

Age Friendly Fairfax 2020 Progress Report



A five-year project to meet the challenges of growing older with dignity and grace in the Marin County Town of Fairfax, California





**Submitted by the Age Friendly Fairfax
Task Force April 7, 2021**

**To:
Town of Fairfax Town Council
AARP Age-Friendly States & Communities
WHO Global Network for Age-Friendly
Cities & Communities**

Age Friendly Fairfax: What's that about?

The international age friendly movement has been going strong since 2010 when the World Health Organization first created the global network. The Town of Fairfax became a member of this vibrant initiative in March of 2015. To be an age friendly community means our town has committed to work with residents of all ages, but with a particular focus on older adults, to listen, advocate and act in support of healthy and active aging.

The task force created five years ago received the full endorsement of the Town Council and set out to assess just how age friendly, or not, the community was in eight areas such as housing, transportation, respect and inclusion, community services, etc., followed by the writing of a “Age Friendly Fairfax Community Assessment and Strategic Action Plan”.

This progress report highlights many of the accomplishments of the last five years. Each section includes a short description of our vision for that aspect of community life, several achievements, a note or two about how you can be engaged and an interesting fact or two about our community.

Over the last few years, additional goals and actions have been identified. For a full list of virtually everything achieved, see our elaborate Age Friendly Scorecard on the Town website.

Here in the United States, AARP became the intermediary with WHO and local age friendly communities. Fairfax was formally acknowledged to be part of AARP Livable Communities in December of 2016. There are many people to thank for the success of our age friendly initiative in Fairfax including then Mayor David Weinsoff and Garret Toy, Town Manager, as well as the outstanding staff members Anne Mannes, Camille Esposito, Maria Baird and Susan Waters. Council member Barbara Coler has also worked tirelessly to make things happen on behalf of older adults in our progressive town.

We have also been well supported by our fellow community leaders in the dynamic Age Friendly Marin Network and also the Marin County Commission on Aging. We'd also like to thank Rafi Nazarians, the AARP California Associate State Director from whom we have had the pleasure of support, advice and direction.

And finally, every resident in Fairfax, whatever their age and whether they have heard about the age friendly initiative or not, is an invaluable member of our community and one whom we hope will join us in forging ahead for many more years in our efforts to age with grace and dignity in our beautiful Town of Fairfax. As we are fond of saying, “Aging in Fairfax, everybody's doing it!”

The Age Friendly Fairfax Task Force: ***Jody Timms, Chair, Barbara Coler, Anne Mannes, Francie Bedinger, Jacqueline Engstrom, Susan A. Brandborg and Jessica Price.***

Our Original Strategic Action Goals:



Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Create more rest areas with age friendly benches and water fountains; renovate a local park for safety and accessibility; repair and replace sidewalks; add pedestrian-activated flashing lights at crosswalks and intersections

Transportation

Educate older adults about Marin Transit options through the use of travel navigators, including public and paratransit services, the discounted taxi service, volunteer driver programs and carpool opportunities

Housing

Support the development of accessory dwelling units; advocate for the construction of Victory Village, an affordable housing complex for older adults in Fairfax; promote creative housing options such as home sharing

Social Participation

Offer free recreation classes for older adults; encourage participation in Town social events; develop additional age friendly activities to counter isolation

What We Set Out to Do!



Respect and Social Inclusion

Create an annual event honoring residents 90 years and older; promote a culture of respect and inclusion; identify ways businesses can support older adults by providing good lighting, signage and accessibility

Civic Participation and Employment

Recruit older adults to volunteer, providing short- and long-term opportunities; support part- and full-time employment opportunities; educate residents about available programs and services to support aging in place

Communication and Information

Offer monthly forums to improve communication about local and countywide programs for older adults; develop an Age Friendly Fairfax presence on the Town's website; build an email list to quickly disseminate pertinent information

Community Support and Health Services

Advocate for a supportive community to help older adults stay healthy; work with community groups on emergency preparedness to support older adults and vulnerable populations during a disaster; offer a monthly social services navigator service

Outdoor Spaces & Buildings

Our Vision

Fairfax is a clean and safe community with accessible public areas, ample and comfortable outdoor seating, buildings with readable signage and safe entrances, stairs and ramps have railings. Sidewalks and street crossings are pedestrian friendly, accommodating walkers, strollers and wheelchairs. Streets and traffic are well-managed with drivers, bikers and pedestrians respectful to each other. Residents can move easily about indoors and out and the community protects and respects the natural environment.

Key Accomplishments

Age Friendly Benches: Five age friendly benches with armrests were purchased by the Town, adding to the eight memorial benches (with age friendly armrests) also placed around town; all are used frequently by community members of all ages.

Water Fountains: An existing water fountain in front of Town Hall was replaced with an ADA accessible one with components for pet drinking water and water bottle refilling; and a second water fountain was installed near the tennis courts.

Lights: Most of the Town's downtown streetlights were replaced by LED bulbs, providing better lighting and more energy efficiency. Also, more than ten pedestrian crossing "beacon lights" were placed or replaced at key crossing areas throughout Fairfax, greatly improving safety for residents of all ages.

Park Renovation: Age friendly volunteers, Town staff and residents of Claus Circle worked together to clear an overgrown park, create a safer walkway with a new bench, and landscape with drought tolerant plants.

Sidewalk Improvements: The Town Council approved repair and replacement of specified downtown sidewalks including along Bolinas Road, Broadway Ave and Sir Francis Drake Blvd. for ADA compliance. Additionally, curb cuts were added at the primary downtown intersection.

FAIRFAX FACTS:

*Are Fairfax sidewalks
well maintained?*

28% Say "yes" (N=96)

61% Say "No" (N=96)

Source: Age Friendly County of Marin Survey/Fairfax
Summary Report, August 2019

What YOU can do!

As you move about Town, do you see any dangerous conditions for those with mobility, sight or hearing challenges that need to be addressed? Do you have ideas on how to improve our public areas and downtown? Contact us at amannes@townoffairfax.org

Transportation

Our Vision

There are a wide variety of transportation modes including walking, biking, driving and public transit that are reliable, frequent and affordable. Bus stops are safe, comfortable and accessible; buses are electric and pollution free and bus drivers are courteous and helpful. Shuttle services with volunteer drivers are available for older and disabled adults, reducing the need for private vehicle ownership and allowing for smaller parking areas, fewer spaces and less traffic congestion.

Key Accomplishments

Bus Stops: A brand new bus shelter was provided on the main thoroughfare through downtown where none had existed prior and the main existing bus shelter was completely rebuilt.

The Parkade: The town's main parking area was reconstructed to be ADA compliant, becoming the largest infrastructure project completed in more than a decade. Trees were replaced, ADA parking spaces were added and stairs were rebuilt with better railings.

Forums: annually an educational event has been held in the library to present transportation options available for older adults in Marin, including the use of travel navigators at Marin Access (paratransit, volunteer driver programs and a discounted taxi service); rides available with Marin Villages; Golden Gate local bus services; Clipper cards for seniors; ride-sharing with Lyft and Uber; car-sharing, etc.

What YOU can do!

Contact the travel navigators at Marin Access for training in the use of all means of public transportation throughout the County so you can travel safely and independently, by calling 415-454-0902

To learn to use Marin Access Passenger Portal (for online services) contact a travel navigator.

FAIRFAX FACTS:

How do you get around?

97% of respondents drive themselves (N=94)

52% report using public transportation (N=65)

Source: Age Friendly County of Marin Survey/Fairfax Summary Report, August 2019

Housing

Our Vision

We envision a town that provides a continuum of well-maintained, affordable and healthy housing options which are close to essential services and facilities. All housing is located away from areas prone to flooding and other natural disasters. Financial assistance is also in place for home modifications so older and/or disabled adults can safely age in place.

Key Accomplishments

Victory Village: After 10 years of hard-fought advocacy, Victory Village, a 54-unit affordable housing project (for low and very low income residents) was built and opened its doors in July 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Section 8 housing complex includes 28 apartments designed for tenants with mobility impairments, and three of those have enhancements for those with auditory or visual impairments. The complex includes 12 units for the formerly chronically homeless.

ADU/JADU: The Town Council adopted ordinances which updated & amended the Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) and Junior ADU Town code sections by streamlining and expediting permitting processes, limiting parking requirements and creating a 10-year amnesty/incentive program to legalize existing accessory units.

Renter protections: Ordinances were passed by the Fairfax Town Council for 1) Source of Income (prohibits discrimination against Section 8 or other 3rd party voucher holders), 2) Just Cause Evictions (requires specific cause(s) to terminate a residential tenancy), and 3) Mandatory Mediation (for rent increases greater than 5% in a twelve month period).

Forums: Educational events have highlighted local housing opportunities such as shared housing, junior second and accessory dwelling units; subsidized housing; and local apartment complexes.

FAIRFAX FACTS:

*Do you plan to remain
in your current home?*

86% of Fairfax respondents say “yes”
(N=95)

73% feel there are enough services and
supports to do so (N=86).

Source: Age Friendly County of Marin Survey/Fairfax
Summary Report, August 2019

What YOU can do!

If you are a homeowner, think about how many rooms you use every day and consider the idea of sharing your home with another person. You could also consider converting a bedroom or an additional space (garage, work room, etc.) into a junior accessory unit.

Social Participation

Our Vision

Social events in Fairfax are frequent, affordable, conveniently located and well-timed for older adults, and for people of all ages and cultures. Events are well promoted and Town staff work with volunteers to find and engage isolated older adults, promoting familiarity and exchange among all community members. In particular, intergenerational activities strengthen relationships and add fun and enrichment to all lives.

Key Accomplishments

Senior Fair: The Town held its first Senior Saturday Social and Age-Friendly Fair in 2015, hosting tables with representatives from Ross Valley Seniors; Marin Access; Alzheimer’s Association; CalFresh; Marin Center for Independent Living; California Free Telephone Program; Whistlestop Senior Center; Marin Villages; Fairfax Volunteers/Food Pantry; Home Care Agencies; Marin Humane; Sutter Health; the Community Wellness Center and others.

Free Classes for Seniors: Year-long, Fairfax Recreation offers free classes for older adults including chair and mat yoga, painting, singing, self-defense, dancing, improv acting, and photography, to name a few. All courses are subsidized through funds allocated by the Town Council.

Monthly Events: In collaboration with the Town of San Anselmo, Fairfax hosts the “Ross Valley Seniors” monthly luncheon with guest speakers at the Women’s Club. Also, a monthly “Breakfast with Friends,” was held at local restaurants, moving online via zoom once the COVID pandemic closed local eateries.

Annual Town Events: Age Friendly volunteers participated in the Annual Fairfax Parade and tabled at the EcoFest, the Fairfax Picnic and Streets for People social events for numerous years, handing out literature, answering questions on local and countywide services for older adults.

What YOU can do!

Go to the Age Friendly Fairfax button on the Town’s website and find a weekly class or monthly event that appeals to you and encourage a friend to join you. All activities are listed on the Town of Fairfax website, www.townoffairfax.org/departments/age-friendly-fairfax/

FAIRFAX

FACTS:

Is it important to have activities geared to older adults?

45% of Fairfax respondents feel it’s very important

45% feel it is somewhat important

10% feel it is not important at all (N=92)

Source: Age Friendly County of Marin Survey/Fairfax Summary Report, August 2019

Respect & Inclusion

Our Vision

Fairfax actively empowers and respects older adults, especially those often marginalized—older women and people of color, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ folks, non-English speakers, etc. Efforts are routinely made to promote awareness of the contributions of older adults who are encouraged to be full partners in the community and who are treated courteously and in a helpful manner by town staff, businesses and other community members.

Key Accomplishments

Annual Celebration for 90+: Fairfax residents who are 90 years and older have been honored for three years in a row with a special intergenerational event. Middle schoolers with Children 4 Change served the food to the attendees at the luncheons the first two years and during the pandemic, they handmade cards that were included with beautiful gift baskets delivered to residents' homes.

Oral Histories: In collaboration with the Community Media Center of Marin, Children 4 Change middle schoolers began taking oral histories of residents 90 and over, interviewing first, and on film, Phyllis Gould, Fairfax's Rosie the Riveter.

Honoring Older Adults: The 2019 Citizen of the Year award was shared by two older adult community leaders, Jody Timms, Chair of the Age Friendly Fairfax Task Force and David Smadbeck, the Executive Director of the Fairfax Chamber of Commerce. Additionally, the Town Council has honored, with proclamations, additional older adults, Phyllis Gould, Lou Vaccaro, Peter Arrigoni, William Sagar and Rose Tabor.

Senior Discounts: Members of the age friendly task force reached out to Fairfax businesses and subsequently created a flyer offering financial discounts for various services to older adults. The flyer remains on the Town's Age Friendly website and is periodically posted at various locations in Town.

What YOU can do!

Consider both internalized ageism and the social structures that disregard or even discriminate against older adults and bring awareness to these perspectives and practices whenever possible. It's also important to reach out to your neighbors on either side of your home and exchange emails or phone numbers to build community and support each other.

FAIRFAX FACTS:

80% of Fairfax respondents report that they feel valued and respected.

85% said that people in their community are polite and helpful

(N=92 and 93 respectively)

Source: Age Friendly County of Marin Survey/Fairfax Summary Report, August 2019

Civic Participation & Employment

Our Vision

We envision an anti-ageist town with opportunities for part-time or full-time paid work at a living wage; with entrepreneurship encouraged as well. Retirement is a choice, rather than an expectation. Meaningful and flexible volunteer experiences are also available for older adults and civic participation and leadership are welcomed.

Key Accomplishments

Volunteer Recruitment: Four of the eight members of the intergenerational Age Friendly Fairfax Task Force are older adults and some have volunteered for Ross Valley Villages, a local group assisting residents with rides, walks, shopping, etc. Announcements are often made at Town Council meetings and in various regular newsletters encouraging participation in age friendly activities and offering volunteer opportunities.

Outreach to Local Senior and Disabled Housing Sites: Age friendly volunteers have connected with residents and staff at four local housing facilities, including Bennett House, where task force meetings and chair yoga classes were held pre-pandemic. The Resident Service Coordinators at two facilities join in at task force meetings in order to strengthen information exchange and support.

Forum: An educational event was held outlining local volunteer opportunities within the Town of Fairfax and in the Ross Valley; and employment training and economic possibilities through the YWCA Women over 50 Program were highlighted.

What YOU can do!

Vote in local and national elections as part of your civic participation! Also, consider volunteering for a short- or long-term activity or event through the Fairfax Volunteer Board, or apply for a position on a local Fairfax government committee, board or commission.

FAIRFAX FACTS:

90.80% of Fairfax voters cast ballots in November of 2020 (4,144 residents out of 4,564 registered voters)

90.23% of Marin voters cast ballots in this year's Presidential election.

Source: <https://results.enr.clarityelections.com/CA/Marin/107124/web.264614/#/turnout>

Communication & Information

Our Vision

We envision a town with older adults who are well connected and communicated with; they have access to current information about the services and resources that are available to educate and assist them and their loved ones. Fairfax actively promotes a range of affordable technologies, including advanced, emerging and assistive methods, as well as high quality print (large-type) and electronic resources. Older adults have access to computers, the internet and instructions for use.

Key Accomplishments

Website: The website of the Town of Fairfax was updated and made more user friendly in 2019, with access to the Age Friendly Fairfax section easily visible as a button on the Town's home page. The site is continually updated, keeping all those who visit the website abreast of local programs and initiatives for older adults.

Publications: An age friendly email list is regularly expanded as older adults offer their email addresses. They receive a monthly age friendly newsletter listing activities and events. Twice a year, the Fairfax Recreation Catalog, mailed to all Fairfax residents, features an Age Friendly section with information on free classes, events, community forums, etc.

Collaboration with Fairfax Library: In late 2018, the Fairfax Library began offering "age friendly Fridays," hosting weekly events—a forum, a chair yoga class and art/music events, all free and supported by Friends of the Library. An Age Friendly binder was also placed in the library, full of flyers and brochures about older adults services in Fairfax and Marin.

Forums: Several monthly forums supported the use of smartphones, teaching basic features such as Wi-Fi, sending text messages, making the device easier to see and hear, turning it into a magnifier and connecting with Bluetooth. Another forum featured the California Telephone Access Program; with free phones and devices on display for older adults with hearing, sight or mobility limitations.

FAIRFAX

FACTS: *How often do you use the internet?*

68% of Fairfax respondents reported using the internet several times a day

19% report using it about once a day

6% reported never using the internet (N=90)

Source: Age Friendly County of Marin Survey/Fairfax Summary Report, August 2019

What YOU can do!

To increase your communication and information, sign up to receive the monthly Age Friendly Newsletter; and find links to additional age friendly resources at <https://www.townoffairfax.org/departments/age-friendly-fairfax/>

Community Support and Health Services

Our Vision

We envision a town well-informed about community services, social services, physical and mental health services available locally and in our County such that healthy aging is accessible for all generations. Emergency and disaster preparedness and response are well coordinated; residents know their neighbors and are willing to offer and/or accept assistance.

Key Accomplishments

Social Services Navigator: In late 2017, Age Friendly Fairfax began a new service held just prior to the monthly forums, “Ask an Expert.” Participants met with a retired social worker if they had questions or concerns about resources for older adults. Handouts, brochures and information were available on transportation, housing, Medicare, aging at home, Ross Valley Villages, hospice, driving, memory issues, etc.

Forums: Numerous monthly forums addressed community support and health services such as “Insuring your Good Health,” “Staying Physically Fit & Preventing Falls,” “Aging in Place with Grace,” “Medicare Made Clear,” “Medical Cannabis: Is It Right for Me?” “Ready. Set. Go. Preparing for Fire, Flood, Earthquake,” and “Can We Prevent and Even Reverse Cognitive Decline through What We Eat?”

Emergency Response: Beginning in March 2020 and throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the Town created a 1 to 1 Volunteer Matching Program with over 130 local volunteers organized to shop, pickup prescriptions, pickup take-out, walk dogs and more to assist older adults and minimize their potential exposure to the virus. Volunteers also made calls to counter isolation and loneliness.

Disaster Preparedness: In June 2020, the Town Council hired a part time Neighborhood Response Group Coordinator to assist with neighbors helping neighbors to ensure no one is overlooked in a disaster. This grassroots, volunteer-driven initiative works closely with Fairfax FireWise sites to identify and support older adults for potential disaster evacuation and/or sheltering in place.

What YOU can do!

To enhance community support, consider joining a local Neighborhood Response Group (NRG) or a FireWise site to better prepare yourself for disaster; go to the Town website and click on the Disaster Preparedness and/or the Wildfire Safety buttons.

FAIRFAX FACTS:

86% of Fairfax respondents report being in excellent or good health compared to same-age peers, with **14%** reporting being in fair or poor health (N=94).

Source: Age Friendly County of Marin Survey/Fairfax Summary Report, August 2019

Next Steps

The end of the first five-year Age Friendly cycle has drawn to a close for the Town of Fairfax. The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the direct interaction of volunteers and older adults but through persistence and resilience the new year 2021 appears brighter as the county vaccination program rolls out. It will be important in the years ahead to continually reach out to listen and assess the needs of our older adults and engage our intergenerational community in strengthening existing and developing new actions and programs to enhance a livable community for all.

2020-2021 Age Friendly Fairfax Strategic Action Goals

Overarching goal: Enhance the age friendliness of the Town of Fairfax.

Action Area 1: Equity & Inclusion

1.1 Promote a culture of respect and inclusion regarding age, race, gender, income, physical and mental ability, geographical location, etc.

- Action step 1: Call out ageism-individual and systemic.
- Action step 2: Connect with representatives on the Fairfax Racial Equity and Social Justice Committee (RESJ) to advocate for older marginalized adults (BIPOC, low-income, women, AFN/disabled, isolated/hills, etc.).
- Action step 3: Work in collaboration with community groups such as Spahr (LGBTQ Center), SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice), MCIL (Marin Center for Independent Living), etc. to support equity issues locally.
- Action step 4: Advocate for Town/Police/Businesses/residents/County to educate about the upcoming vaccines, and wearing masks during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Action step 5: Hold our annual event honoring 90+ older adults.
- Action step 6: Encourage intergenerational programs whenever possible.

Action Area 2: Community Support and Health Services

2.1 Advocate for a supportive community to help older adults stay safe and healthy

- Action step 1: Work with FireWise sites, Neighborhood Response Groups (NRGs), CERTs, the Marin VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Assisting in Disasters), Ross Valley Village and other community organizations focused on disaster preparedness to assist in identifying and supporting older adults and vulnerable individuals in our community.

Action Area 3: Housing

3.1 Advocate for affordable housing

- Action step 1: Promote junior/accessory dwelling units: ADU/JADU.
- Action step 2: Reach out to support Victory Village and Bennett House residents/staff.
- Action Step 3: Advocate for any new affordable housing projects that might arise.

In the meantime, much good work continues with and for the older adults of Fairfax. In late summer of 2020, the Age Friendly Fairfax Task Force generated an interim list of strategic action goals to carry us over the next year while we look and plan ahead. The world, our world is a changing place and we have grouped our domains a bit differently to reflect the times. We invite you to become or stay connected to our work, as we all move forward in love and appreciation for our community.

Adopted August 2020 by the Age Friendly Fairfax Task Force

3.2 Promote creative housing options for older adults

- Action step 1: Support renters in any way possible.
- Action step 2: Promote home sharing programs and local co-housing projects.

Action Area 4: Civic Life & Engagement

4.1 Engage the older adult population to be actively involved in the community

- Action step 1: Promote Town's 1 to 1 Volunteer Match Program, seeking those in need and those able to assist others.
- Action step 2: Support older workers and volunteers to safely stay employed and engaged.

Action Area 5: Social Connection and Information

5.1 Partner with various organizations to increase information and communication.

- Action step 1: Continue to offer monthly forums (via zoom) in collaboration with Age Friendly Marin Network, Aging Action Initiative (AAI), Marin County Health & Human Services (HHS) and other county-wide organizations.

5.2 Advocate for a wide variety of activities that appeal to older adults.

- Action step 1: Promote Fairfax Park & Recreation Commission classes and events, on-going and newly developed.

5.3 Use technology to communicate more broadly

- Action step 1: Continue to enhance and expand the Age Friendly monthly newsletter and email list to quickly disseminate pertinent information.
- Action step 2: Work to expand digital access and literacy for older adults.

Action Area 6: Mobility Options, Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

6.1 Advocate for safer sidewalks and benches

- Action step 1: Prioritize repairing sidewalks and other outdoor areas (crosswalks, etc.) that may need immediate attention.



Aging in Fairfax - Everyone's Doing it!

