Results of Brevard's Age-Friendly Community Needs Assessment

BACKGROUND: In February 2024 the City of Brevard officially joined the AARP Age-Friendly Community Network. The first requirement after acceptance into the program was to conduct a needs assessment of older residents.

METHODOLOGY:

A. **Survey**: The City of Brevard in collaboration with AARP created a survey to help determine current satisfaction level and future needs from older residents. This was distributed to residents aged 50 and above over the period mid-April to mid-July.

   The survey was open to all residents in Transylvania County since City of Brevard services, programs, amenities are utilized by and impact more than just city residents. Data is, however, sortable by zip code. 79% of respondents were from 28712 zip code.

   The survey was available both online and via paper copies. It was advertised via social media, in the newspaper, via flyers, on radio, at several in-person town hall meetings, via local churches, veterans groups, at Bread of Life, Sharing House and copies were hand delivered to Meals on Wheels clients.

   A total of 647 surveys were received.

B. **Listening Sessions**: In addition to the survey four in-person listening sessions were held where 201 specific suggestions/comments were received.

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS: The following were key demographics of survey responders.

81 % of survey respondents were white/Caucasian (2% were Non-white and 17% failed to respond)

69 % had a bachelor's degree or higher; 21% had some college; 7% High school or below and 3% did not respond.

58 % had lived in Brevard/Transylvania County for less than 20 years. The median years lived in TC was 14.

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS:

The Community Age-Friendly Task Force reviewed the survey results and identified the following as the most significant findings.

1. Overall there was a high level of satisfaction for the community as a place to age.

(27.4% Excellent; 34.8 % Very good; 21.8% good;11.8 % fair; 2.8% poor)

There was a slightly lower (less happy) shift for people who lived here a long time.

2. **The main issues of concern from the survey were:**

   a. Ability to age in place. 43% rated this as Extremely important; 42 % as Very important; 7.8% as somewhat important; 1.2 % Not at all important; 5.5% not sure

   b. Affordable Housing. Respondents were concerned about the lack of affordable housing for older residents as well concerned about the lack of affordable housing for adults of all ages.

   c. Transportation. Accessible and convenient public transportation scored extremely low. Many comments were submitted concerning the need to better advertise the existing county van routes as well as suggestions on expanding this service.

   d. Conveniently located public parking. This received the lowest overall score of all the public building & spaces questions. Multiple comments were submitted about lack of downtown parking impacting the ability of respondents to access, enjoy and support downtown.

   e. Safety issues. Concerns with condition of downtown sidewalks, need to enforce vehicle speed limits

   f. Adult day care. This service is not currently available anywhere in Transylvania County and respondents saw a high need for it.

   g. Public Restrooms. Need for more public restrooms downtown.

3. **There was a high level of satisfaction with:**

   a. Social connection. Very few people felt left out, or isolated. 65% of respondents currently attend a social group.

   58% of respondents would like to see more offerings of intergenerational programs.

   b. Community involvement. 64% of respondents volunteer and 73% said that information on volunteering opportunities was readily available.

   c. Lack of Ageism. 81% of respondents said ageism was NOT a problem

LISTENING SESSION FINDINGS:

Following is a breakdown of the 201 suggestions obtained during the four in-person listening sessions. The most frequently mentioned suggestions were in the following areas of perceived need:

- Additional downtown parking
- Expanded public transportation and information about it
- More primary care providers and medical specialists in Brevard

- More affordable housing for both older adults and service workers
- Improved safety on city roads
- Community wide calendar or newsletter
- Increase in the number of opportunities for lifelong learning

These 7 areas of perceived need account for 72% of the responses. Noteworthy is the overlap of many similar areas of concern comparing these suggestions to the responses from the survey.

NEXT STEPS.

Results of the survey and listening sessions will be provided to AARP, the public, and other interested stakeholders.

The Age-Friendly Community Task Force will begin working on an action plan focused on the findings from the needs assessment survey. This will identify items where City of Brevard, Transylvania County, nonprofits and others can make a difference.