



What We Heard:

How Age-Friendly is Our Community?

Public Input: Phase 1 Workshops

November 2022 – January 2023

Introduction

In May 2022, Banff Town Council passed a resolution to actively support, promote and work towards becoming an age-friendly community. Age-Friendly is the idea of making infrastructure, services, and social environments that facilitate activity, social connection and respect for seniors.

The Town of Banff is seeking the [Age-Friendly Community Designation from the provincial government](#) as a process to improve our community. An Age-Friendly designation promotes healthy and active aging and identifies any needed support and services. Age-friendly qualities help strengthen the community, improve businesses, and make life better for all residents.

An Age-Friendly designation is a World Health Organization recognition of the commitment to the promotion of active healthy aging of its residents. It is a community where policies, services, settings and structures support and enable people to age actively. Interested parties including seniors, their families, neighbours, community organizations, health and social service providers, and the Town of Banff itself have been asked to provide input.

The strategy is being developed using an established World Health Organization framework, which evaluates a community on the following eight areas:



Outdoor spaces and buildings – The design and condition of the physical environment, including public buildings, sidewalks and parks



Transportation – The availability, accessibility and affordability of a range of transportation options



Housing – The design, location and affordability of a range of housing options



Social participation – The opportunity to participate in social, cultural and recreational activities of choice



Respect and social inclusion – The attitudes and behaviour of the community as a whole towards older people



Civic participation and employment opportunities – The opportunity to take part in citizenship and economic activities, including governance, paid employment and volunteerism



Communication and information – The ability to access clear and relevant information about all community dimensions



Community supports and health services – The ability to access high-quality, affordable health care and community services

This report summarizes the results of that input. The Town along with the Age-Friendly Committee is seeking feedback from the participants and other members of our community, about the themes and priorities that emerged from the public sessions. All public feedback will be provided to council.

Public Engagement

The project has been guided by the Age-Friendly Banff Committee. Age-Friendly Banff Committee consists of engaged community members who have advocated for the pursuit of an age-friendly designation since its formation in December 2020.

In order to assess the community on the range of topic areas, information was gathered in six different focus groups to identify potential gaps in programs, services and community infrastructure for adults 55 years old and older. Over 130 people provided feedback and helped with an overall an assessment of how age friendly Banff is. The focus group sessions reviewed and explored the eight different areas in the provincial Age-Friendly Checklist as it relates to the Banff community.

Feedback from these focus groups identified areas that require attention and opportunities for making Banff more age friendly.

Participants included residents 55 years and older, other interested parties, service providers and local businesses in the following sessions:

- Tuesday, November 8, 2022, 12 - 2 p.m. Public session at Catharine Robb Whyte Building (48 participants)
- Tuesday, November 15, 2022, 12 - 2 p.m. Public session at Catharine Robb Whyte Building (41 participants)
- Tuesday, November 22, 2022, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. Mt. Edith House Residents (11 participants)
- Tuesday, November 29, 2022, 11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Cascade House Residents (8 participants)
- Thursday December 8, 2022, 12:30 - 2:30 p.m. Additional public session at Catharine Robb Whyte Building (24 participants)
- Tuesday January 10, 2023, 6 - 7 p.m. meeting with a Filipino cultural group (6 participants)

A total of 138 participants provided input.

Common themes expressed

After engaging with more than 130 people during the different community conversations there were **three underlying issues** that presented themselves consistently throughout the eight different areas.

The main issues identified were:



1. **Lack of Personal Safety** – Personal safety can be defined as a [state](#) or a [place](#) where you are not in [danger](#) or at [risk](#). This can be real or perceived. This was a common concern. Focus group participants identified lack of personal safety as a frequent perceived feeling when interacting with their built and outdoor environment, social/civic participation, their digital/online connection, personal health and sense of wellbeing. Many focus group participants identified that while commuting by foot, bike, or motorized transportation, they had a fear of being injured by:
 - the large number of people on the sidewalks, pathways, and roads;
 - fear of being knocked over by people on bikes, or skateboards; or
 - fear of slips and falls because of snow or ice build-up.

Having a strong sense of personal safety is linked to a livable community.



2. **Low or Lacking Community Awareness** – participants identified an issue with the knowledge and information developed between people in the community and the organizations, institutions and businesses there to serve them. Community awareness is dynamic, two-way and needs to be reviewed, maintained and updated. Focus group participants identified a number of issues under the umbrella of community awareness. Participants noted that the varying stages of aging aligned with different levels of awareness regarding what is available, for example:

- A number of participants were unaware of a number of programs and services available to them.
- Participants were unsure where to find information about programs and services.
- Some said there is an inability to access information and services because of technology barriers (i.e. social media, web-based information, and no computer or lack of experience with a computer).
- Newsletters and the newspaper were identified as preferred places for accessing information.

Effective community awareness reduces community risk and maintains a resilient and coherent community.



3. **Different Stages of Aging Require Different Supports** – Focus group participants identified the types of programs and services needed to age in place independently change as you age. There is no one size fits all as everyone ages differently, but many participants identified the following stages of aging in Banff:

Stage 1: Self-sufficiency. It includes imagining, researching and planning for independent living. It includes downsizing and moving to housing more appropriate for an aging adult, self-organizing social activities and civic participation.

Stage 2: Interdependence. This stage requires some support and assistance such as transportation or mobility aids to move around and participate in community life, assistance with basic chores, the need for some programming and services specifically for an older adult.

Stage 3: Dependence. There is a need for more social or health supports such as home care, family connection, or the need for companionship. This may include more complex medical services not available in Banff. Seniors may still be living in their own home, but social participation may decline due to inability to attend.

Stage 4: Crisis Management. This can either be unexpected or part of a medical transition and will require immediate medical support, moving to long term or residential care.

A senior's individual needs vary at different ages—no one program or service provides a continuum of care throughout the aging process. Individual circumstances also determine what services or levels of care are needed. This is influenced by multiple factors: physical health, financial means, education, connection and relationships with friends & family, and the proximity of family living in the same geographic area.

All three underlying issues identified in the focus groups will help guide the Age-Friendly Committee in developing an action plan, which will improve personal safety, community awareness and meet the needs of the different stages of aging in each of the eight areas.

Public Input on the World Health Organization's eight topic areas

Below is a sampling of feedback provided across all focus groups. The comments do not represent a consensus of opinion on the topic areas and may contain contrasting perspectives. This report captures popular sentiments expressed by many participants about experiences or perceptions of issues affecting people 55+.



Outdoor Spaces and Buildings



We asked:

How accessible do you find buildings and outdoor spaces to be?
When you leave home, what is that experience like for you?



We heard:

Snow/Ice removal:

- The need for more timely snow/ice removal
- Hazards of sloped driveways/sidewalks
- Snow and ice build-up at curb cuts and parking drop off areas, increasing enforcement of bylaws
- The fear of slips and falls were foremost in participants minds
- Some intersections/crosswalks and streets are consistently named as treacherous

Shared sidewalks/traffic:

- Feeling vulnerable and unsafe on shared pathways with bikes, skateboards, scooters and large groups of visitors
- Fear of being hit or knocked from the pathway
- Pedestrian bridges were both cited as high traffic areas where people felt most at risk
- Traffic congestion and lack of parking: specifically impeding accessing the medical offices on Bear Street and the problem of car to office people transfers (patients unable to transfer alone)
- Banff Avenue closure had negative impacts on residents' ability to access downtown
- Cascade House seniors are affected by bus fumes and traffic noise due to closure of Banff Avenue

Lighting:

- Poor lighting reported on pathways/bridges and trails
- Many older seniors said they do not leave their homes after 5 p.m. in winter due to poor lighting

Buildings accessibility:

- Old infrastructure that was not designed for universal access, especially for those with mobility challenges. This includes wheelchairs/walkers and those recovering from medical procedures, (this would also include strollers, wagons, and people with personal shopping carts)
- A number of businesses/private buildings were identified as having outside stairs/steps with no ramp option or hand rails
- A lack of colour markings on stairs for the visually impaired
- Most cited problems include medical buildings with no elevator access
- Businesses with heavy manually operated doors
- Lack of places (inside and outside) to sit and remove or put on cleats
- The Fenlands is not accessible without a car for many



Transportation



We asked:

How would you describe the availability of transportation in Banff?
What has your experience been like when you try to get around town?
In what ways would you like to see improvement?



We heard:

- A high demand for public transport or regular service to take people to Calgary for medical appointments
- Older residents do not have family members or friends who can drive them
- A lack of volunteer drivers – many cited they declined appointments because of the inability to get to them
- The regional Roam transit service to Canmore is considered unreliable – people reported missing appointments because it has been running late
- The free local Roam service for residents is highly appreciated and considered a community asset. To be universally accessible and age-friendly, participants said they need to feel more comfortable using Roam
- Not everyone knew about other transportation services: we heard clearly at all sessions other than Mount Edith House/Cascade House that many community members were unaware of the seniors bus and taxi pass services
- Seniors Bus: those who know about the bus consider it a community asset and are highly appreciative that it is dedicated to seniors, free and offers a door-to-door service
- The seniors bus driver's role in taking care of seniors' needs is valued
- Many younger seniors had no knowledge of the seniors bus.
- Lack of awareness around eligibility, schedule and usage
- Taxis: those who know about the seniors taxi pass service consider it a limited asset

- Taxis are judged expensive, not age friendly – a belief that drivers do not understand a seniors pace/ability to get in/out and taxis offer limited flexibility
- We heard several times taxis will not cross the bridge during busy times
- There is a need for delivery service options for those who are isolated or unable to get out. Specifically, food support and medication
- There is an openness to exploring a car share program
- Increase the frequency; the buses are currently too busy to use during the summer.
- Buses that lower down or “kneel” for access: Older adults are fearful of mounting/ dismounting – will not take bus if using a mobility device.
- Better signage about route and time information at the bus stops. Older adults do not have cell phones or apps to find information
- Shelters/seating and lighting at bus stops for protection, comfort and safety
- Expand bus routes into neighborhoods. Many older adults live in residential areas away from Banff Avenue
- Overwhelming request for a bus service to The Fenlands, the compound and the Banff Centre
- Ethno-cultural participants concerned about lack of transit access to the industrial compound where they work. Sense of danger and inaccessibility for them



Housing



We asked:

What kind of housing options exist in our community?

Are there a variety of housing options available that suit varying needs?

Can you identify a priority housing issue in our community?



We heard:

- There are not enough options for the stages of aging in place
- A belief that decision makers know there is a shortage of options for the aging population but are not listening or doing anything about it
- Both rentals and ownership options are unaffordable
- Belief most people have no choice but to move away if they want to downsize
- Lack of universally accessible housing with elevators/covered parking/walk in showers/single level living
- No supported living or options for couples to stay together if one needs assisted living
- A desire for new housing models such as cooperatives and intergenerational housing with live in managers/homecare service options
- More housing for homecare staff
- A need for more human resources to support older living, e.g. Homecare volunteers or services for snow shoveling, housework, home maintenance etc.
- A need for more emergency and transitional housing for people to get back on their feet

- People do not know where to access information on resources and assistance for aging in place e.g. services/grants/rebates
- An insistence that all businesses must provide staff housing
- Mount Edith House income level to rent policy is prohibitive to working. Residents are fearful they will be evicted if they get a job
- Mount Edith House residents feel vulnerable living next to the train station parking lot due to the increase in foot traffic going onto their property and unruly behaviour late at night
- Cascade House: negatively impacted by bus diversion during Banff Avenue closure. Windows cannot be left open due to fumes and noise



Social Participation, Respect, Inclusion



We asked:

How easy is it for you to participate in social activities in Banff?

Do you feel that Banff is respectful of people with different backgrounds and needs?

Can you identify a way to improve respect and social inclusion in our community?



We heard:

- COVID interrupted participation and for many. It has been hard reconnecting afterwards
- There are opportunities to participate if people want to
- Participation is contingent on feeling safe, that they belong, availability of transportation and awareness of what's available
- Aging and participation move in stages - younger older adults do not want to be labelled as seniors or go to activities specifically for seniors
- It is a struggle to access information on what is going on
- A concern it is harder for newcomers/ethno-cultural individuals to participate
- A desire for more multicultural events/opportunities to mix mingle and get to know each other, e.g. multicultural meals
- There was an overwhelming unease at the lack of visible minority representation in the room and a feeling that their lived experience is different and should also be heard
- At the Filipino conversation session, they reported that they socialize by gathering around food and that everyone is welcome
- Older seniors ask for more daytime senior programs and nonphysical activities at the seniors center e.g. games/cards
- A fear of not feeling welcome at new activities
- A need for buses to go to The Fenlands and the Banff Centre
- Banff is welcoming because it is a tourist town but a perception the tourists are not respectful of seniors
- A belief that seniors have been forgotten in Banff
- A need for a central information hub with posters/newsletters/handouts

- A need for a newspaper column specifically for older adults
- A desire for more intergenerational activities between kids and seniors



Civic Participation & Employment Opportunities



We asked:

Do you think there are accessible employment opportunities for seniors and persons living with disabilities?

Describe your experiences in community life – volunteering, engaging with community groups and participating in community decision making.

Are you able to fully participate and access them?

Can you identify a way to improve civic participation and employment opportunities in our community?



We heard:

- Civic participation received similar comments to social participation, respect and inclusion.
- There was appreciation for being invited to engage in this civic process (many attendees heard about it through word of mouth from the Age-Friendly Committee)
- Lack of community awareness with regards to understanding and valuing older adult skills, talents and experience
- Some distrust around what the outcome of this process would be, and that the community's vision is not in line with the aspirations of an age-friendly community
- Employment is different at an older age
- Older adults perceive a disconnected relationship between businesses and seniors.
- A feeling of a mismatch between employment opportunities and older employers.
- A belief that employers do not take older adults needs into consideration e.g. is it age appropriate? Does it pay a living wage, provide appropriate benefits/accessible (job postings now using QR codes was considered inequitable and ageist)
- A strong belief employers are ageist (over 40 not hired)
- Mount Edith House residents fearful about working in case of eviction (income to rent ratio policy)
- A desire to work and participate but not at the same pace
- A concern there was no business representation in the room suggesting to participants businesses are not interested in an age friendly initiative
- Barriers to civic participation included transportation/awareness/physical ability/training/language/digital divide
- A mismatch between what older adults want to volunteer for versus what is needed
- Older adults don't know where to look for civic opportunities
- Those who do participate in civic opportunities do not feel heard
- A need to feel welcome and safe when participating



Community Support and Health Services



We asked:

Do you think the services in Banff meet the varying needs of residents?

Can you identify some community supports and health services needed in our community?



We heard:

- Many of the concerns raised in this section are identified in previous areas such as cost of housing, lack of human resources to support people aging in place, transportation gaps and unique needs related to the stages of ageing:
- Appreciation for the services that already exist especially for a community of its size
- Acknowledgement for the value of the seniors coordinator role at the Town of Banff
- Concern regarding staff shortages across the board in health care: In particular, people reported struggling to access doctors/companion care/respite care/social workers/dementia support
- More help to access affordable housing for health care staff
- A need for more volunteers for homecare supports/caregiver support/drivers
- A need for a non-digital central place for older adults to speak with a person and get information on support services
- The need to access a public pool – considered an essential health service
- The inability to access essential health services in Calgary due to lack of transportation.
- A need for more outreach to those who are isolated and less mobile
- Universally accessible medical offices
- Ethno-culturally inclusive health services that support the multicultural community e.g. cultural sensitivity, translation services, more visible diversity in the health care system
- Food insecurity and the impacts it has on mental and physical health – in particular lack of access to culturally appropriate food or special dietary requirements



Communication



We asked:

Are you able to access information about what is happening in Banff?

How could governments, businesses and organizations communicate better with you and other community residents?



We heard:

- COVID interrupted and changed how people access information and many people became isolated from the communication loop
- There is a gap between awareness of needs by service providers and older adults
- The exponential shift to digital resources has many older adults feeling left out, vulnerable and at risk
- In each of the eight areas, the inability to access the right information, communicate two-ways and a lack of understanding was raised as a concern
- Information is hard to find. There needs to be more than digital options e.g. central bulletin boards/posters/newsletters/an older adult newspaper column
- Older adults do not feel heard
- The digital divide is making it hard to keep up. As people age, they are unable to keep pace with the technological changes
- There are too many websites/apps/and too much reliance upon cell phones
- There is a need for more inclusive communication e.g. braille/plain language/translation
- Older seniors reported a feeling of vulnerability and fear identity theft and financial fraud

Next Steps

Seniors engaged in the consultation said they want their voices to be heard.

The public consultations identified over 70 individuals who said they want to remain involved with this project. The Age-Friendly Committee plans to establish working groups to move priority areas for action that will help Banff to become more age friendly.

A survey will be conducted to gather feedback from focus group participants and those interested individuals and organizations in our community who did not attend the the community consultations. This survey will help to ensure we understand what we heard and provide an opportunity for people to rank their top three priorities for each area of an Age-Friendly community. This information will assist the age friendly committee to formulate an action plan.

Following receiving that feedback, a briefing will be submitted to council for their consideration. Pending council's consideration, the Age-Friendly Committee and Town of Banff will apply to the Provincial Government for an Age-Friendly Community designation upon the completion of an action plan. This designation would help to support future applications for funding, in order to further our goal of becoming more age friendly. If designation is received from the Province, the Age-Friendly Committee will develop an action plan to identify areas to improve upon to become more age-friendly.