted that London’s black taxi fleet is 100% wheelchair-accessible, while Philadelphia lags significantly behind. Second, Karin highlighted the importance of affordable access – many locations have free transit options for those over a specific age. Third, she mentioned the concept of traffic calming through shared space streets, and lastly, she provided an example of a separate bicycle network called “quietways,” located on back streets in London that paralleled the busier direct routes and were designed for the less confident bicyclist, with input from the aging community.

In conclusion, Karin presented seven lessons learned from the German Marshall Fellowship:

- 1) Framing the debate: how the concept is explained matters.
- 2) The role of messaging: change the images and attitudes.
- 3) From aspiration to reality: how to move from policy to implementation. Data, metrics, partnerships.
- 4) Situate age-friendly in sustainability.
- 5) Distill the message – what is good for aging is good for business.
- 6) Learn from the other domains.
- 7) Embed in plans, policies, leadership.

### ***Panel Discussion Age-Friendly Models/Efforts in the Region***

The panel discussion began with introductions from the three panelists:

**Kate Clark** is a Planner in Policy & Program Development for the Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA). PCA, which is funded by the lottery and Older Americans Act, is a private, non-profit organization that has served as Philadelphia County’s Area Agency on Aging since 1973. PCA’s

mission is to improve the quality of life for older Philadelphians or people with disabilities and to assist them in achieving their maximum levels of health, independence and productivity.

Kate had an opportunity to elaborate on PCA's efforts and she discussed various events, efforts, and volunteer organizing through GenPhilly (Generation Appreciation Philadelphia) that are helping people to envision communities in which they want to age. She noted that PCA's 2010 Lawton Conference on Urban Aging led to Philadelphia's application for the WHO designation as an age-friendly city. The Mayor's Commission on Aging also recently completed a survey to ask residents how age-friendly Philadelphia is.

**Joe Lukach** is the Chief Executive Officer at the Ralston Center. Based in West Philadelphia, the Ralston Center works to improve the health and quality of life for older adults in Philadelphia. Founded in 1871, the Ralston Center will be celebrating its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year.

In 2014, Ralston Center undertook the Age-Friendly West Philadelphia Initiative. They convened over forty organizational stakeholders, representing community groups, service providers, area institutions and city government, to identify the most pressing needs of older West Philadelphians. To ensure the initiative was informed and driven by the older adult community, Ralston held approximately 100 focus groups and community listening sessions with older West Philadelphians in late 2014 and 2015. From those sessions, the Center has decided to focus on public spaces, a resource network, and healthy access to food.

Joe also discussed some challenges that the Ralston Center faced, specific to the Age-Friendly Initiative, including getting the community to trust the Ralston Center. Additionally, he mentioned that funding is a challenge, as only 2% of foundation money currently goes to age-friendly communities.

**Anne Torregrossa** is the Chair of Swarthmore Borough's Aging-in-Place Task Force. The inspiration for the Task Force came from the realization that important senior members of the community were leaving Swarthmore for other, more age-friendly places. As a result of this realization, the Mayor of Swarthmore convened the Aging-in-Place Task Force. The Task Force, made up of Swarthmore residents, conducted an initial community assessment using the WHO age-friendly checklist. The list of sub-committees and final report is available online. Ultimately, Anne found that most outcomes of the report improve things for ALL people.

Regarding the implementation of recommendations from Swarthmore's Aging-in-Place Task Force, Anne noted that adjusting local zoning regulation to be more age-friendly will be a challenge because people can be resistant to change in their communities. Other challenges included the backlog of home repair programs. Specifically she noted the need to focus on ensuring safe homes for seniors.

### ***Facilitated Discussion***

The facilitated discussion focused on efforts that exist within the DVRPC region to engage and support seniors. Ideas included connecting active seniors to students at universities and high schools; integrating inter-generational communities; developing time banks; reducing language barriers for home health care providers; and introducing more technology assisted devices.