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A Great City for Older Adults

An Action Plan for Burlington

The
Burlington
Livable
Community
Project

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www.aarp.org/vt

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*A livable community is one that has affordable
and appropriate housing, supportive community
features and services, and adequate mobility options,
which together facilitate personal independence and
the engagement of residents in civic and social life.*

(AARP *Beyond 50.05 A Report to the Nation on Livable Communities:
Creating Environments for Successful Aging)*

Acknowledgments

Introduction

The Burlington Livable Community Project (BLCP) is
a collaborative approach for increasing assets for and
acknowledging the assets of an aging population. The
project is led by AARP Vermont in cooperation with the
city government and a group of some thirty community
stakeholder organizations. The multi-year effort aims to
provide direction, assess needs and resources, develop
recommendations in the areas of housing, transportation
and mobility and community engagement, and initiate
actions toward specific outcomes identified by the
community.

Burlington as a livable community for an aging population

Extensive research coordinated among stakeholder
groups and residents confirmed some common wisdom
about Burlington and provided the project with insights
as to specific actions to increase and improve the many
community assets that support a livable community. We
have known that Burlington, like most of the country, is
aging. The first members of the "boomer" generation
turn 60 this year. In the city it is expected that there will
be a 50% increase in the number of Burlington residents
age 55-65 between the years 2000 and 2010, and a
similar increase in those age 65+ beyond 2010. With
so many more of our residents in these age brackets,
there will be a need for different housing, transportation,
engagement opportunities, and service delivery options.
Burlington is choosing to meet these challenges by
working as a community to enhance the features of
livability for its older residents.

Building on the strengths of the community

The findings of the initial research projects confirmed
why Burlington has been recognized as one of the
nation's most desirable small cities. Of Burlington's
many assets, residents of all ages repeatedly identify
a long list of assets. These include Burlington's small
town feel, its great cultural offerings, the diversity of
its population, the natural beauty - especially the lake
setting, easy access to downtown, a general feeling
of safety, the vibrancy offered by the local colleges, a
community of friendly, caring people, and easy access to
leaders and government.

In 2006, the project focus was on information gathering.
Residents, service providers and city government
officials contributed to an increased understanding of
the many areas needing improvement. While there
was broad agreement about the supportive foundations
provided in the city, there was also a sense of urgency
in advancing further discussion and converting that
discussion into action given the fast-changing nature
of the population and the growth of the number of
residents over age 50. There is a need for new services
and infrastructure to meet the changing needs of the
population but there is also an opportunity to see an
increased population of older residents as a real asset.

The charge given to the many working groups
participating in the project in 2006 was to look for the
intersection between opportunity, need, community
support and feasibility as we move ahead. One of the
very encouraging findings and common agreements

among participating residents is that many of the actions necessary to increase livability for an aging population will also improve livability for other residents, including young families, new Americans and entrepreneurs, all of whom are part of the important mix that makes Burlington special.

As the project moved forward, one immediate truth that was expressed by participants over and over again was that there is no longer (if there ever was) an easy definition or terminology for talking about our "older" residents. People may work full time now well into their seventies or retire fully at age 50. Many participants in the research who were over 70 often exhibited more energy and stamina than the researchers in their thirties and forties. There are no easy age cut-off points any more to say when you cross this line you are retired or become a "senior citizen." The project was initiated by AARP Vermont and so for the most part when the report refers to an "aging" or "older" population it refers to the age qualification for AARP membership (50+). Both as individuals and as a society planning to meet the needs of individuals, understanding the ideas and vision as well as the needs and concerns of those who are growing toward these "older years" in addition to those well into the

second half century of life is important. There are many sources of information and "data" on this population and unfortunately it often creates arbitrary age groups, such as eligibility for Medicare at 65. Throughout the report we will generally use the term "older" residents to mean those more than 50 years of age. Where necessary, we will note specific age groups (such as 65+) if there are specific issues related to some other cut-off. There are many terms that could be adopted, such as elder, senior citizen, retiree, but none of them are universally accepted, well-defined or even viewed positively by those to whom they are applied.

Our Vision - Ten years out
When AARP Vermont initiated this project it made a commitment to help lead and support the effort for the next decade. The question is not just about what is needed today, but what are the initiatives that we can start and nurture over time to make sure that we can take significant sustainable steps. The vision of a livable Burlington in 2016 is a growing one that needs to be embraced by all the residents of the city if it is to become reality.

C O N T E N T S

How we worked together to think about a livable community

Stakeholders
Upwards of thirty organizations were invited to take part in the early design of the project and have stayed committed to a well integrated and coordinated effort to produce new and better results for the city. Addressing issues such as housing, mobility and accessibility, and community engagement for any population is best done in a synchronized manner that emphasizes the interaction between these factors and does not treat them as separate. Where housing is located determines needs for transportation and enhances or restricts the ability of residents to be engaged and active in their community. In the past year stakeholders, including housing groups, transportation agencies, health and education organizations, and others met regularly to assess the current situation, learn about new options for community building, and design ways of collaborating and working more effectively as the project moves forward.

Residents
In support of this Project, four major research activities have taken place, which collectively have included the participation of nearly 1000 of the city's middle-aged and older adults. First, a series of focus groups, facilitated by The Snelling Center for Government, were held in September 2006 at various locations in Burlington. Residents age 50 and older were invited to attend these groups and participate in discussions around questions such as: *What are your current experiences in Burlington in meeting your changing needs as you grow older? What is needed to be in place to make Burlington your city of choice for living as an older adult?*

The focus groups were coordinated with two other activities that allowed residents to have some deeper involvement in gathering information and formulating ideas for increasing livability in Burlington. Three study groups of local residents (32 total members) met to focus on each of the key areas being addressed: Housing, Access and Mobility, and Community Engagement. These groups assessed the information that had been gathered, sorted through numerous proposals and ideas, and individually and collectively suggested a series of targeted short and long term ideas for consideration. In addition a group of 35 volunteers gathered to conduct surveys of pedestrian issues along

seven key routes traversed by many older residents in Burlington. This "data" was compiled into a series of findings and recommendations.

An extensive city-wide telephone survey of 800 Burlington residents age 45 and older was conducted by Woelfel Research, Inc. of Dunn Loring, VA, between November 1 and November 14, 2006. The survey collected information from respondents on their opinions and experiences in Burlington on transportation and mobility options, housing and neighborhoods, and community engagement opportunities, as well as tested some of the themes that emerged from the focus groups in each of these areas. These resident interviews provide insights into the needs, preferences, and expectations of Burlington residents as they continue to make their home in the city as they grow older.

Full reports on each of these activities are available at from AARP Vermont at www.aarp.org/vt.

City Government
The City of Burlington has been a major partner in encouraging and supporting the initial activities of this project. Both Mayor Kiss and former Mayor Clavelle enthusiastically embraced the project as one way to build a cohesive and practical agenda for the city. The staff at the Community and Economic Development Office (CEDO) has lent critical support, providing advice, facilitation, research and general support to advance the project over the course of its first year. City departments such as Fletcher Free Library, Public Works and Parks and Recreation have also been active resources and enthusiastic participants.

What we have learned so far about working toward a livable city

- Older residents love Burlington for many of the same reasons most residents do; it is a vibrant community that allows for great participation, access to amenities from the lake to the university, and there is a sense of it being a community of caring.
- The residents who participated in the research activities universally agreed that their desire, whether age 50 or age 85, was to be active and engaged in community life.
- Participants voiced concerns common to the needs of individuals who are aging (health, finances, isolation), but also were concerned about being viewed as "aged."
- Burlington's population as a whole is increasingly becoming more diverse in many ways. So too is the older population of the city. In this older population group there are now, and increasingly will be, different racial and ethnic backgrounds, new Americans, and LGBTQ members of our community. Just as we invest in learning about how to be a more diverse community in our schools and workplace, so too must we take into consideration this diversity in a population that is growing older and has new and emerging needs.
- Participants resisted being labeled by "age." They expressed concerns about becoming invisible in a youth oriented culture and a desire to be connected to others based on interests, experiences and lifestyles and not to be assigned an identity as "old." Rather than being seen as a population in "need" or a burden to the larger community, participants actively encouraged the notion that they are vibrant contributors to community life – a fact we have benefited from over and over again through their participation in these early studies.

Key research findings

In 2005 it is estimated that some 7100 residents were age 55 and older. This is expected to grow to some 7900 by 2010 making this group 21% of the city's population. A quarter of the older population has income of less than $15,000 but more than half own their own home and a higher percentage own an automobile. Forty percent of those over 65 years old have one or more disabilities.

Burlington has a dynamic mixed population full of extraordinary ability and assets as well as a growing set of specific needs that must be accommodated to maintain the high quality of life its community members have come to expect. Burlington's age 50+ residents are extremely diverse. Residents who have been part of the process resist being defined primarily by their age. Instead, they made distinctions based on cognitive and physical ability, personal lifestyle, and politics. This resistance may stem from participants desire to distance themselves from the personal and cultural perception of aging and of older residents as burdens to others and to society. Participants clearly wish to be engaged,

"Burlington is like a little metropolis, very cosmopolitan…it has a lot to offer for a small city."

recognized, valued, and useful as individuals—and as community assets—rather than as part of a population that requires a host of services. Participants also articulated a deep desire for community and personal connections to alleviate loneliness, to prevent isolation, and to create relationships of mutual aid. These themes infused the discussions of housing, mobility, and community engagement in 2006 and are the cultural cornerstones on which we build as we move forward with a community-embraced action agenda to enhance Burlington's livability for an older population.

One of the major research projects was a survey of 800 Burlington residents, age 45 years and older. The findings below that reference the survey are referring to this group of Burlington residents in 2006.

Housing

- Eight out of ten respondents to the AARP survey in Burlington rated their neighborhood as an excellent or good place for older people to live, and a similar number said they would like to stay in their current home and neighborhood as long as they can.
- Most residents related staying in their homes as long as possible to remaining independent but also to remaining connected to family and the community.

- Financial concerns, such as affording property taxes, rent, and utilities, topped the list of items that residents felt threatened their ability to stay where they are, but a significant number were also concerned about factors that could limit their independence, such as no longer being able to drive, and getting help with chores and personal care.
- If they could no longer stay in their current homes or wanted to move, a location that enabled the greatest amount of independence, such as being able to schedule their own daily activities and having access to transportation, shopping, and services, was identified as most desirable for a new setting. Older residents don't want to be "warehoused" nor isolated from shopping, services, cultural, educational and civic events, friends and family.
- More affordable housing options for older residents are needed, particularly the middle class, as well as assisted living and one-level housing choices.

"There are things Burlington has to offer if you have really great resources. You can find a terrific place to live. And I think if you are in a poverty situation, you can find some place to live. But that middle – when I sell my house to downsize, where am I going to go?"

- Housing settings that are age diverse appealed to a large segment of residents. Participants wanted options that reflected their diversity – lifestyles, personality, interests, needs.
- Looking ahead most participants expressed concerns over maintenance/upkeep of their homes and overall affordability of living in Burlington.

Mobility - Accessibility

- The majority of Burlington residents surveyed indicated they are quite mobile, getting out of their homes and going somewhere, such as shopping, visiting, or exercising at least five times a week. However, residents age 75+ got out much less frequently, as did those with lower incomes and education.
- Three-quarters of Burlington residents surveyed use a personal vehicle as their primary mode of transportation when going somewhere, although considerable numbers also walked, biked, and got a ride from someone else on occasion. Only 30 percent of residents surveyed had used the bus, and most of these did not use it regularly, even though few had any complaints about using it.
- Despite the high reliance on personal vehicles to get around in the city, most Burlington residents surveyed did not think it would be difficult to remain in their current neighborhood if they were no longer able to drive. However, most agreed that more help from family and friends; more driving alternatives, such as community vans and volunteer drivers; and more delivery services for groceries and prescriptions would make it easier for them to remain in their current locations.

- CCTA and SSTA were generally perceived of as good services, but limited. Drawbacks include: bus schedules not meeting needs of riders, no Sunday service, no nighttime service, distance to bus stops in some neighborhoods, few benches or shelters, lack of signage indicating routes and times.
- Interest in an *on-demand* ride system was expressed (perhaps for those who donate cars/funds). Event specific shuttles, ride sharing and matching of riders with able drivers were ideas residents would like to see pursued.
- Most residents who sometimes walk around the City thought sidewalks were for the most part quite accessible. However, opportunities for improvements were also listed, such as better lighting and maintenance, better clearing of snow, ice, and debris, better policing to ensure drivers stop at crosswalks, and restricting the sidewalks for pedestrian use only. Repeatedly residents noted that the crosswalk signals in many parts of the city were far too short for people to safely cross the roads. Competing for sidewalk space with bikes, skate boards and other modes of transportation was a widespread concern. The other major areas of concern for walkers was a need for more places to sit, crosswalk safety, better lighting, and drivers' consideration for pedestrians.
- While accessibility has generally increased in Burlington, new issues emerging include the increased use of motorized mobility machines.

Community Engagement

- Most Burlington residents surveyed are well-connected to others in their community. In addition to their regular contact with family, friends, and neighbors, about sixty percent of residents surveyed reported that they were volunteers and/or belong to social, religious, recreational, or special interest groups. Wealthier and college educated residents were more likely to be connected to the community in each of these ways.
- The majority of residents surveyed felt Burlington has convenient places for them to participate in public meetings and events, and that it has well-run community centers, recreation centers, parks and other places where older people can socialize. In addition,

most respondents, particularly older residents, agreed they are very well-aware of activities for older adults that are available in Burlington. However, a substantial number of residents reported having barriers to attending events in the City, such as cost, timing of events and transportation.
- Residents surveyed believed it is important for the City to offer community engagement opportunities such as educational offerings, waterfront activities, volunteer opportunities and recreational activities for older adults. However, each of these activities was more appealing to those who are younger, wealthier and college-educated.
- Staying engaged in the community is something all participating residents felt strongly about. Most volunteered and wanted to continue. Volunteer opportunities are seen as a way to remain engaged in community life and as a way to share their skills, abilities, expertise, and personal assets in creating a better community.

"If you are the kind of person that feels like you need to make a difference, Burlington is a place where you can make a difference. You can volunteer to make a difference or work and make a difference. What you do can show."

- Notable gaps were events and activities targeted to and/or accessible by older residents at the waterfront and the lack of opportunities for "active seniors" and "the physically and cognitively able."
- Newspapers were noted as the best way to reach the older population, while the Internet presents a good opportunity to develop.

An integrated vision for our community

Continuing on from this community learning, our next goal is to formulate an integrated "game plan" to grow as a city and change in ways that build new opportunities and resources for an older population while enriching strong community connections and Burlington's vibrancy and attractiveness. Housing, while a key issue, was almost always discussed in the context of how people got around or wanted to get around the city. It affected how they interacted with or did not interact with neighbors and friends, and how they were able or not able to easily access services. While it is important for planning purposes to break these issues apart, the conversations with residents served to demonstrate that residents see housing, mobility and community engagement as integrally connected.

"Dr. William Thomas talks about the three plagues of old age as loneliness, depression and boredom. And I think that what we are talking about here is how to create communities that not only deal with those plagues but offer a way of life that is inclusive and forward thinking."

One concept that was explored was how to support Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs). These are usually neighborhoods where many residents have lived for a long period, raising families, working and, ultimately, retiring in the same houses. These neighborhoods, that thirty years ago were designed and serviced as places for young

families and children, now have many residents 60+ still living in single family homes. These longtime residents are looking for new ways to connect to neighbors, their community and meaningful activity, as well as ensure that they can access the services that they need and want as they age. Burlington has a number of neighborhoods that are going through this transition. How do we support this "aging in place?" Can we look to neighborhood based services and support alternative housing arrangements and home modifications? Can we create supportive environments for middle income older residents?

"One of the reasons I love where I live is that my neighborhood is a real neighborhood…there's a real sense of community…I know that there are lots of people who know my comings and goings and that I have dinner with, and they pop in."

Despite a widely shared environmental ethic, Burlington is still a city dominated by the car. This is true whether the driver is a college student or a retiree. Residents own cars and drive to meet most of their needs. This does decline some for residents past 75, but by then the "downsides" of using the bus service can also be a major deterrent. Those who regularly use bus service are generally satisfied with it (especially those living in the city center), but there is a desire for extended service (night and weekend) and more shelters. "Getting around" generally gets more difficult the older one gets. Most services (shopping, medical, cultural and educational) are widely scattered and unevenly accessible. People generally say they enjoy the city because it is multi-modal and want to see continued improvements for walking, biking, buses and cars.

Most of these improvements require small changes but consistent follow-up, such as more benches along sidewalks, better timing of pedestrian crosswalk lights to actually allow time for crossing, better construction of sidewalks to maintain smooth surfaces for all types of mobility, enforcement of rules of the road for bikes and skateboards, clear rules for mobility machines that are increasing in number and more flexible bus schedules and routes. Residents generally understand that there is a bigger planning question behind such improvements that involves coordinating housing, transportation and amenities and they are looking for ways to support an integrated approach.

Almost all conversations with residents end up with people talking about connections. The glue that holds people in the community is their connection to family, neighbors and friends, to work and activities, to education and culture. Not surprisingly, the level of connectedness often declines amongst those with lower income and education levels, and as age increases. Older residents

want straight-forward connections to being active. Many are, or see themselves as, working long past traditional retirement age and want satisfying work, either paid or volunteer. Most also spoke of wanting life-long learning opportunities. They value and support senior centers, services and activities but want to make sure that they have multiple options for connecting. Many spoke about the need for increased attention to venues for participating in city government at hearings and meetings, or serving on committees and commissions. Many opportunities exist, but generally are oriented around the needs and schedules of younger working residents. Thus they do not always take into consideration impediments to participation that certain meeting times and locations might present for older residents willing and interested in joining.

In composing this vision, stakeholder groups and residents worked together on many fronts. This cooperation and coordination is necessary to sustain the energy and resources that will move this project from vision to action and implementation. Sustainability is a key feature of each step of this project. The plan to achieve the vision will build action around achievable goals and identify adequate resources to support actions so that they can be completed and integrated into the composite picture of our ever more livable city.

Preparing for Action

HOUSING

Community attachment is highest for those who have lived in their communities the longest. In fact, people age 50 and older strongly and overwhelmingly express interest in remaining in their homes for as long as possible, and this desire rises as people grow older. There are several ways in which the home is a key to personal independence and engagement in community life. Home design, for instance, can affect how an individual is able to conduct everyday activities, ranging from personal care to hobbies and household chores. It is where residents prepare to conduct their lives in the surrounding community, and it is a setting for socializing with family, friends, and neighbors. Further, the affordability of the home influences how residents, especially those with low or moderate incomes, are able to continue living and participating in the community in which they have established social and economic ties. Under the right circumstances, the home as a financial asset can even be tapped to fund supportive services, finance home modification, or supplement monthly income. All of these facets are integral to residents' ability to remain independent in the community of their choice and to enjoy their quality of life and continued engagement in that community. (Beyond 50.05)

What does the national evidence say about Housing and an Aging Population?

- The Nation's 35.6 million people aged 65 and older face a quadruple threat:
  1. Many have inadequate incomes to pay for housing costs.
  2. Mounting healthcare needs compete with other basic expenditures.
  3. Most live in single family homes that require maintenance and that are expensive for caregivers to reach because they are geographically dispersed.
  4. Many have physical limitations or cognitive impairments that must be addressed by in-home care or structural modification.
- In the larger community, land use and zoning decisions not only affect housing stock, but they also have implications for how readily residents can use their community's features. For instance, sprawl and segregation of residential and commercial areas can make it difficult to get places. Neighborhoods without safe, well designed and maintained sidewalks can affect the ability of people to leave their homes on errands and to interact with neighbors.
- The availability of supportive services influences not only whether a person can remain in their home and community, but also the types of activities that person can engage in.
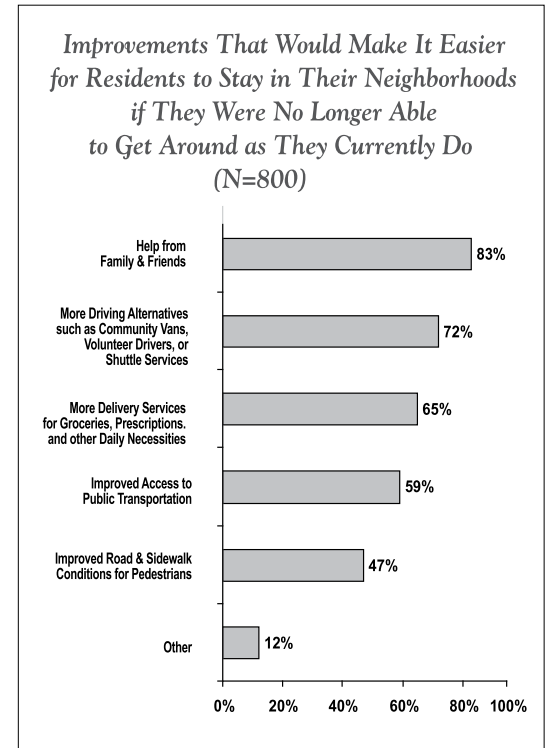- Community safety influences property values and personal security as well as the activities that residents are willing to undertake, especially in the evening.
- Single family homes and other individual family options are likely to be ill-equipped with features that would support safe and comfortable occupancy by older residents. Cost of home modifications is often out of reach for older home owners.
- Housing options to stay in a single family home (e.g., shared housing, accessory apartments) are not widely utilized.
- Housing options to move from a single family home (e.g., congregate housing, assisted living) are not as available or as affordable.
- The decision to move from a single family house to another arrangement is often made when there is a dramatic increase in "need" (e.g., health, finance) limiting choice and opportunity.
- Today's subsidized rental housing is a patchwork of disparate programs, which creates problems in coordinating housing policy for diverse needs.
- Housing options for those moving from their individual home and neighborhood can lead to separation and isolation from attributes that contributed to their health and ability to contribute back to the community.

MOBILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Transportation that connects individuals to the goods, services, and social opportunities of the community contributes to successful aging. It connects the home with community activities and social opportunities. People who do not have transportation options to meet their individual needs cannot easily contribute to their communities as volunteers or advocates, and they are less satisfied with their lives. A livable community provides a transportation system with a range of services operated to support the involvement of all its residents. (Beyond 50.05)

What does the national evidence say about mobility and accessibility?

- Older Americans use transportation in their everyday lives in much the same way younger Americans do— they make daily trips to shop, to do family chores, to visit with family and friends, to go to work, to socialize, to give rides to others, to obtain medical and dental care. It is not surprising that older Americans make fewer passenger trips (trips made for the purpose of giving someone else a ride) and work-related trips than do mid-life Americans, as they are less likely to have children living at home and are more likely to be retired.
- In large part these trips are made by car, although by age 75, both the number of trips made and the number of individuals who drive decline significantly.
- Age-related functional limitations that impede use of transportation options limit community engagement and successful aging.
- The transportation mode that individuals age 50 and older use has a strong influence on how much they get around and what they do when they travel. Health, disability, where people live, and income also influence levels of mobility.
- Although cars and other private motorized vehicles are the predominant travel mode, other types of transportation contribute as well to the mobility of persons age 50 and older. Indeed, individuals who use a combination of modes have higher levels of mobility than do those individuals who rely on a single mode.

Improvements That Would Make It Easier for Residents to Stay in Their Neighborhoods if They Were No Longer Able to Get Around as They Currently Do (N=800)

Help from Family & Friends	83%
More Driving Alternatives such as Community Vans, Volunteer Drivers, or Shuttle Services	72%
More Delivery Services for Groceries, Prescriptions, and other Daily Necessities	65%
Improved Access to Public Transportation	59%
Improved Road & Sidewalk Conditions for Pedestrians	47%
Other	12%

"…[S]he gave up her car way too early…She could use it to go to supermarket and back, or the library and back during the day. And she'd have her mobility and freedom. But right now, she's stuck and just has to wait until somebody helps her out. And I'd hate to be in that spot."
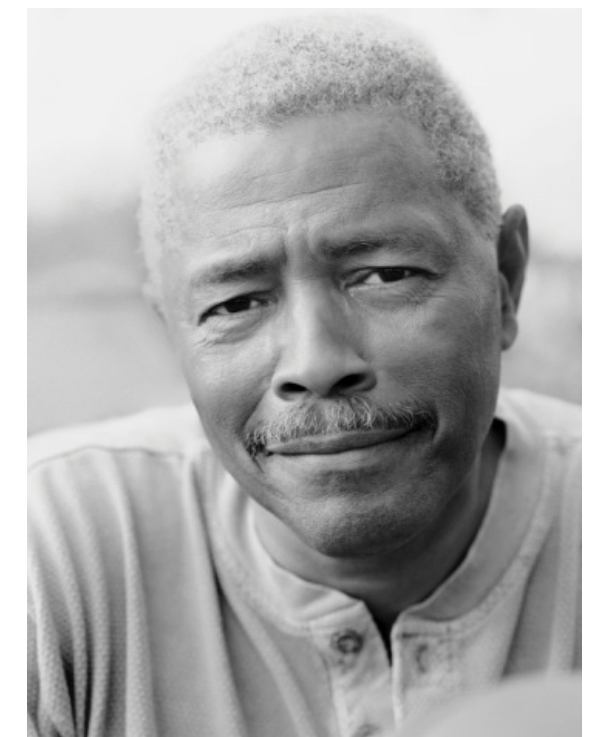
- Driving poses challenges for older persons. Although driving is the most common transportation option for staying connected to the community, as people age, their risk of fatality or serious injury in a car crash increases. Although drivers age 55 and older are involved in fewer accidents per licensed driver than are drivers in all younger age groups, after age 65 they have an increased risk *per mile driven* of being involved in an accident. If they are in an accident, they are much more likely to die than are younger individuals. Many older individuals protect themselves by regulating their own driving; they do not drive at night, in poor weather, or during peak travel hours.
- Parking is another driving challenge. There may not be enough parking, or parking may be too far away from destinations in urban areas to meet the needs of older persons with functional impairments. The design of parking lots may create safety risks for drivers of all ages, particularly for older ones. In addition, often there is not enough parking for individuals with disabilities (handicapped parking), even if minimum legal requirements under the ADA are met.
- Modification of the travel environment to accommodate age-related changes in physical functioning can promote continued driving.
- With improved road layout and design, lighting, and the design and placement of signs, increasing numbers of older drivers can continue driving safely.
- As the demand for transportation alternatives grow, public transportation that is usable by all could increasingly become an important mobility resource. However, older adults want their transportation to be "affordable, accessible, adaptable, available, and acceptable."
- In an increasing number of places, and with the encouragement of metropolitan planning organizations, human service organizations are coordinating their transportation offerings with one another to use their limited resources more efficiently.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement comprises a wide range of activities, including social encounters with neighbors, volunteering, and participation in community planning and political activities, which link a person with his or her community. Community engagement includes all community-based aspects of organized civic life as well as informal relationships that bind people to those who live nearby. (Beyond 50.05)

What does the national evidence say about Community Engagement?

- Community engagement is important for all ages, but can be especially important as people leave paid employment (or at least full-time paid employment) because it can result in useful and well-defined roles that provide meaning and a sense of purpose, enhance their feelings of self-worth and mastery, involve them in relationships that can offer them social support, trigger a flow of positive emotions, and provide a source of cognitive stimulation.
- There is considerable evidence that links community engagement to longevity, physical health, life satisfaction, and other indicators of psychological well-being of older adults. Older adults who are not engaged with the life of their communities are at risk for the adverse consequences associated with social isolation.

"The older I get, the more invisible I become."

- It has been demonstrated that social capital (civic and social involvement and community engagement) is linked to economic prosperity, community viability, and individual mental and physical health. Shifting the focus to the level of the community or neighborhood itself, there is strong evidence that in those places where residents identify with the area and are active in maintaining a local group life, the quality of life is enhanced for most residents.

Action steps for the next decade

HOUSING

Burlington Vision and Values

Burlington at its best offers a diverse and affordable range of housing and supportive services to meet the needs and interests of all its residents throughout all stages of aging.

- A livable city is designed to allow residents the choice of living in their own homes and neighborhoods for as long as they want to. "Aging in place" should be an affordable and supported option.
- Housing choices are affordable for all. Middle class homeowners, or those living independently, should not feel that the only options open to them when they choose to, or need to, leave their homes are expensive continuing care communities or subsidized living that requires them to extinguish their savings and resources. Feeling forced to choose to leave the area all together is not a situation Burlington residents should have to encounter.
- Housing choices should include a range of options from age segregated to multi-generational housing. Creative attention to this will generate many different ideas and options including affinity housing units (housing for those most interested in the arts, or gardens, or being around children, etc.).

"I feel as though I've met what I consider the perfect situation for myself in this last third of my life, hopefully. It's a community. It's a cooperative, so it's automatic community because everyone has to participate…safety… limited equity…28 units…community room…courtyard for children to play."

- Housing options from single family homes to nursing homes should be designed with services in mind that reduce isolation, with programs for bringing engaged residents to housing and bringing residents out into the community to be thoughtfully engaged.
- Issues of safety in our neighborhoods, accessibility to community resources (shopping, healthcare, cultural and educational events), and design for connecting people to their neighbors is just as, if not more, important for older residents than it is for young families and others.
- Design and master planning for the city should be followed up by action and master implementation that aggressively pushes for changing land use patterns so they maximize the connections between where people live and where they want to get to in the city, and creates new and easier options for moving from place to place.
- If diversity is a hallmark of a livable city, it must include age diversity as well as other ways that we think about a diverse community. In addition, we must be aware of and promote community learning to address all the "isms" in the context of the experience of residents who by virtue of age are transitioning out of the work force and have needs and assets that the community must embrace and address.

ACTION: Planning and Policy

- Create senior housing "game plan" based on consumer input, reflecting livable community guiding principles.
- Explore/develop financing incentives for additional senior housing consistent with housing game plan.

- Obtain inventory of developable and redevelopable sites for new housing development including "above storefront housing," schools, and theaters. Look for ways to expand inventory. Engage residents in prioritizing these sites for development consistent with the "game plan."
- Quantify service gaps for lowest income/frailest older populations "aging in place" in congregate and family settings.
- Incorporate growing housing and service needs of older residents into 2008 Burlington Consolidated Plan.
- Participate in the rewrite of the Burlington zoning code and other ordinances to ensure that needed types of senior housing are encouraged.
- Determine whether allowable densities are a barrier to implementing the housing "game plan."
- Review federal and other definitions of a *Naturally Occurring Retirement Community* (NORC) and identify potential funding sources; assess city neighborhoods for potentially qualifying NORCs.
- Research legislation that would require all new development and redevelopment to meet universal design and energy efficiency standards.
- Assess impact of housing occupancy changes; seek opportunities for targeting housing sold by older residents for younger families.

Participants in focus and study groups determined that a livable city will develop a model for what housing should be like. One example that they liked for such a model was created by MacKenzie Architects (Burlington, Vermont) in their *Tenets of Aging in Community.* These tenets represent the type of design/development philosophy that could be developed for a city like Burlington. *1) Include people of all ages, especially elders; 2) Promote a lifestyle that is ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just and humane; 3) Enhance wellness of the mind, body, and spirit; 4) Embrace interdependence, both within the community and in the greater society; and 5) Support opportunities at every age for civic and social engagement, education, and creative expression.*

ACTION: Housing Infrastructure

- Advocate at the city, state and federal level for adequate funding of existing priorities and new pilot projects. Create a list of Stakeholder organization policy priorities and distribute to group.
- Assist in coordinating and building partnerships between public, private and nonprofit stakeholders to support a more coordinated city plan.
- Design and provide training for housing developers and housing management staff to address the needs of the growing and diverse nature of residents needing new housing options (designed both for aging issues but also for the unique issues associated with diverse background, ethnicity, race, new Americans, LGBTQ).
- Generate a range of housing options that provide opportunities for residents to be creative and independent with ample space for parking and storage.
- Provide more assisted living residences and supportive housing options for low-and middle income residents.
- Preserve existing stock and create new housing, including an affordable continuing care community.
- Eliminate "buy outs" of senior housing.
- Work with nursing home institutions to encourage continuous quality improvement in care.
- Address workforce development and funding issues on the state and federal level for nursing homes and nursing care.
- Link nursing home institutions and residents to opportunities and resources throughout the community so that nursing homes are more integrated into the community and community life.
- Explore *Green Houses* (http://www.nccapitalimpact.org/default.aspx?id=146) and other innovations as part of the evolution of nursing homes and nursing care.
- Develop new residential options for low-income residents with dementia.
- Promote the development of accessory apartments so residents and families can live together with the privacy each wants; assess zoning ordinance and revise if necessary. Clarify and promote an application process for accessory apartments.

ACTION: Aging in Place Services

- Create a network for sharing supportive housing information and issues (a Statewide Housing Roundtable). Establish an annual conference bringing together senior housing and service providers (health and other service providers) to discuss issues requiring collaboration.
- Continue to support more outreach and education about housing options to help people make decisions before they are in crisis mode and forced to choose options they do not want or like.
- Amplify current efforts to educate consumers about programs available through Burlington Electric Department and Vermont Gas to make homes more energy efficient and loan programs for home modification. Delineate single home/rental needs and congregate housing needs
- Explore grant opportunities for supplementing home modification loans.
- Establish a program to assess individual homes for safety and mobility and make more residents aware of assistance (financial, volunteer) to make modifications that allow homeowners to continue living independently.
- Establish and expand programs providing housing based services, particularly for existing low income residents "aging in place**."**
- Strongly support adequate funding of HASS

(Housing and Supportive Services) for current buildings and expand to new sites; evaluate what has worked and how to improve.
- Promote awareness of non-profits serving the housing needs of older residents for the purpose of sustaining and increasing resources.
- Ensure adequate training for providers (paid and volunteer) to develop adequate cultural competencies to address the growing diversity in the population (ethnicity, race, new Americans, LGBTQ).
- Establish neighborhood-based care giving program to provide respite to family members and help frail residents stay in their homes, preferably in concert with the development of a "horizontal" NORC initiative using neighbors, volunteers and circles of care and implement one model.
- Intensify marketing effort to promote the benefits of home sharing allowing older residents to stay in their homes if they choose. Promote range of options and existing community assets.

"…you and your husband have each other, but a lot of us – as we get older and much, much older – don't. We have the potential for isolation. I think the idea of house sharing…has tons of potential."

MOBILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Burlington Vision and Values

Burlington at its best offers a comprehensive, convenient and smart network of mobility options providing affordable access to all its community members.

- A livable city is not necessarily "anti-car" or "pro-bus." It offers an integrated set of options that meet different needs at different times and provide choices. It is concerned with ensuring that all residents, no matter what level of mobility-ability, do have options for getting to where they need or want to go.

- A livable city encourages people to connect and provides convenient and affordable systems for how one moves around the city. How inviting it is to transport oneself in more communally-oriented modes enhances or detracts from livability.
- Mobility and accessibility are key to all civic goals. If the city values participation, the means by which people get to the place of participation needs to be in the center of the consciousness of planning. This includes place, time and the connectedness to the means to get there and get home. It also means that once people get to a site of activity it should be accessible, safe and friendly.
- A livable city can adopt the idea of "Complete Streets" (http://www.completethestreets.org/) where roads, sidewalks, bus routes, bike paths all exist to serve people. Transportation infrastructure is built with the pedestrian at the center not the car.

ACTION: Planning

- Encourage Burlington residents and service providers to participate in development of Burlington's Transportation Plan. Work to ensure Stakeholder mobility recommendations are incorporated into the Burlington Transportation Plan.
- Encourage pedestrian-based road design ("complete streets" concept)
- Encourage full accessibility zones (e.g., Church Street Marketplace) and establish a BLCP certificate and door sticker for participating

ACTION: Pedestrians

- Provide pedestrians with adequate amount of time to safely cross all streets including major arteries.
  - Time crosswalk signals throughout the city to ensure adequate amount of time for older residents to cross streets and provide consistency of signals.
  - Recalibrate signals to increase amount of time to cross as needed.
  - Immediate action to add time for crossings should be made at crossings near senior housing.
  - Install count down crossing signals across major arteries to reduce confusion about amount of time allowed to cross.
- Maintain city sidewalks in good condition, free from tripping and other hazards.
  - Regularly assess city sidewalks to document areas in need of repair.
  - Repair dangerous sections of sidewalk.
  - Maintain and if possible increase city funding for sidewalk plowing.
- Research strategies in other northern communities to mitigate impact of snow and ice on sidewalks in the winter.
- Investigate community ordinances related to motorized wheelchairs and scooters, bicycles, skateboards, etc. Require notification devices and lighting on bikes.
- Expand downtown area covered by prohibition of bicycles, skateboards, etc. on city sidewalks to encompass downtown senior housing sites.
- Work with the police department to enforce sidewalk ordinances.
- Create more bicycle lanes to reduce conflicts between pedestrians and bicyclists on sidewalks and increase safety of bicyclists riding on the road.
- Educate residents about good use of sidewalks and city ordinances.

- Provide more resting spots such as benches along the bike path and other walking routes and at bus stops with priority given to routes that connect senior housing to services and in high volume pedestrian routes on hills.
- Provide more accessible public restrooms and indoor resting areas and create rewards for companies and institutions that offer public restrooms and resting places.

ACTION: Public Transit & Innovation

- Investigate innovative and effective transportation options such as Ticket to Ride, the Senior Van in Essex, on demand transportation services (door to door), volunteer driving services, access to private shuttles (e.g. hotels), and other comparable programs as possible models for Burlington.
- Create prepay (online, by mail) bus swipe card

making payment easier and more accessible.

- Establish a CCTA Accessibility Service Package to include: a program to educate bus drivers about the needs of older riders and how to provide a safe, welcoming environment for them; a program of volunteer "ambassadors" to show new riders how to use the bus; and enhance and increase marketing of discounts for older residents.
- Expand and extend bus service to meet present and future demands: weekend and night bus services; greater neighborhood penetration; door-to-door service when needed (SSTA).

"I'm in an area where you have to get to where the bus stops…I would have to have someone take me there. I can't walk that far at this point."

- Continue outreach and marketing of public transportation to educate the public about public transit as an environmentally friendly, community connection.
- Integrate housing development with current and future public transit planning. Housing targeted to older residents should connect directly to public transportation and pedestrian options for easily getting around without access to a car. Housing development that does not follow this design protocol should not be approved.

- Provide incentives to housing developers to build new housing on existing transit routes or to work with transit authorities to ensure that transit is made available.
- Provide better lighting and security in garages, and at bus stops and parking lots to increase comfort and safety.
- Coordinate various bus services in Burlington and clarify ridership requirements on niche services.
- Increase private and non-profit sponsored transportation (bus or shuttles) to meetings, shopping and cultural events (similar to Price Chopper weekend shopping bus).
- Create a comprehensive list of services, transportation options, resources for the public and use United Way 211 as a way to disseminate information.
- Elevate public transportation as a priority for public funding by organizing resident activists and educating the public about importance of the bus and other forms of public transportation.

ACTION: Cars
- Research the feasibility of car sharing programs (Zip Cars or Car Share) to reduce demand for parking and improve mobility of older residents.
- Work with Burlington Police Department to increase enforcement of city speed limits and traffic signals.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Burlington Vision and Values

Burlington at its best is a community of engaged residents, diverse and active on many levels.

- Burlington is a community where ageism and community attitudes and stereotypes about aging are identified and addressed by the entire community.
- Programs impacting older adults are integrated into the community and community programs integrate older adults.
- Diversity is embraced and addressed as programs for older adults are designed and implemented.
- Older adults are resources, and active and engaged workers and volunteers who add value to the whole community.

"When you get old, you're no longer who you were…nobody knows you except as an old person. The fact is we have a treasure trove of experience and interesting things that could be shared."

- Shared interests transcend chronological age.
- The community acknowledges the essential connection between transportation and mobility and community engagement.
- As a community we recognize the role of housing and neighborhood design in facilitating community in its planning and growth decisions.
- Institutional structures, services and general practices work to actively decrease the isolation of residents whether at home or in independent living facilities or nursing homes.
- Cultural and educational institutions and service agencies actively work to reorient attitudes around aging and older residents not just through what they do *for* older residents but what they do *with* older residents, moving from a service mentality to a partnership vision.

ACTION: Participation in Social, Educational, Cultural, and Recreational Activities

- Develop a presentation/training program to educate the public, policy makers and agencies on aging issues including developmental stages of aging and how programming to address needs at different stages can increase participation.
- Promote and adequately support existing ways in which residents access information about opportunities, programs and activities such as 211 and the Senior HelpLine.

- Working with an advisory group of older residents, establish additional ways to disseminate information about programs, services and activities in Burlington through a variety of written and electronic media.
- Promote Front Porch Forum list-serve as a way to connect neighbors throughout the city.
  - Recruit volunteers to serve as "livable community" point people for their neighborhoods.
- Explore the viability of developing a "welcome package" for Burlington's older residents.
- Support Burlington's senior centers as they rethink, redesign and reprogram to meet the needs of the community. Support Burlington's senior centers in the process to receive national accreditation.
- Healthy aging programs, such as opportunities for safe and appropriate exercise and physical activity, should be encouraged.
- Require civic organizers and event organizers to include how they are ensuring engagement and accessibility for older residents and people with disabilities as a condition to get a permit.
- Ensure that options for translation services of

community event information are available and determine additional needs and how best to help.

- Provide and publicize affordable and accessible lifelong learning opportunities for residents.
- Work with school department to increase attendance of older residents at school performances, sporting events and other activities that involve the community.
- Work with school department and agencies working with children and young adults to increase intergenerational programs.
  - Encourage and maintain Service Learning as a component of graduation in Burlington with focused opportunities for intergenerational service and activities.
  - Develop additional Service Learning programs at Burlington area colleges with focused opportunities for intergenerational service and activities.
  - Increase mentoring programs and target older adults for recruitment as mentors.
- Identify appropriate city collaboration with senior centers and other community organizations who are designing programs for 50+ residents, including wellness and health education, and physical activity.
- Encourage cultural organizations provide discount tickets for older residents or "same day" pricing for events that are not sold out.

ACTION: Volunteering and Employment

- Collaborate with local business organizations to train employers to provide best practices for meeting business needs tapping the expertise of older workers. Encourage businesses to re-examine HR policies to recruit and retain older workers.
- Develop new opportunities for lifelong learning as part of a strategy to assist people transitioning from full time employment.
- Develop a volunteer corps for older residents similar to AmeriCorps Vista as conceptualized by the Wisdom Works grant proposal.
- Work with the city to strengthen neighborhood connections for informal neighbor-to-neighbor caregiving and social interaction.
- Strengthen the connection of RSVP of Chittenden County and AARP VT to increase 50+ volunteerism in Burlington.
- Work with RSVP of Chittenden County to:
  - Focus on strategies to recruit and place 65+ volunteers.
  - Enhance agencies' understanding of the wide range of skills of 65+ volunteers.
  - Assist agencies to make use of more highly skilled older volunteers and create leadership opportunities for them in the coming years.

ACTION: Civic Participation/ Leadership Development

- Increase capacity of city government to act on BLCP recommendations and issues affecting older residents of the city with a mayoral appointment of staff, an ombudsman or a resident council or commission.
- Identify resources from professional associations (e.g. school boards, VLCT, etc.) to provide specific training on how to be on a board/commission.
- Identify and train individuals 50+ to represent issues of concern to older residents to boards and commissions and those in local elected office.
- Provide legislative advocacy training for older residents.
- Explore the model of the Milwaukee Sr. Leadership Academy for importation to Vermont.
- Increase participation of people 65+ on public commissions, in elected office such as City Council, School Board and state legislature, and on non-profit and private boards.

(These steps are not listed in priority order. Each year an annual plan will set priorities.)

Working together for the future

Future directions –

While the research exposes challenges and opportunities, it also leads to some key questions/issues to consider in further discussions and planning efforts, such as:

1. How will we change the way we think and talk about aging and the members of the older population?
2. How can Burlington residents, officials and service providers promote the reinvigoration and/or development of neighborhoods as a place of connection? What policies, services, community features or practices would increase neighborliness?
3. What will be needed to support people in their homes and communities? What combination of "neighborliness," informal or organized voluntary action, and agency provided services will be needed? How can we ensure this mix is in place?
4. How will we engage our older residents in community life?
5. How will we engage our older residents as vital assets in creating a livable community?
6. How will we make our communities truly accessible to all residents regardless of age or disability?
7. How will we embrace the diversity of our older residents as we grow to understand the different ways that aging may impact community members of different ethnicities or race, or of members who are new Americans or LGBTQ.

"It's very easy to make a difference [in Burlington]…there's one degree of separation between any of us and the governor of this state…and the neighborhood councils are a way for residents to participate, no matter who they are, and to make – to really make – a difference. And that is democracy at its best, really."

Some principles to consider as we work to respond to these questions and strengthen our community are:

- **Engage older residents as resources and assets in the conversations about community policy and design; not just as the user or target audience.**

- **Focus our efforts on enhancing connections.**
  How will the new policies and programs improve mobility and housing to meet "needs" of the population *and* serve to link people of all ages to one another and to community life?

- **Change our language and thought patterns about being older.**
  We must catch ourselves when we use language or present ideas that segment or label our older community members as some homogenous group to be acted on. We need to look for a tone that acknowledges the diversity, vibrancy and wealth of experiences of these vital contributing members of our community and always welcomes them as full participating community residents.

The project organizers also realize that Burlington is not an island. The project started in Burlington both because of the great support from city government and stakeholders, and because it is a manageable unit from which to look at initiating and measuring change. This does not mean that the project will

not look at linkages between Burlington and adjacent communities. Because many older Burlington residents use a variety of services and commercial establishments located in South Burlington, Colchester, Winooski, Shelburne, etc. and they often have to move to housing in other communities, adjacent communities, and conversations going on in those communities will also be considered in our livable community project. The project will also be taking into consideration actions that need to be addressed at the state, regional and federal levels, even though the recommended actions are focused on Vermont. In the end, the project will measure its success based on its ability to achieve the goals that residents of Burlington set and maintain.

Be Engaged!

Project plans and activities will be updated regularly and an annual plan will be developed with the City and stakeholders.

What is going on now?

➢ Stakeholder groups meet quarterly
➢ Presentations and discussions are being organized with community groups and neighborhood organizations
➢ Resident task groups are organized to focus on the action items
➢ BLCP recommendations are being presented at city meetings, such as those on the zoning rewrite or the transportation
➢ Resident training programs are being developed and will be operating to help residents become more engaged

What can you do now?

➢ Place yourself on the AARP Vermont Action list for Burlington to stay up-to-date on important opportunities to participate and help.
➢ Volunteer when the project or project partners call for help with task forces, research, study groups, and community service opportunities.
➢ Be an advocate when AARP Vermont and

other stakeholders alert you to important opportunities to make a difference in city, regional and state deliberations that will impact BLCP objectives.
➢ Continue to tell us how you think Burlington can be a livable city for all ages.

Contact Jennifer Wallace Brodeur, AARP Vermont, 802- 224-1113 (JWBrodeur@aarp.org)

A copy of *Beyond 50.05* is available at: http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/beyond_50_communities.pdf

Summary of Activities and Participants

Thank you to the…

- Former Mayor Peter Clavelle for his early support, providing leadership in initiating this project with AARP Vermont on behalf of the City of Burlington.
- Mayor and City Council for supporting this effort and listening carefully to the ideas.
- 30 plus service organizations and stakeholder groups who met regularly and worked diligently to make this a cohesive well-integrated effort, maximizing the future opportunities for successful advancement of a livable community.
- The 55 residents who participated in the focus groups.
- The 800 residents who responded to the telephone survey.
- The 32 residents who participated in the three study groups.
- The 35 residents who conducted the pedestrian study.
- The many resource people from Burlington and beyond who shared their experiences and wisdom.

The insightful quotes incorporated throughout this document were sentiments offered by the Burlington residents who participated in the seven focused conversations in September 2006.

Burlington Livable Community Project Stakeholders

AARP Vermont
Burlington CEDO
Burlington City Arts
Burlington Housing Authority
Burlington Parks & Recreation Department
Burlington Police Department
Burlington Public Works
Cathedral Square Corporation
CCTA
Champlain Senior Center, Inc.
Champlain Valley Agency on Aging
Champlain Long Term Care Coalition
Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization
Community of Vermont Elders (COVE)
Converse Home
Ethan Allen Residence
Fletcher Allen Health Care - Community Health Improvement
Fletcher Allen Elder Care Services
Fletcher Free Library
Foster Grandparent Program and RSVP of Chittenden County, programs of the United Way of Chittenden County Volunteer Center
Greater Burlington YMCA
Heineberg Senior Center
HomeShare Vermont
Snelling Center for Government
United Way of Chittenden County
University of Vermont - Department of Continuing Education
UVM Transportation Center
Vermont Interfaith Action
Vermont LGBTQ Elders Advisory Group
Vermont Refugee Resettlement Project
Visiting Nurse Association of Chittenden and Grand Isle Counties

NOTES

The Burlington Livable Community Project

AARP SM

The power to make it better.®

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