

Richmond Hill Age-Friendly Community Strategy *What We Heard* Report

March 2023



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Introduction



Introduction

The City of Richmond Hill is taking steps toward becoming an Age-Friendly Community — a community providing opportunities for people of all ages to participate in activities that promote health and inclusion in community life.

Age-friendly communities support aging with dignity, respect, and independence, and promote the inclusion of older adults in all areas of community life.

As part of our work in becoming an age-friendly community, the City is preparing an Age-Friendly Community Strategy. To inform the development of the strategy, a series of engagement activities were carried out from January to March 2023. This report summarizes the experiences, insights, and wisdom shared by residents, community organizations and groups, City staff, and Members of Council.

Engagement activities were aimed at hearing a range of experiences and opinions on the current age-friendly needs across the City of Richmond Hill, and to begin to explore and identify future directions. This report outlines what we are hearing so far.

More opportunities to engage in the age-friendly planning process will be starting in April 2023.



Age-Friendly Communities



Age-Friendly Communities

Age-friendly communities support aging with dignity, respect, and independence, and promote the inclusion of older adults in all areas of community life.

An age-friendly community benefits people of all ages. Age-friendly communities design policies, services, programs and structures related to the physical and social environment to support seniors to age safely and be engaged in their communities in a meaningful way.

The concept of age-friendly communities was developed in 2007/2008 following the World Health Organization's (WHO) *Global Age-Friendly Cities Project*. The project was a direct response to the rapid aging of the population; with a doubling of the world's population over the age of sixty by 2050.



The World Health Organization (WHO) [Age-Friendly Cities Framework](#) proposes eight interconnected domains to help identify and address barriers to the well-being and participation of older people:



Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

The external environment has a major impact on the mobility, independence, and quality of life of older people as they go about their daily lives beyond the comfort of their homes.



Transportation

Accessible and affordable public transport is key to ensuring a city's older population is able to age actively and remain engaged with their community, with access to health and social facilities.



Housing

The housing conditions, such as design, proximity to services, affordability, and safety of older people, are often linked to their quality of life and whether they are able to age independently and actively in their community.



Respect and Social Inclusion

An inclusive society encourages older people to participate more in their city's social, civic and economic life.



Community and Health Care

Accessible and affordable community and health services are crucial in keeping seniors healthy, independent, and active.



Civic Participation and Employment

An age-friendly city and community provides ample opportunities for older people to continue contributing to their communities, be it through voluntary or paid employment, and keeps them engaged in the political process.



Communication and Information

Staying connected with events, news and activities with timely, accessible, and practical information is a key part of active aging, especially with the trend of information overload in urbanized cities.



Social Participation

Participating in leisure, social, cultural and spiritual activities in the community fosters seniors' continued integration with society and helps them stay engaged and informed.

Additional information on age-friendly communities and the World Health Organization's (WHO) *8 Key Areas of Age-Friendly Communities* can be found on our [project page](#).

Listening & Learning



Listening & Learning

Our Process

Listening to and learning from the experiences of residents and community stakeholders is the core component in creating the City's Age-Friendly Community Strategy. Several community engagement activities were undertaken with the aim of building awareness for the age-friendly project and hearing from a range of people about their experiences on the current and future age-friendly needs across the City. Throughout these conversations, we also began to explore the many ideas and opportunities in creating an even more age-friendly city.



Engagement Activities

Focus Groups

Three focus groups were held with specific stakeholder groups; City of Richmond Hill staff, Community Organizations, Clubs and Groups, and the Age-Friendly Community Council (AFCC). All focus groups were aimed at establishing a baseline and understanding of current strengths and assets, barriers and gaps, as well as exploring initial opportunities and ideas for the City to consider in becoming a more age-friendly community. The Staff Focus Group and the Community Stakeholder Focus Group were held virtually (Zoom), while the session with the AFCC was held in-person at the McConaghy Centre in Richmond Hill. Focus group participation was invited through direct email.

Community Round Tables

Two community round tables were held: one virtual and one in-person. Community round tables were aimed at hearing from residents and the public. These round table sessions were promoted broadly through posters, social media, and direct email. Like the focus groups, community round tables were aimed at hearing from residents about the current strengths and buildings blocks, challenges and gaps being experienced within the city, and ideas and suggestions for where the city can be a more age-friendly community.

Interviews

Nine interviews were held with Members of Council and senior City staff. Interviews were conducted by phone or virtually. Conversations explored different perspectives on the current state of age-friendliness across the city.

Survey

An online survey was created using the platform VideoAsk. The survey questions were asked in a video format with the questions also appearing in text on the screen. Survey respondents had three ways of responding to the survey questions: written text, voice recording, or video recording. The survey was posted on the City's Age-Friendly website and promoted through social media, direct email, and posters located at community centres, libraries, and York Region housing properties. Hardcopy surveys were also available at community centres, libraries, and local seniors organizations. An option to complete the survey by phone was also provided. The purpose of the survey was to hear from residents their vision, their challenges, and their ideas for an age-friendly Richmond Hill.

Additional Outreach and Engagement

In addition to the activities above, an email and phone number were provided on the City's Age-Friendly website, and on posters at City community centres, where residents and stakeholders could provide feedback and/or ask questions.



Who We Heard From

Over the course of the first phase of our engagement activities, we heard from over 230 residents and stakeholders.

Activity		Date	Participation
Survey		January 26 to March 8	118
Focus Group 1: Age-Friendly Community Council		January 27, 2023	21
Focus Group 2: Richmond Hill City Staff		January 30, 2023	21
Focus Group 3: Community Organizations & Groups		January 31, 2023	16
Community Round Table 1 (virtual)		February 6, 2023	15
Community Round Table 2 (in-person)		February 7, 2023	7
Interviews: Members of Council and Senior Staff		February 6-9, 2023	9
Community Group Discussions		February 17 & March 6	22
Additional Feedback (email and telephone)		February & March 2023	7

Community groups and organizations who participated in an engagement session:

- CHATS
- City of Richmond Hill
- Family Services York Region
- Hill Potters Guild
- Richvale Lions and Lioness Club
- MP Jowhari Office
- Mon Sheong Foundation
- Probus Club of Richmond Hill
- Region of York
- Richmond Hill Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Richmond Hill Chinese Seniors Association (RHCSA)
- Richmond Hill Computer Technology Volunteers
- Richmond Hill Lawn Bowling Club
- Richmond Hill Curling Club
- Richmond Hill Mobility
- Our Lady Queen of the World Catholic Church – *Young at Heart* Seniors Club

In addition to staff from these organizations, many community members and volunteers also participated!

Communication Outreach

City staff led the outreach activities, using multiple channels to invite people in to this process.

					
City Project Website: 503 unique views	Age-Friendly Video: 201 views	Social Media Posts: 359 engagements	Direct Emails: 183 (stakeholders and community groups)	Posters: 20+ locations	Public Service Announcement: 47 unique views

What We Asked

Throughout the engagement activities, we explored the following questions:

1. In one word, what does an age-friendly Richmond Hill look and feel like to you?
2. In what ways is Richmond Hill an age-friendly community? What are the strengths that you think can be built on? Think about your top two.
3. In what ways is Richmond Hill not an age-friendly community? Where are our gaps? What is missing? What are the most critical barriers that come to mind?
4. What are the most important ways that Richmond Hill can be more age-friendly in the future?



What We Heard

Throughout the various engagement activities and conversations, we heard a range of opinions, ideas and comments on current age-friendly strengths, barriers, and opportunities for the future.

Creating a Vision

Each stakeholder was asked to share their thoughts on what an age-friendly Richmond Hill looks and feels like. Here is what we heard:



Strengths, Barriers, and Opportunities

Feedback from residents and stakeholders on the current age-friendly strengths, barriers and opportunities is summarized below for each of the eight age-friendly domains. In some cases, a certain scenario was identified as both a strength and a barrier. This is indicative of how different people, each with their own unique context, experience the same place.



Outdoor Spaces & Buildings

Strengths & Assets	Barriers & Gaps	Opportunities & Ideas
• Accessible and enjoyable parks and trails • City buildings and newer buildings are accessible • The City prioritizes age-friendly principles into planning new infrastructure • Parks are open year round • Activities around Mill Pond are enjoyable for seniors • Accessible parking spaces are available • Safe streets and neighborhoods	• Sidewalks, bus stops, and trails are not always cleared during winter • Trail crossings at roadways are unsafe • Some spaces, in particular older buildings, are not accessible (e.g., accessible entrances and bathrooms, ramps) • Lack of greenspace in some neighborhoods • Not enough benches or rest stops • Mobility challenges on some streets (e.g., cobblestone) • Lack of streetlights in some neighbourhoods	• Snow removal programs for seniors in need • Improve accessible parking spots at frequently accessed buildings by seniors • Improve accessibility among existing and older buildings • Better trail maintenance and improved accessibility (e.g., more wheelchair ramps) • More benches and places to rest in parks • More dedicated spaces for seniors in the community (e.g., convert space in apartments or community buildings for seniors' programs) • Ensure sidewalk safety • Expand walking, hiking, and cross-country trails • Portable washrooms in public areas • Create walkable neighbourhoods • Provide outdoor spaces for gathering





Transportation

Strengths & Assets	Barriers & Gaps	Opportunities & Ideas
• Improved specialized transportation options (iRide, Mobility On-Request) • City commitment to age-friendly lens for transportation planning	• Transit is not available in all areas of the city • Car-centric community • Specialized transit options are not flexible, and there are no cross-border options • Cross-walk times are too short at some intersections • Lack of awareness of transit routes or schedules • Cost of transportation can be a barrier • Transit systems can be difficult to navigate • Lack of accessible parking on the street	• Improve transit information on City website • More affordable transit options (i.e., free transit for seniors) • Longer cross-walk times • More flexible transit options for seniors and people with disabilities (i.e., scheduling, cross-border options) • Improve walkability with more accessible pedestrian corridors • Allow accessible transportation vehicles to park (short-term) on roads • Ensure bus stops cleared of snow • More Stop signs • Lower the speed limit around churches and hospitals/health clinics





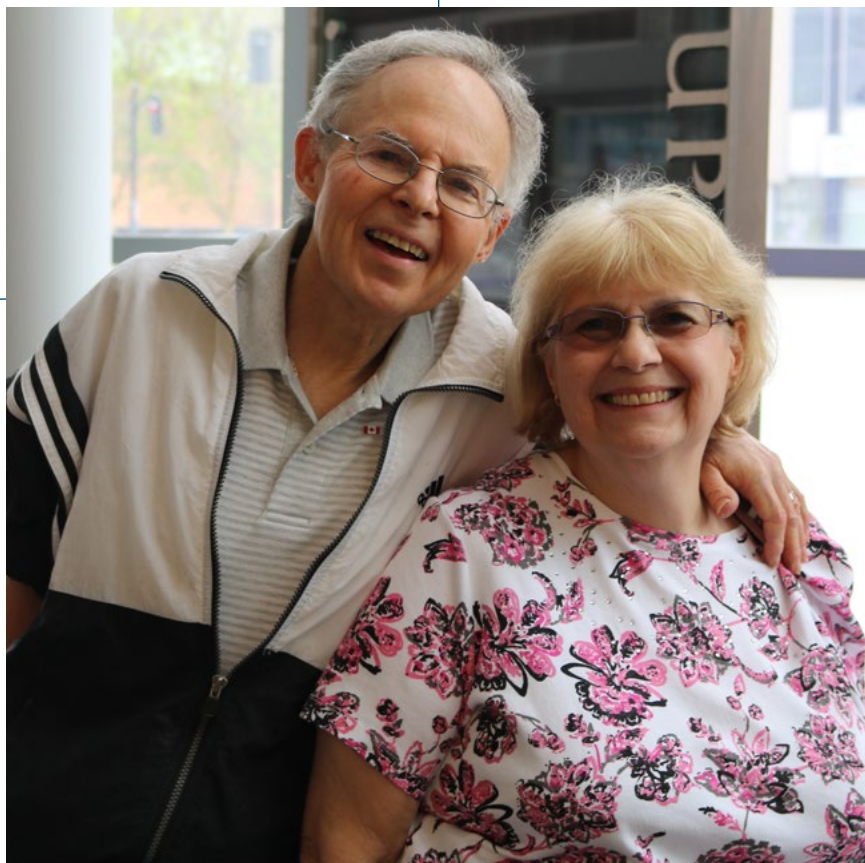
Housing

Strengths & Assets	Barriers & Gaps	Opportunities & Ideas
Council commitment to planning new housing buildings exceeding accessibility requirements	- Lack of housing options to age in place - Lack of affordable housing for seniors - Some buildings are not accessible for seniors (e.g., no elevators or automatic doorways) - Lack of subsidized housing for seniors, long-waiting lists for long-term care housing - Concern for increasing utility/energy costs	- More housing options for seniors (e.g., to downsize and live among peers, family, and supports) - More affordable and subsidized seniors housing options - Improved partnerships with housing providers - Build housing closer to parks and green spaces - Zoning that supports age-friendly planning and aging in place



Respect & Social Inclusion

Strengths & Assets	Barriers & Gaps	Opportunities & Ideas
• Positive and respectful interactions with City staff • Several dedicated community centres and spaces for seniors to socialize • Strong sense of belonging • Resources to prevent elder abuse • New Seniors Getting Connected Program	• High risk of social isolation for seniors living alone • Negative attitudes towards aging population • Seniors are vulnerable to cyber crimes • Language barriers • Declining social cohesion	• More outreach to vulnerable and newcomer seniors to prevent isolation and promote inclusion • ‘Seniors Helping Seniors’ peer programming • Promote equal access to community programs and services • Improved education and awareness on community and cyber safety • More programs for youth to help seniors with day-to-day needs, and multi-generational programming • Support programs for caregivers • Free classes for seniors





Community & Health Care

Strengths & Assets	Barriers & Gaps	Opportunities & Ideas
• Accessibility Advisory Committee • Community programs and services (including fall prevention programs)	• Language barriers among some community service providers • Increased seniors' mental health issues • Long wait-times for health services • No local rehabilitation centre • Challenges in accessing home care	• Health navigation and improved access to health care for seniors • Targeted mental health services for seniors





Civic Participation & Employment

Strengths & Assets	Barriers & Gaps	Opportunities & Ideas
• A variety of volunteer opportunities • Seniors have been engaged in community and age-friendly planning	• Seniors face barriers in participating in civic events (transportation, language, lack of knowledge, etc.) • Attitudinal barriers in labour market	• More engagement with seniors • More accessible opportunities for seniors to share ideas and engage in community planning • More targeted volunteer opportunities for youth and seniors • Create more civic engagement groups (e.g., Probus)





Communication & Information

Strengths & Assets	Barriers & Gaps	Opportunities & Ideas
• 211 • Efforts to ensure AODA guidelines are incorporated in communication with community • Monthly communication from Mayor West	• Language barriers • Lack of knowledge or understanding of where to find community information • Signs and publications have small print • Challenges in navigating City website • Lack of access to technology for some seniors	• Improve City website and include a translation option in multiple languages • Provide a variety of communication options (digital, print, ASL) and in different languages • Ensure official communications are aligned with AODA guidelines and are in plain language • Education and supports to improve digital literacy among seniors • Improve communications and outreach on which programs and services are available (i.e., Adult 55+ Program Guide) • Provide options to engage in-person with City Hall





Social Participation

Strengths & Assets	Barriers & Gaps	Opportunities & Ideas
• Variety of recreational programs for adults 55+ • Many accessible community events • Library programming • City support for age-friendly programming and activities • Theatre • Seniors Centres	• High demand of older adult programs • Closure of wave pool, “so important to many people in the community” • High cost for some activities and programs • Lack of awareness of which activities and events are offered and how to participate • Participation in some events and activities can be limited due to transportation, mobility issues, scheduling, etc. • Lack of winter activities for seniors • Lack of cultural diversity in programs	• More affordable and free activities and programs for seniors and people with disabilities • Outreach and awareness campaigns to enroll seniors in community events • Offer more online/hybrid events and activities • Offer activities at different times during the day/week • Culturally relevant programming in several languages • More accessible fitness programs for individuals with mobility issues • Day trips and outings which include transportation • Offer winter programming for seniors • Re-open wave pool and programs • Continue to expand community activities



Key Messages



Key Messages

Through all the conversations and feedback, residents and stakeholders have placed emphasis on several areas for action as the City moves forward in becoming a more age-friendly community.

- Reduce barriers to transportation
 - Increase affordability, accessibility, and flexibility of system
- Improve safety of streets, trails, and crosswalks
- Continue efforts to improve accessibility within city spaces, buildings, and events
- Provide more housing options for seniors
- Increase community outreach and engagement
- Enhance access to community information by utilizing a diversity of platforms/methods
- Continue expansion of programs for older adults and seniors
 - Create opportunities to socialize and connect
 - Provide affordable and free options
 - Create multi-generational programs and events
 - Include cultural programs and programs in other languages
 - Ensure coverage across the City
- Improve health navigation and access to health care services

It was also noted numerous times that many of these suggestions across all of the domains will support older adults, but they will also support people of all ages and abilities.



Next Steps



Next Steps

Thank-you for taking the time to share your insights and ideas!

The experiences and wisdom shared with us will guide the development of the City's Age-Friendly Community Strategy.

For more opportunities to continue to participate, please visit: RichmondHill.ca/AgeFriendly or contact adult55+@richmondhill.ca.

