



Age-Friendly Community Assessment: Town of Weare



Photo: SNHPC Staff

August 2017

Town of Weare

Age-Friendly Community Assessment



Introduction

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

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

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

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



Photo: SNHPC Staff

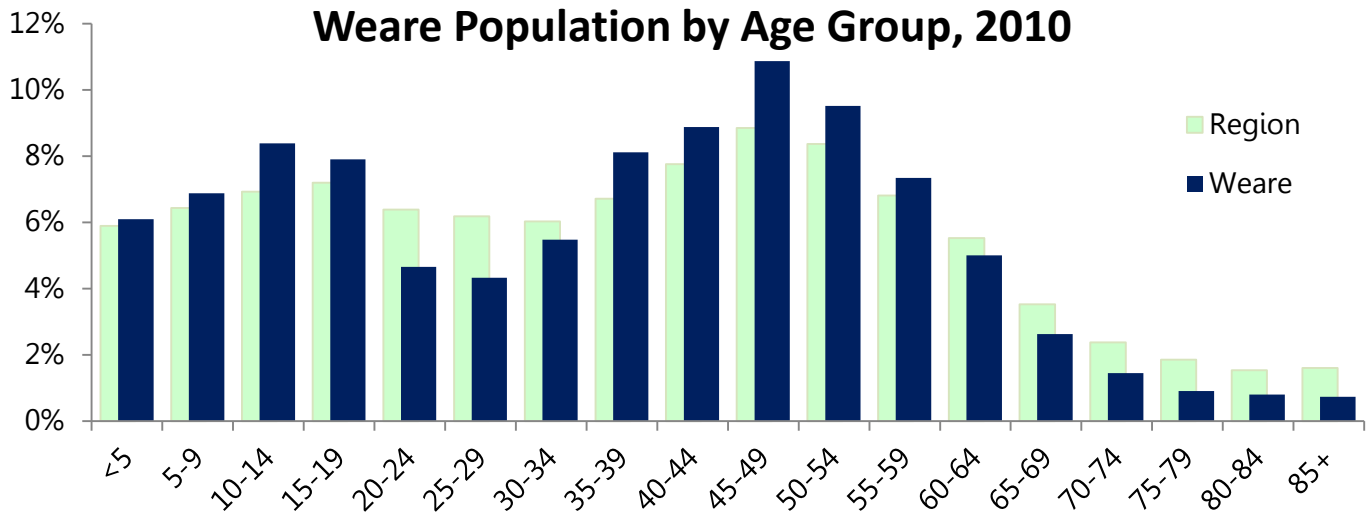


Community Snapshot

This territory was first granted by the Massachusetts government in 1735 by petition by Robert Hale for Captain William Raymond's men, who were soldiers in the Canadian wars. It was known as Beverly-Canada, for their home in Beverly, Massachusetts, or Halestown. In 1748, Ichabod Robie, Meshech Weare, and others from Hampton Falls petitioned for township near the Amoskeag, which was granted by the Masonian Proprietors. It was called both Robiestown and Wearestown. In 1764 it was incorporated as Weare, in honor of Colonel Meshech Weare, who served New Hampshire as its first president from 1776 until 1785.¹ With a 2015 population of 8,883, Weare is the 32nd largest municipality in NH, and the 8th largest in the 14-town SNHPC region.



SNHPC's Sylvia von Aulock leads an age-friendly listening session at Weare Public Library (Photo: Thelma Tracy)



Weare's population characteristics are somewhat similar to those of the region, with an even more pronounced drop-off in the 20-29 and 70+ cohorts. The 45-49 and 50-54 cohorts make up considerably more of Weare's population than that of other towns.

¹ From NH Employment Security town profiles: <https://www.nhes.nh.gov/elmi/products/cp/profiles-htm/weare.htm>

Community Assessment: April 6, 2017

[15+ in attendance, including reps from Library, School Board, Selectmen, many residents]



What is the community doing well?

- Town conservation areas, such as Lake Horace, are cherished.
- The Winter Wanderers Snowmobile Club is one of the most active groups in town.
- There is some good in living "far from the madding crowd."



Where is there room for improvement?

- Communication is a huge issue – there is no central repository for community events.
- The town is very isolated, making transportation (especially for those without a car) a difficult endeavor.
- Property tax rates are some of the highest in NH.
- A volunteer coordinator to help match willing volunteers with various community needs/events.

Transportation & Connections

Highlights:

- There was a generally negative attitude toward the difficulty of transportation in Weare, mostly due to its isolated location. When asked about transportation assets, one resident said “there aren’t any.”

Asset:

- Lack of traffic; “rush hour is when the turkeys cross the road.”

Barriers/Opportunities (in no particular order):

- Isolation; can be a struggle to get rides if you don’t drive
- Walkability rated a 1 of 10
- Bikability: hard to rate given such varied landscapes, but very few roadways are conducive to walking and cycling.
- Upkeep of state roads is lacking, especially shoulders for cyclists
- Unsure of whether master plan/zoning ordinance encourage a continuous street network.

Basic Data²³:



Mi. of town roads

191



WalkScore

29 of 100



*Mean travel
time to work*

35.8 minutes



Nearest Interstate

12 miles

Access to Internet:

- Public WiFi available at library, but not at municipal center
- Broadband and cell phone coverage is problematic; inconsistent due to varied terrain

² Sources: NH Empl. Security Community Profiles, Town of Weare, www.walkscore.com; WalkScore @ town center



Housing

Highlights

- It was unknown whether conversions are allowable; anything more than two units would go before the ZBA for a variance
- Property tax rates, at \$22.37 per \$1,000, were said to be the 20th highest of all NH municipalities
- In last five years, mostly single-family dwellings have been built; there have also been some townhouse-style condos built (Collins Landing)

Assets:

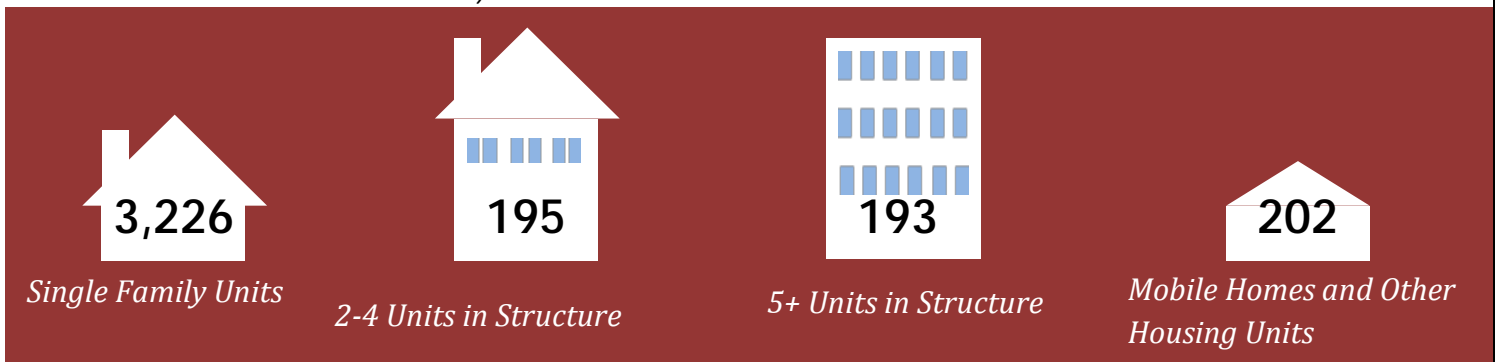
- Accessory dwelling units, multi-family homes, duplexes, and manufactured housing allowed
- Zoning allows for multiple housing types, including mixed-use



"We don't not permit it."
– Weare resident on co-housing

Barriers/Opportunities:

- No single-level units available – seniors will be leaving Weare due to lack of transportation and distance to services
- Master Plan is outdated (2005); town may look to SNHPC to help update
- Cheapest rent around \$1,100/month + utilities; these units are hard to find
- Tax relief: there is an elderly exemption based on income, as well as relief for veterans and those with disabilities
- While there are no formal housing services offered to residents, the Baptist Church in South Weare and various high school groups perform community service activities.
- Barriers to developing affordable housing include the town's remoteness (although there are two sides to that coin – that is the very reason many enjoy Weare), and the lack of town water and sewer (the latter exists in a very small area in town center)





Recreation & Engagement

Highlights:

- The library and its new newsletter, Weare in the World, are well-used and appreciated
- Many multigenerational events, such as the town-wide yard sale, patriotic celebration in mid-July, and Old Home Day in August prove popular
- Conservation areas, such as Lake Horace and Clough State Park, are well-used

Assets (in no particular order):

- White Birch Community Center – located in Henniker, this center provides Weare residents (for a small fee, paid by town) recreation and other social opportunities.
- Farmers Market
- Winter Wanderers Snowmobile Club – one of the most active groups in town
- Bolton Athletic Fields
- Churches, including Holy Cross Church/Community Center & Weare Christian
 - WAC (Weare Athletic Club) – children's sports
 - High school, middle school, elementary school
 - Senior Happy Weare-ites
 - Partnerships with New England College in Henniker
 - Recreational Trails Committee
 - American Legion
 - Grandparents' Day at elem. school
 - Reading and Writing groups



Barriers/Opportunities:

- Communication is a huge issue – no central repository for events
- Very little to attract millennials in regards to recreation
- No welcome wagon for new residents (used to be one)
- Difficulty of recruiting volunteers on some town committees (Econ. Development, Heritage)
- Lack of venues/community gathering space



Business & Economic Development

Highlights:

- Town businesses in general are very generous
- Community allows for mixed-use zoning in village center

Assets (in no particular order):

- Businesses giving back to the community and sponsor sports teams include:
 - “Just Like Mom’s” Bakery, “Nana’s Snack Shack”
 - Stark House Tavern – live music in summer
 - Mt. William Inc
 - Allied Motor
 - Town businesses in general are very generous



Weare Central Business District

Barriers/Opportunities:

- Location
- Town is too spread out
- Not on any major route
- People commute out of town and do grocery and other shopping while away



Partnerships

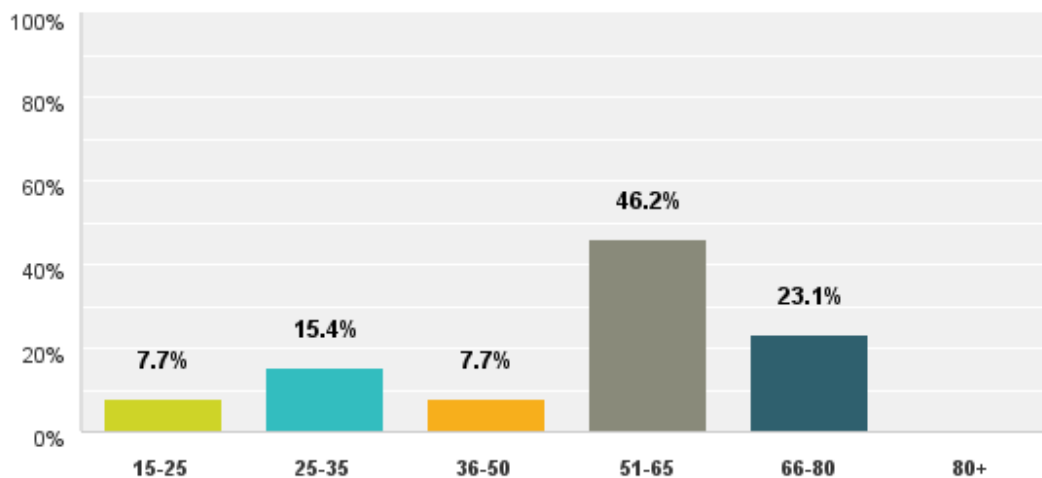
- Police/fire internship programs
- Elementary schools/Parks department
- Library - teen/adult programs
- Crispin’s House/ HS/ MS/volunteer ops
- Many, many others!



Survey Says...

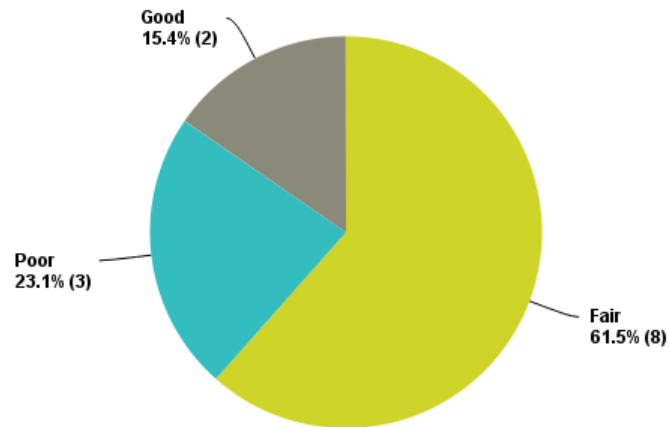
From February through April of 2017, The Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission (SNHPC) embarked on a "Becoming Age-Friendly" program. A resident survey was hosted by SNHPC and sponsored by AARP, Tufts Health Plan Foundation, and the City of Manchester to gather ordinary citizens' input on topics including recreation, transportation, housing, and beyond. A total of 641 responses were received, including 13 from Weare.

What is your age?



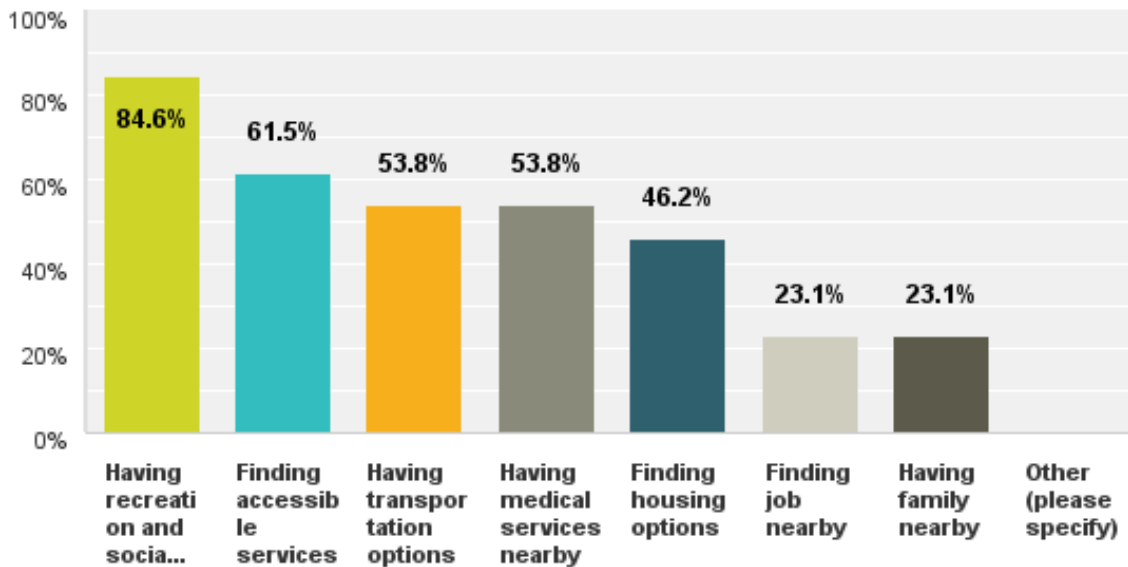
The majority of respondents (69.3%) came from the 51-80 age brackets. There were no residents from Weare aged 80+ that participated in the survey.

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



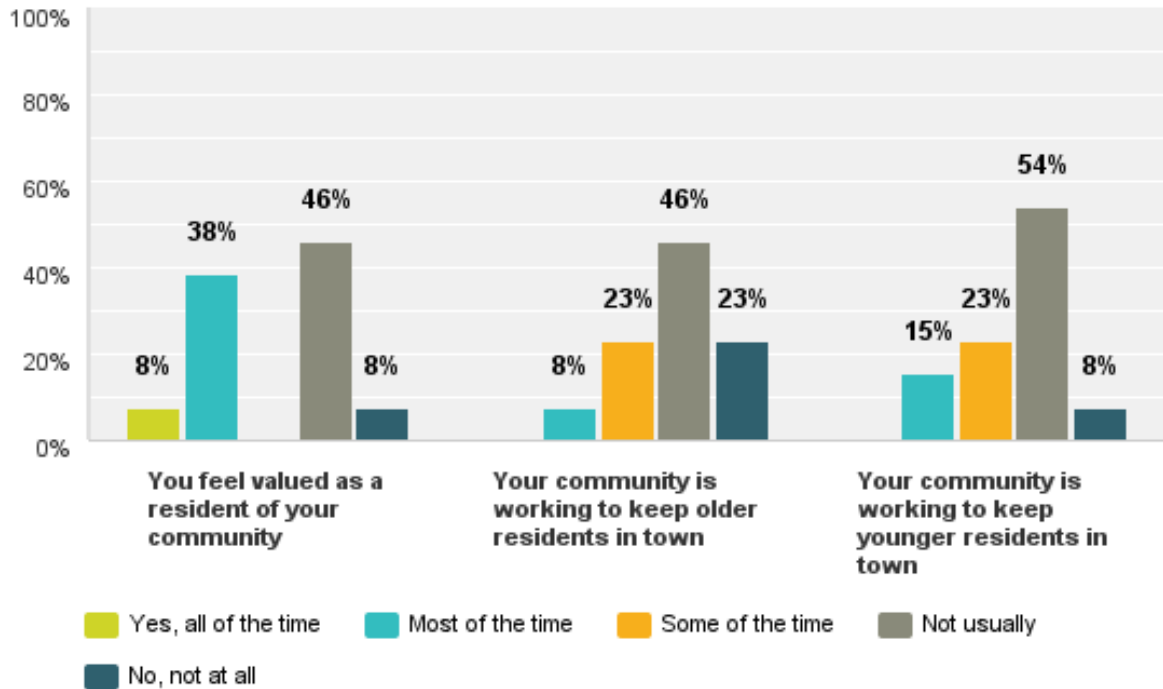
Only two respondents (15.4%) deemed Weare a good place to age. Eight respondents (61.5%) deemed it fair, and three respondents (23.1%) deemed it poor.

What concerns you most about aging in your community?



Somewhat different from other towns, a vast majority (84.6%) of respondents said having recreation and social options was their largest concern about aging in Weare. Accessible services and transportation were the next biggest concerns, a trend we saw in many SNHPC communities.

Check all that apply for the following statements:



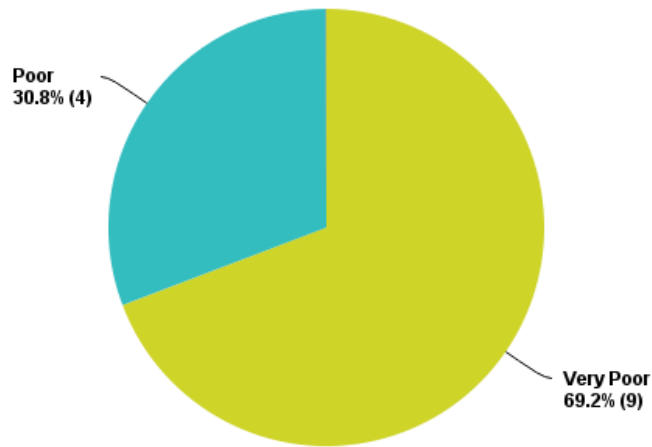
There was a definite disconnect between respondents when asked to report if they feel valued as a resident of Weare. Six respondents (46%) said “most of the time” or “all of the time”, and seven respondents (54%) said “not usually” or “not at all”. No one said “some of the time”. Only 31% felt that the community was working to keep older residents in town most or all of the time; the number was 38% for keeping younger residents in town most or all of the time. 69% and 62% responded “not usually” or “not at all” to this question regarding older and younger residents, respectively.

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

Transportation Weare Accessibility
Senior Center

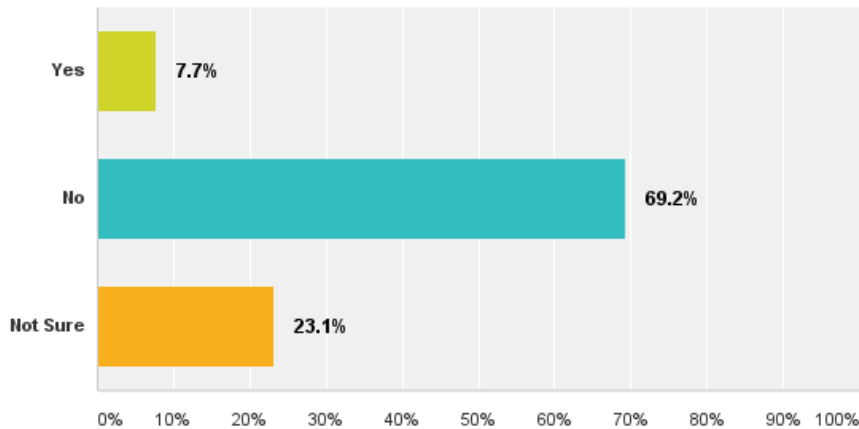
Accessibility, Transportation, and Senior Center were mentioned most among the changes that would enable Weare residents to stay in their homes/community.

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



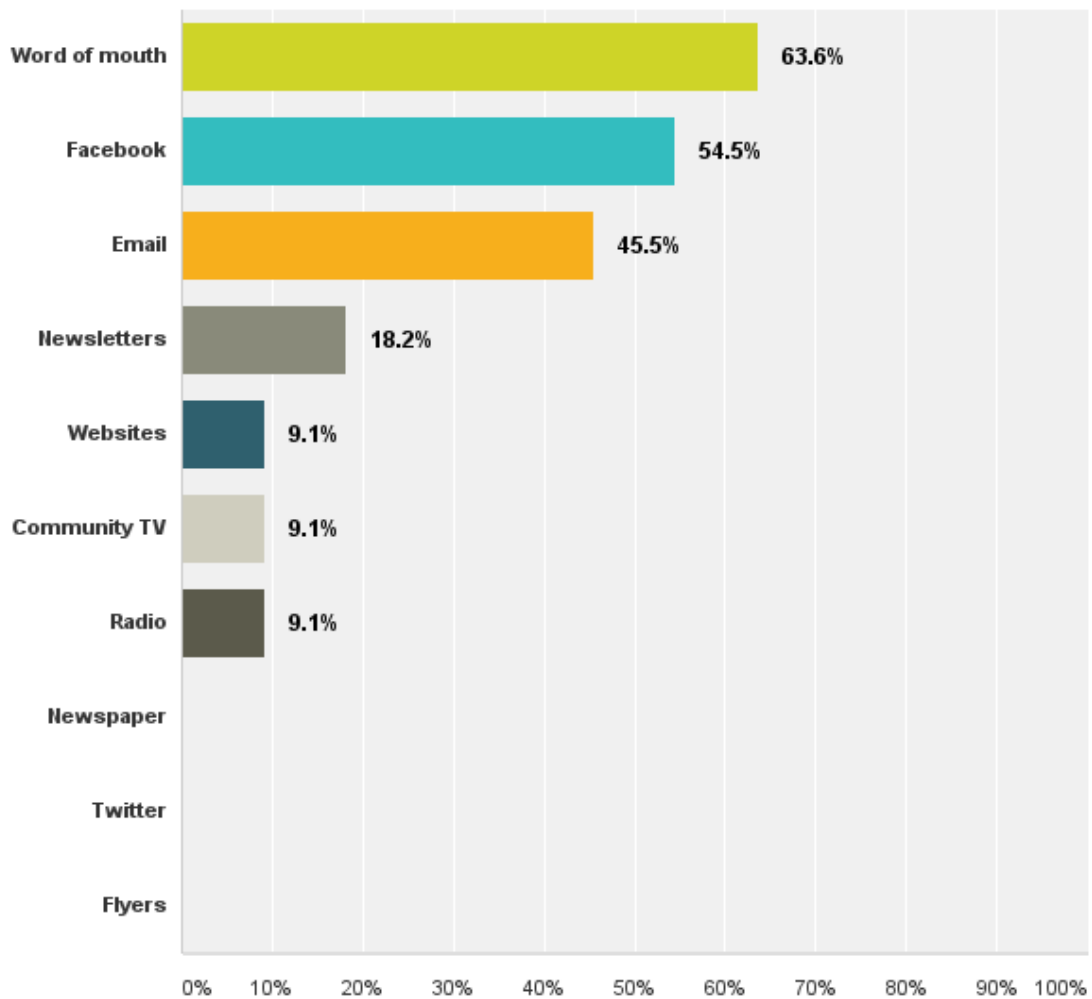
In terms of transportation options, 100% responded either "Poor" or "Very Poor", the de facto worst assessment of options of any town in the region.

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



The overwhelming majority of respondents (92.3%) either didn't think Weare offered appealing smaller home/unit alternatives, or were unsure.

How do you find information about community services & events?



Word of mouth (63.6%) was respondents' favorite method of finding information about community services and events, followed by Facebook (54.5%). Email came in third at 45.5%, and was followed by newsletters (18.2%) in a distant fourth place.



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

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| Naomi Bolton | Mike Sullivan |
| Angela Drake | Karyn Stognar |

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

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