Age Friendly Brevard

Action Plan 2025



(Letter from Mayor.

To be added after Council endorsement)

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This plan is the result of a collaborative effort between The City of Brevard, AARP, community members and stakeholder groups. We want to thank everyone who took time to participate in the Age Friendly Survey and listening sessions. We especially want to thank the volunteers who formed the Age Friendly Community Task Force.

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Introduction

Brevard is a small, rural town with a population of approximately 8,000 residents located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It is the county seat of Transylvania County, North Carolina. The population of Transylvania County is approximately 33,000.

Brevard and Transylvania County both have an increasing percentage of older residents. Between 2000 and 2023, the median age of Brevard grew from 45 to 52. Similar aging trends are reflected in much of Western North Carolina. Currently Transylvania County is ranked 5th highest of the 100 counties in the state for median age. Approximately 33% of the population of the City of Brevard and Transylvania County is over 65.

The City of Brevard has become a popular retirement destination with an increasing population of older adults who are active, involved and want to continue this lifestyle. Older residents are not just a significant percentage of our community but a vital and active part of what makes Brevard special.

To ensure we meet the needs of all members of our community, the City of Brevard has spent the last several years soliciting community input and recently updated our long-term planning documents to reflect a strong commitment to "livability" for all residents, including older adults. These documents include *Building Brevard: 2030 Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Brevard Pedestrian and Bicycle plan,* and the *Downtown Master Plan.*

There is already a strong correlation between the livability factors identified as priorities in our city plans and the AARP 8 areas of livability. Our *Building Brevard: 2030 Comprehensive Land Use Plan* sets as goals: housing for all residents, livable communities, health & safety in the built environment, community health and wellness, improving access to recreation and prioritizing multi-modal transportation. All these goals correlate almost exactly to the AARP Age Friendly Livability Factors.

Our goal in becoming a member of the Age-Friendly Community and our goal in developing this Age Friendly Action Plan was not to duplicate existing plans and goals but rather add depth and focus to these already stated goals by specifically listening to our older demographic and incorporating what we heard into recommended actions that complement ongoing plans.

This plan reflects the current conditions as of 2024. We plan to conduct an annual review regarding the status of action items listed in this plan and update accordingly.

We plan to conduct another community survey/assessment in approximately three years.

Glossary of Acronyms

AFTF – Age Friendly Task Force. This is a grassroots group of community members and stakeholders working together to achieve the goals of an Age Friendly Community and the primary group responsible for developing this plan.

BRCC – Blue Ridge Community College. Local community college.

BTHC – Brevard/Transylvania Housing Coalition. A grassroots community group focused on ways to increase the availability of affordable housing.

COB – City of Brevard

HAC – Housing Assistance Corporation. A local non-profit that builds and repairs affordable housing.

HOB – Heart of Brevard. A non-profit organization whose purpose is to maintain a vital downtown.

LOS – Land of Sky. Regional Council of Government covering Brevard/Transylvania County.

NP – Non-profit organization.

TC – Transylvania County

TEA – Transylvania Economic Alliance. A public/private partnership that focuses on economic development in Transylvania County.

How the Age Friendly Action Plan was Developed.

Background:

Immediately after the City of Brevard joined the AARP Age-Friendly Community Network in February 2024 an Age Friendly Community Task Force (AFTF) was established to help organize, promote, analyze, and begin working on age friendly goals. To help lead the Task Force the City of Brevard recruited a local gerontologist, Dr. Paula Hartman-Stein, whose background in ageing-related issues and programs was an invaluable resource to the team and the City. Brevard was fortunate that Dr. Hartman-Stein agreed to be the Age Friendly Community Task Force Coordinator.

Other members of AFTF included: Mayor, City of Brevard and two Brevard City Council members; an employee from Blue Ridge Community College; the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Heart of Brevard; a retired physician; Chairperson of the Transylvania County Council on Aging; member of the Transylvania County Parks & Recreation department; Transylvania County Planning & Community Development Director; Transylvania County four AARP volunteers; Executive Director of local non-profit; several at-large community members aged 55+.

The AFTF realized that the first thing needed before embarking on planning or action was to obtain more detailed input from the community, especially the older adult community. They embarked on a six-month effort to document the current satisfaction level and future needs of the age 50+ community based on direct citizen input.

Input Methodology:

To obtain this input the City of Brevard worked with our regional AARP office and developed a 48-question survey. This survey was distributed to residents aged fifty and above over the period mid-April through mid-July 2024.

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

The survey was available both online and via paper copies. It was advertised via social media, in the local newspaper, via flyers, on radio, at several in-person town hall meetings, via local churches, veterans' groups, at Bread of Life (the local soup kitchen), Sharing House and copies were hand delivered to Meals on Wheels clients. Residents completed and returned a total of 647 surveys.

In addition to the surveys, the AFTF conducted four in-person listening sessions. Several hundred residents attended these sessions, and 201 specific suggestions/comments were received.

Survey Demographics:

The following were key demographics of survey respondents.

- 81% of survey respondents were white/Caucasian. 2% were non-white and 17% did not respond to this question. This closely aligns with the overall demographics of the county where 90% of the population is white, 4% are African American, 1.6% Latino and 3.4% other.

- 69% of respondents had a bachelor's degree or higher; 23% had some college; 8% high school or below.

- 58% of the respondents had lived in Brevard/Transylvania County (TC) for less than 20 years.

Key Survey Findings:

The AFTF 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.**
   Rating breakout: 27.4% excellent; 34.8% very good; 21.8% good; 11.8% fair; 2.8% poor.

2. **The key 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 as the lack of affordable housing for adults of all ages.

   c. **Transportation.** Satisfaction with accessible and convenient public transportation scored extremely low. Many comments were submitted

concerning the need to better advertise the existing public van routes as well as suggestions for expanding this service.

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

e. **Safety Issues**. Concerns were expressed about the condition of downtown sidewalks (lots of trip hazards), about the need for more sidewalks and accessible facilities as well as concerns about traffic safety specifically speeding, crosswalks, and timing of lights.

f. **Adult Day Care**. This was the issue highlighted the most under health care as there is no adult day care service available anywhere in Transylvania County. Residents must drive to neighboring Henderson County for the service. Respondents saw a high need for this service to be available within Brevard/Transylvania County.

g. **Public Restrooms**. There is only one public restroom in downtown Brevard. Respondents saw a need for more, especially one on the east side of town.

3. **Areas of high satisfaction:**

a. **Social connection**.

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

68% 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:

The 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 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 seven 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.

From Input To Action Plan.

The results from the survey and listening sessions were presented to Brevard City Council in September and out briefed to the public in November. Once the results had been made public, discussed and accepted by both the Council and the public, the AFTF began working on the action plan.

Based on the high levels of satisfaction already expressed regarding the AARP Domains of Livability for Civic Participation and Employment; Respect and Social Inclusion; and Social Participation, it was decided not to concentrate on these areas in the plan. Instead, the plan focuses on the following five domains of livability where the public input indicated efforts would be most relevant to improving livability for older adults in the City of Brevard:

- Housing
- Transportation
- Outdoor Spaces and Buildings
- Health Services and Community Supports
- Communication and Information.

The Age Friendly Brevard Action Plan closely aligns and complements existing City plans and policy such as *The Complete Streets Policy* (March 2019), *Brevard*

Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan (2023), *and Building Brevard: 2030 Comprehensive Land Use Plan* (2023). The goal of this plan is not to replicate or replace existing plans but rather to help strengthen these plans with age friendly specific recommendations to ensure the City of Brevard is a place where all ages can thrive.





Action Plan

Goals and actions in this plan were developed in response to community and stakeholder feedback throughout the process. Based on this feedback the action plan is centered around the following five domains of livability:

- Housing
- Transportation
- Outdoor Spaces and Buildings
- Health Services and Community Supports
- Communication and Information

Housing

Goals:

1) **Improve the ability of citizens of all ages, (but with a concentration on housing for 55+ residents) to find safe, income appropriate housing within Brevard/Transylvania County.**
2) **Support and increase awareness and implementation of home modification programs that promote aging in place.**

What community input showed

Results from the survey and listening sessions showed an extremely high desire to be able to age in place (43% Extremely Important; 42% Very important). There was also a high level of concern about the lack of affordable housing for all demographics within Brevard/Transylvania County.

Current Age Friendly Practices

- There are 8 affordable housing complexes within the City of Brevard. Four of these, with a total of 149 units are specifically for 55+ or disabled.

- There is a 213-unit market rate, 55+ retirement community complex in Brevard.

- Habitat for Humanity has built eighty-one affordable homes in Transylvania County.

- Habitat for Humanity and Housing Assistance Corporation (HAC) both operate Home Repair programs in Transylvania County.

- Brevard/TC Community Housing Coalition (BTHC) is a grassroots effort that brings together government, non-profit, for-profit, and faith organizations to work on the affordable housing issue.

- The City of Brevard recently completed an inventory of land parcels throughout the City analyzing them for affordable housing development suitability.

- The City of Brevard revised its Code of Ordinances to encourage more infill development, including accessory dwelling units and cluster homes, as well as increasing permitted density in residential areas.

- The City of Brevard placed restrictions on short-term rental units to encourage more long-term rentals.

- The City of Brevard created a Housing Trust Fund, and a Housing Handbook detailing uses for these funds for affordable home development and home repair.

Future Plans that Support Age-Friendly Practices

- 42 income-based apartments are scheduled to be constructed in the 2025/26 timeframe.

- The City of Brevard has submitted a request for PRO-Housing grant funding.

- The City of Brevard has an option to purchase 3.8 acres of land for an affordable housing project.

- WNCSource is looking at adding additional units at English Hills, a subsidized housing complex.

- Transylvania County is in the process of conducting a housing survey.

- Transylvania County will incorporate findings and strategies from the Transylvania County Comprehensive Housing Study into its Transylvania 2050 Comprehensive Plan Update in FY25/26.

- Transylvania County will continue to work with the City of Brevard and Town of Rosman on infrastructure development to support Affordable and Workforce Housing.

- Transylvania Habitat for Humanity's goal is to build 10 new affordable homes in Transylvania County in the next year or so.

- Housing Assistance Corporation (HAC) is actively looking for locations in Transylvania County for an affordable housing project.

Proposed Action Item	**Potential Partners**	**Estimated Timeframe**
H-1 Action item: Increase awareness and increase usage by older residents of existing home repair programs such as those offered by Habitat for Humanity or Housing Assistance Corporation.	COB, Habitat for Humanity, BTHC, HAC	Year 1
H-2 Action Item: Solicit support from local faith groups to assist with home repair programs as part of their church outreach or mission.	BTHC	Year 1-2
H-3 Action Item: Hold an Aging-in-Place summit.	COB, AFTF, AARP	Year 1
H-4 Action Item: City of Brevard begin implementing and funding programs detailed in the COB Housing Handbook.	COB	Year 1 & ongoing
H-5 Action Item: Local and Regional Governments, Chamber of Commerce and nonprofits (including NC AARP Housing Champions committee) collaborate to advocate for changes at the state level authorizing greater flexibility in use of local government funds for housing needs.	COB, TC, Land of Sky, Chamber of Commerce AARP	Year 2
H-6 Action Item: Emphasize need for Age-friendly/universal design concepts to be followed when repairs are made and in new construction, e.g., wider doorways, handrails on both sides of stairways. Ensure contractors are aware of this.	Habitat for Humanity, HAC, COB, TC	Ongoing
H-7 Action Item: Support/collaborate with Brevard/Transylvania County Housing Coalition to better educate the public about the need for housing, especially senior housing.	COB, BTHC, Non-profits	Year 1
H-8 Action Item: Explore grant opportunities and collaborate with TC and non-profits on grant applications	COB, TC, BTHC	Year 1-5

H-9 Action Item: Explore the possibility of COB owned land on Cashiers Valley Road being used for affordable housing.	COB, HAC	Year 1-2
H-10 Action Item: Facilitate discussions with regional developers who build/operate housing for older adults to encourage their expansion into TC.	COB, TC,	Year 2-3
H-11 Action Item: Look for partnership opportunities with County Commissioners after County Housing Study released	COB, TC	Year 2
H-12 Action Item: Facilitate discussions with local contractors and subcontractors about the importance of affordable housing and the potential for collaboration with existing nonprofits.	BTHC, COB	Year 1





Transportation

Goals:

1) **Ensure that Brevard has a transportation system which supports age friendly travel (adequate parking, public transportation system, safe streets).**
2) **Expand mobility choices throughout Brevard to include walking, biking, & public transit.**

What Community Input Showed

Most older adults in the City of Brevard drive themselves or walk to places they want/need to go. There was a high level of discontent with the existing public transportation system within Transylvania County as well as with the difficulty parking in downtown Brevard. Respondents pointed out that there is no public transportation between Brevard/Transylvania County and adjoining counties and no public transportation to the airport.

Respondents were concerned about safety issues, especially speeding, timing of lights and safety at crosswalks.

Respondents felt that transportation issues were directly impacting their ability to take advantage of facilities, attend events and this impacts on the overall quality of life.

Current Age Friendly Practices

- Transylvania County runs a variety of transportation programs for Transylvania residents called *Transylvania in Motion*. These include General Public Transportation, Demand Response, Paratransit, Fixed Route and Medical Transportation.

- Residents age 65+ are eligible for free medical transportation to doctor's appointments under the Silver Squirrel Voucher program.

- Residents age 60+ are eligible for transportation to Nutrition sites located at the Quebec Community Center or Silvermont.

- Transylvania County runs a fixed route van service hourly between 7am and 4pm Monday to Friday. One route is centered on the City of Brevard making twenty-

two stops at key locations. Passengers pay $1 per ride or may purchase a monthly pass for $30.

- The City of Brevard installed a series of speed cushions as a traffic calming measure on Probart Street in Fall 2024. The City of Brevard also installed bumpouts on the key intersection of Main and Broad Street, reducing the distance pedestrians must cover when crossing this major intersection.

- The City of Brevard has a Public Safety Committee chaired by two city council members. This committee hears complaints from citizens regarding road safety issues and then researches and recommends the implementation of safety measures to the full council.

Future Plans that Support Age-Friendly Practices

- The Downtown Master Plan Committee has recommended that the city conduct a parking study in FY2025/26.

- The City of Brevard has a review underway to identify improved safety enhancements for existing and planned trails within the city.

- Transylvania in Motion will conduct a survey of the public in FY25 regarding transportation service and routing improvements.

- In response to survey results, Transylvania in Motion will implement new routing for its fixed route service in FY26 to more efficiently and effectively serve its riders.

- Transylvania in Motion will work with the City of Brevard and Town of Rosman to provide multi-modal transfer stations and transit facilities in strategic locations to align with Transit Oriented Development principles.

Proposed Action Item	**Potential Partners**	**Estimated Timeframe**
T-1 Action Item: Increase public awareness of all TC Public Transportation options.	TC AFTF	Year 2
T-2 Action item: Increase awareness and usage of the fixed route van service.	TC AFTF	Year 1
T-3 Action Item: Expand days and hours of operation of fixed route van service	TC	Year 2

T-4 Action Item: Improve visibility/usability of fixed van route with installation of signage and covered shelters.	TC COB	Year 2-3
T-5 Action Item: Evaluate the efficiency/effectiveness of the Fixed Route vans to ensure they align with areas where older residents live.	TC	Year 1
T-6 Action Item: Align the Fixed Route van route to connect with pedestrian and parking network.	TC, COB	Year 3-4
T-7 Action item: Rejoin/participate in Vision Zero program	COB	Year 2 then ongoing
T-8 Action Item: Continue to build multi-modal connections throughout the City such as the Estatoe Trail, and sidewalk extensions as delineated in COB Bike/Pedestrian Plan	COB	Year 2-5
T-9 Action Item: Work with TC to identify location and obtain grant funding for a multi-modal transit center.	COB, TC	Year 4-5
T-10 Action Item: Provide safe driver training for older adult drivers, including potentially reduced insurance premiums after taking a safety class with AARP	AFTF AARP	Year 2
T-11 Action Item: Conduct a parking study to review downtown parking options and needs. Ensure age friendly needs are part of the study.	COB	Year 1-2
T-12 Action Item: Increase traffic calming measures and a focus on car/pedestrian/bike relationships	COB	Year 2-3
T-13 Action Item: Actively try to recruit a commercial ride service company (such as UBER or LYFT) to operate in Brevard.	Chamber of Commerce, TEA	Year 2



Outdoor Spaces

Goals:

1) **Improve the safety, availability, and accessibility of existing outdoor spaces so that all ages can enjoy and utilize these amenities.**
2) **Enhance the walkability of City of Brevard for all ages and abilities.**

What Community Input Showed

Older adults want to live an active lifestyle. To do this they need spaces and facilities that are designed to safely support all ages. Trip hazards on sidewalks were a major concern. Lack of connecting sidewalks hampers the ability to walk instead of drive to places. Existing parks have few amenities geared toward older adults.

Current Age Friendly Practices

- The Heart of Brevard (HOB) conducts an annual assessment of the overall conditions of the downtown area which includes walkability, safety, and ADA compliance. These findings are provided annually to the city for action and correction.

- The City of Brevard allocated an additional $30K toward downtown sidewalk/street repair in FY24/25 budget.

- City of Brevard has been a Tree City USA program member for 45 years.

Future Plans that Support Age-Friendly Practices

- Completion of the Ecusta Trail which will provide multi-modal access between Brevard and Hendersonville

- Completion of Estatoe Trail, or the internal citywide greenway, which will provide multi-modal access between key areas of Brevard (schools, stores, hospital & medical offices, residential areas, community centers)

Proposed Action Item	**Potential Partners**	**Estimated Timeframe**
O-1 Action Item: City of Brevard prioritize, fund and continue correcting the downtown safety issues documented in the annual HOB Walkability Study. Track progress and provide quarterly	City of Brevard, HOB	Year 1 and ongoing

updates to the public.		
O-2 Action Item: Work with HOB on annual downtown assessment to include walkability, safety, ADA compliance and accessibility for all.	COB	Year 2-5
O-3 Action Item: Conduct an annual age friendly assessment of sidewalks and ADA accessibility across the entire City.	COB	annually
O-4 Action item: Include funding for maintenance/repair of safety issues at COB facilities (including sidewalks) in annual budget.	COB	annually
O-5 Action Item: Create map of easy to access entry points to our local trail system.	COB	Year 2
O-6 Action item: Partner with local groups to educate age 55+ residents about outdoor opportunities.	COB. local NP	annually
O-7 Action Item: Review current parks for existing and needed age friendly/intergenerational features.	COB	Year 1-2
O-8 Action Item: Include funding for age friendly enhancements in the City's Parks & Recreation annual budget.	COB	Year 2
O-9 Action Item: Ensure age friendly needs are part of all planning processes	COB	annually
O-10 Action Item: Create more public restroom options in the downtown area. Look at partnering with the Chamber of Commerce for restroom facility at their location.	COB	Year 3





Health Services and Community Supports

Goals:

1) **Ensure that health care options are readily available to Brevard residents.**
2) **Ensure healthy life choices are readily available.**

What Community Input Showed

Survey and listening session results showed an older community that is already extremely involved and active. They are concerned that there has been a reduction in medical services available locally and extremely concerned that there is no adult day care available within the county.

Current Age Friendly Practices

- The City of Brevard became a Blue Zone certified community in 2022**.**
- The City of Brevard began a 6-session pilot program, *Age Well Across the Life-Span*, August/Sept 2024 partnering with Blue Ridge Community College (BRCC) Community Health nursing class. Two successful sessions were held before the rest were derailed by Hurricane Helene.
- Based on a public health perspective, the City of Brevard sponsored 9 sessions of a hurricane recovery support group in conjunction with the BRCC nursing program.
- The City of Brevard worked with local non-profit SparkPoint to provide free individual counseling sessions with credentialed psychotherapists to help cope with Hurricane Helene emotional trauma.
- The Hunger Coalition, a local non-profit, provides healthy fresh food to low-income area residents especially in food desert sections of the county
- Non-profit Bread of Life serves free hot meal Monday-Friday. Available to all.
- There is an active Meals on Wheels Program that delivers meals to residents in Brevard.
- Transylvania County, in partnership with WNCSource, provides free lunches to residents 60+ Monday through Friday at the Silvermont Senior Center.

Future Plans that Support Age-Friendly Practices

- Pardee Hospital is planning to build a new medical center in downtown Brevard.

Proposed Action Item	Potential Partners	Estimated Timeframe
M-1 Action item: Better communicate and promote existing health and wellness services and events.	Council on Aging, Health Dept, AFTF, COB	Continuous
M-2 Action Item: Educate people to take charge of their health by engaging in healthy activities, eating better, staying active and involved.	COB, AFTF, SparkPoint	Year 2-3
M-3 Action Item: Communicate and raise visibility of need for adult care services in Transylvania County with potential providers.	Council on Aging	Year 1
M-4 Action Item: Work with HCA, Advent and Pardee to encourage additional primary care and medical specialists to be located in Brevard.	COB, Non-profits, AFTF	Year 2-3
M-5 Action item: Plan/conduct an educational Summit for Disaster Preparedness and Resilience, prior to the anniversary of Hurricane Helene.	Health Dept, EMS, AFTF	Year 1
M-6 Action Item: Hold another series of Age Well Across the Life Span sessions	COB, BRCC, AFTF	Year 1-2



Communication and Information

Goal:

1) **Improve communication so that information about events, opportunities, and issues is available to all ages via multiple communication methods.**

What Community Input Showed

Survey and listening sessions showed that the local newspaper is the primary means of obtaining information followed by social media, friends and neighbors and faith organizations.

There was a concern that there was no central or coordinated location to find information about events.

Current Age Friendly Practices

- The local paper, *The Transylvania Times*, is published twice a week and includes information about local events and issues. However, *The Transylvania Times* no longer publishes a community calendar showing events happening on each day.

- Local radio station WSQL broadcasts public interest announcements daily.

- The City of Brevard has a communication alert system that residents can sign up for and receive alerts on various topics via email or text.

- Monthly in-person information sessions are held by the mayor in various locations around town.

Proposed Action Item	**Potential Partners**	**Estimated Timeframe**
C-1 Action Item: Conduct information sessions at College Walk and DeerLake and other areas with high density of older residents to educate and inform about the City's alert system.	COB, TC Library	Year 1
C-2 Action Item: Apply for grant funding to create a community calendar (both digital and paper) so that all events are listed in one place and easily reviewed.	Non-profit Through the Trees, SparkPoint AARP	Year 2

C-3 Action Item: Increase technology familiarity for older residents through senior oriented technology classes	Non-profit Through the Trees, BRCC, Silvermont Senior Center, LOS	Year 1-2
C-4 Action Item: Create an Age-Friendly Information Resource Guide on COB website	COB	Year 2



Appendix A: Survey Results

Survey Results may be viewed and downloaded on the City of Brevard website.

Brevard Age Friendly Survey Results