



# Age-Friendly Community Assessment: Town of Hooksett



Photo: Town of Hooksett

## 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

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



# Community Snapshot

Hooksett, NH is located in Merrimack County, abutting the City of Manchester and the towns of Auburn, Candia, Allentown, Bow, Dunbarton, and Goffstown. Hooksett is a suburban community well-connected to the Interstate 93 corridor that has experienced several years of commercial and industrial growth.

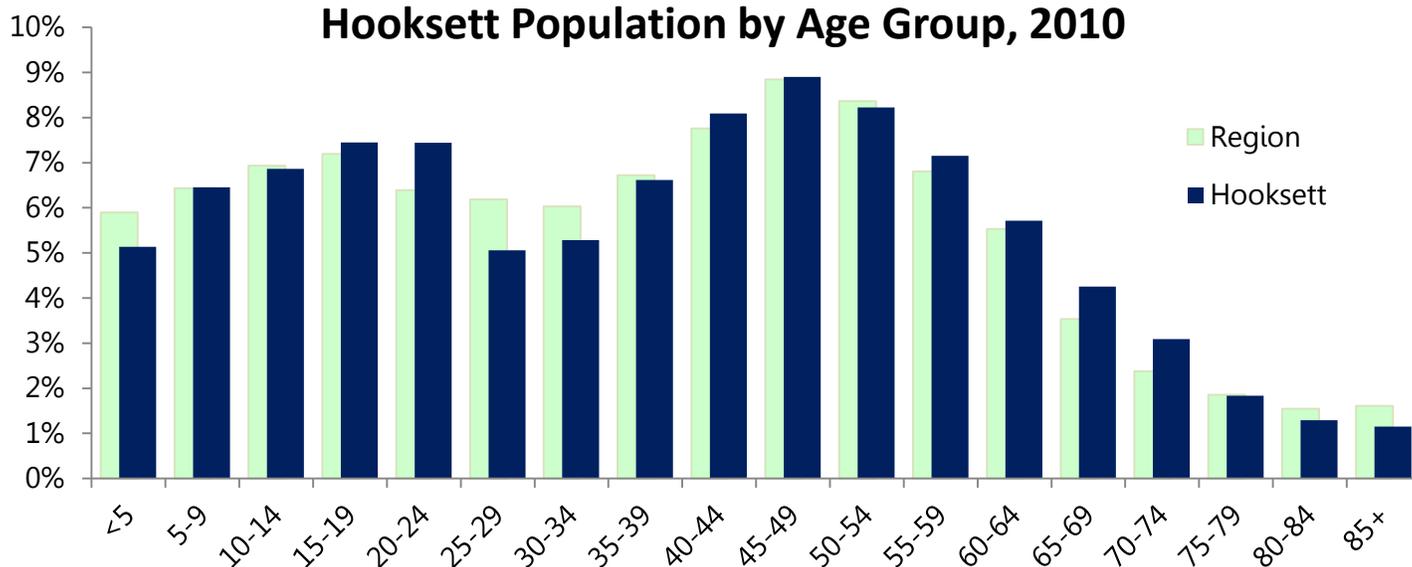


Photo: SNHPC Staff

Hooksett was incorporated in 1822. At 37.5 square miles and a population of 13,669, Hooksett still has much

developable land available and has experienced prolonged population growth since the 1970's. The town is home to such regional draws as Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) and Robie's Country Store, a National Historic Landmark.

### Hooksett Population by Age Group, 2010



Hooksett's population by age group is almost exactly the same as the regional average. It features slightly more 20 to 24-year-olds, likely attributed to SNHU; however, there is a slight dip in all other millennial residents, suggesting that some have moved elsewhere in the region.

## Community Assessment: March 27, 2017

20+ in attendance, including reps from conservation commission, town council, DPW, Economic Dev. Committee, code enforcement, Planning Board, church, Library, Fire Dept., Town Planning, and multiple residents



### What is the community doing well?

- Hooksett has space to develop, and **allows for multiple housing types**.
- There's a **warrant article to improve roads and sidewalks** in town.
- Hooksett features **5 mixed-use zones**.
- **Strong business presence** provides employment opportunities and contributes to the tax base.
- There are **numerous organizations, clubs, and groups** for people of all ages to get involved and meet—especially at library and sports fields.
- Housing diversity makes it **more affordable than surrounding communities**.



### Where is there room for improvement?

- **Cost of living** is a challenge; a lot of homes are very expensive.
- **Desire for more choices "after hours"**; Residents go to Manchester or Concord for night life.
- **Communicating events/programs** to residents, especially those without children in the schools.
- **Sense of civic pride** – a number of residents expressed desire for their children to have the same pride in Hooksett that they did in the town(s) they grew up in.



# Transportation & Connections

## Highlights:

- Limited transit availability
- Community walkability: rated 2 out of 10 by participants (1 being the worst or lowest score, 10 the best or highest score)
- Hooksett has several funded road and sidewalk improvement programs

## Assets (in no particular order):

- Uber/Lyft
- 3 exits to the highway (including one without the toll)
- NH 101 connectivity
- Less than one hour to the ocean, big city (Boston), and the mountains
- Only 15 miles from Manchester-Boston Regional Airport
- Access to the hospitals north and south is fantastic—emergency healthcare access is superior to that of other NH communities
- Easy proximity to Manchester and Concord

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

- Roads are laid out with limited crossing opportunities over the Merrimack River
- Route 3 & 28 are frequently congested; insufficient transportation infrastructure during peak travel times has hurt businesses
- Streets are not walkable or bikeable

## Basic Data:



*Mi. of town roads*

**88**



*WalkScore*

**19 of 100**



*Transit Availability*

**Limited**



*Nearest Interstate*



## Access to Internet:

### Broadband Coverage:

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

# Housing

## Highlights

- There are no restrictions on housing types in Hooksett, and nearly all housing types are represented except for nursing homes
- A variety of housing types have been built throughout Hooksett recently
- Co-housing: there are no restrictions that people were aware of

## Assets(in no particular order):

- Veteran & Elderly tax exemptions exist
- On-campus housing for SNHU Students is growing
- Master Plan identifies workforce housing
- "Are You Okay?" program for seniors
- 12 neighborhood watch groups

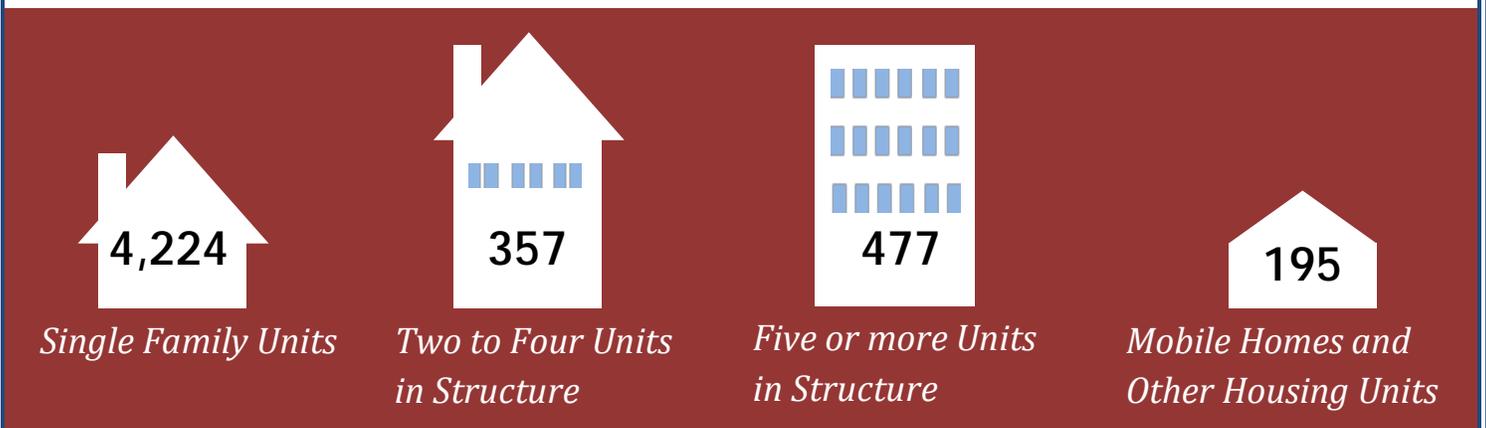


"I want my kids to have a pride in Hooksett like I did in the town I grew up in. I want to see us have more community events and have more annual draws: a winter carnival, concerts, other cultural events... it would be nice to see more things like that bring people together.

**-Dave, Hooksett Resident**

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

- Steep cost of land
- Although workforce housing is an identified goal, there are no incentives to develop it
- Rental inventory is priced very high
- Disabled/universal design considerations have not been incorporated into regulations
- Mixed-Use zoning districts offer promise
- More affordable housing options for first-time homebuyers and seniors looking to downsize.





## Recreation & Engagement

### Highlights:

- There are many open space areas in Hooksett, including 700 acres that abut Bear Brook State Park (pictured) and other natural areas; no established bike/pedestrian trails.
- Hooksett is connected to the state's snowmobile trail system (trail 15).
- Hooksett Library has become an 'unofficial community center', serving seniors and young people with its large community spaces—more than 120 meetings per month.
- Large number & variety of meeting venues exist across the town, including a gym at the town office.

### Assets (in no particular order):

- Trail systems (hiking)—both organized and private (700 acres that abut Bear Brook State Park)
- Athletic fields—Hooksett has and is very proud of its great selection
- Merrimack River—there is a boat launch among other amenities
- Hooksett Youth Athletic Association
- Churches/Places of Worship
- Library – has become an unofficial Community Center/Senior Center
- Robie's & Roots Catering – these are central and beloved by town residents
- Tap House – has many social engagement opportunities
- Two movie theaters in town

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

- Lack of partnerships between local organizations—especially SNHU
- Create/improve upon a bicycle/pedestrian trail network; a pedestrian bridge/crossing over the Merrimack could have a local and regional impact
- Standalone community center or larger meeting/event facility
- Lack of a centralized information source for town happenings/events





## Business & Economic Development

### Highlights:

- Hooksett is zoned for more than 25% commercial/industrial (higher than Manchester, possibly highest in the region)
- Many town businesses donate time or their services to town residents; Home Depot and Bass Pro Shop feature a lot of family programs

### Assets:

- Robie's Country Store
- GE Aviation – good jobs and great for the tax base
- Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU)
- Market Basket and other big box stores near Exit 10 off I-93
- Polaris, Insignia, United Healthcare
- Tap House

### Barriers/Opportunities:

- Lack of water and sewer has been an obstacle—Hooksett lost F.W. Webb to Londonderry as a consequence
- More opportunities on exits off I-93
- Transportation improvements would be a boon to business

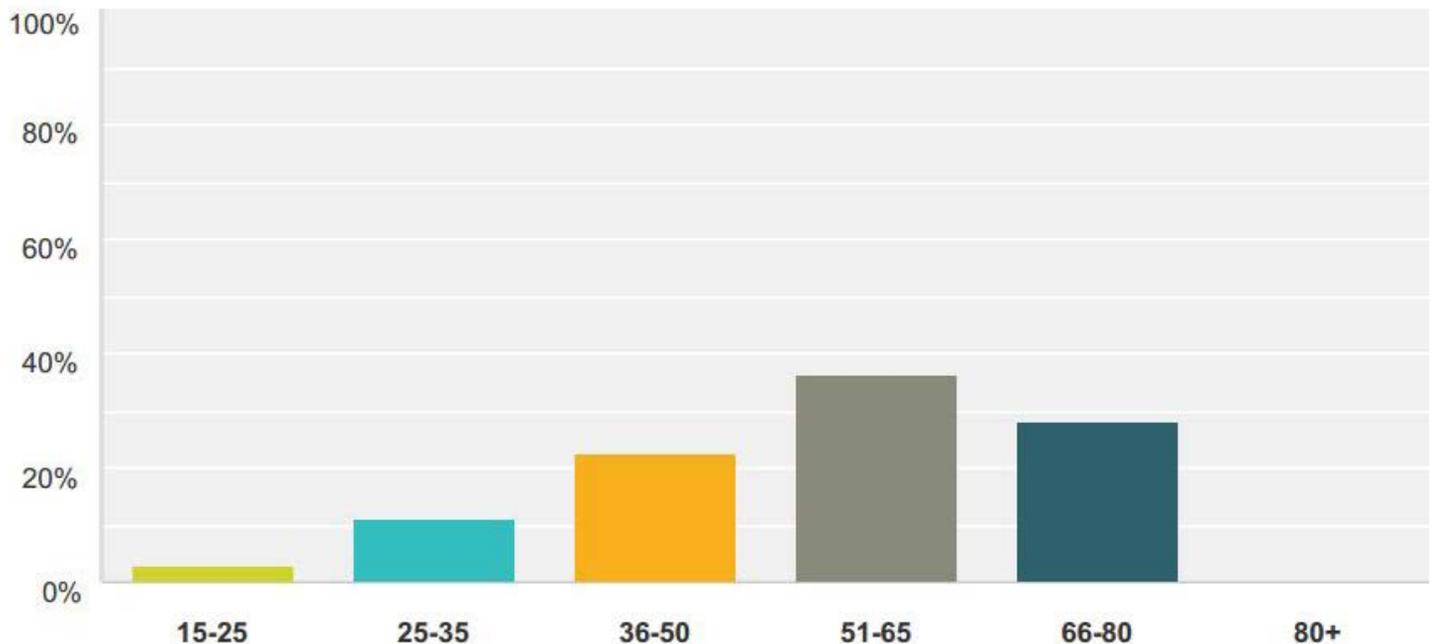




## Survey Says...

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 36 from Hooksett.

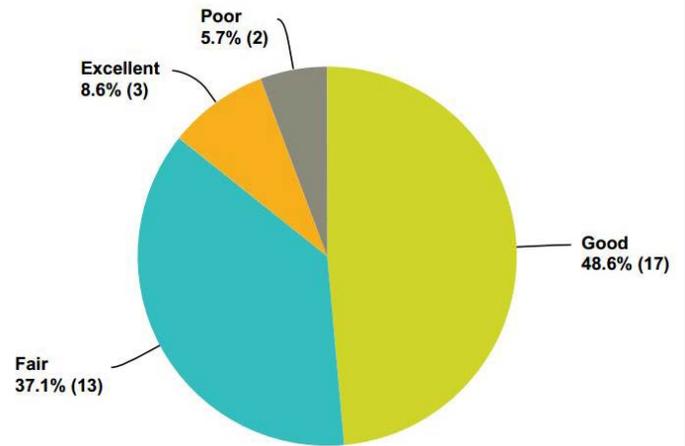
### What is your age?



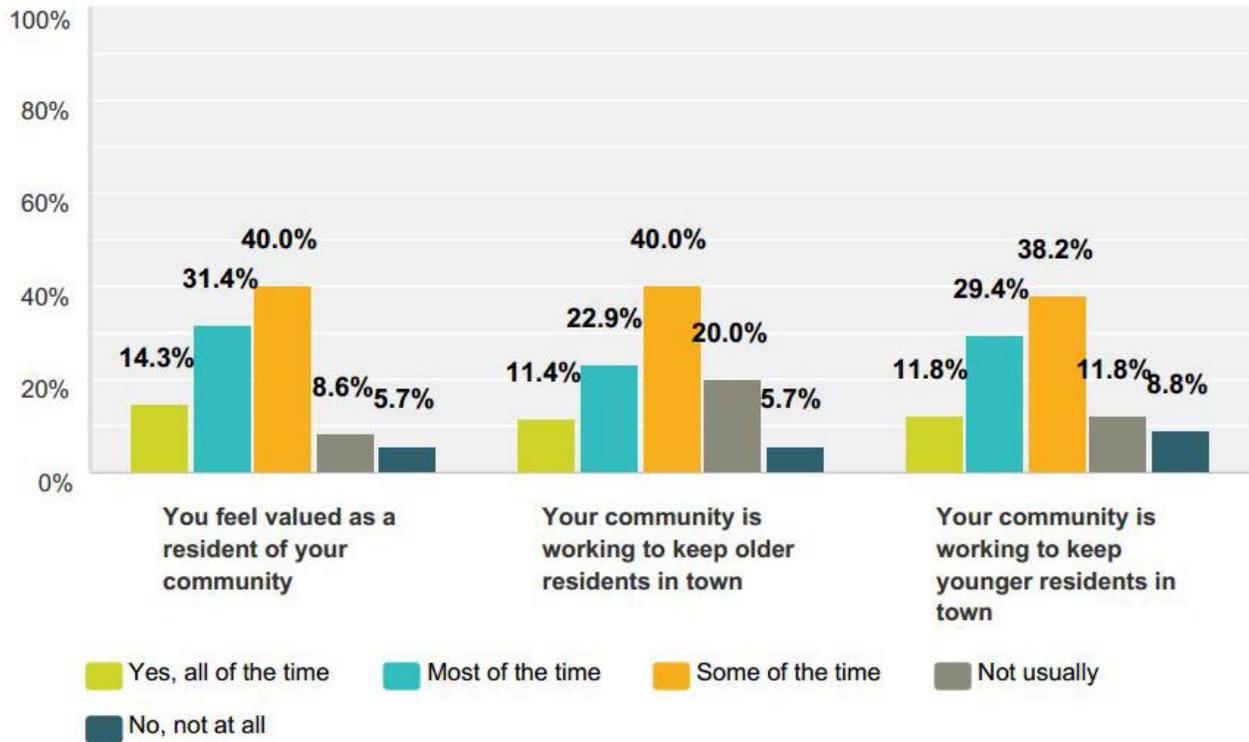
There was a fairly diverse range of respondent ages, but the majority came from the 51-65 age bracket, roughly mirroring the town’s demographics. Unfortunately, there were no residents aged 80+ that participated in the survey.

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

A little more than half (57.2%) of residents surveyed agree Hooksett is a good or excellent place to live as residents age. This was slightly above average relative to other communities in the region.

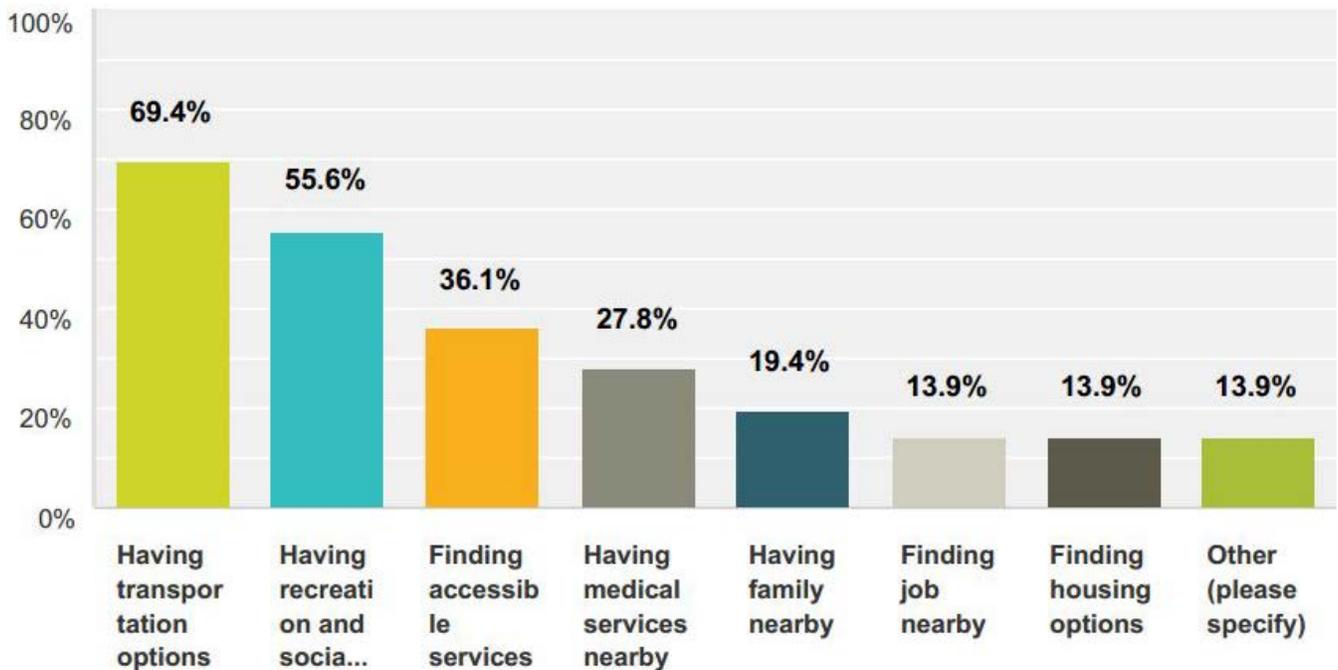


## Community Value



Fewer than half of Hooksett residents (45.7%) feel valued as a resident all or most of the time. Even fewer respondents feel the town is working all or most of the time to keep older residents and younger residents in town (34.3% and 41.2%, respectively).

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



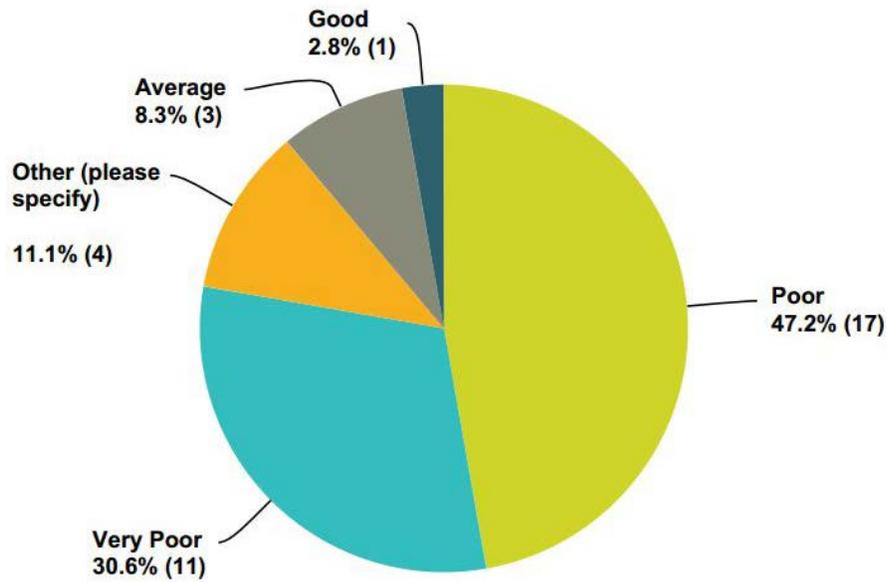
While transportation was the top concern for all SNHPC communities, Hooksett was unique in that recreation opportunities and finding accessible services rounded out the top concerns among residents. With diverse housing options and multiple employment opportunities, Hooksett respondents' concerns for finding housing options or nearby jobs was a lot lower than other communities in the region.

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

Living Care **Community** Public Transportation  
**Housing** Nearby **Taxes**

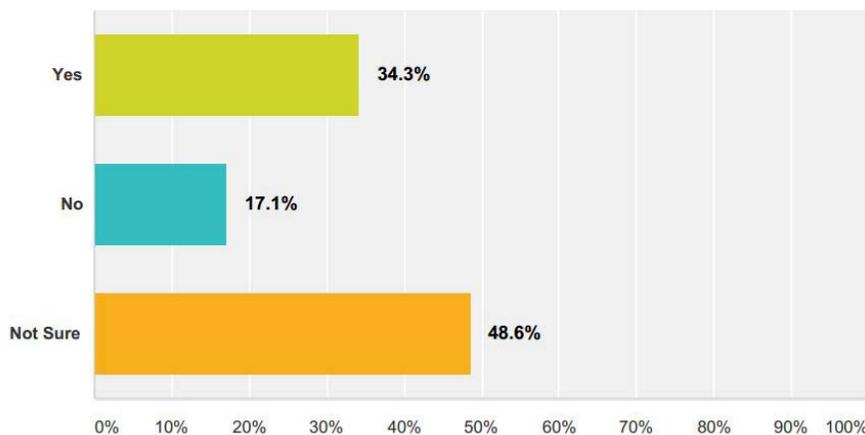
Community, Housing, and Taxes were mentioned more than any other change that would enable Hooksett respondents to stay in their home/community.

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



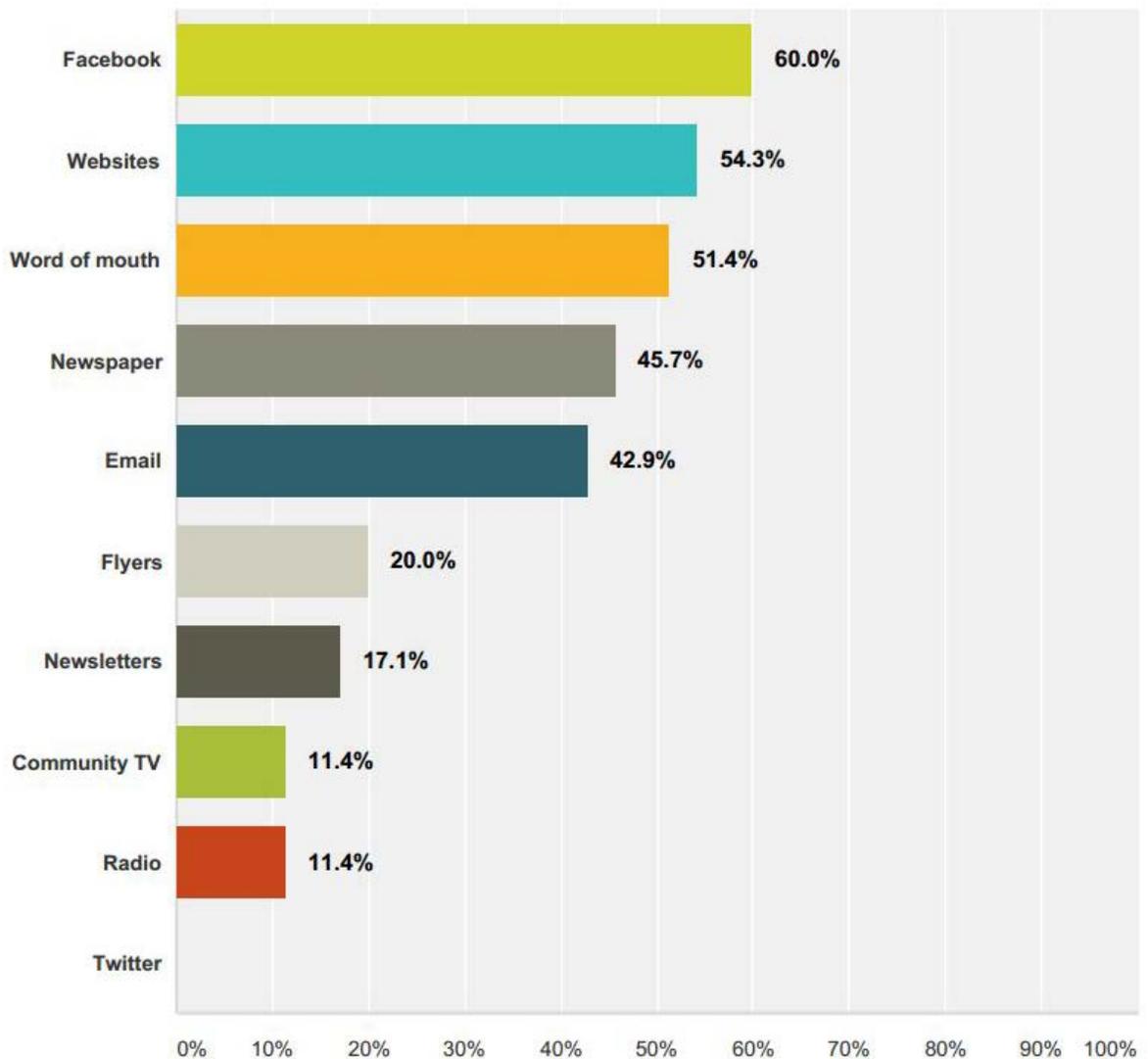
In terms of transportation options, only 2.8% responded "good"; 77.8% responded "poor" or "very poor", which was surprisingly higher than some other SNHPC communities. Without much in the way of fixed route transit, townwide sidewalks, and dedicated bicycle lanes, a lot of residents believe more can be done to improve transportation for those without a car.

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



Only 34.3% of respondents thought the community offers appealing alternatives if one wanted to move into their first home, or to downsize. With nearly half of respondents (48.6%) answering "Not Sure", many Hooksett residents are unfamiliar with local housing options.

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



Facebook and websites proved to be the #1 and #2 methods of finding information about community services/events. However, traditional outlets such as word of mouth and newspapers ranked higher (51.4% and 45.7%, respectively) than email (42.9%).

While deemed important by several focus group attendees, only a small portion of residents surveyed found community TV or radio (11.4%) a top source of town information. One reason for this could be because Hooksett has neither a Community TV station nor a radio station—it relies on Concord and Manchester frequencies for those services.



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

- |             |              |
|-------------|--------------|
| JoAnn Duffy | Dean Shankle |
|-------------|--------------|

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

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