

Editorials

the world that collectively give substance to what each of these features really means in everyday living. For instance, under Outdoor Spaces and Buildings the checklist, with many detailed examples, includes there being a pleasant and clean environment; the importance of green spaces (that are safe to visit); somewhere to rest; age-friendly pavements; safe pedestrian crossings; accessibility; a secure environment; age-friendly buildings (railings, ramps, wide doorways); and more.

Transportation is the feature that elicited from the focus groups around the world the greatest number of examples to emulate, 16 in all. Certainly, many of us are aware that getting in and out of our communities safely and affordably is both necessary and desirable for many reasons, from economic to physical health to mental well being. The absence of this feature connotes the worst extreme of *aging in place*. The WHO guidebook cites these examples of transportation in age-friendly cities: availability; affordability; reliability and frequency (transport that is there on weekends and doesn't take forever to reach a destination); travel destinations (going where people want to go); age-friendly vehicles (accessible); priority seating for people with special needs; transport stops and stations kept in good condition; information (ready access to timetables, routes); courtesy to older drivers; priority parking; and more.

One can clearly see that the criteria that WHO and AARP offer for an age-friendly community really speak to what would constitute a

desirable place for all members of the community, young and old, working and not working. A starting point, in my mind, for assessing how friendly or livable a community is, is to consider its *walkability*. Many of the features listed above convert or relate to walkability. By walkability I do not mean the requirement that one be able to stand and place one foot in front of the other. Rather, I mean that, among other things, there be features in the community that would motivate a person to want to visit or take advantage of them.

Walkability seems to be a common denominator across several sets of criteria established by AARP, EPA, and WHO. AARP's *Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide* (2005) even has a section on it. Walkability has different dimensions, for it implies not only that there be amenities in the community to which one would want to go, but also that one can move about safely; that the person motivated would have the health status or needed support to move about; that there would be means of transportation within and outside of the community, such as public transportation and taxis; and so on.

Walkability is not the single simplistic answer, but it appears to me to be a fairly understandable yardstick to begin measuring what we in the aging network need to do in partnership across the generations to identify and create livable communities that are all-people-friendly.

From the Commissioner, Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services

Jim Rothrock

Planning, Planning, Planning ...

Sometimes I don't fancy myself a real planner and delude myself into false comfort rationalizing that I'm a doer not a planner. But as time goes on, I realize the error of my ways and understand each and every day that if we are to fully address the challenges and opportunities of the *Age Wave*, planning is the key.

Over the last month or so, I have had the good fortune to attend several events signaling the culmination of the first planning efforts to position certain communities to respond to this Wave. I am certain that many other communities are realizing the same planning processes, but I would like to feature at least two here.

About a year ago in *Age in Action*, I noted the completion of the *Blueprint for Livable Communities* initiative that Dr. Bill Hazel, Secretary of HHR, launched in May 2010. This effort put the Departments for Aging, Health, and Rehabilitative Services in a collaborative to generate local activities in planning. At that time, it was agreed that the state had no business foisting a Blueprint template on communities as diverse as Fieldale and Fairfax, and this report focused on the role the state could play as a catalyst for local planning.

Editorials

Since the completion of that first report, Marcia DuBois, Blueprint staff, and I have conducted a number of conferences and she has done a great job keeping the website current and full of useful information; check it out: www.vadrs.org/vblc. But recently I was able to play a small part in two efforts to move this most important topic along and underscore the value of another resource, the *Older Dominion Partnership (ODP)*. The ODP completed the first meaningful survey in decades to better understand the needs and concerns of boomers and older adults in Virginia, key elements in the Wave. The ODP website can be accessed at: www.olderdominion.org.

The survey sponsored by ODP offers findings from more than 5,000 respondents and breaks down results based on the geographic areas served by our 25 Area Agencies on Aging. On the ODP site you can readily access data in your area and/or read the overall report. Their data was a factor in the reports announced by two areas I wish to discuss in more detail.

First, the ODP data set offered a solid research component for the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area planning process. Senior Connections (the local Area Agency on Aging), under the stellar leadership of Thelma Bland Watson, matched perfectly with the visionary staff at the United Way. They brought in the other partners, as many entities must be included within the effort to catch the Wave. Their process took three years, with numerous meetings, community updates, and partner subgroups to garner their product. You can read up on their

effort at: www.yourunitedway.org/news/historic-milestone-reached-age-wave-planning

Second, the United Way took a lead role as the Northern Shenandoah Valley launched its plan recently. The United Way partnered with the Shenandoah Area Agency on Aging (SAAA) and completed over 250 surveys of seniors in the Meals on Wheels and Senior Center programs. This effort clearly noted the sparse resources currently available and cited that the needs would only grow with time as the target population is growing quickly. Their report can be accessed at this site: www.unitedwaynsv.org/Pages/SeniorNeedsStudy.aspx.

Both of these reports are exceptional. However, they are not the end result but the beginning of an ongoing process. That's what makes these two reports important. They embrace the ongoing nature of the conversation among critical partners that will help our Commonwealth truly be one of opportunity for our citizenry, one which values community based services and encourages us to age in place.

I invite you to share with me any similar reports that you are aware of where planning is now going on. You can send them to me at: Jim.Rothrock@dars.virginia.gov. I will then post them on our *Blueprint* website to be an aid to others engaged in similar critical discussions.

As the newly created Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services becomes an entity, we will focus on supporting communities in their planning efforts which are

critical to our Commonwealth's ability to respond to the Age Wave. Thank you for your help in making sure that we are able to catch this Age Wave.

DARS has three advisory boards. Upcoming meetings in 2012, which are open to the public, include:

The Commonwealth Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Commission

August 21st, December 11th

The Commonwealth Council on Aging

September 19th

The Virginia Public Guardian & Conservator Board

September 6th, December 6th

For more information, visit <http://vda.virginia.gov/boards.asp>.

Can your organization link individuals with disabilities to jobs serving people with disabilities?

The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities is releasing a revised 2013 Request for Proposals (RFP), seeking to expand the number of direct support professionals and increase employment for individuals with disabilities. Proposals are due by July 24, 2012. To download the RFP booklet, forms, and other information regarding these 100% federally-funded grant awards, visit www.vaboard.org/grants.htm.