



Age-Friendly Community Assessment: Town of Francestown



Photo: SNHPC Staff

August 2017

Town of Francestown

Age-Friendly Community Assessment

Prepared by the Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission



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

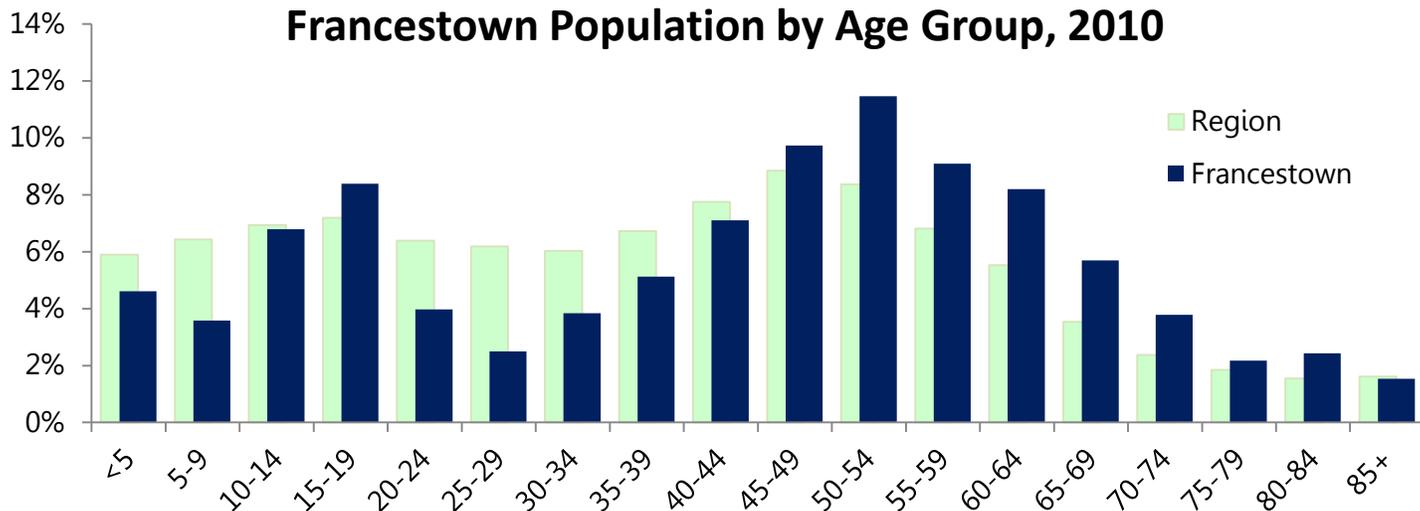


Community Snapshot

Francestown is approximately 30 square miles in size with a 2014 population of 1,564 residents (NH Office of Energy and Planning). Francestown is the second smallest town in terms of population among surrounding towns. Francestown also has the lowest persons per square mile (52) compared to its neighbors.

Incorporated in 1772, Francestown was named for Frances Deering Wentworth, wife of Governor John Wentworth. She was the source of some scandal, marrying John just ten days after the death of her first husband, Theodore Atkinson. Three years after Francestown was incorporated, the Wentworths fled to exile. Situated on the Second New Hampshire Turnpike, the only through route between Boston and Vermont, the town collected a toll of one cent per mile from travelling coaches and wagons. Francestown was also the site of a high-quality soapstone quarry, which was mined until the 1890s.¹

Francestown Population by Age Group, 2010



The largest age group in Francestown is currently 45 to 64 years, which represents 38 percent of the total population of the town (2010 U.S. Census). Between 2000 and 2010, the total population in this age group increased by 45 percent which reflects the aging of the town’s baby boomer generation. The second largest age group in Francestown is 20 to 44 years, which represents 23 percent of the town’s 2010 population.

Between 2000 and 2010, Francestown’s oldest population (65 and older) increased by 28.5 percent while the town’s young adult population (20 to 44 years of age) decreased by 30.7 percent. In addition, between 2000 and 2010 both the town’s school-age children age cohorts (under 5) and (5 to 19 years of age) decreased by 17.4 percent and 19.4 percent respectively. (Francestown Master Plan, 2015)

¹ NH Employment Security Community Profiles, Aug. 2017

Community Assessment: April 3, 2017

[25+ in attendance, including reps from Town Administration, Town Residents, Local Transit Providers, Local Volunteers, and Local Religious Institutions]



What is the community doing well?

- Francestown has a strong network of volunteers.
- Extensive trails and parks are seen as an asset to the town.
- Transit provided by Community Volunteer Transportation Company serves residents of all ages in need of transportation.
- Many community events are hosted by the town's recreation department, town's library, local church, and other local organizations.



Where is there room for improvement?

- Roads are disconnected and lack sidewalks and bike infrastructure which make it difficult to walk and bike around the community.
- Encouraging some commercial development in town could boost local tax revenue.
- Lack of water and septic infrastructure may adversely impact future development.
- There are opportunities to diversify housing options.



Transportation & Connections

Highlights:

- Participants rated the town 2 to 3 out of 10 in terms of how difficult it is to get around without a car
- Community Volunteer Transportation Company (CVTC) provides free transportation services for Frankestown residents
- Residents recognize the lack of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in town, but value the town's unpaved local roads as a means of keeping its rural character
- Frankestown is mainly a bedroom community: 72.7 percent of residents commute out of town for employment

Assets:

- Rail trail and other local trail systems
- Access to major state routes: NH47, NH136
- CVTC's Volunteer Drivers provide "no-fee" transportation for people who do not have access to transportation because of age, ability, economic situation or other limiting circumstances. Trip purposes include non-emergency medical & social service appointments, as well as trips to the grocery store and the pharmacy.

Barriers/Opportunities:

- Disconnected road system
- Lack of sidewalks and shoulders leave little space for pedestrian movement
- Subdivision regulations could be updated to newer standards to systematically enable more users of the road
- General lack of walkability outside of trail network
- Highways and state routes can be barriers to walkability
- CVTC's riders could benefit from a stronger volunteer driver network

Basic Data:



Access to Internet:

- WiFi available at town office and library
- Connection speed rated as good overall. Some residents have noticed spotty connections

Housing

Highlights

- Vast majority (94 percent) of housing units in town are single family homes
- 31 percent of Francestown's homes were built between 1980 and 1990; 26 percent built prior to 1939 – thus providing for the town's historic characters
- Francestown has a Median Sales Value of \$225,000 and Average Sales Price of \$239,814 (New England Real Estate Multiple Listing Service Database)

Assets:

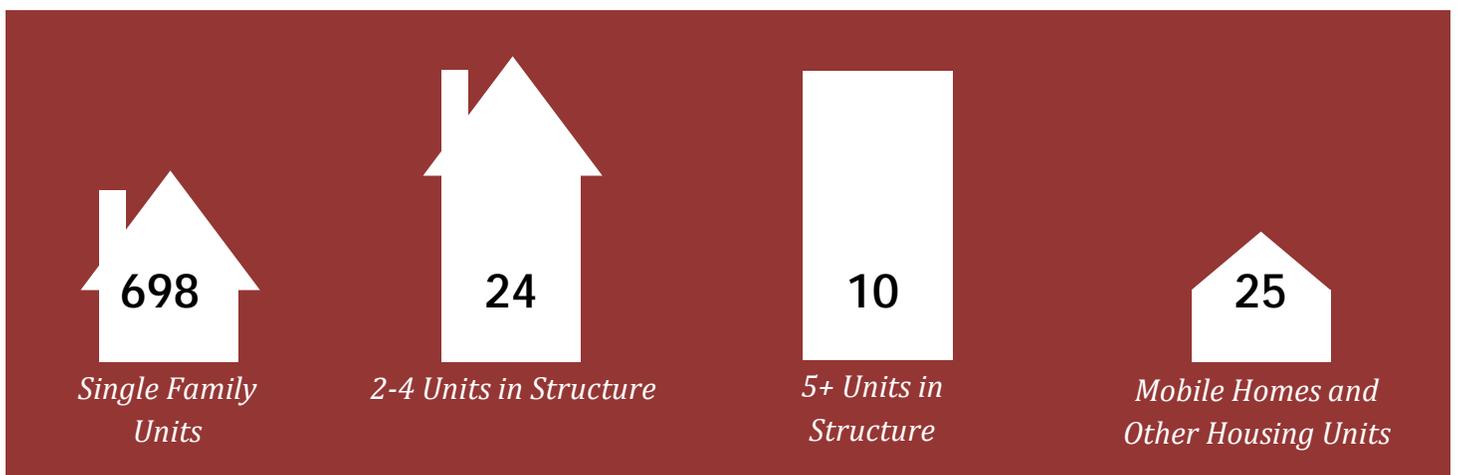
- The town allows for a variety of housing types
- Although mixed-use zoning is not prohibited, there is no mixed use designation/district in the town's current zoning
- Town offers property tax relief for seniors, veterans, and for disabled residents



"We do have some younger residents wanting to stay in town"
– Francestown resident

Barriers/Opportunities:

- Lack of sewer and water infrastructure can be a barrier to developing more diverse or denser housing options
- Limited housing options, including multi-family
- Disabled/universal design considerations have yet to be adopted
- Lack of affordable houses for first-time home-buyer and for seniors wanting to downsize





Recreation and Engagement

Highlights:

- Francessown has a strong presence of local volunteer networks.
- Francessown is home to an extensive trail network, conservation land, and town forest.
- George Holmes Bixby Memorial Library Central Library offers a variety of programs for residents of all ages
- Local organizations provide community support and services for Francessown residents

Assets (in no particular order):

- The George Holmes Bixby Memorial Library, open 25 hours a week, is an accessible building, and hosts a number of inter-generational programs, such as IT/techonology help during the week.
- The Old Meeting House and the Community Church of Francessown utilize their facilities for public events, meetings, and activites.
- Francessown Friends, Inc. is a local, volunteer driven organization that works to promote community among the citizens of Francessown by raising funds and providing a confidential way for people to receive the assistance they need.
- Francessown has miles of local trails in the north, south, and western parts of town.
- The town has a number of large parks and conservation lands, including: Lord Town Forest (25 acres), The Crotched Mountain Town Forest (900 acres), Driscoll Hill Town Forest (53.6 acres), Piscataquog River Town Forest (6 acres), The Shattuck Pond Town Forest (418 acres), and Dinsmore Brook Conservation Area. (302 acres)
- The Francessown Land Trust also owns a number of forest land with trails, including: Rand Brook Town Forest, The Dorothy & Herman C. Miller Family Memorial Forest, and The Schott Brennan Falls Reserve.
- The Piscataquog Watershed Association offers volunteer and internship opportunities.
- Crotched Mountain, although located in the town of Bennington, the mountain offers many seasonal recreation opportunities for Francessown residents.



Barriers/Opportunities:

- There is an opportunity for local volunteers to develop a centralized hub for needed volunteers and services.
- Improving venues to make them accessible for all users.
- Creating a one-stop for community business and resident info and events



Business & Economic Development

Highlights:

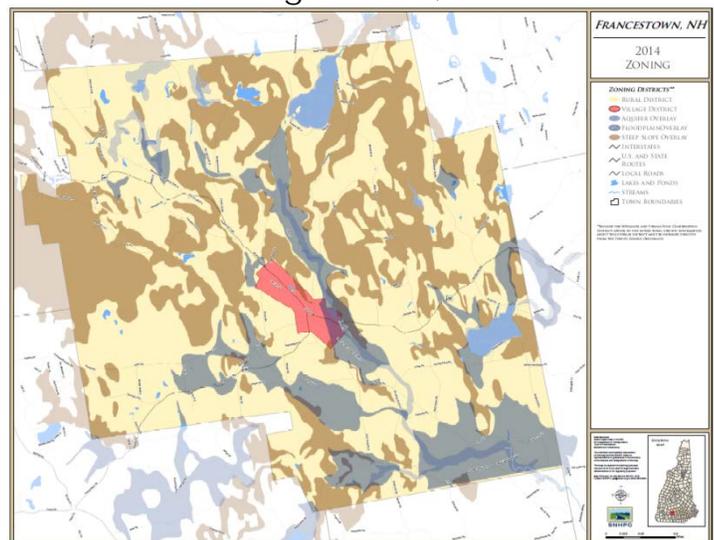
- The lack of gas lines, sewer and water stunts development possibilities
- Frankestown recently lost the Frankestown Village Store, the second-oldest continuously operating general store in the country
- Frankestown has very little commercial businesses, leaving residents to go outside of their community to find the resources they need their community

Assets:

- Some of Frankestown's largest businesses are
 - Crothed Mountain Resort & Spa (located in Bennington)
 - Country Brokers Real Estate
 - Frankestown Sand & Gravel
 - Millers Construction
- Crotched Mountain and Frankestown Sand and Gravel are largest employers in town

Barriers/Opportunities:

- Lack of sewer/water infrastructure
- Town is working to create a more walkable town center
- Town's unemployment rate of 5.7 percent is higher than the state average of 3.0 percent
- 72.7 percent of residents commute out of town for employment
- There are no grocery stores or retail stores in town
- Residents have to drive relatively long distances to receive medical services
- Developing more commercial properties in town can help boost tax revenue
- Currently, the town identified the town's center as a Village District; while there is defined purpose of the district, the town's Master Plan suggests business uses such as farmers markets, coffee shops, antique/crafts, art shops, bed & breakfasts, and incubator spaces which could exist in the District.
- Build upon tourist identify with events such as the Tour de Frankestown

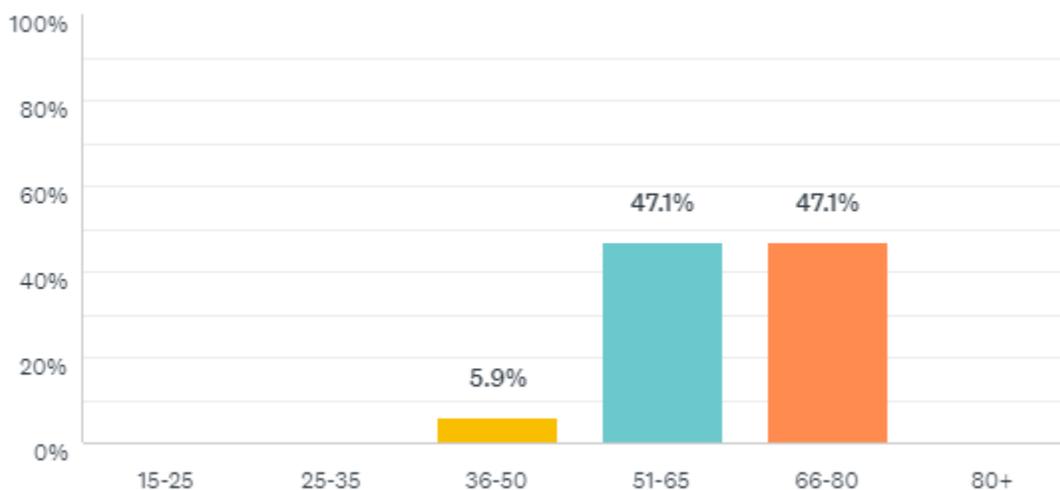




Survey Says...

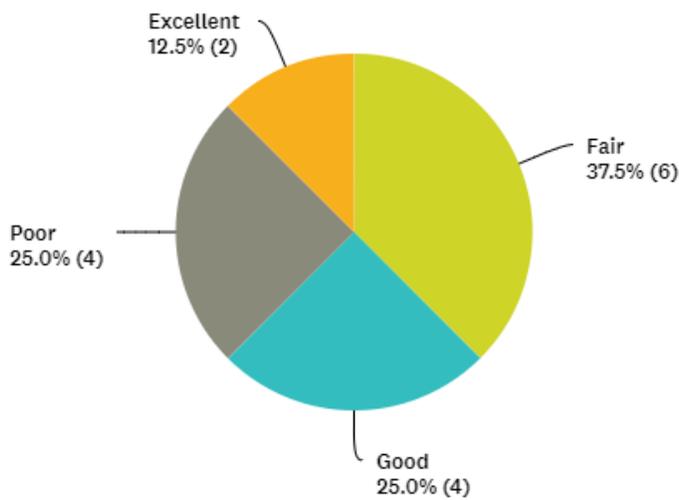
From February through April of 2017, The Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission (SNHPC) embarked on a “Becoming Age-Friendly” program. A resident survey was hosted by SNHPC and sponsored by AARP, Tufts Health Plan Foundation, and the City of Manchester to gather ordinary citizens’ input on topics including recreation, transportation, housing, and beyond. A total of 641 responses were received, including 17 from Frankestown. The following is but a sample; full results are available upon request.

What is your age?



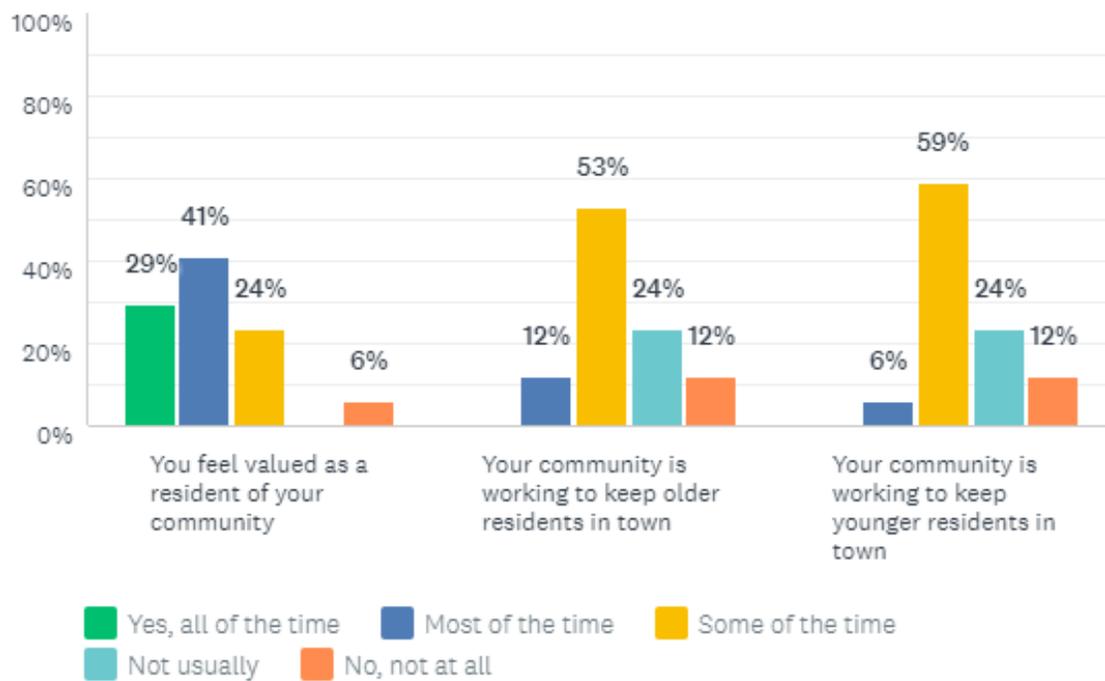
The majority of respondents were between the ages 51-80 years old. There were no responses from residents ages 15-35.

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



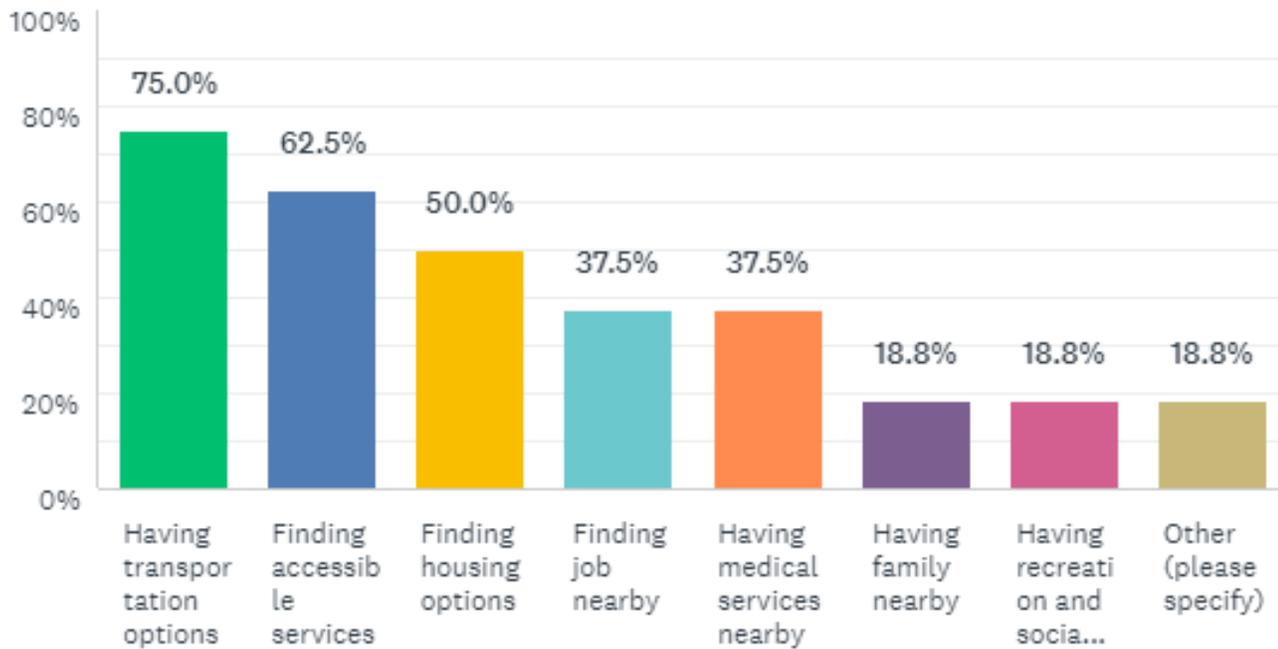
25% of respondents agreed that Francestown was a “good” or place for people to live as they age. 35.6% of residents rated their community as “fair”.

Community Value



The majority of respondents (70%) feel valued as a resident of Francestown most or all of the time; 6% felt that the community was working to keep younger residents in town most or all of the time. While residents feel valued in their town, many do not feel that the town is working to keep young and older residents in town.

What concerns you the most about aging in your community?



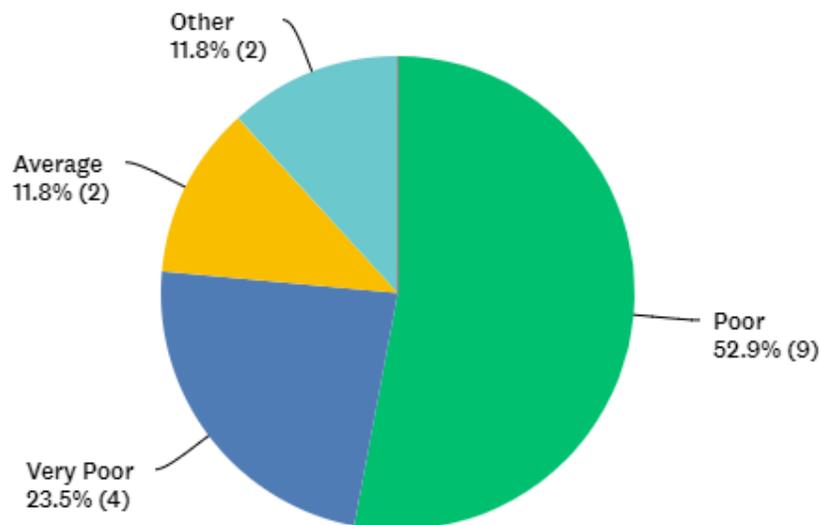
Residents of Francestown are most concerned with having transportation options in their community as they age. Additionally, respondents were concerned about finding accessible services and housing options that will suit them to meet their needs as they age.

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

Lower Taxes Property Taxes Affordable services
Transportation Nearby Housing

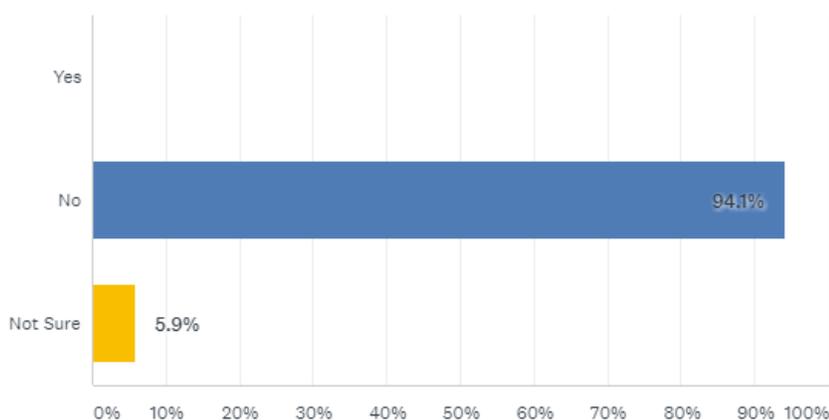
When asked what is the most important change that would enable you to stay in Francestown, respondents referenced affordability, transportation, housing, property taxes, and access to services.

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



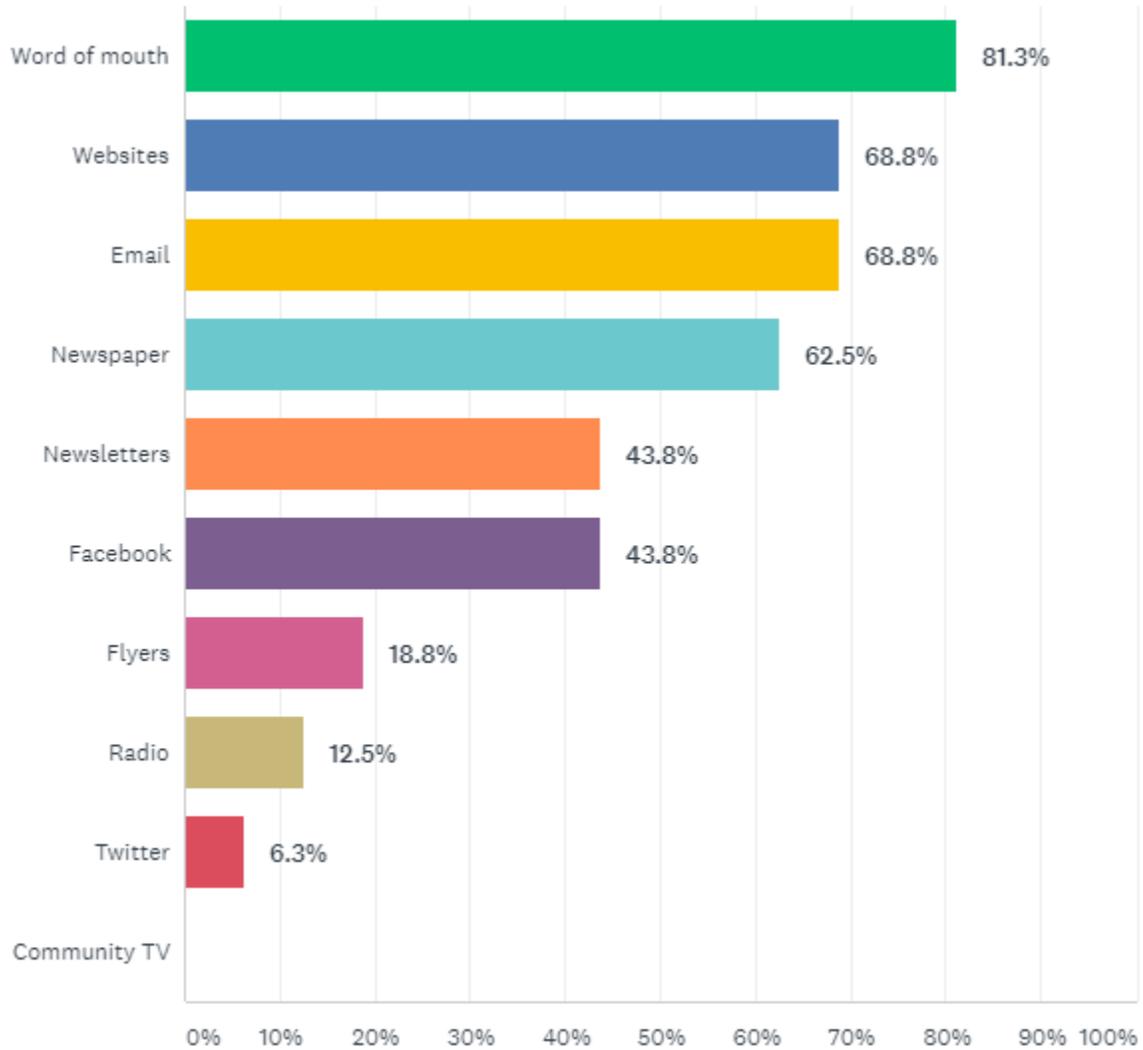
In terms of transportation options, 0% responded "good"; 76.4% responded "poor" or "very poor", mirroring trends seen in nearly all SNHPC communities. Outside of the town's center, there are virtually no sidewalks in Frankestown. While CVTC does offer transportation services to Frankestown residents, many residents who attended the community forum were unaware of CVTC's services.

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



94.1% thought the community offers no appealing alternatives if one wanted to move into their first unit or a smaller home. No respondent thought the community offers any appealing alternatives, and 5.9% were unsure.

How do you find information about community services and events?



Word of Mouth was the most common way residents find information about community services and events. Many respondents also utilize Websites, Email, and Newspapers.



Acknowledgements

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

- | | |
|-------------|--------------------------------|
| Jamie Pike | Francestown Historical Society |
| Carol Broke | |

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

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