



Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission's Becoming Age-Friendly Phase I – Executive Summary

August 2017



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:

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| 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 |

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

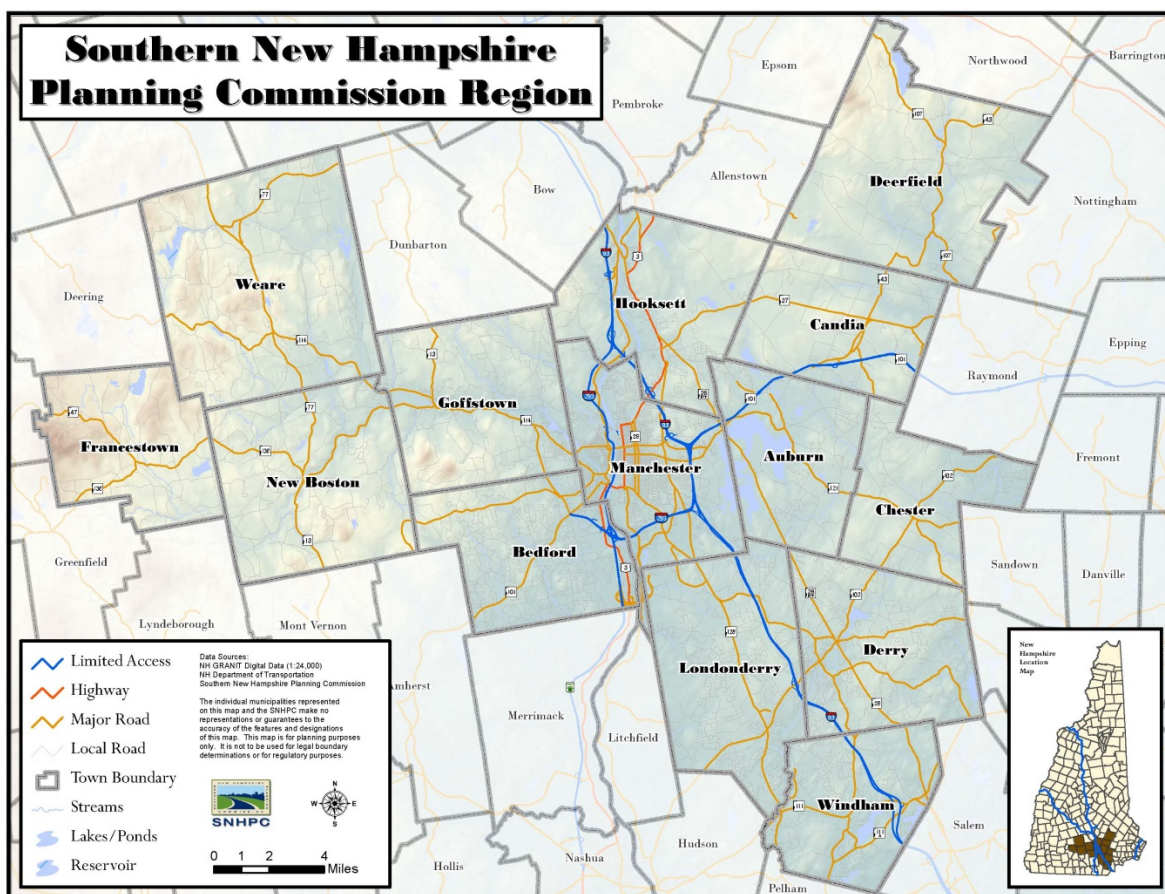
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| Adam Hlasny | Derek Shooster |
| Nate Miller | Amy Kizak |
| David Preece | Linda Moore-O'Brien |

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Executive Summary

In 2016, the Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission (SNHPC) received funding through the Tufts Health Plan Foundation, New Hampshire Department of Transportation, the City of Manchester's Health Department, as well as support from AARP NH to address the different issues facing the people of different ages in the Southern NH Region, to assess the built environment, and to illustrate the barriers and opportunities for making the region 'age-friendly'. The Southern NH Region is made up of more than 260,000 people across a 500+ square-mile area in the following 14 municipalities:

| | | |
|-----------|-------------|------------|
| Auburn | Derry | Manchester |
| Bedford | Francestown | New Boston |
| Candia | Goffstown | Weare |
| Chester | Hooksett | Windham |
| Deerfield | Londonderry | |



For this program, the term "age-friendly" included recognizing needs for people of all ages, but giving special consideration to New Hampshire's growing senior population and the declining millennial population. The baby-boomer generation is arguably the economic backbone of the state, and the younger population has the opportunity to vitalize the local and regional economies in the future.

These seemingly dissimilar populations may have surprisingly similar wants and needs, and the Becoming Age-Friendly program is intended to identify those needs, communicate them to the region, and work with communities to address any barriers and promote their assets.

One of the purposes of the age-friendly assessment was to raise the awareness and examine assets, opportunities, and roadblocks on many aspects of quality of life issues for both seniors and millennials. SNHPC sought to learn how each community was dealing with the growing aging population, as well as learning if they were recognizing the outmigration of millennials; and if they were, to see if anything was being done about it.

Partners and Key Stakeholders

This project was supported by the efforts of many including AARP, Engaging NH, Alliance for Healthy Aging, Manchester Regional Committee on Aging, NH State Council on Aging, UNH, SNHU, InTown Manchester, NHIP, PlanNH, TransportNH, EaserSeals, and many local organizations and businesses within the SNHPC's fourteen communities. Together, these champions helped steer this work, spread the news, encouraged survey participation, and helped inform the process along the way. The Commission's enthusiasm was palpable, but it was the added support from these stakeholders that combined to create the success enjoyed throughout the assessment process.



Process

The project was originally slated to engage communities, other agencies working in the realm of age-friendly work (such as AARP), and to organize a stakeholder committee to advise the Commission through community assessments. As the work began and interest grew, the project scope grew into multiple surveys, the fourteen community conversations, and the Regional Forum. The SNHPC team was delighted with the outpouring of interest. As hoped for, the community conversations included representatives from multiple town departments, the local library, land-use boards, school offices, senior organizations, youth groups, churches, healthcare providers, civic organizations, and recreational organizations among others.

THE PROCESS, **AN OVERVIEW**

Southern NH Planning Commission

The team of Sylvia von Aulock, Cam Prolman, Derek Shooster, and Adam Hlasny were responsible for creating/administering the surveys, producing town reports, and were catalysts in developing the process and engaging stakeholders.

AARP

Todd Fahey and his team provided consistent technical support throughout the process such as providing the foundation for the resident survey. They also generously hosted community conversations and events.

Stakeholder Group

This group met thrice, providing valuable input and feedback to guide the Age-Friendly surveys and process:

- October 2016 – kickoff meeting
- January 2017 – overview of surveys
- May 2017 – review of town assessments

Agency Support and Collaboration:

EngAGING NH, MRACOA, NHSCOA, SNHU, InTown Manchester, AHA, and SNHPC Businesses and Communities all provided support to the project.

THE STRATEGY

Community Listening Sessions

The SNHPC team visited all 14 communities to hear residents' feedback on the four focus areas:

- Transportation/Connections
- Housing and Zoning
- Recreation/Engagement
- Business/Economic Development

Sessions were generally well-attended and valuable feedback received from seniors, millennials, and everyone in between.

Resident Surveys

A six-page survey co-developed by SNHPC and AARP was distributed regionally. After two months, 641 responses were received, illuminating trends across towns and age brackets. Several respondents were thankful their voices were being heard.

THE RESULTS

Community Assessments

The product of nearly a year's work, a 10+ page document was prepared for each SNHPC community, highlighting residents' attitudes toward the four subject areas as well as analyzing the survey data gathered.

The conversations were focused on concerns around four focus areas: Transportation & Connectivity, Housing, Recreation & Engagement, and Businesses & Economic development. Each focus area reflects the fundamental infrastructure of any livable or age-friendly community.

SNHPC recognized that each community conversation was limited by those who attended: if there was a young person in the room, the conversation inevitably was different than if there were only seniors.

Each community conversation was unique; the conversations were supplemented with additional research, such as the resident survey adapted from AARP's resident survey on their Eight Domains of Livability (For more information go to <http://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/>). These surveys proved to provide critical information on how residents of all ages felt about the services provided by their community and the region.

The Commission's outreach effort was a multi-pronged approach that grew almost on a weekly basis. Facebook, Twitter, newsletters, media blasts, phone calls, public TV, dovetailing with existing agency meetings, presentations at workshops and forums, emails, and engaged partners all helped get the word out about the program to ensure that participation in every community and with agency partners was very high.



Sandy Hicks' Public Television Program, Inside Story, Interviewing AARP NH Chapter Director Todd Fahey and Sylvia von Aulock, SNHPC Deputy Executive Director on the Age-Friendly Program

Summary of What Was Shared

Standouts - The Good Stuff: Whether they were unique or more typical, partnership examples filled every community conversation. Partnerships among town departments, public agencies, clubs, businesses, and others filled in gaps of service, sponsored events, provided unique programs, and generally made life more exciting for every community. Often these programs/events were multi-generational and involved a volunteer or business champion.



Another element that was important in all community conversations—yet only a few communities were successful in establishing—were “one-stop-shop” types of outreach for community events and information. The Town of Auburn had the best example of a community newsletter that kept residents informed of public and private happenings.

Town departments like Parks & Recreation and Libraries were responsible for many multigenerational or senior programs. One of the more unique programs came from the Candia library in which their Director created opportunities for potential volunteers to link with organizations or programs that needed volunteers.

Vital to the success of programs was the presence of venues/meeting places that could house the many scheduled (and sometimes impromptu) programs, events, clubs, and gatherings that every community experienced. Many community schools, churches, town offices, libraries, historic societies, and even private businesses were willing to share and coordinate space.

Standouts - The Problems: During several of the community conversations, similar concerns from seniors and millennials were shared about not having choices for crucial living elements, including affordable housing, accessible transportation options, convenient shopping, walkable neighborhoods, and places to meet and socialize. Additional senior concerns were single-level living options, convenient medical services, and lower taxes; younger adults wanted greater job options, rail service to Boston, more nightlife, and music venues.

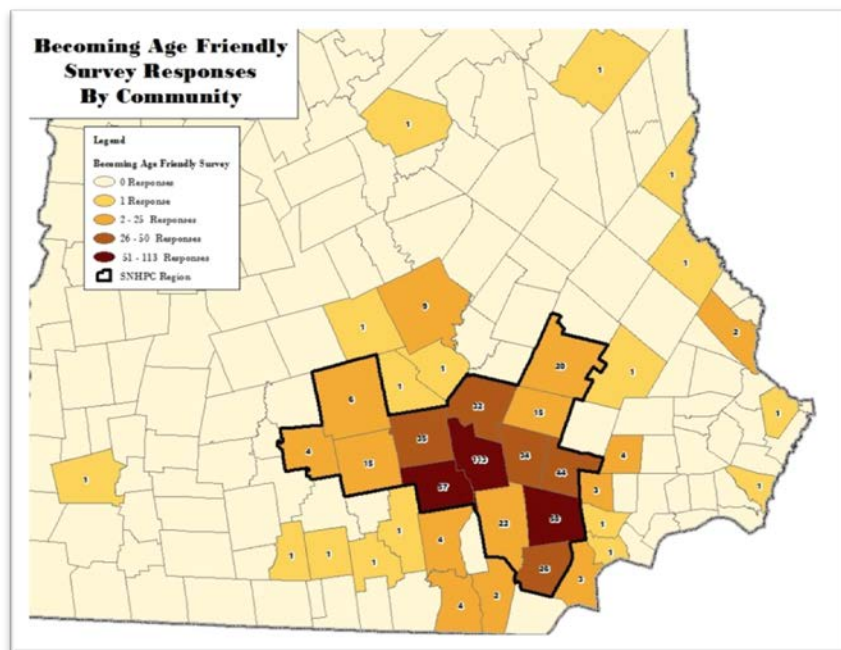
Disheartening was a lack of succession planning for many partnership programs and services—if the key individual left or stopped organizing an event, that particular service went away. One common example was the lack of a “welcome packet” for newcomers to the community. Another frequent comment was, “We used to do that years ago....”, often accompanied by more reminiscing.

Communication varied across the region, from Facebook for public forums to school or local newsletters. However, in most communities there was no organized medium for public communication.

Regional Resident Survey

SNHPC worked with the stakeholder committee to develop a resident survey to supplement the community conversations. The survey was developed by staff with support from AARP NH, and the stakeholder committee weighed in and ultimately shaped the final survey.

In total, 641 residents from the SNHPC region and other NH towns responded to the survey. As mentioned above, community conversations and the regional resident survey focused on the areas of Transportation & Connectivity, Housing, Recreation & Engagement, and Businesses & Economic development. These four focus areas helped organize trends related to the built environment, as well as to highlight the social infrastructure in each community. The following section highlights each focus area from a regional perspective and identifies the major findings from the regional resident survey.



Resident Survey Participants:

- Manchester (136)
- Derry (60)
- Bedford (59)
- Windham (52)
- Chester (47)
- Goffstown (35)
- Auburn (34)
- Hooksett (35)
- Deerfield (27)
- New Boston (26)
- Londonderry (24)
- Candia (16)
- Weare (13)
- Francestown (4), and
- NH communities outside SNHPC region (50)

Atkinson, Amherst, Bow, Concord, Dunbarton, Fremont, Hampton, Hampstead, Hopkinton, Hudson, Keene, Salem, Merrimack, Milford, Milton, Nottingham, Penacook, Portsmouth, Rochester, Salem, Sandown, Sanbornton, Temple, Wilton, and Wolfeboro]. From this response, it was concluded that the interest for age-friendly communities is clearly within and outside the SNHPC region and that people likely commute from all over New Hampshire to this region.

Transportation & Connectivity

The transportation portion of the survey asked residents three specific questions:

- Please tell us how you usually travel around;
- If you find it difficult to get around and/or rarely leave home, please check the reasons why;
- How would you rate your community's transportation options if you were unable to drive?

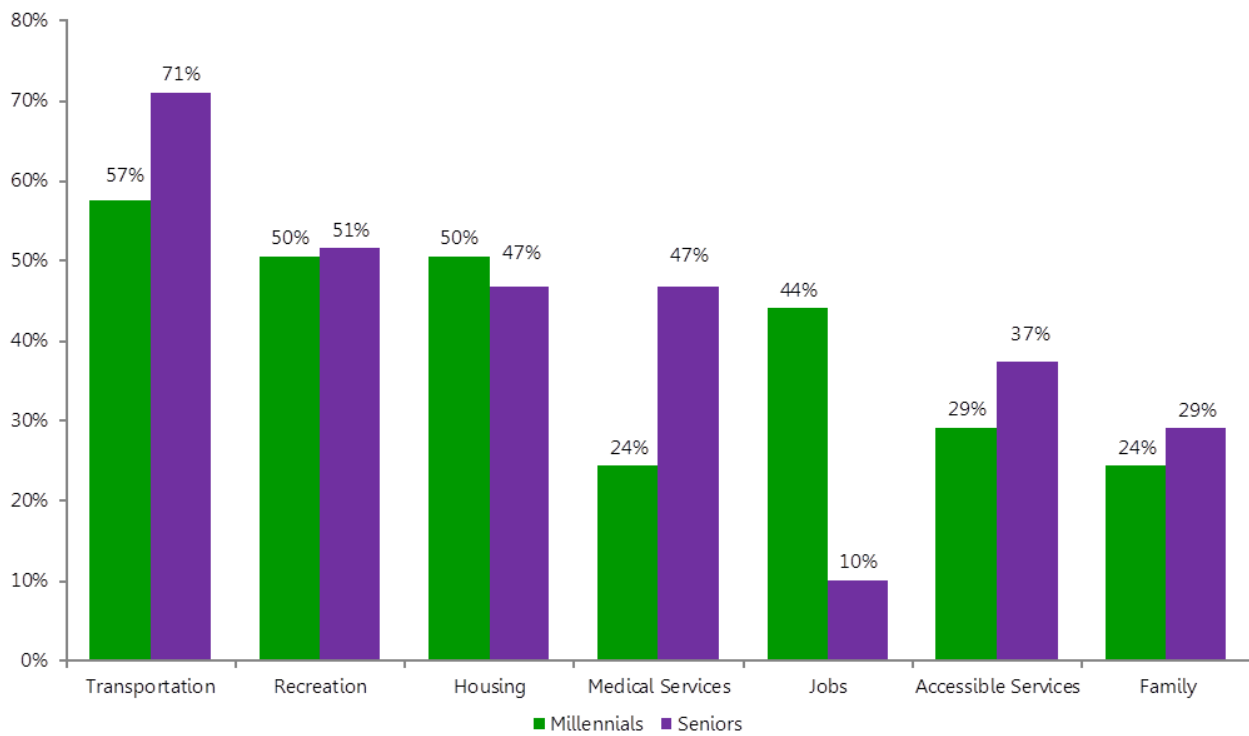
Transportation concerns also surfaced elsewhere in the survey, in questions like:

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

Transportation was consistently mentioned by SNHPC region residents during the community listening sessions. It was also residents' top answer choice (71% among seniors, 57% among millennials) when asked what concerned them most about aging in their communities (please see below). Generally speaking, seniors were concerned with being unable to get around when they can no longer drive themselves, and millennials desired transportation options. Walkable, bike-able neighborhoods were something all generations desired, but that are currently lacking in nearly all of SNHPC's towns.

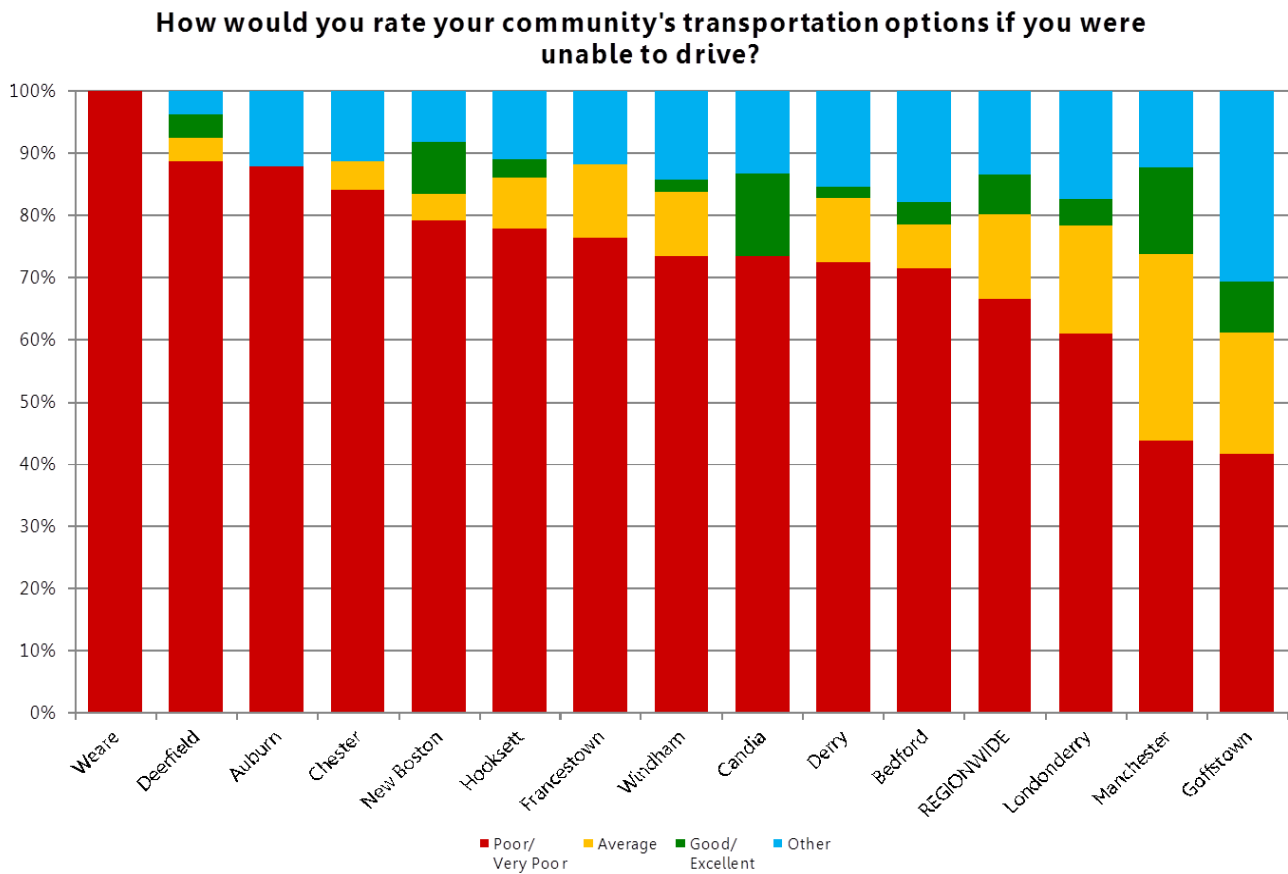
Of the many concerns about aging in Southern NH communities, transportation was ranked #1 by both millennials (57%) and seniors (71%).

What concerns you most about aging in your community?

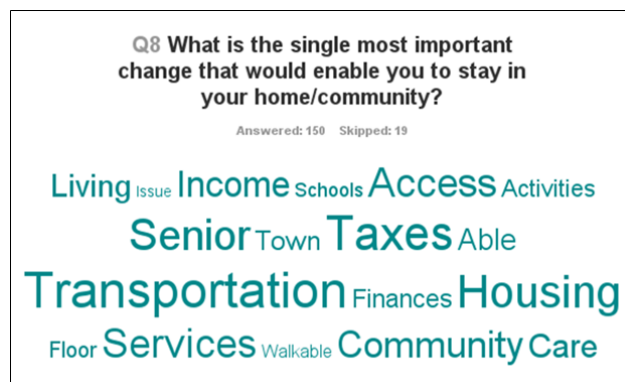
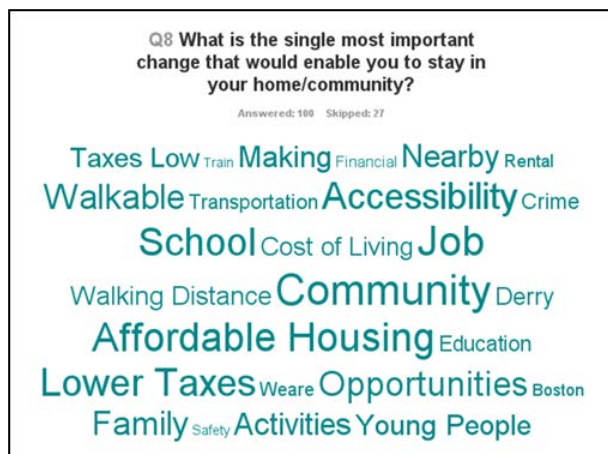


Perhaps the most telling responses were in regard to the question “how would you rate your community’s transportation options if you were unable to drive?”

- Of 609 region-wide respondents, 406 (66.7%) rated community transportation options as “poor” or “very poor”.
- 83 respondents (13.6%) rated options as “average”; 38 (6.3%) as “good” or “excellent”, and 82 (13.5%) rated options as “other”. Many of these ratings consisted of answers like “non-existent”, “not sure”, or “don’t know”.
- On a town-by-town basis (below), “poor/very poor” responses ranged from 100% in Weare to a low of 41.7% in Goffstown and 43.8% in Manchester.



The below word clouds summarize responses to the question "What is the single most important change that would enable you to stay in your home/community?"



Both millennials and seniors mentioned transportation-related words such as "Walkable", "Walking Distance", and "Train" multiple times. Some residents wrote in the following desired changes:

"Affordable housing within walking distance of reasonable social/recreational and eating options."

"Sidewalks (that are plowed during the winter), train/frequent bus or other public transit options to get around town/NH/into Boston."

"Transportation that's convenient and easily accessible."

"Reliable and affordable community transportation options."

"WALKABLE DOWNTOWN!! Mixed-use downtown Windham is WAY too car-dependent."

In summary, transportation is a major concern, and in many cases the number one concern, among the region's residents. Transportation options (or the lack thereof) were seen to be problematic, and without significant investment/upgrades, the problems will likely increase as the state ages further.

Housing

The housing portion of the survey asked residents various questions focusing on occupancy, affordability, and physical limitations of their current homes. The following are examples of questions asked in the housing section of the survey:

- Whether you wanted to move into your first home/unit or move into a smaller home/unit, does your community offer appealing alternatives?
- In thinking about your future, how likely is it that you will move to a different home outside of this community?
- If you were to move, what is the primary reason why you would move?

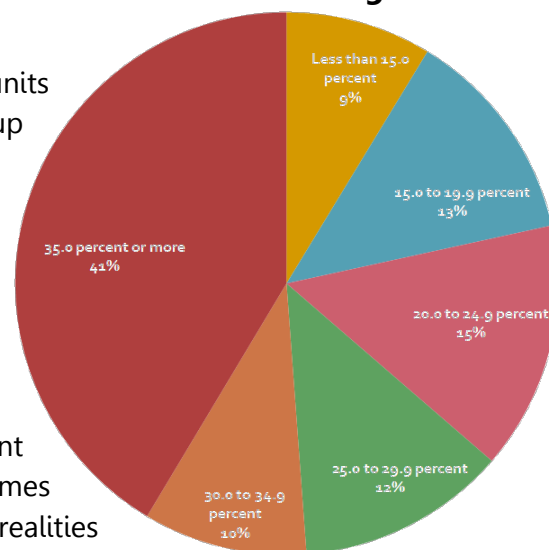
A component of an age-friendly community is having housing options for people of all ages and incomes. Towns in the SNHPC region differ in terms of housing options. During the community assessments and the resident survey, many people claimed that there is not enough diversity in housing choice and price in their respective communities. While single-family housing units are dominant, there are areas where more diverse options are available. The more urban and larger suburban towns like Manchester, Goffstown and Derry tend to have more housing diversity and zoning which allows for more densely-built housing. Older residents frequently stated that they often have trouble finding affordable senior housing.

According to the 2010 US Census, there are about 102,223 housing units in the SNHPC Region. Single-family homes make up 61.5% of the total units in the region, while structures with 2 to 4 units make up about 16%, structures with 5 or more units make up 20.7%, and mobile homes and other structures make up 1.8% of the total number of units in the region.

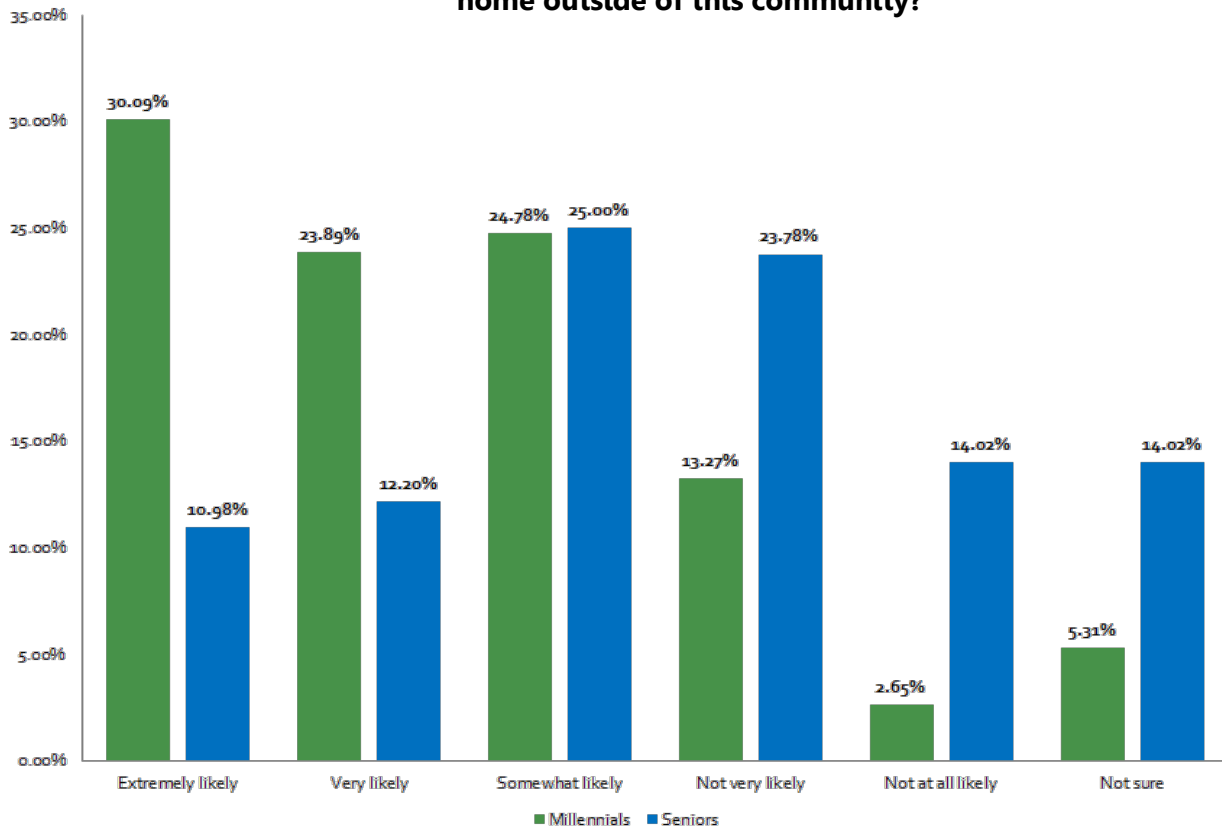
While the majority of housing units in the SNHPC region are owner-occupied, 35% are renter-occupied. Of those renter-occupied units, over 40% spend 35% or more of their income on rent.

As mentioned above, single-family homes are the dominant housing type in the SNHPC region. While these types of homes allow the communities to keep their NH character, the physical realities of multi-story, single-family homes can be a barrier to people as they age. SNHPC surveyed residents and found that 80% of respondents live in single-family homes, 7% live in multi-family/apartments, 7% live in condos, 4% live in duplexes, and 2% live in mobile homes or other housing types. Residents who attended the community conversations frequently stated they would prefer having housing options close to amenities such as grocery stores and health facilities, as well as having the ability to live in smaller homes.

Gross Rent as a Percentage of Income



In thinking about your future, how likely is it that you will move to a different home outside of this community?



When asked how likely residents would move to a different home outside of their community in the future about 30% of millennials said it was extremely likely while 25% of seniors said it was somewhat likely.

When asked what would be the primary reason to move to a different home, millennials mentioned affordability, jobs, schools, community and a sense of place. Seniors discussed topics that were more physical, such as the size of their home, their health, and accessibility.

Kids Expensive Downsize Age Family College Place
 Quiet Community Weather House Land
 School Employment Affordable Space
 Job Urban Taxes Career Larger Home Cost
 Opportunities Entertainment Closer Town

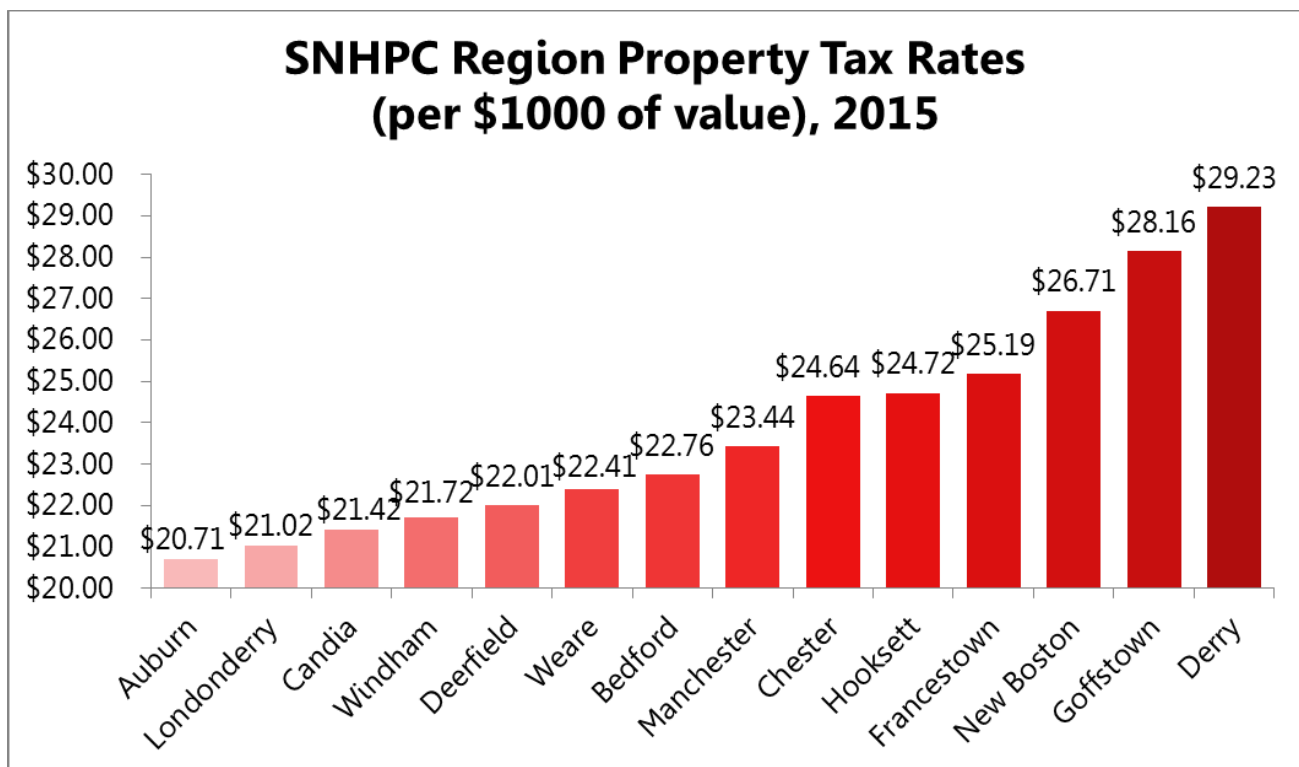
Millennials

Maintain Friends Stairs Assistance Taxes Expensive
 Community Cost Smaller Single Live
 Transportation Unable Level Housing
 Illness Care Mobility Family Not Able
 Downsize Reduce Health Cultural Accessibility
 Weather Spouse

Seniors



Many residents' greatest housing concern centers on affordability. A number of survey participants highlighted lower taxes as the biggest change that would enable them to age in place. When seniors retire and move on to a fixed income, the escalation of property tax rates has a palpable impact on their ability to afford other life essentials like food, healthcare, and travel expenses. A chart displaying tax rates across the region (below) shows that they range from \$20.71 in Auburn all the way up to \$29.23 in Derry (*per \$1,000 of value).





Becoming Age-Friendly: Questionnaire For Home-Building Industry Representatives

A second survey was specifically created for representatives from the Home-Building Industry, and was completed by more than 40 industry professionals. Nearly two thirds of the Homebuilders Survey's respondents have 15+ years of experience in New Hampshire's housing industry, their companies completing jobs across the entire state. When asked if they see a need to build more diverse housing to tailor to the state's changing demographics, 90% of industry professionals responded "Yes."

When asked why they think there isn't more diversity in housing among NH communities, the responses were varied:

- 72% of home builders agree zoning restrictions are a major reason there is not more housing diversity.
- 60% of home builders believe land availability and costs are a barrier.
- Nearly half (47%) feel regulatory challenges restrict housing diversity.

There appears to be unanimous consensus among homebuilders that there is a market for more diverse housing; however, many acknowledge that the market is also driving/sustaining the construction of more typical large, single-family homes. The most common factors in their strategies to build in a community are the housing market/desirability within a community, land availability, and ease of getting through the local land use board process.

According to homebuilders, the three best ways communities could attract more innovating housing solutions would be to:

- Provide allowances for multi-family housing, tiny homes, conversions, duplexes, and other allowances that enable diversity in housing stock;
- Allow more flexible zoning and land use regulations (such as setback/height allowances, form-based codes, etc.); and
- Provide incentives, such as density bonuses.

Recreation & Engagement

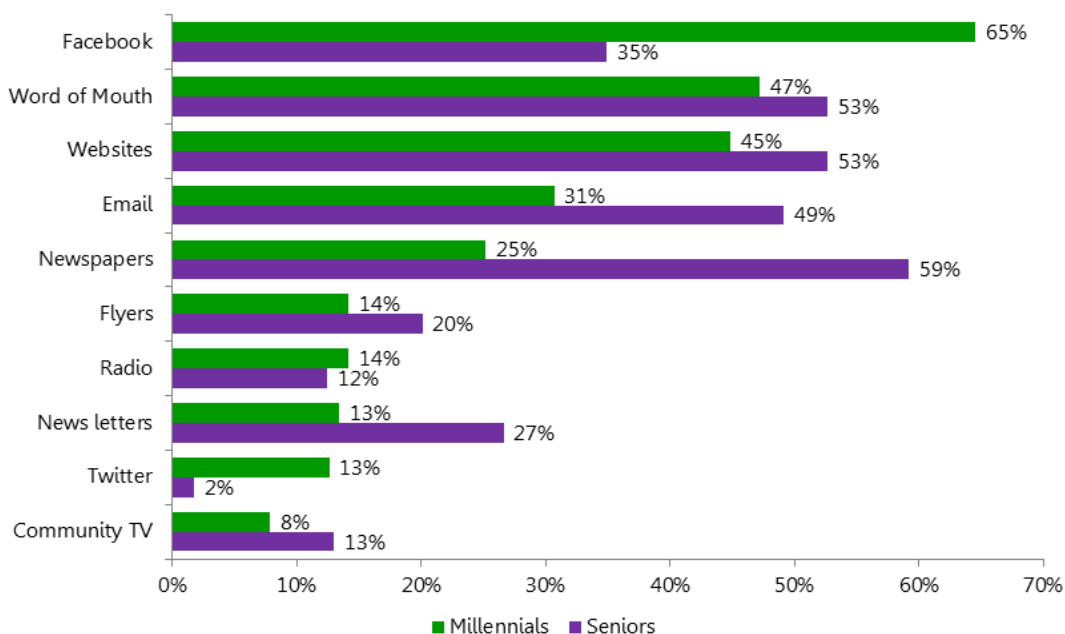
Recreation and engagement sections of the survey focused on identifying the many programs people come together for, where they were located, key venues, how residents learned about events, and what were example partnerships that strengthened community connectedness.

There is no shortage of recreation opportunities in the region. Many residents find enjoyment in the region's many walking or snowmobile trails such as those along Lake Massabesic in Auburn or Uncanoonuc Trail in Goffstown. Many town parks and recreation departments provide opportunities for residents of all ages to participate in activities such as athletic leagues, movie nights, town dances, and more. Increasingly, town libraries have become community centers, creating unique programming for all ages.

The most common multi-generational events were the community heritage celebrations, holiday, and seasonal events. Many programs rely on venues like church basements, school auditoriums, town offices, libraries, and other venues. Most communities aren't fortunate enough to have community or senior centers and in those cases it's typically libraries and parks departments that have filled in programs for all ages. Community champions who might self-describe themselves as people who can't say no, are the people that make things happen. In Deerfield there are community champions who still make the town welcome packets and town phone books so neighbors can reach out to one another.

Common roadblocks described included not knowing what was going on in town, especially once kids were out of the school system, not enough venues or room for expansion, and no senior center or place to connect with friends.

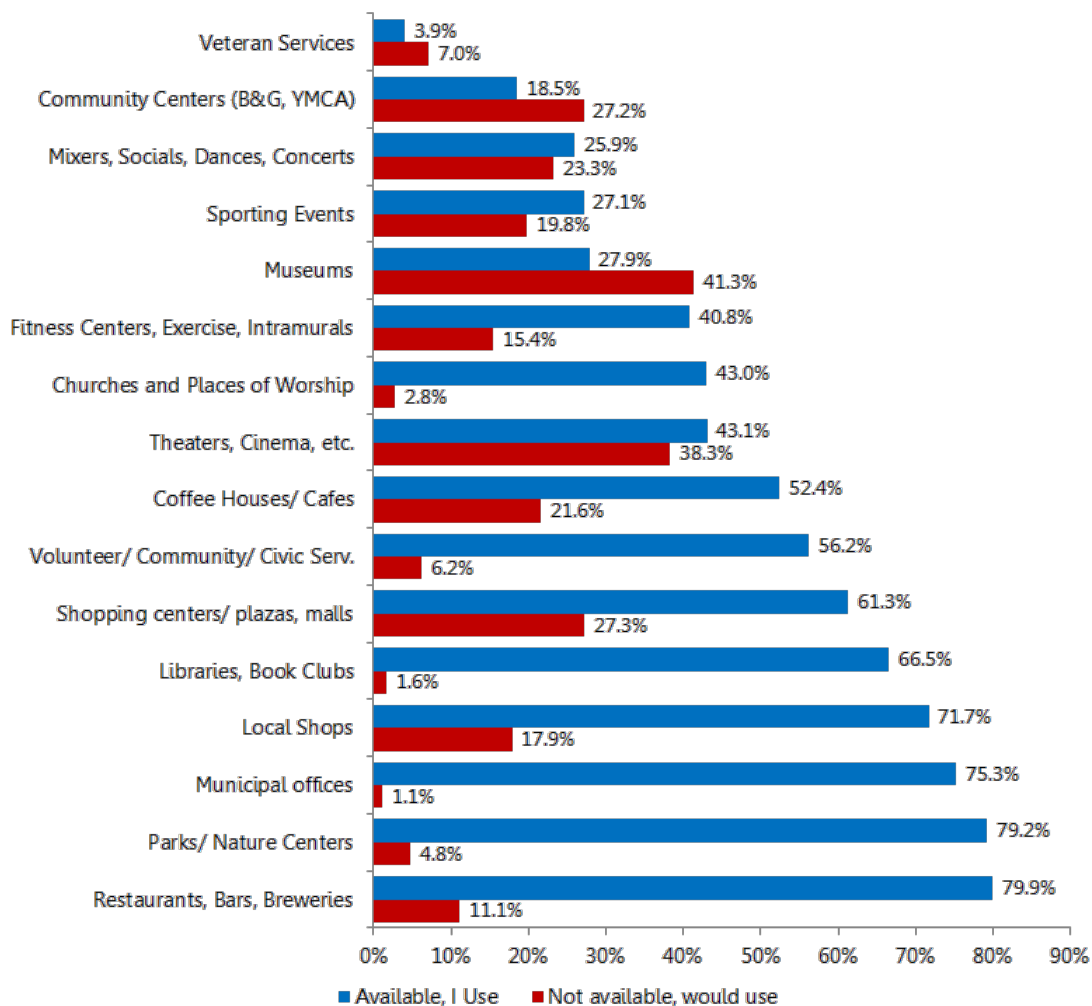
How do you find information about community services and events?



As previously stated, there is no shortage of recreation opportunities in the region. However, not every town has a bustling downtown with local coffee shops and bookstores—one is more likely to find things-to-do (outside of their home and work spaces) in the region’s larger communities, like Manchester. Smaller, more rural communities have to get creative in providing recreation opportunities for their residents. For instance, holding community events where local residents are encouraged to help organize and volunteer; taking advantage of underutilized spaces for community dinners or concerts; hosting recreational athletic leagues for residents of all ages—the list goes on.

When asked what places or activities residents frequent, the responses varied heavily by the size of the town. Residents in Manchester have many more recreation opportunities within a short walk or drive, and those residents stated they frequently utilize those opportunities. In some smaller communities like New Boston or Franconia, residents stated that while they don’t have many shopping centers, they would use them if they were in their town. The chart below does not show the responses by town. However, it does illustrate the activities and places—community centers, museums, theaters, and concert—that would be used by residents if they had the opportunity.

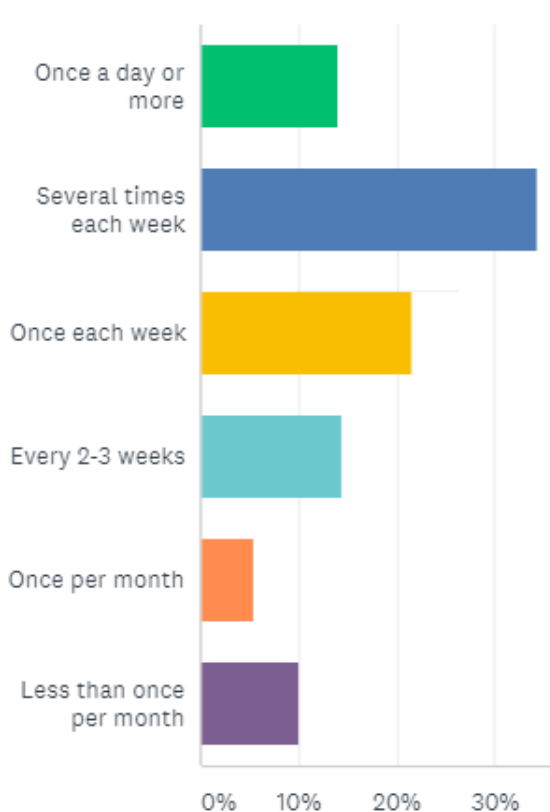
Which of the following places or activities do residents frequent?



Business & Economic Development

Following feedback from numerous stakeholders, it was decided that Business & Economic Development was an important topic among all communities and, therefore, was selected as a focus area. Aside from a handful of municipalities in the SNHPC region, most communities feel there are a lack of businesses and employment opportunities. A survey was designed to assess local businesses for characteristics that are age-friendly to seniors and millennials. The goals of the survey were to establish a baseline of existing conditions among different businesses in a community, and how they 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.



When asked, “how frequently you spend time with family, friends, or neighbors in your community,” more than half of respondents said either several times each week or once each week. Looked at even closer under the microscope, the data revealed that the mostly elderly seniors’ responses demonstrated they were disproportionately socially isolated (i.e. engaging with family, friends, or neighbors once per month or less).

One challenge many seniors face with going out with friends or family is around accessibility. One partner made on this journey was **Access Portsmouth**. Launched in 2016 by JSA, Inc., Access Portsmouth identifies criteria for accessing Portsmouth, NH’s restaurants, sharing the secrets of accessibility with the general public. Access Portsmouth founder Todd Hansen believes that accessibility not only benefits the less mobile—it benefits businesses, too. With that in mind, SNHPC integrated their program’s principles into the businesses assessed in Downtown Manchester during Phase I.

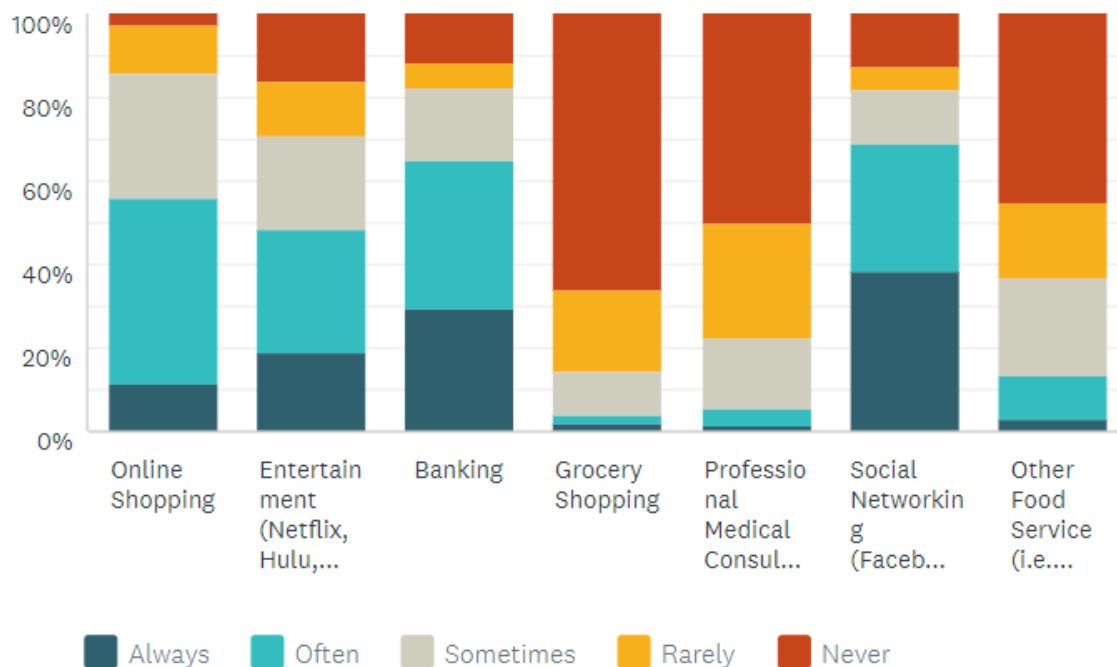
Site visits to businesses are essential to answer three critical questions:

- Can you get in the door?
- Can you use the facility with ease?
- Is the bathroom accessible?

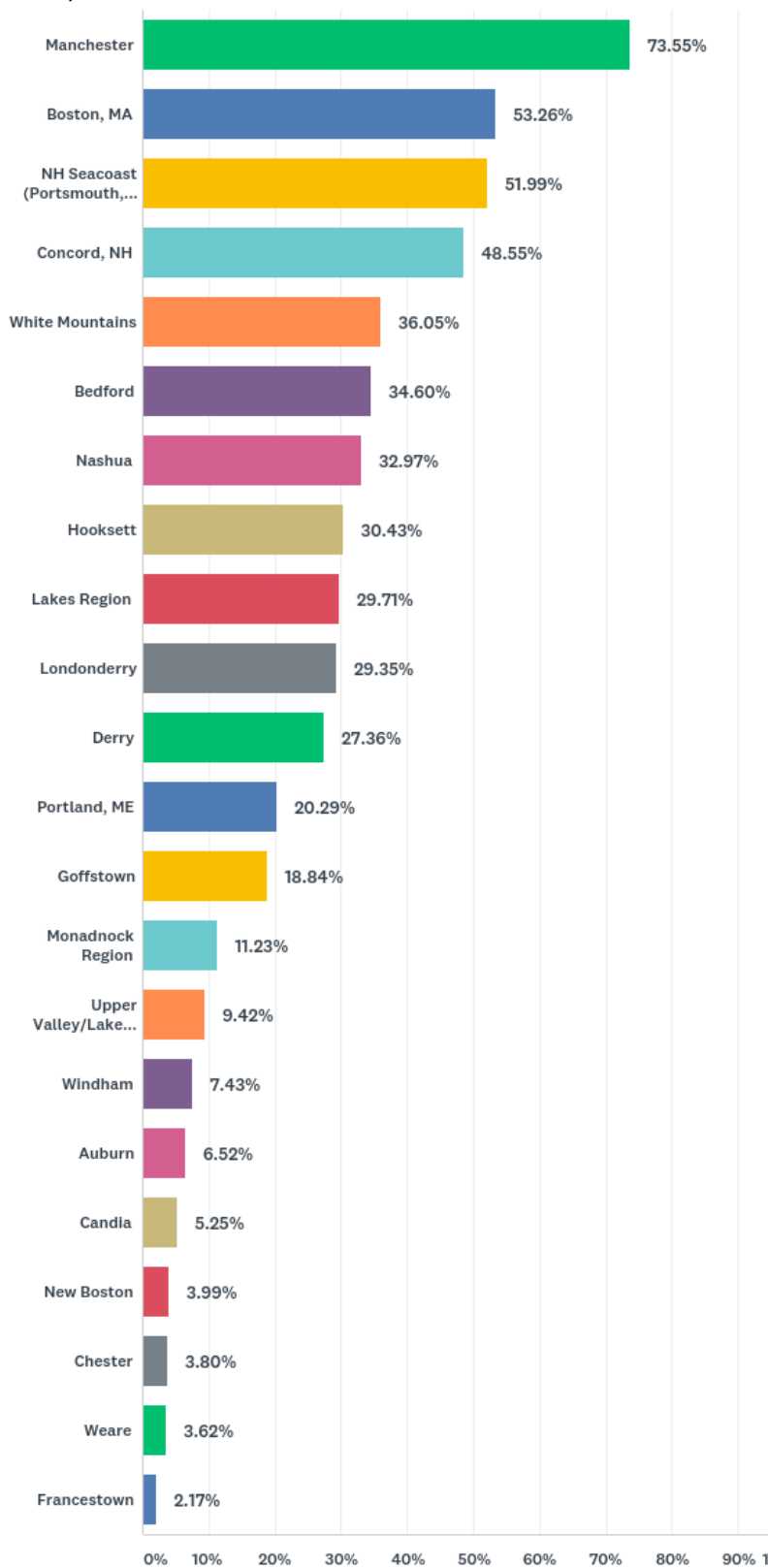
Given the Internet's proliferation into people's lives—especially those of millennials—one area of concern was whether survey respondents were turning to online means for goods or services traditionally associated with brick and mortar stores. Businesses have an opportunity to take these trends into consideration when working on their plans to attract customers or clients. When asked how often they use certain online services instead of their more traditional counterparts, respondents of all ages said the following:

- More than 50% shop online often or always
- Nearly half turn to the Internet for Entertainment (like Netflix or Hulu, for example) instead of going to entertainment venues
- About 30% of residents handle all of their banking online now; that number climbs to 80%+ when including often or sometimes.
- Fewer than 35% have ever shopped for groceries online; however, this is an industry that is starting to expand in popularity nationwide.
- 50% of respondents have sought a professional medical consultation online in the past.
- Unsurprisingly, more than 80% of survey respondents go online to social network always, often, or sometimes.

How often do you use the following online services instead of their more traditional counterparts?



If going outside of one's municipality for any activities, survey respondents replied they go to the following communities and/or urban centers:





An analysis of this data immediately shows some expected frontrunners where people go and spend their time (and money). Manchester is the center of the Southern New Hampshire region and the largest city in the state, offering the most to do among other municipalities locally. Boston was not only the second-most highlighted place survey respondents visit, it was also the #1 destination among millennials: 72.3% of millennials listed Boston as the place they visit compared to 68.3% saying Manchester. After Manchester (77%), the NH Seacoast and Concord were tied as the #1 destinations outside the immediate region among senior respondents.

During focus group discussions, some longtime residents explained they choose communities like Boston and the NH Seacoast to visit because they are *easier* places to facilitate meet-ups for groups of people from near and far away. While Southern NH does not have as much to do as a city like Boston or New York, they said that there certainly is A LOT to do here; however, it can be a challenge to cover as much ground in a day or a weekend locally as it might be in some other places. The ability to walk among businesses, cultural venues, and other sites is important for people of all ages, and without rail connectivity or even sidewalk connectivity in many communities they lack that competitive advantage.

The Becoming Age-Friendly program identifies several barriers and opportunities for businesses in each municipality to strengthen their outreach with millennials and seniors, and with whom to build partnerships to accomplish economic development goals.

Next Steps

Phase II of the Becoming Age-Friendly program is all about guiding both communities and businesses to become more age-friendly. To accomplish this, SNHPC will reconvene the original stakeholder committee from Phase I, include newly formed alliances via the community focus groups, and together create a strategy including criteria for potential pilot communities that may want to move forward in this next phase. The tentative plan is to identify up to 3 municipalities and 10 businesses to work with.

With stakeholder input, SNHPC will survey participating communities on their interest in moving the pilot program forward from assessment into strategic planning, and developing recommendations to becoming age-friendly. SNHPC will continue to work with local Chambers, economic development committees, and business associations to partner with businesses that would like to move forward in creating age-friendly environments.

Participating pilot communities and businesses will be identified, and tailored process steps will be developed for each community and business based on their input, the assessments, AARP's Livable Communities guidance (among other agency tools), feedback from the stakeholder committee, and case studies researched during Phase I.

Each pilot community and business will be assisted in creating age-friendly strategies; recommended actions will be developed for short- and long-term projects, innovative partnerships, service improvements, land use regulation revisions, entrepreneurial opportunities, information/marketing resources, and other recommendations. An outreach plan of age-friendly efforts utilizing Facebook/social media, website improvements, community news bulletins, community welcome kits, and other resources will be implemented.