



Age-Friendly Community Assessment: City of Manchester



Photo: Derek Shooster, 2017

August 2017



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

Attendance was robust in most towns, but 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



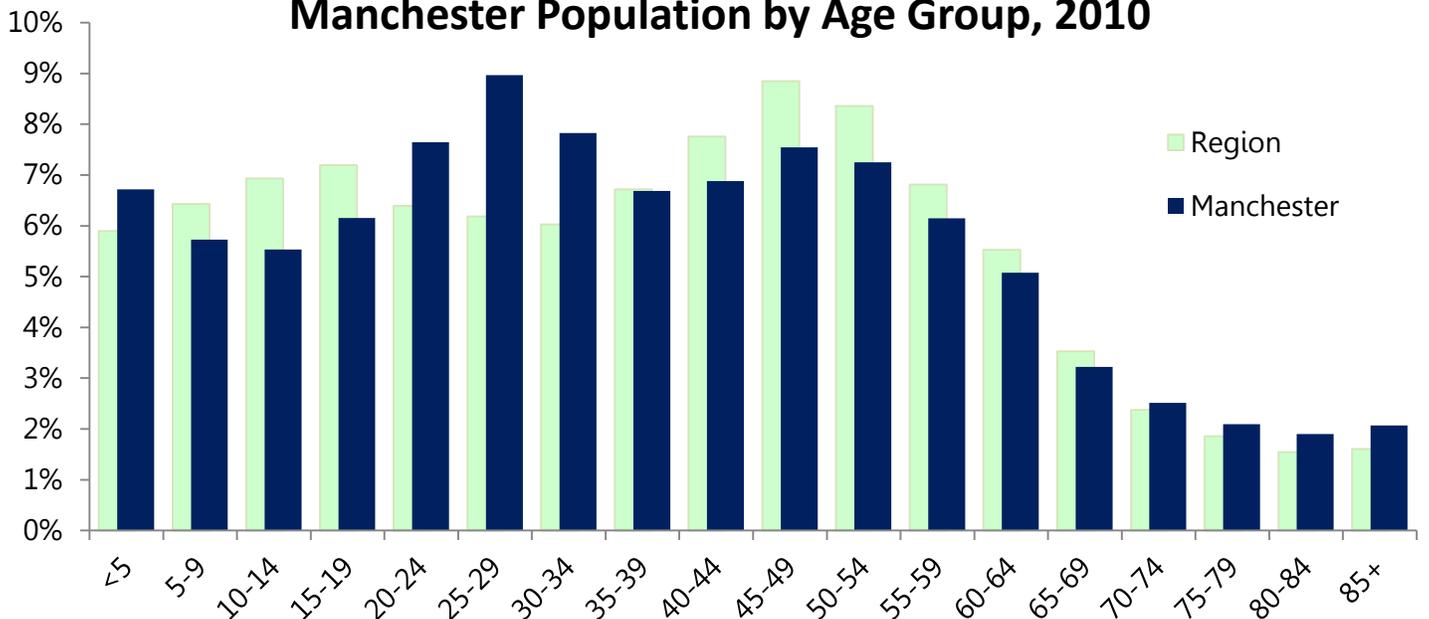
Community Snapshot

Manchester is located in Hillsborough County and is abutted by the Towns of Auburn, Hooksett, Bow, Goffstown, Bedford, Merrimack, Litchfield, and Londonderry. With more than 110,000 residents, Manchester is not only the largest municipality in the SNHPC region, but also the biggest city in New Hampshire. Hosting the region’s largest airport, employers, and college student population, Manchester is objectively the central hub of activity in Southern New Hampshire. Otherwise referred to as the “Queen City”, Manchester is also known for its rich diversity and culture as well as being a critical economic center for the state and region.

The City of Manchester has more than 3,137 persons per square mile, resulting in the highest population density in New Hampshire. The City is comprised of 33.1 square miles of land area with an inland water area of 1.9 square miles.

Relative to other SNHPC communities, Manchester is not only ethnically diverse, but also diverse in age. The City has the highest percentage of millennial residents, ages 20-34 making up 24.4% of the population. Senior populations over 70 years of age make up only 8.6% of the population, yet this age cohort represents a higher percentage than the regional average.

Manchester Population by Age Group, 2010



Manchester not only has a higher share of millennials (age 20-34) than the region average, it also has a higher share of seniors aged 70 or better. Based on the data, it would seem families are more inclined to reside in towns outside of Manchester. Implementing age-friendly features stand to benefit New Hampshire’s largest city as it looks to attract and retain residents of all ages.

Community Assessment: March 24, 2017

40 in attendance, including town residents and representatives from Fire Dept., Police Dept., Zoning Board, Lions Club, Maintenance Dept., Planning Board, Building Dept., Conservation Commission, and Library Board of Trustees.



What is the community doing well?

- Manchester's transit services—including MTA—are the most comprehensive and serve the most commuters in the region.
- Local colleges and universities populate Manchester with thousands of young people that support numerous industries.
- The library system and cultural facilities are numerous and widely used.
- Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) excels at engaging seniors.
- MPD's Community Police division is incredibly active, leading senior walks, Citizens Police Academy, and community tree-lighting at Christmas.
- There is growing trail network connectivity and a new bicycle master plan.



Where is there room for improvement?

- An audit of Manchester's one-way streets and implementation of traffic-calming measures could drastically improve the City's walkability.
- There is demand for more venues catered to young people. Exploring partnerships such as daycare facilities and adult day care are excellent ways to integrate generations.
- Continued expansion of transit services, including outreach to immigrants and low-income residents, would be beneficial.
- Physically and socially bridging Eastside and Westside residents and services would strengthen the city.
- Some neighborhoods feel "forgotten;" the city might explore inequalities.
- Community events could serve to better link neighborhoods together.



Transportation & Connections

Highlights:

- A lot of new residents/immigrants do not have cars and do not have means to get to the places they're trying to go. Financially they cannot afford taxis to take them to the places they want to go. Explained eloquently by one immigrant new to this country and without a car, "Where you are in Manchester is your America."
- I love the Merrimack River, but I always think it's the largest transportation barrier in the city. We have a limited number of crossings, and not every one of those crossings can be done safely by bicycle or walking. And in winter, they became completely unusable. Wheelchair users are forced to use roadways.
- City has limited sidewalks—and no sidewalk program—because of lack of funding.

Assets (in no particular order):

- MTA/Green Dash
- Manchester-Boston Regional Airport (MHT) – this is the only airport in the SNHPC region, and the largest airport in NH by passenger volume.
- Interstates
- "I think the core of Manchester is very walkable and the important services are very accessible."
- "I think the trolley tours add to the quaintness of Manchester. People love the mounted police on horses downtown. Not only does it give a feeling of safety, but it gives a positive vibe. It adds vibrancy to the downtown and encourage building connections."
- Bike Manchester and the new BikeShare Program (NOTE: kicked off in June 2017, just after the April community listening session)
- The trail system is awesome, and much used by walkers and cyclists, but could be better connected.



Photo: Manchester Transit Authority

Barriers (in no particular order):

- Several participants believe rail service would be a “game changer” for Manchester.
- Disconnected/broken sidewalk network; in my residential neighborhood sidewalks suddenly disappear and reappear, causing folks to walk in the street for part of the time. I'd say ¼ or so just walk in the street the whole time due to the frustration of the incomplete sidewalk network; in winter the 25% becomes nearly 100%, which is unappealing and unsafe.
- Lack of Millyard parking is a huge barrier, especially
- Winter and overall maintenance for sidewalks are a concern.
- Lack of benches on Elm Street; difficult access for elderly/disabled
- What good is Uber/Lyft if you can't afford a smartphone?
- Connect bike lanes on streets with existing and growing rail trail network.

Opportunities (in no particular order):

- How do you get to schools if the buses don't go where you need them to? If the city would consider extending the bus service beyond its current operational hours, it would be helpful to younger folks... especially the ones taking evening classes. [NOTE: in September 2017, MTA is extending hours on three of its routes on a trial basis]
- One of the problems we've had is that a lot of residents rely on corner stores for their meals and don't have affordable healthy options for residents. We've done outreach to corner stores to improve healthy options, but a lot of the owners flip frequently, so it changes the entire ramp of improvement that's gone there. It's been a big dilemma. People can walk to the corner stores, but more needs to be done for improving access to healthy options and choices, including in the core neighborhoods.
- Further outreach to new immigrants, including introducing them to city services.

Basic Data:



Mi. of town roads

400+



WalkScore

48 of 100*



Transit available:

MTA



Nearest Highways

*city average; downtown average is 92 of 100—best in region.

Access to Internet:

Broadband Coverage:

- Public Wi-Fi/Internet: good internet connectivity; library & downtown have public wi-fi.

Highlights

- Manchester allows for a wide variety of housing, varying in type and density
- Many residential areas are within close proximity to amenities
- The City has recently built smaller rental units to attract younger populations

Assets(in no particular order):

- Manchester's medium and high density residential districts create more housing options for residents, as well as enable a more walkable environment compared to low density housing
- Many zoning ordinances in the city allow duplexes. Conversions and Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) will likely start coming online as well.
- There are multiple 55+ housing facilities in Manchester
- The City has set a goal to build 2,000 units downtown within a five-year period. More than 500 rental units, including lofts and micro apartments, have been added in and around the mill district in the last few years
- The city's lead abatement program geared for older homes is an excellent step at making Manchester homes more attractive to families with young children.



“With all of the apartments coming up, it’s bringing a new group of people into the city, but for a person looking to raise a family in the city it’s difficult to find a place for raising a family.”

-Manchester Resident



Photo: Derek Shooster

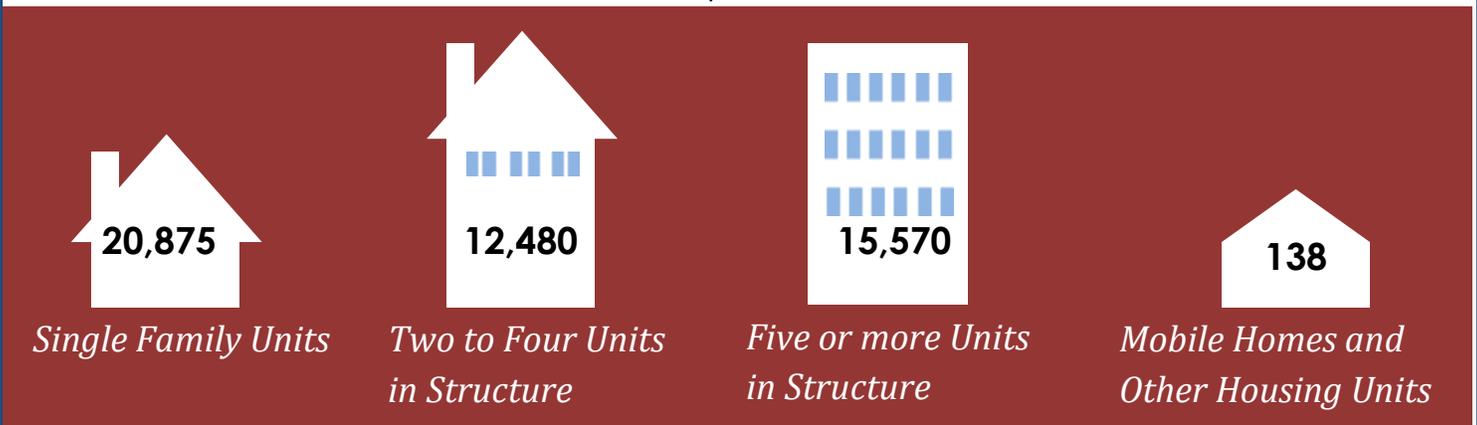


Barriers/Opportunities(in no particular order):

- Over 30% Manchester homes were built prior to 1940. A representative from the City's Health Department stated during the public focus group that there are many health risks associated with older housing stock, including an increased risk of asthma
- There are more opportunities to renovate older buildings into small, affordable units
- While there are senior housing facilities in the city, many feel that the facilities are isolated from the rest of the community



“If you see what’s left after market takes over without subsidizing housing costs in some way, people that earn below 80% AMI [area median income] struggle to find housing that costs less than 30% of their income. And the City does not subsidize to help people find those homes. – City Staff





Recreation & Engagement

Highlights:

- Manchester is a regional resource that features many venues—sports, arts, colleges, and shopping—that are relied upon by residents from beyond the city boundaries.
- Manchester Health Department does a lot of intergenerational work with schools, such as assisting high school equivalency (GED) training.
- Social media communication via Facebook, Twitter, and Nixle are widely used among PTO's, PTA's, community advisory committees, and neighborhood watch groups.
- “There’s a lot going on in Manchester, so the good problem to have is that it’s a challenge advertising *everything* to residents here. It’s been something the Health Department has been working on with **MyManchester**.”
- Organizations like INTOWN Manchester organize the following popular annual events:
 - Adopt-A-Block
 - The TD Bank Summer Fest
 - Taste of Downtown Manchester
 - Downtown Holiday Market
 - Manchester Zombie Walk
 - Manchester Christmas Parade
 - Morty the Elf
 - Seamus the Leprechaun



Assets (in no particular order):

- YMCA: Manchester's is the largest of the 5 branches in region; it is used by thousands of people every week and offers dozens of intergenerational opportunities to members of all ages. Power Scholars and "Taking Time for Teens" programs (among others) are very successful and involve seniors engaging with teenagers.
- Public TV/WMUR
- Colleges, Universities, and Institutes feature many clubs and organizations, some of which do not require student status. Manchester Community College has a gaming club where community members pair up with students to play various types of games.
- New Hampshire Sports & Social Club (NHSSC)
- William Cashin Senior Center on the Westside offers numerous programs for seniors.
- Cultural diversity is abundant due to many foreign-born and immigrant residents
- Robust library network citywide, including on the East and West sides
- Currier Museum
- Millyard Museum
- Palace Theater
- Multiple religious facilities, including one of the only cathedrals in the state.
- Manchester Police Department's Community Division leads seniors walks and other programs, such as the Manchester Police Athletic League.

Barriers/Opportunities (in no particular order):

- Many newcomers to Manchester live in isolation and feel they don't have a place to socialize; they feel that their neighborhoods are not safe, so they're less inclined to venture outside their homes.
- Many households still do not have a computer; this needs to be considered when marketing community events.
- Opioid crisis and culture of drug abuse present challenges in some Manchester neighborhoods.
- Lack of funding for certain community services is seen as a major barrier.
- Improve communication of events.
- Capitalizing on existing education infrastructure and resources can include greater intergenerational opportunities.
- Tackle the divide—both physically and psychologically—between east and west sides of Manchester.
- Despite having a Bike Master Plan, Manchester still misses opportunities to include bike lanes on streets that have been resurfaced.
- Improve connections to regional trail networks—the city's Bike Master Plan achieves many goals connecting destinations in town, and greater regional connectivity could have additional positive impact.

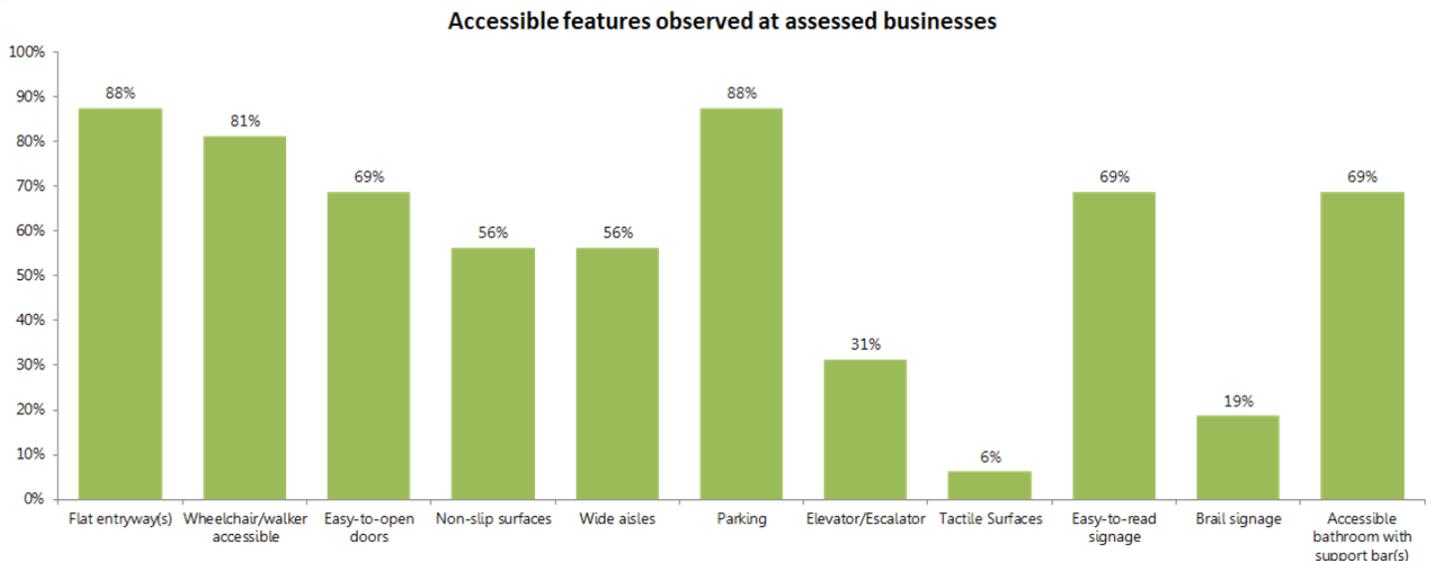


Business & Economic Development

Because Manchester is the largest employment center in the region, a pilot business study was performed to assess local businesses for characteristics that are age-friendly to seniors and millennials. A survey was designed with a goal to establish a baseline of existing conditions among different businesses in the community, and how businesses address senior and millennial interests.

SNHPC worked with Intown Manchester to identify businesses in Downtown Manchester as a pilot area for collecting data. SNHPC then partnered with SNHU professor Christina Clamp and her research methods students to perform the assessments. More than 20 businesses were studied. The industries represented included retail/food service, non-profit, finance, education, recreation, entertainment, and health/wellness services. The following data represents findings from those assessments.

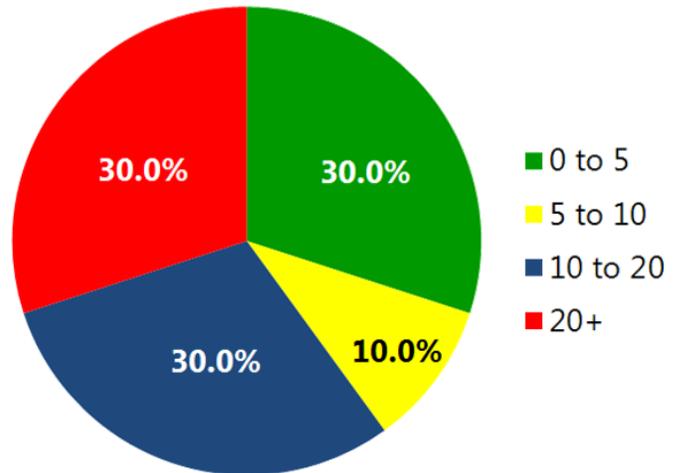
- Downtown Manchester has a variety of new and established businesses.
- Half of businesses assessed are a member of local Chamber of Commerce or other professional organization(s).
- Flat entryways and wheelchair/walker accessibility abound Downtown—this was a surprise given the age of many buildings (pre-ADA).
- About 70% of businesses offer complimentary Wi-Fi, and 25% have bicycle storage.
- 50% feature benches or places to sit.
- Only 15% feature infant changing tables, and 10% offer booster seats.
- Managers of businesses were asked to rank on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being least important, 5 being most important).



Assets (in no particular order):

- Manchester-Boston Regional Airport (MHT) – this is the only airport in the SNHPC region, and the largest airport in NH by passenger volume.
- Local hospitals – Elliott Hospital and Catholic Medical Center are not only major employers, but also provide essential, life-saving medical services for the entire region.
- Local dining establishments—institutions according to several residents—include The Puritan, Chez Vachon, Red Arrow Diner, and Cremeland.
- SCORE: seniors donate their time to help others through their knowledge of previous life skills, such as writing a business plan, securing financing, or other programs.
- Boys and Girls Club: does a lot of work between children and people of all ages, including a summer camp and independent adult classes.
- Downtown Market Basket is a tremendous asset... was a huge positive change for the better... it's incredibly walkable and carries a lot of the foods that people like.
- Local colleges provide local and regional businesses with educated graduates that possess necessary skills to fill vacancies.

Years Business is Operational



Barriers/Opportunities (in no particular order):

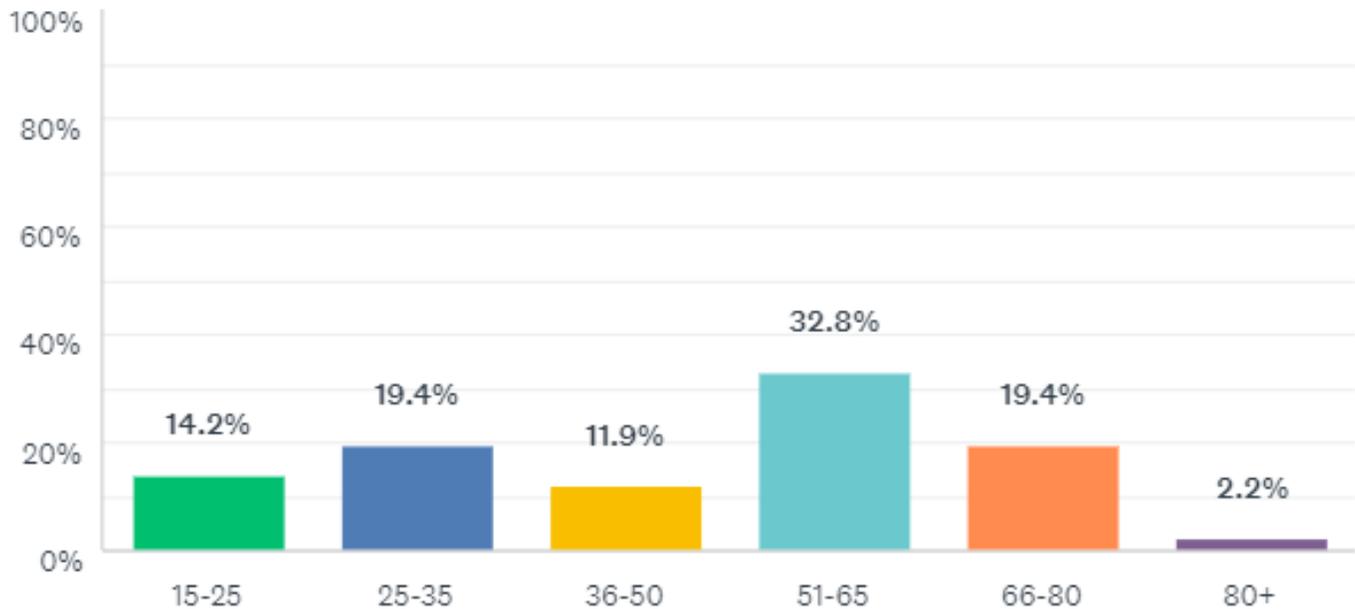
- The City's tax cap limits ability to make infrastructure improvements that are relied upon for economic growth.
- Although South Willow Street features many businesses frequently traveled to, a number of residents raised concerns that making this area more walkable and transit accessible would be desirable, especially among seniors and millennials.
- Businesses should work with local and regional colleges to recruit employees with desired technical skills.
- Businesses should be more aware of being more culturally sensitive, recognizing language barriers.
- Parking in the Millyard is a challenge for both employees and business patrons.
- Landlords can better market retail space downtown to attract new businesses.



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 137 from Manchester.

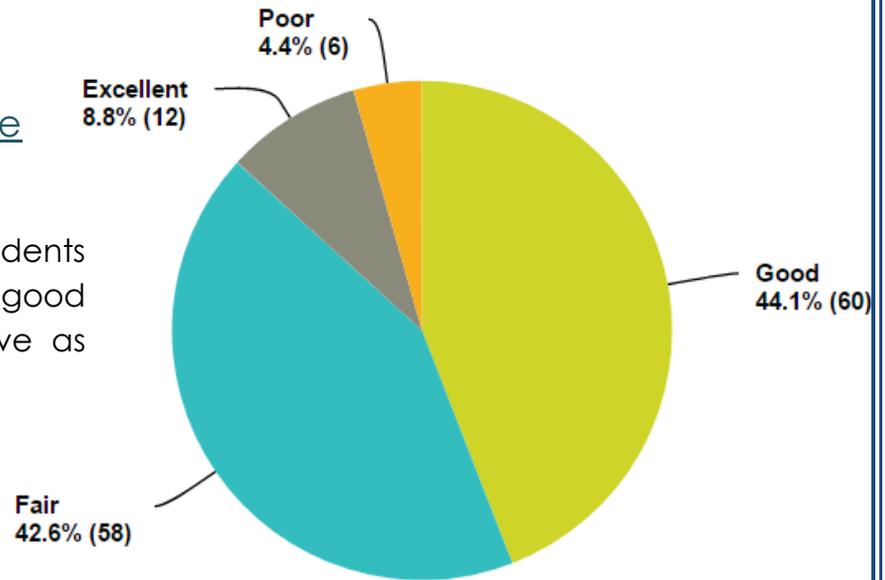
What is your age?



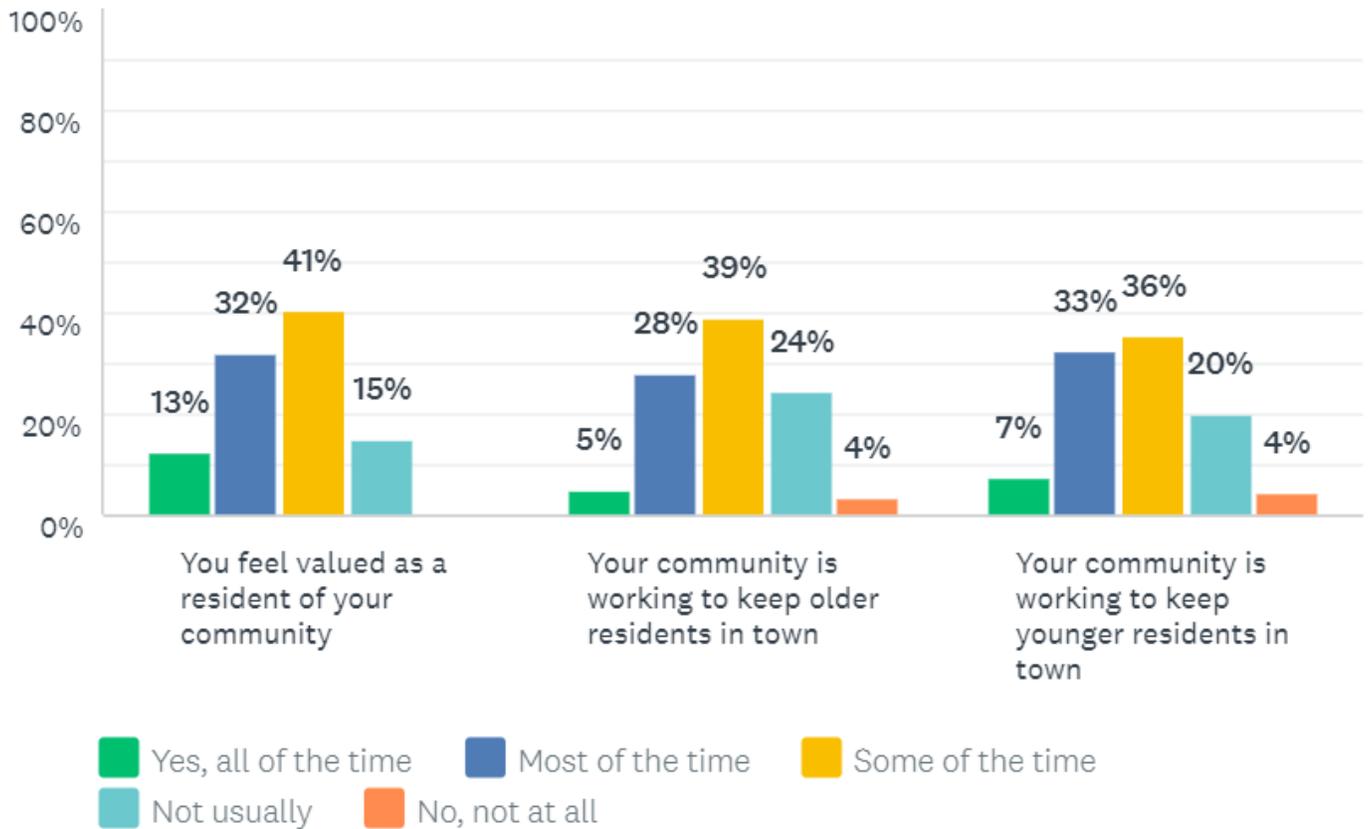
Although response rates among residents age 51-65 were highest, the share of millennial residents (aged 15-25 and 25-35) from Manchester was higher than many other communities. This is consistent with the demographics of Manchester showing a higher share of millennial residents than most other communities in the SNHPC region.

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

More than half of Manchester residents surveyed rated the community as a good or excellent place for people to live as they age.

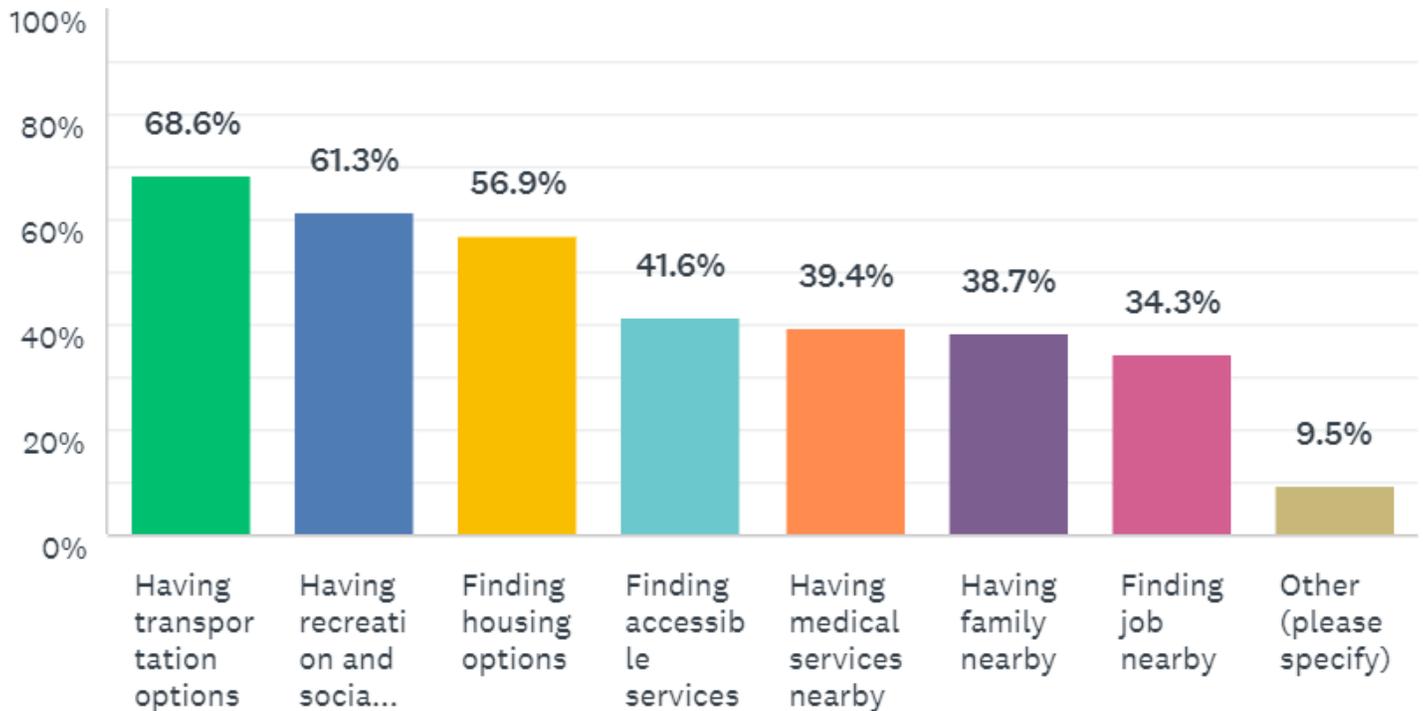


Community Value



Fewer than half of Manchester residents surveyed (45%) feel valued as a resident all or most of the time—far lower than the region average. It also seems most residents think Manchester can do more to keep older and younger residents in town than it currently tries to.

What concerns you the most about aging in your community?



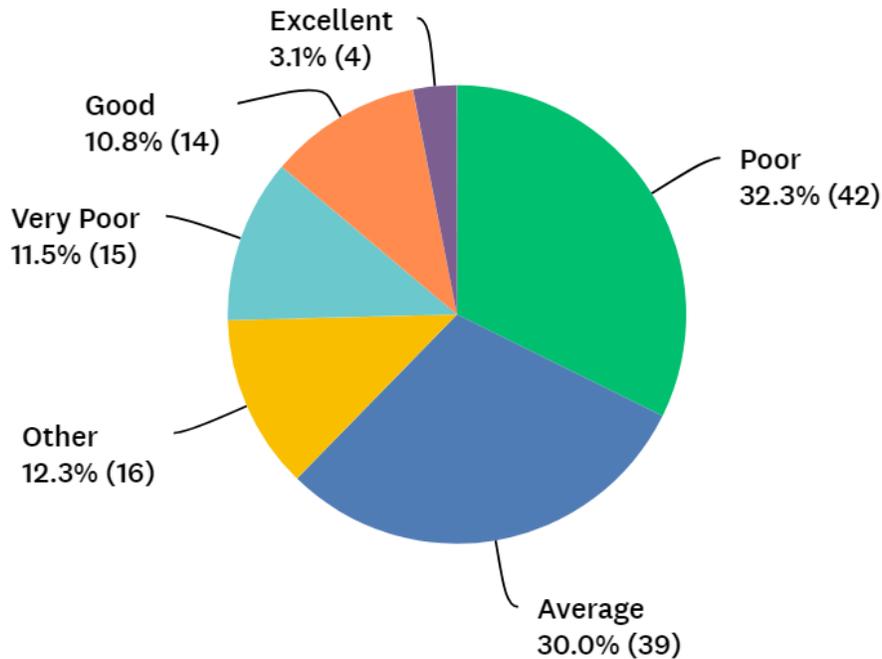
Like most other community, having transportation options was the top concern about aging in Manchester among surveyed residents. They were also very concerned about having recreation and social engagement options as well as housing options when thinking about aging concerns.

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

Reasonable Speech **Safety** Education **Improved** Job
Safe Income **Care** Walking Distance
Transportation Property Taxes
Accessible Better Bus **Affordable**
Recreational Activities **Services** Getting
Community Children **School** Downtown
Sidewalks Making **Crime** **Family**

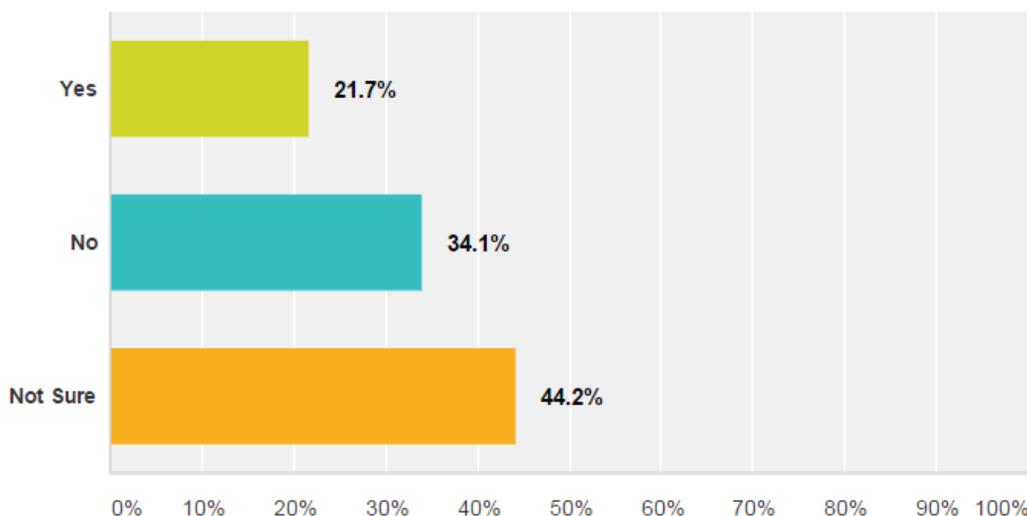
Like many other municipalities, transportation and lower taxes were mentioned most, followed by Housing and sidewalks.

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



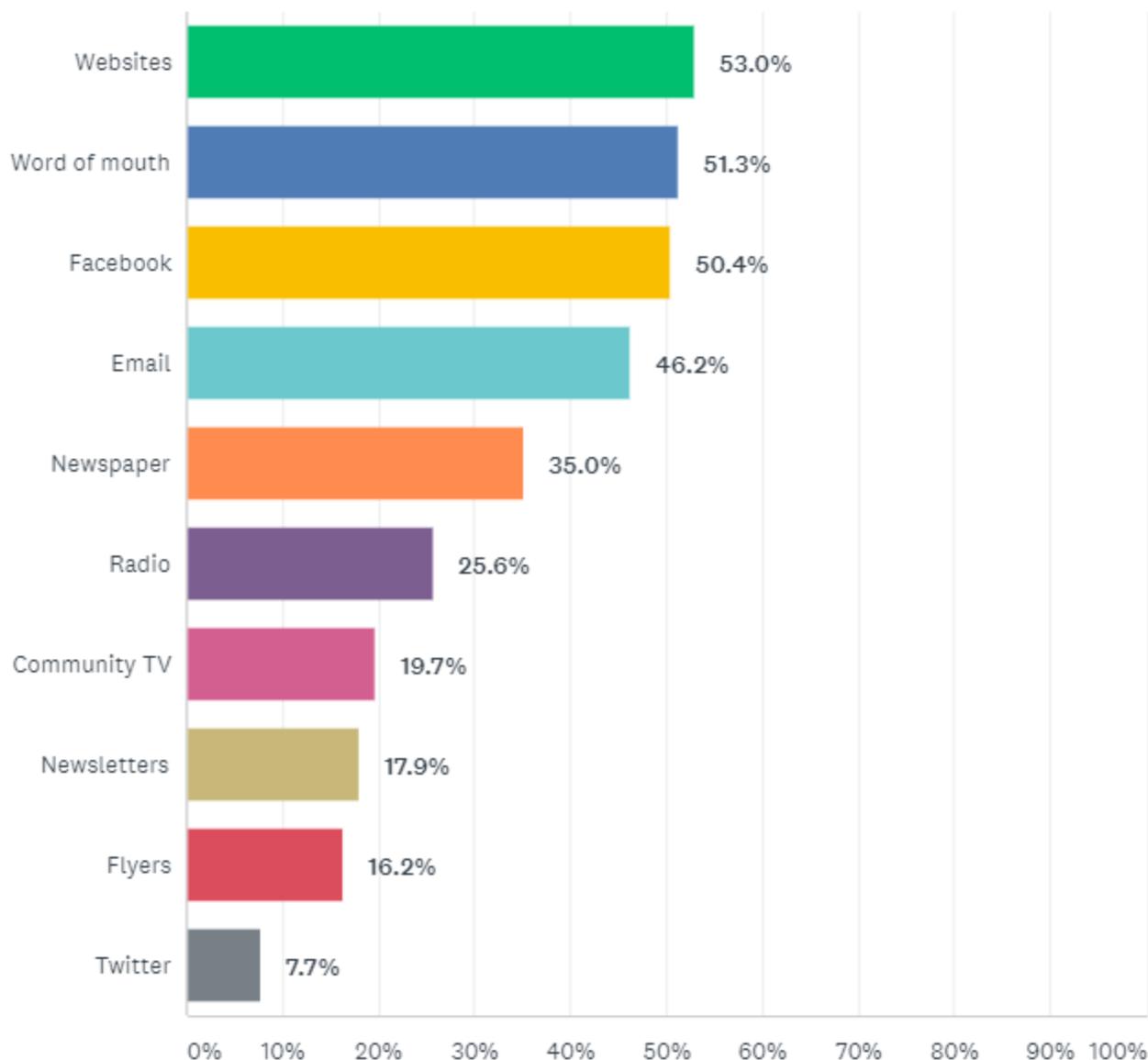
In terms of transportation options, only 10.8% responded “good”; 43.8% responded “poor” or “very poor”; and 30% responded “average”. Manchester is home to more modes of transportation compared to other towns in the region. Most residents have some access to public transportation.

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



Despite having the most housing diversity in the region, one out of three Manchester residents feel the city lacks appealing housing alternatives, and nearly half aren't quite sure.

How do you find information about community services and events?



Websites and Word of Mouth proved to be the #1 and #2 methods of finding information about community services/events, respectively. This was followed very closely by Facebook and Email.



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/JSA, Inc. | NH Builders Association |
| Alliance for Healthy Aging | NH Center for Public Policy Studies |
| 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 |
| Manchester-Boston Regional Airport | Service Link |
| Manchester Chamber of Commerce | Southern New Hampshire University |
| Manchester Community College | Stay. Work. Play. |
| Manchester Public TV | Transport NH |
| Manchester Regional Area Committee on Aging | Union Leader |
| Manchester Transit Authority | UNH Institute on Disability |
| Manchester Young Professionals Network | UNH Manchester |

The City of Manchester featured dozens of participants between the community assessment and the resident survey. The program's Community Representatives from Manchester included:

- | | |
|--------------|----------------|
| Bill Klubben | Anna Thomas |
| Pam Goucher | Melanie Sanuth |
| Dee Santoso | Chris Sullivan |
| Ray Clement | Bruce Thomas |

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

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