



# Age-Friendly Community Assessment: Town of Bedford



Photo: The Arbors of Bedford – Bedford, NH; Facebook

## August 2017

# Town of Bedford

## Age-Friendly Community Assessment



### Introduction

The community assessment process—part of the larger Becoming Age-Friendly program—began in early 2017. The SNHPC team visited all 14 communities in its region, engaging town staff, board members, citizens, and other stakeholders. Staff led conversations on issues that affect seniors and millennials among the following topic areas:

- Transportation & Connections
- Recreation & Engagement
- Housing
- Business & Economic Development

While attendance was robust in most towns—despite SNHPC’s efforts to engage diverse age groups—it should be noted that results from these conversations may not necessarily reflect overall town demographics. For instance, some towns’ attendees were primarily seniors; therefore, responses may naturally be more senior-oriented. Feedback gleaned from community conversations has been supplemented with sample data from a community survey that was widely distributed, and which saw 641 responses from across the region.

These two sources of information dovetailed to create this document: a 12-page summary of age-friendliness in each municipality, most of which came from townspeople themselves. The hope is for these documents to become a valuable resource to assess current age-friendliness, as well as to constructively evaluate what improvements might lead municipalities toward a more age-friendly future.



Photo: SNHPC Staff



# Community Snapshot

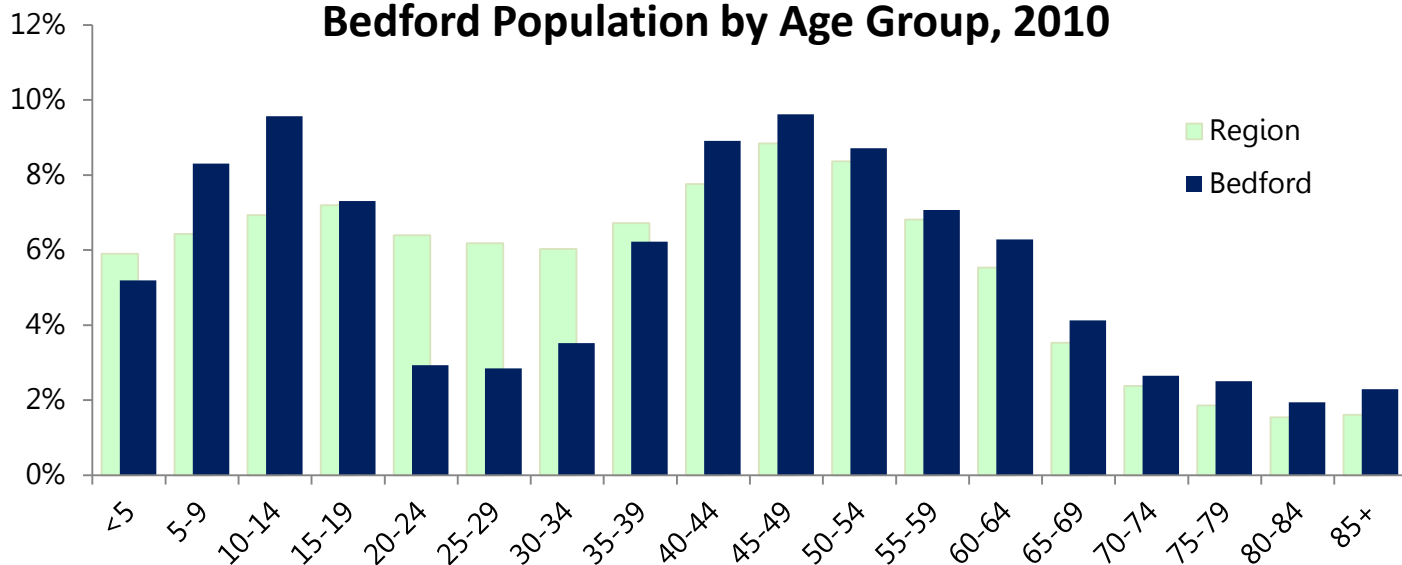
Bedford, NH is located in Hillsborough County, abutting the City of Manchester and the towns of Amherst, New Boston, Goffstown, and Merrimack. Bedford is a suburban community well-connected to Interstate 293, the F.E. Everett Turnpike, and NH Route 101.



Photo: Bedford Library

Bedford was established in 1730; it was named for Lord John Russell, fourth Duke of Bedford, in 1750. The 2015 population of Bedford was an estimated 21,659. The town experienced rapid population growth in the last 50 years, and has also seen a lot of commercial growth in the east part of town. There are six public schools in Bedford, including Ross A. Lurgio Middle School and Bedford High School, both completed in 2007. Although Bedford features many rural/ suburban subdivisions, there are mixed-uses throughout town, including the multi-phase Market & Main development under construction.

### Bedford Population by Age Group, 2010



Bedford has a much higher ratio of children age 5-14 than the regional average; however, the millennial population shrinks considerably relative to the City and towns around it. This exodus of millennials could be from a number of factors, such as lack of housing choice, affordability, or employment options.

## Community Assessment: March 24, 2017

25+ in attendance, including town residents and representatives from AARP, Parks & Recreation Dept., Historical Society, Rotary Club, Realtor, Planning Board, Library, Garden Club, Catholic Church, and Bedford Cemeteries.



### What is the community doing well?

- **Library** is a regional draw and part of a larger consortium.
- **Town organizations and clubs** are strong, accomplish a lot.
- **The *Bedford town app*** is a fantastic, free resource for residents.
- Planning Board control over development approval makes it **simpler for businesses to develop**, especially near interstates.



### Where is there room for improvement?

- **Non-vehicular transportation options** (including sidewalk and bicycle infrastructure).
- There is demand for a senior/community center, but **no dedicated funding** for one.
- Bedford could integrate age-friendly program(s) into their 2020 Master Plan when they begin to update it in 2018.
- **Affordable and more diverse housing** options for all residents.



## Transportation & Connections

### Highlights:

- When asked, every community member said town’s best transportation asset is, “Your own car!”
- Available Transportation: volunteer, or private rideshare only (such as Lyft or Uber)
- Community walkability: rated 1 out of 10 by participants (1 being the worst or lowest score, 10 the best or highest score).

### Assets (in no particular order):

- Route NH 101 & I-293 connectivity
- Less than one hour from the ocean, big city (Boston), and the mountains
- Only 7 miles from Manchester-Boston Regional Airport
- Close proximity to Catholic Medical Center and Elliot Hospital (Manchester)

### Barriers/Opportunities (in no particular order):

- No fixed route transit available
- High traffic during peak hours has hurt businesses and lengthened commute times.
- Lack of sidewalk facilities and connectivity threatens pedestrian safety.

### Basic Data:



*Proximity to Airport*  
**5 miles**



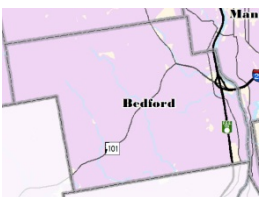
*WalkScore*  
**40 of 100**



*Transit available?*  
**Limited**



*Nearest Interstate*  
**+ F.E. Turnpike**



### Access to Internet:

#### Broadband Coverage:

- WiFi available at town office, library, schools, etc.
- Connection speed rated as good; no issues mentioned



### Housing

5 – *Becoming Age-Friendly*, Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission

## Highlights

- Diverse housing types are recommended by the town’s Master Plan and have been built across Bedford in recent years.
- Many residents identify relationships between family and friends as important reasons they choose to live in Bedford.
- There is an affordable housing requirement for multi-family and senior housing.

## Assets(in no particular order):

- There is workforce housing
- Assisted living facilities and nursing homes exist in Bedford
- St. Elizabeth Seton Church offers a “fix-it” program to assist residents with homeware items.
- Accessory Dwelling Units and in-law apartments are allowed.



“We are very fortunate in Bedford to have a very commercial area that abuts the highway. Generally, the residential areas are isolated from commerce, so it does not interfere as much with housing.”

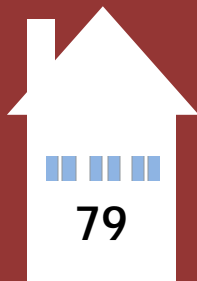
-Karen, Bedford Resident

## Barriers/Opportunities(in no particular order):

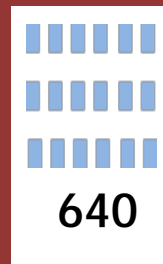
- Conversions are not traditionally allowed, but are a desired alternative for some elderly homeowners.
- There is limited developable space available.
- Some participants were interested in continuing care facilities, such as Riverwoods in Exeter, NH.
- Universal design considerations could be made.
- Mixed-Use zoning districts offer promise.



*Single Family Units*



*Two to Four Units  
in Structure*



*Five or more Units  
in Structure*



*Mobile Homes and  
Other Housing Units*



## Recreation & Engagement

## Highlights:

- Bedford has its own app—a mobile version of the town website.
- Common sentiment among organizations is value of social media to interact with millennials about town events.
- Recreation Department hosts numerous programs; however, some residents think they can do more to engage seniors.
- Events are advertised across all mediums, including Newsletters, emails, Facebook, BCTV and Radio, Bedford Journal, Bedford Bulletin, Hippo, and flyers at town facilities.



Photo: Bedford Farmers Market, Facebook

## Assets (in no particular order):

- Bedford Farmers Market (pictured)
- Bedford Library – very popular among town residents and is a regional draw; acts as a make-shift community center.
- Multi-generational programs include summer concert series, family archery, ice fishing, magic classes, movie matinee December, whale-watching trips, and the Koala Bear Playgroup (many grandparents babysit).
- Popular senior programs include Tai Chi, Drop in Meditation, Pilates, Barre Basics, Ballroom Dancing, Yoga, and Lunch & Learns (such as for “Estate Planning”).
- Saint Anselm College athletic fields and hockey arenas
- There is a strong network of clubs, including Women’s Club, Men’s Club, Flower Club, Book Club, Rotary Club, and organizations run through the library.
- Joppa Hill farm
- Schools are tremendous assets for multiple events, programs, and community uses.

## Barriers/Opportunities (in no particular order):

- A community center is highly desired—the historical society has been working since 2009 to raise funds to adapt the Steven-Buswell school into such a space.
- Trails along roads and ability for pedestrians to safely share the roads with cars
- Per the survey, newspapers are still a popular way for people to learn information about what’s happening in their communities; however, several residents exclaimed they do not want to pay for a Union Leader subscription, and they do not have a computer to access content online.



## Business & Economic Development

## Highlights:

- Businesses like the Harvest Market and Lowe's Home Improvement have made generous partnerships with local organizations like the Rotary Club and Historical Society, respectively.
- Bedford Planning Board has an approval process for development that bypasses the Zoning Board of Adjustment(except for wetland issues) that makes it easier for businesses to move through the development process.

## Assets:

- Vibrant commercial area in the northeast section of town
- Excellent highway connectivity (I-293, F.E. Everett Turnpike, NH-101) has been boon to business growth.
- Multiple grocery stores in town, including Whole Foods—several millennials and seniors liked that there is a pub there
- Industrial diversity—different business types in Bedford stabilize its economy.

## Barriers/Opportunities:

- Lack of water, sewer, and gas is an obstacle to business growth in some areas.
- Transportation improvements would be helpful for seniors trying to frequent local businesses, especially as more of them age.
- Approved development at Market and Main development (pictured) may change perceptions about doing business in Bedford.



Photo: Prellwitz Chilinski Associates, Inc.

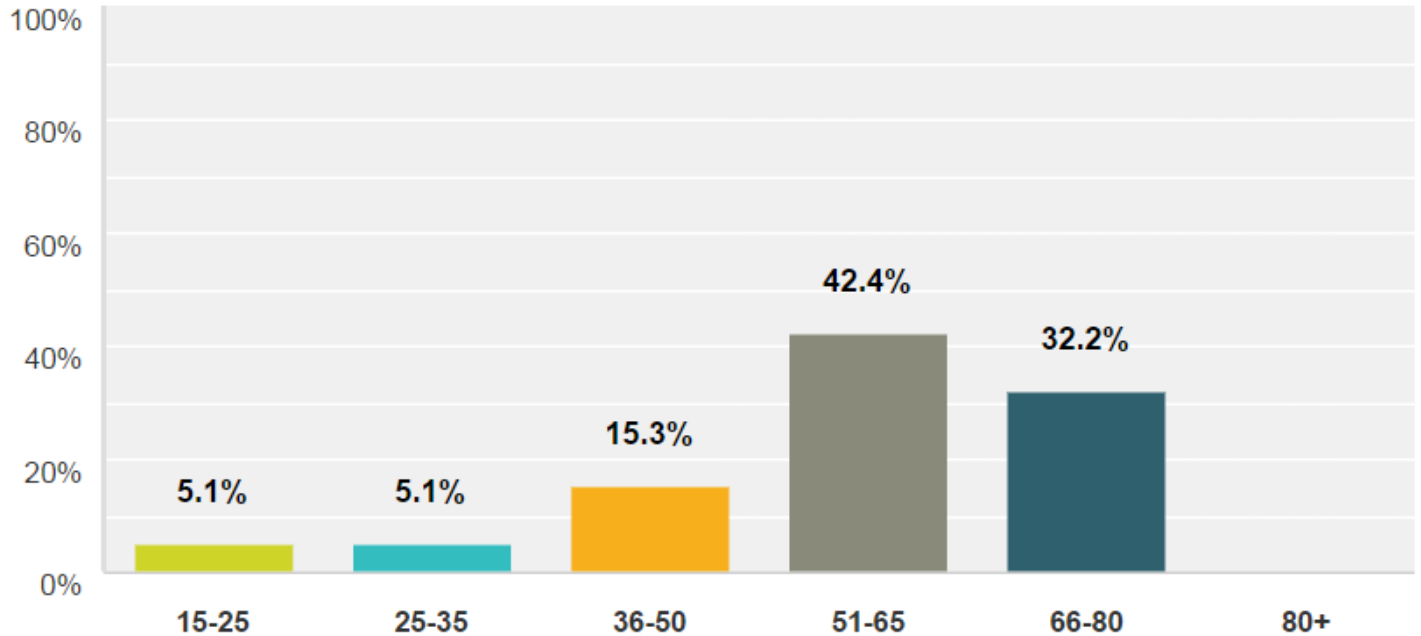




## Survey Says...

From February through April of 2017, The Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission (SNHPC) embarked on a “Becoming Age-Friendly” program. A resident survey was hosted by SNHPC and sponsored by AARP, Tufts Health Plan Foundation, and the City of Manchester to gather ordinary citizens’ input on topics including recreation, transportation, housing, and beyond. A total of 641 responses were received, including 59 from Bedford.

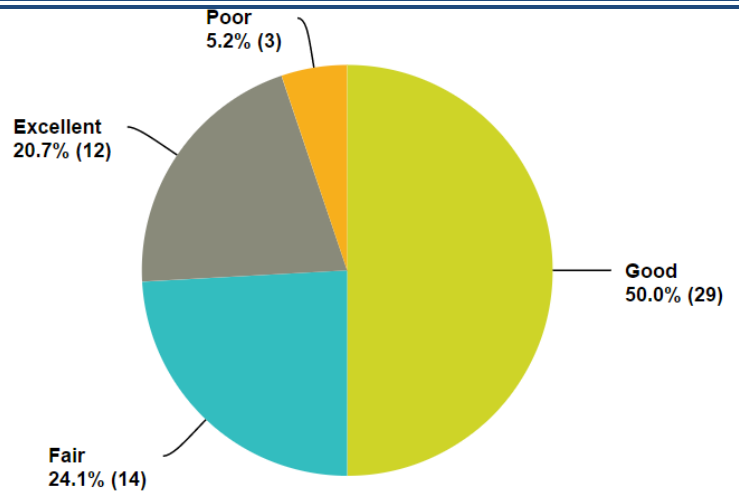
### What is your age?



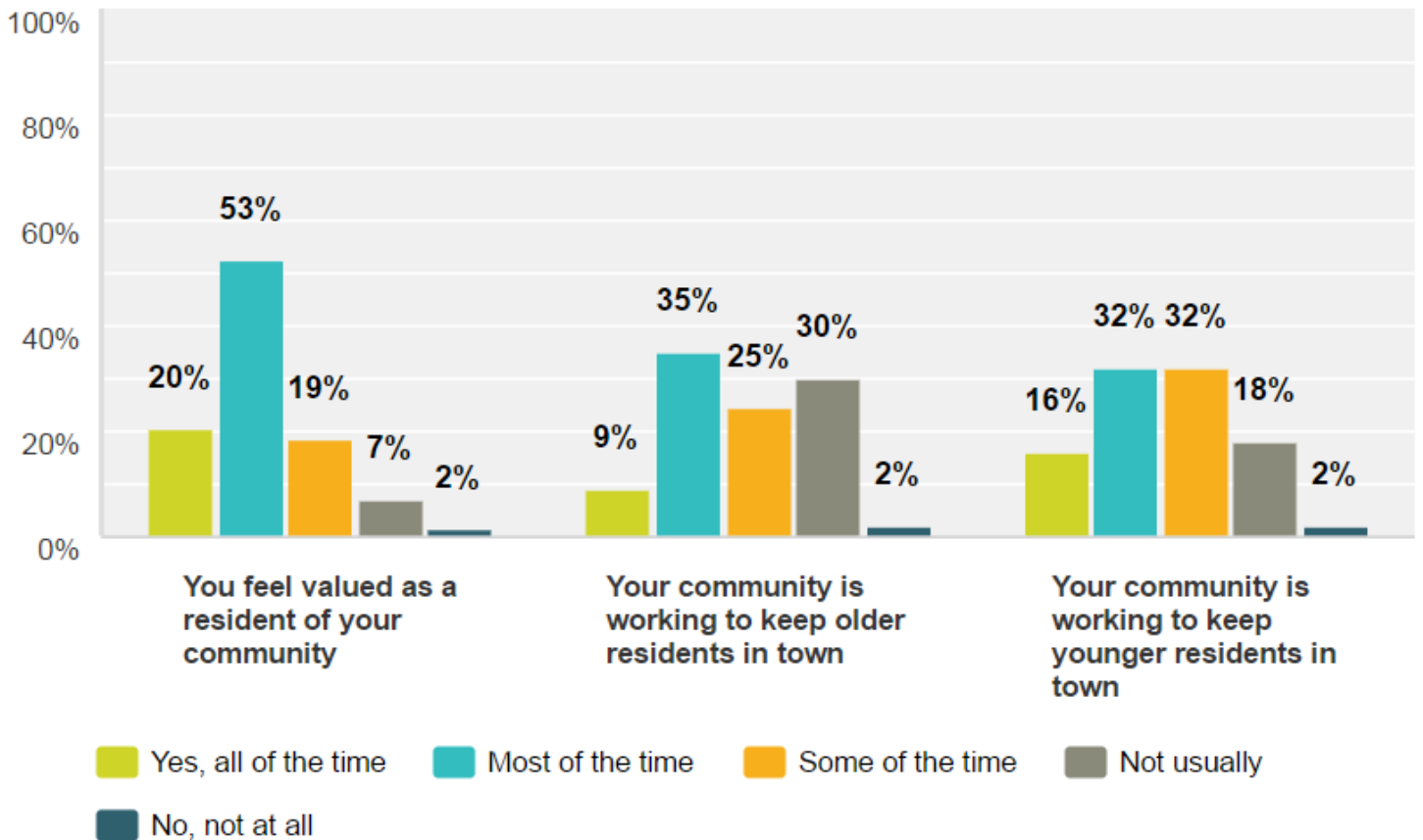
The response rates from residents aged 51-65 and 66-80 was substantially higher for Bedford than other communities in the SNHPC region, which meant all other age groups made up a lesser share. Also, there was not a single Bedford resident age 80+ that took the resident survey.

How would you rate your community as a place for people to live as they age?

A little more than two thirds (70.7%) of residents surveyed agree Bedford is a good or excellent place to live as residents age. This was above average relative to other communities in the region.

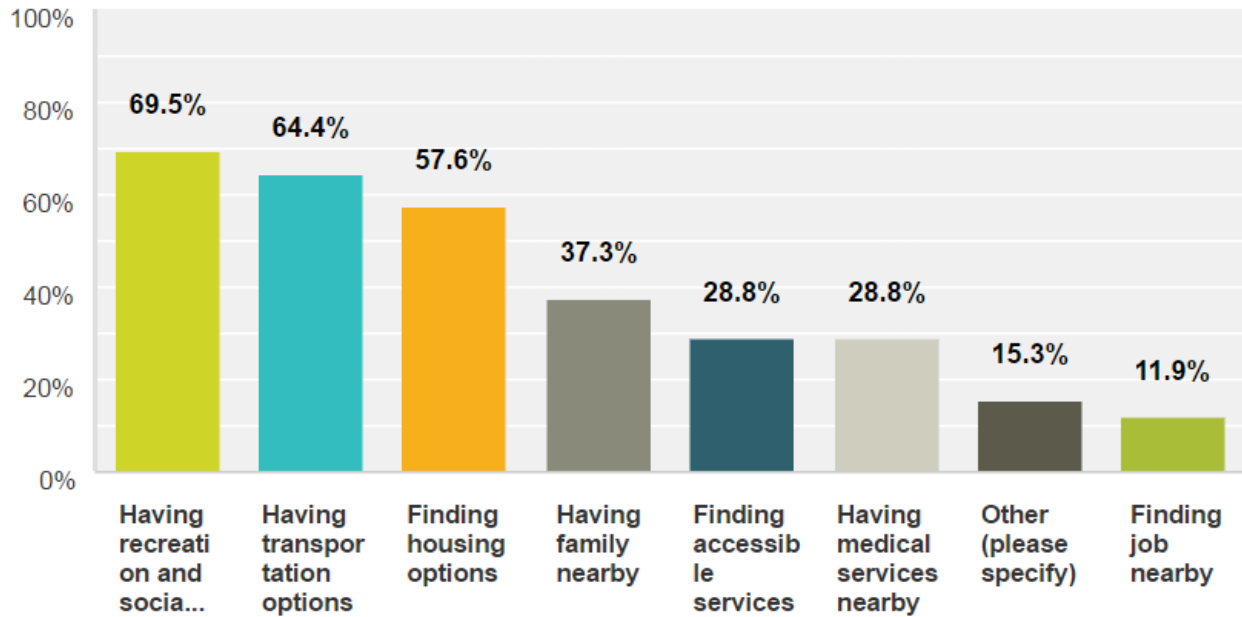


Community Value



Nearly 3 out of 4 Bedford residents surveyed (73%) feel valued as a resident all or most of the time. Roughly 3 out of 5 Bedford residents surveyed believe the community is working to keep older residents in town (60%) or to keep younger residents in town (64%) some or most of the time.

## What concerns you the most about aging in your community?



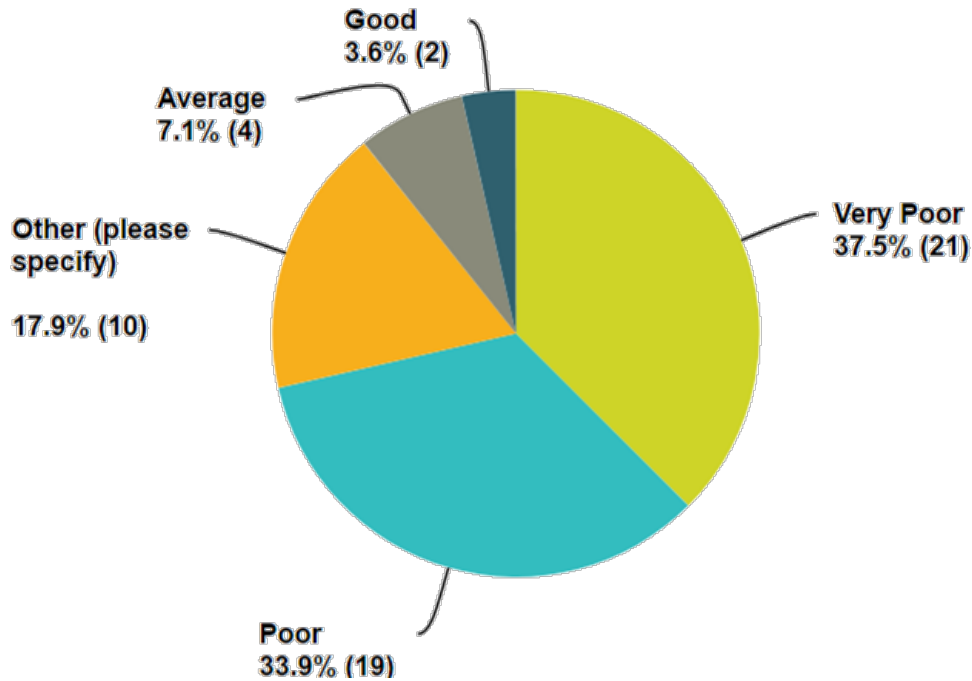
While transportation was the top concern for nearly all SNHPC communities, Bedford was unique in that recreation and social engagement opportunities were the top concern among residents surveyed. Many community assessment participants explained that they would like to see a senior center open in Bedford. Transportation and housing options were also listed as greatest concerns for several survey respondents. Given the age of most survey respondents, it would be useful to learn if Bedford millennials' concerns reflect these trends.

## What is the single most important change that would enable you to stay in your home/community?

Housing Affordable Lower Taxes Sidewalks  
Transportation Bus Property Taxes

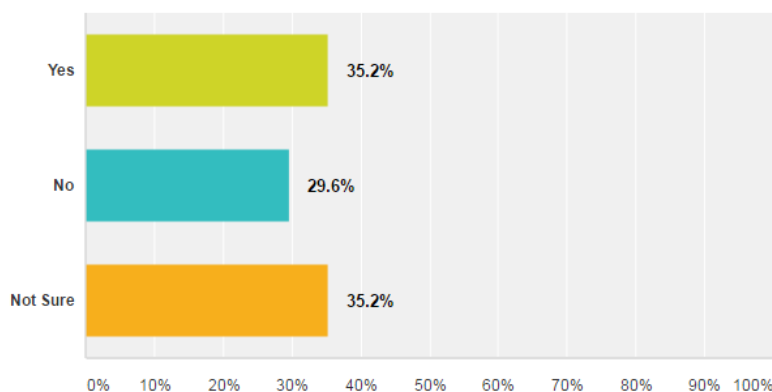
Like many other municipalities, transportation and lower taxes were mentioned most, followed by housing and sidewalks.

How would you rate your community's transportation options if you were unable to drive?



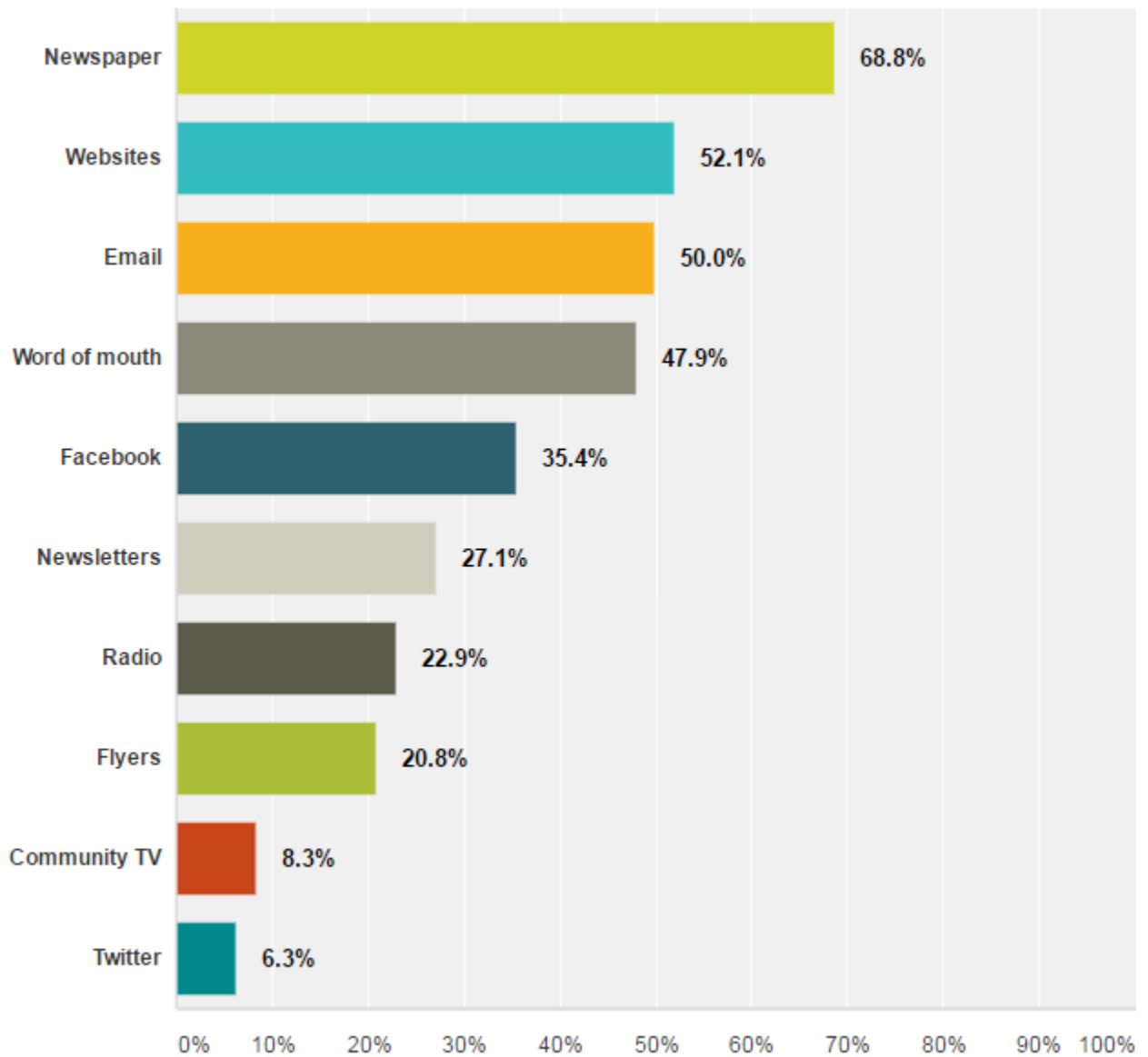
In terms of transportation options, only 3.6% responded "good"; 71.4% responded "poor" or "very poor", which was higher than some other SNHPC communities. Without any multi-modal infrastructure, a lot of residents agree more can be done to improve transportation. It was shared at a community assessment that Bedford eliminated MTA service because their residents were not using it—it was used by residents from other towns coming into Bedford.

Whether you wanted to move into your first home/unit or move into a smaller home/unit, does your community offer appealing alternatives?



The distribution of resident responses was pretty evenly distributed on this question.

## How do you find information about community services and events?



Newspaper(s) and websites proved to be the #1 and #2 methods of finding information about community services/events, followed by email and word of mouth. One noteworthy feature about the Town of Bedford is that they have their own Smartphone App—"The Bedford App"—which includes all the information one may find on the town website (including the ability to pay bills).



## Acknowledgements

The Becoming Age-Friendly program was administered by the *Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission (SNHPC)*, and funded by a grant from the *Tufts Health Plan Foundation*. The program received funding and resource support from *AARP NH* and *City of Manchester Health Department*.

Becoming Age-Friendly received regional support from many stakeholders across the Greater Manchester region, including members from the following organizations:

Access Portsmouth	Manchester Young Professionals Network
Alliance for Healthy Aging	NH Builders Association
Bike Manchester	NH Department of Health & Human Services
Community Caregivers	NH Endowment of Health
Easterseals	NH Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI)
EngAGING NH	NH Institute of Art
Granite YMCA	NH Institute of Politics
Grantmakers in Aging	NH State Committee on Aging
Greater Derry Londonderry Chamber of Commerce	Plan NH
Infinity Realty Group	Regional Trails Coordinating Council
InTown Manchester	Saint Anselm College
JSA, Inc.	Service Link
Manchester-Boston Regional Airport	Southern New Hampshire University
Manchester Chamber of Commerce	Stay. Work. Play.
Manchester Community College	Transport NH
Manchester Public TV	Union Leader
Manchester Regional Area Committee on Aging	UNH Institute on Disability
Manchester Transit Authority	UNH Manchester

The Town of Bedford featured dozens of participants between the community assessment and the resident survey. The program’s Community Representatives from Bedford included:

Rick Sawyer	Mark Connors
Becky Hebert	

This town report was prepared by the Becoming Age-Friendly team and staff from SNHPC:

Sylvia von Aulock, Project Manager	Cameron Prolman
Adam Hlasny	Derek Shooster
Nate Miller	Amy Kizak
David Preece	Linda Moore-O’Brien

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