About the Workbook

When we think about advocating for livable communities, there is so much to have in our vision. Much has been written on the topic, from developing livable communities for older adults, to creating livable communities for people with disabilities, to intergenerational community building. National initiatives such as AdvantAge, AARP’s Livable Communities, Communities for a Lifetime efforts in several states, and others all pose some common ideas and approaches. Livability principles may also be found in initiatives related to health, community-building and engagement, and urban design. Each brings something unique and valuable to the discussion.

Given the level of work existing, this workbook does not present new information. Rather it brings together key points from the existing material to focus the content on what is needed to take action. What can you do, as an advocate, trained with information about livability concepts and tools for advocacy, to work across ages and abilities to change your community? How can you use examples of successful actions to further the livability of the place you call home? This workbook is for local leaders who want to start work, those who have begun but want to charge up their efforts, or for those actively engaged in creating more livable communities.

The workbook is organized in two sections. The first focuses on livability concepts and tools for action; the second focuses on skills needed to be an effective advocate. In each chapter, look for:

- **What Matters:** an overview of what is covered
- **Get Started:** an exercise to help you get started applying what you have learned
- **Tips:** to more ideas to support your work after the training

And in many sections, you will find:

- **Real Scenarios:** examples of successful applications
Becoming a visible advocate in the community, establishing yourself as a knowledgeable and dedicated voice for livability issues, and working with other advocates and community leaders will improve the lives of those in your community.

The training introduced in this workbook is not the only roadmap to creating livable communities. But, it does show you how to focus your advocacy efforts to ensure effective outcomes, inspires you to think in new ways, to work with new partners, and move your community forward toward greater livability for all ages and abilities. It provides information, directs you to other resources and includes real examples of others who have achieved change.

We hope you will share your successes with us as you go forward. Tell us what you have done. Share what has worked and what has been a challenge. We are also here to be a resource for the future.

Stay in touch,

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How Do We Look at Aging & Disability?

If you were to go home and turn on the TV tonight you would see, over and over, commercials trying to sell you products that keep you young. Skin creams, tanning products, vitamins, exercise contraptions, medicines and even surgeries—all manner of “anti-aging” promises.

If you Google “anti-aging”, you will get 83,500,000 results! The Huffington Post reports that the anti-aging business is currently worth $80 billion and will grow to $114 billion by 2015. Clearly, the term anti-aging as well as the associated myths have entered into our everyday language and culture.

What are the basic assumptions that would make people interested in anti-aging medicine?

- Normal aging is bad.
- No one wants to grow old.
- Growing old should be dreaded.
- Young is good and beautiful.
- Old is ugly.
- Aging is about one thing—the body.
- Anti-aging is about one thing—treating the body.

The list could go on.

Would you agree that our culture exhibits many of these stereotypes?

Of course, there are exceptions to these stereotypes. Advertisers and other media use the exceptions to help reinforce the normal, or use exceptions to hold out the promise of an alternative. Think of Betty White. She is a wonderful person, no doubt. She is also old, no doubt. Is she not held up as a “star”? An example that old can be fun? There are other stars in the world of aging images and, often, we hear them say things like: “Anyone can do this.” “You just have to stay active.” “Use it or lose it.” “Keep a young attitude.”
It’s not that these statements are untrue or not useful. Of course they are. But what is the other message? It is—“a good old age is just a matter of the individual’s ability to overcome.” If you can’t do that, I guess you have failed.

You can see the power of advertising—of what we call “Madison Avenue”—the Mad Men. Advertising and, more broadly, the media, contribute to the way we see our world and help define what is “normal.”

What About Disability? What Kinds of Images Are Created by Our Culture to Represent Disability?

Well, times have changed in some ways. In the earlier days of the last century, up until the 1960’s actually, disability was represented in the media, in popular culture, and even in science as a pathological deficiency—something that required treatment and, often, a place to quarantine folks. We had names for those places that sounded nice… homes, schools, farms, etc. But they were institutions.

We’ve made progress. If you do a search of Google images today, you find many positive representations of disability, where people with disability are shown doing the same things, and in the company of, the general population—going to public school, going to work, going to college, voting, etc.

So at least the images you see in the media suggest that disability is not such a bad thing. But if you look a little closer you see many, many stories and pictures about how individuals with disabilities “overcome” their limitations. That’s a good thing of course, but what is the underlying message?

► Good disability is all about individuals overcoming.
► Only the “stars”, the poster children that overcome, are to be our models.
► Disability, like aging, is about the body.
► “Exceptional” means not normal, exception to the rule doesn’t it?
So, in many ways, the representation of both aging and disability reflect and represent a core American value: individual achievement. Again, that’s not a bad thing. We do like to think that anybody can become President if they try hard enough.

- But do you think this model of aging and disability works for everyone?
- Can we *really* reverse the aging process and look young to the end of our days?
- Can a person in a wheelchair will himself up the stairs if he tries hard enough?
- Should a person who is old or with a disability be ashamed when they can’t accomplish these goals?

So maybe our assumption that aging and disability are all about “personal overcoming” and all about the individual body is not always a helpful way to look at things. Is there an alternative lens we can use to “see” aging and disability?

Yes, there is, and it’s pretty radical, given the deep attachment we have to the current models. In the Advocates for Livable Communities-Training, participants will learn a new way to see and think about aging, disability, and advocacy.

Notice the word “community” there?

What if we re-fashioned every discussion about aging and disability not through an individual lens, but through the lens of community? What would that mean?

Here’s a famous quote from the disability literature that helps explain what is meant by this:

> “Disability is not a personal characteristic, but is instead a gap between personal capability and environmental demand.”

Think about this. Disability (and aging) is not “in the body” but in that gap between the body and the environment. You could fairly say that disability and aging are “out of body” experiences.
As Advocates for Livable Communities, you won’t be talking about disability and aging as personal characteristics but as a relationship between a person and the environment. You won’t be talking about disabled people, but about “disabling environments.”

It makes all the difference in the world. As the famous author Wendell Berry has written: “Community is the smallest unit of health.” That’s pretty radical. Let’s draw this out a little bit.

**With Regard to the Physical Environment:**
It means you are going to focus heavily on advocating for environments that work for people of all ages and abilities. Just making one home accessible is important, of course. But what if a person’s home is accessible and she still can’t get out to visit her neighbor or to shop at the grocery on her own?

*Livable community advocates will learn not only about individual accessibility but about broader social access—concepts like visitability and universal design.*

**With Regard to the Social Environment:**
It means you are going to learn how people can accomplish things together and create not just individual health but social health. People of all abilities need access to places for active social and cultural lives. This means not only a built environment that includes places to get together, such as parklets and plazas, but also easy pathways there. It means including people with disabilities and older people, and children and adults, in the arts.

*Livability community advocates will learn about ideas like intergenerational programming, arts for all, and design of social spaces that include everyone.*
**With Regard to Health Care & Services:**
It means you will learn about how we can better focus on getting services but also on how this can intersect with building real community. We most highly value the doctors and other people who provide direct individual care (the laying on of hands). But what about volunteer efforts, neighbor efforts, and other ways that we can ensure people have access not just to health care but to the day to day support that helps everyone feel a part of the community?

*Livable community advocates will learn a broader definition of health and ways in which community initiatives can help ensure all residents have access to health care and services, but also to health enhancing community design.*

**With Regard to Work & Commerce:**
It means you will learn about the difference between employment and engagement. As individuals, we need not only access to employment opportunities, but also the supports needed to fully engage in work and in commerce. Fully engaging all residents is vital for economic development but also for empowering everyone to be a part of the community in a way that provides income, opportunities for personal growth and development, and access to needed goods and services.

*Livable community advocates will explore work and commerce in a way that goes beyond just jobs and shops. Together they will see how their collective power can be used to help local communities find ways to bring people with disabilities, older adults, youth and adults into a web of life-enhancing opportunities for using their skills and redefining how and where they spend.*

So remember the term “collective advocacy” and think how this is different from “self-advocacy.” Of course, self-advocacy is very, very important. But it’s just a starting place. After you learn how to advocate for yourself, you are in a wonderful position to advocate for others. And not just people like you, but everybody in your community. When everyone wins, everyone wins.

Section 1
Livability Concepts & Tools for Action
Each of us might list a different set of features that make a community, neighborhood or even street “livable.” One person might think a busy street with buses, streetcars, restaurants, book stores, cafes, skateboarders, day care centers, groceries, and a plaza where street vendors sell food and anyone is free to perform is the most “livable” place. Another might envision their rural or small town street, with good sidewalks and where everyone waves and knows one another, but mostly things are quiet, as their desired livable place. But beyond our individual definitions of a livable community, there are some common features advocates for livability include in their work. Communities able to see and act on the interrelated nature of these features will be those we see as most “livable” in the future.
How Did We Get Here?

While no one moment gave rise to the movement for more livable communities, there was a convergence of issues in the past few decades leading to the rise in advocacy to make communities better places to live, work and play.

- The population is getting older, and many of those aging will experience greater disability.
- Design of communities forced people to drive their cars to meet daily needs.
- Rising costs of fuel and crowded freeways, as well as concerns for the environment led the public to ask why we do not have better public transportation.
- Zoning laws and tax incentives separated residential areas from business and service areas.
- Older cities experienced decline in the last decades of the last century. Yet, neighborhoods and city centers had once been vital and contained many of the features of livable communities, e.g., access to public transit, walkable neighborhoods, small businesses and local support services.
- Rural areas and small towns also declined in the past decades, leaving many small towns with an aging population. Small towns in rural America also possessed, at one time, many features of livability, such as walkable town squares and local businesses.
- Rising rates of obesity among children and adults led health advocates to look at how our communities are built and the role the built environment plays in whether we get enough exercise in daily life.

Some would say the “perfect storm” created by these and other issues led to the movement for more and better planning for greater community livability.
Core Components of a Livable Community

While each of us probably has our own vision of what makes a community livable, advocates in this work typically include identifying features of key areas that are essential to creating livable communities. These key areas provide the framework for the remaining content of this section of the workbook. Each of these areas can be linked to accessibility and design components highlighted in each chapter.
Other Definitions of Livable Communities
In addition to these core components, some community advocates add others. These definitions typically reflect the field of view. For example, environmental organizations may emphasize the sustainable aspects of livable communities. In the example below, you can see that architects emphasize others. But all have a common core based on improving our communities through multiple strategies.

| American Institute of Architects
| Cites 10 Principles for Livable Communities¹ |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Design on a Human Scale     | Provide Choices                        |
| Encourage Mixed-Use Development | Preserve Urban Centers               |
| Vary Transportation Options | Build Vibrant Public Spaces           |
| Create a Neighborhood Identity | Conserve Landscapes           |
| Protect Environmental Resources | Design Matters                  |

Assessing Livability
Doing an assessment provides you a way to consider what changes you would like to see in your community and why. “It helps you identify the good, the bad, the challenging and the uplifting,”² which can then be used to develop a roadmap for the future. It can let you see things you never saw before in a place you think you know well, especially when you look through the eyes of new partners in the process.

Every community is in a different phase and some may feel an assessment is not needed. But if it has been some time since an assessment has been done, or if this is the first time doing it, “completing an assessment will provide you with the insights and mapping needed to accomplish your goals regardless of where you are in the process.”³

Community Leaders
An important step in assessing community is to evaluate the community’s leadership structure. What does this mean? It means identifying the people and organizations that have a stake in whether the community is livable. It might also include people or organizations who might oppose some aspects of planning and action. Who are powerful local leaders who might work with livable communities advocates to
make change? Examples of local leaders might be mayors, council members, foundations, universities, developers. Local leaders might also be neighborhood or issue activists well known in the community.

**Identifying Partners for Assessment**
The most successful assessments are done by a *coalition of residents of all ages and abilities*. Think about who might work with you to conduct the assessment. How can you bring as many different “eyes” to the livability assessment as possible? Later, in Chapter 10, we will look in more detail at how to establish effective collaborations for advocacy. But, the assessment phase is a great place to begin a strategic collaboration; organize for the long term.

**Assessment Tools**
There are a lot of tools available to assess your community’s livability. Since much of this work began with aging communities in mind, many of these tools focus on age-friendliness. But a community livable for older adults will contain many of the things making the community better for everyone. A few examples of these tools include:

- World Health Organization’s Age Friendly Cities Checklist
  [http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Age_friendly_cities_checklist.pdf](http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Age_friendly_cities_checklist.pdf)
- AARP’s Livable Communities Evaluation Guide
  [http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/d18311_communities.pdf](http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/d18311_communities.pdf)
- AdvantAge Initiative’s Indicators of An Elder Friendly Community

There are also tools for assessing specific components of livability planning (e.g., walkability, bikability, rollability, street design). Examples of these additional tools are highlighted in the remaining chapters of this first section of the workbook.

If assessing the entire community seems too much, start with something smaller. You might use one of these tools to assess only the downtown area or a neighborhood. Or, you might start by assessing a local park or a set of buildings and spaces heavily used in the community.
Real Scenario

In October, 2012 sixteen adults with intellectual disabilities from across the state and their families and/or support staff came to Bloomington, IN for a two-day workshop developed by Indiana University, Center on Aging and Community and discussed what makes neighborhoods/communities good places to live and stay put no matter what your age. The group learned how to look at streets, crosswalks, sidewalks and neighborhoods through an ageless lens, thinking about what life there might look like at any age. Late in the afternoon, with new information and utilizing the AARP Sidewalks and Streets Survey (www.CreateTheGood.org) assessment tool, the group split up and completed two different “walk and roll abouts” in local neighborhoods. One route focused primarily on the new, highly acclaimed B-Line trail through the downtown area while the other route focused on a nearby neighborhood a few blocks from the downtown area.

Get Started

- Who are the community leaders and how might we engage them?
  - 
  - 
- Who are some partners we can work with to conduct a livability assessment?
  - 
  - 
- What tools do we want to explore?
  - 
  - 
- Set a date for assessment and findings.
- If you have done an assessment in the past, think about these questions from the perspective of where are we now? Do we need new leaders on board and new partners? Do we want to use the same tool(s)?
For most attendees this was the first time they had thought about or participated in such an assessment even though several participants used wheel chairs (both motorized and non-motorized). Most participants were surprised at all the “infractions” discovered in the two hour adventure and the level of ease or difficulty by which the infractions could be remediated.

A few of the observed infractions the group thought could easily be remedied included not enough time to cross streets, shrubs and low hanging branches obstructing sidewalks, absent cross walks, cars parked in front of businesses covering the sidewalks and trash cans too far off the B-Line trail to reach from a wheelchair. A few more difficult-to-remedy infractions observed included lack of accessibility into the newly renovated local grocery store/restaurant in the downtown, access to get onto the city bus when using a wheel chair at a few locations, lack of curb cuts and many broken sidewalks.

With their observations and assessments the group finalized a presentation of findings and recommendations to share the next day with another workshop group working on a local Rails to Trails neighborhood. This Rails to Trails audience included state and local planners, developers, architects as well as interested parties. The group led a 20 minute presentation with many PowerPoint slides summarizing the recommendations. It was very well received. Upon completing the workshop and returning home each workshop participant was asked to help gather some interested people and help lead another walk and roll about in their home community.
Tips

▶ Spend some time thinking about how to get press to cover some part of the assessment process. This is a good first step in raising awareness that advocacy and action around livability is starting or moving to a new level. For example, someone might take photos of your assessment team walking a portion of the community.

▶ Consider how you will report the assessment findings and to whom. Beyond a written report, what kind of presentations would gain community interest?

Notes

3. Ibid.
The ability to move easily, safely and conveniently in one’s community is essential for engaging in the daily tasks of life. Mobility includes having transit options that are affordable, accessible for all abilities, conveniently located and scheduled, inter-connected, and reach enough of the community to ensure you can get where you need to go. It also includes walking and having paths, walkways and safe street crossings so that linking your walk or roll with a destination or even to another transit option can be done with ease. Mobility challenges differ in cities, suburbs and rural areas but each location can devise systems that encourage ease of mobility. What we want and need to advocate for are the most mobility-supportive environments.
What Matters
► Assessment & Action for
  ● Public & Private Transit Services
  ● Walking & Rolling
  ● Biking
► Planning for All Users
► Mobility Matters!

Public & Private Transit Services
Transit includes a range of services from buses, door-to-door vans, streetcars, light rail, subways, and in some communities, small retirement or even college towns, three-wheel taxis and golf cart taxis are popping up. A comprehensive transit approach includes:
► Fixed route, para-transit (on demand), neighborhood shuttles, affordable taxi and other private services
► Safety and comfort (covered stops, seating, lighting)
► Easy access (easy to read schedules posted where all can see and read, clear posting of fees and routes)

Assessment
While extensive assessment tools are referenced below for you to undertake a comprehensive look at transit options in your community, key questions to ask would include:
► What types of services exist and how well are they interconnected?
► Is a range of affordable and accessible transit options available?
  Are there supportive programs to assist those who cannot afford to pay or pay full-fare?
► Can most residents reach needed and/or desired services, employment, and social and educational opportunities through walking and wheeling or by public transportation?
► Is access to transit encouraged through education, ride-training, bus-lowering devices and other tools to enhance use by all ages and abilities?
► Are key areas of the community covered or are there significant areas where transit functions only on a very limited schedule or does not provide service?
What is the community doing now to build a comprehensive transit approach and where are the main gaps?

Who is already talking about this?

**Action**

Advocates can ask, once these and other questions have been answered, what are next steps. In a rural community or very small town, action steps might include:

- Extending para-transit and affordable taxi service hours to include nights and weekends
- Starting small bus or van public transit systems
- Ensuring existing transit services visit key service centers (shopping, medical, city offices) on a regular basis
- Securing funding to manage a volunteer driving program

Other actions to explore new options include:

- Look at voucher programs in other communities.
- Examine whether E-taxis might also be used.
- Explore having the city hire a mobility manager. Some communities have done this with good outcomes for residents.

In larger, urban areas, many of these same action steps are important. Additionally, many cities still lack realistic public transit. That is, they may have buses, but with limited routes, running primarily into and out of a downtown core (rather than cross-town or to suburban centers), lack seated and covered transit stops, have few, if any, supports to enhance use, and suffer from issues related to perceived safety and comfort. Action steps for urban residents might include:

- Advocacy for extended routes
- Education and ride support for new users
- Increased security
- More accessible design features at stops and stations
- Addition of options such as light rail and neighborhood shuttles

Once you have completed a transit assessment, you will have a good idea of the needs, and can then decide what sort of coalition you want to build to address these issues.
Walking & Rolling

Pathways provide access for pedestrians and persons in motorized and non-motorized chairs. Yet, the state of our pathways, sidewalks, and their connectivity to streets and transit are, in many communities missing or greatly limited, in disrepair, and unsafe. Sidewalks may have gaps, be heaving from weather or roots, and lack curb cuts. Design of walkways may not sensibly lead to cross-walks best serving users, e.g., the cross-walk may be very far from most common uses on a thoroughfare. Parking may reach into the walkway, limiting the width, making use difficult, impossible or unsafe. Pedestrians may not easily be seen by oncoming traffic, either during the daytime or at night. Inadequate lighting and signage present other hazards. Intersections are often designed for cars not for other users.

Issues with drivers also affect those who walk or roll. Drivers, as we all know, often drive too fast, especially on crowded thoroughfares, but in residential and slow zone areas as well especially when they use these areas to avoid major streets or traffic signals. Drivers do not yield or stop for pedestrians in crosswalks. Drivers may be distracted by devices like cell phones or text devices. Drivers may illegally pass, even when school buses have their stop warning devices in place.

Assessment

Do a Walkability/Rollability Assessment.

Gather a group of pedestrians representing a cross-section of users—walkers, people with wheelchairs, young mothers with strollers, small children—to assess a specific section of a street, a neighborhood, or the community. Once you have done the assessment, finding out what is already being done and gaps that could be addressed will give your advocacy efforts a great foundation and help target your efforts.

In picking a site for the assessment, try to pick one where changes will be indicative of changes needed throughout the community or where change will have the greatest impact. Some ideas for sites include:

- A main street that is old or that needs a boost
- A model school or great building that needs to be saved and changes are needed to some functioning streets that surround it
- A campus-to-town connection that needs better streets and better connectivity between streets and walkways
A place with the potential to become a social gathering hub, whether simple plaza spaces, streets or new and better places to invest in mixed use housing and retail.

A series of neighborhoods where traffic is not civil and where people are willing to work together to reclaim their right to a decent, respectful place to walk, live and congregate.

One excellent tool for assessing walkability can be found here: http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/ped_cmnity/ped_walkguide/

Walk Friendly Communities is a more comprehensive way to assess your community for certification. This site has lots of excellent information and good examples of steps communities have taken to increase walkability. www.walkfriendly.org

Another site with a huge set of resources for planning, educating and advocacy is: www.walkinginfo.org

COLLECT DATA ON PEDESTRIAN ACCIDENTS.
It is helpful to not only observe places in the community that need work for pedestrians to be safe and have good access, but also to identify problem areas. Finding good data on type of pedestrian accidents and age or other descriptors of the person(s) in the accidents can be challenging. So, you will first need to find out how this data is captured in your area and then how it might be used. This data can lead to change. Early developers of Safe Routes for Seniors found that by redesigning just two key intersections, they could reduce pedestrian accidents to almost zero!

COLLECT INFORMATION ON WHAT THE CITY IS DOING NOW. Find out what is being done, is planned, and where advocates could help push these changes along. Contact your local planning department. Then ask who is responsible for sidewalks, curb cuts, and other pedestrian planning. Among things you could ask the local planner are:

- Does your city have pedestrian friendly/vehicle free zones?
- Is the city installing features like raised sidewalks, expanding ramps and curb cuts, and installing benches for people to rest in places where long walks or street crossings may be challenging?
- Are there improvements occurring or in place to increase connectivity of walkways?
Action

Once gaps in pedestrian safety and access have been identified, there are many options and tools for improvement. You might advocate for these actions:

- Redesign least safe intersections and corridors.
- Develop Safe Routes for Seniors. Safe Routes for Seniors adds some design features building on ADA requirements that accommodate changes in sensory perception with age. Many of these features benefit people of any age with mobility and visual impairments. http://www.transalt.org/campaigns/pedestrian/safeseniors
- Encourage community application for Walk Friendly Community certification. http://www.walkfriendly.org/get_started.cfm
- Encourage a comprehensive approach to pedestrian access—walking and rolling—planning. Things like curb cuts, zero step entrances, sidewalk repair, linkage of walkways, and other features should be part of a larger commitment to ensuring everyone can get around safely and with relative ease.

A few other websites with good information on policy and planning changes:

Follow the RoadMap to Pedestrian Safety Steps found here: http://www.library.unt.edu/gpo/OTA/walk/resource/psrdm4.htm

Walk Steps website has many case studies of different policy tools communities in the U.S. and other countries have used to improve walkability. http://walksteps.org/case-studies/

A 38 minute on-line course to help you see how to begin to set up Safe Routes for Seniors (cost is $14.95). http://courses.planetizen.com/course/safe-routes-seniors

Did You Know?

Some communities are creating their own walking maps for their town. These walks and rolls can be short or long. They can wind through parks or business districts or residential areas, but are used to get people out moving through safe and pedestrian friendly areas. These maps are great for local residents but also to help visitors get a sense of the place where you live. Maybe you can create some “walk and roll” maps for your town!

Biking

Biking is another key element of a comprehensive and interconnected plan for mobility. Safety issues similar to those experienced by pedestrians are important. Creating bikeways that serve to get people to and from work, services and for recreation are all important. Connecting bikeways with other types of transit is also important to creating a comprehensive web allowing access to the community by linking different forms of transit.

Assessment

CONDUCT A FOCUSED EVALUATION OF BIKEABILITY.

Bikes, pedestrians, persons in wheelchairs, kids on skateboards, and moms with strollers, are all vying for space on our walkways and roadways. But often, what is good for bicyclists, is also good for all of these users.

These tools from the Pedestrian and Bicycling Information Center are a great start to conducting an assessment of bike friendliness:
http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/

Doing this type of assessment should help you inventory what your city is doing now. But if needed, be sure to conduct a thorough review of what is being done. Contact the local planning department to see if a bicycle plan is in place or being considered. Then you will know how best to target any advocacy efforts.

Action

As with other mobility options, there are many ways to enhance bikeability. Actions steps you might take include:

- Find partners with an interest in biking for a specific purpose (health, bike to school). Explore how you can work together to promote bicycling and bike-friendly planning.
- Work on an education plan for road users and bicyclists to enhance safety for all.
- If local masterplan (see more in Chapter 12) does not integrate bicycling, advocate for including it.
Planning for All Users

There are good signs in planning for mobility. One of these is the Complete Streets movement; another is the interest in overall planning for more walkable communities. “Complete streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users; pedestrians, persons in wheelchairs, bicyclists, motorists, and public transportation users of all ages and abilities are able to safely move along and across a street.” (Health by Design, 2013). The focus of the Complete Streets movement has primarily been to help states and local communities adopt new policies (e.g., planning ordinances) and procedural changes “to ensure the entire street right-of-way is designed and operated to enable safe access for all users.” (AARP, 2009)

The Complete Streets movement is an excellent example in many communities of effective collaborative advocacy. Since so many users are affected by the Complete Streets policies, advocates who have come together to show the benefits for all residents, rather than any one group, have typically been successful in their efforts.

To see examples of Complete Streets policies communities like yours have developed, go to: http://www.healthbydesignonline.org/IndianaCompleteStreetsCampaign.html

Mobility Matters!

Mobility must also be seen as a part of overall planning for quality of life, affecting where we choose to live, work and play, our health, and access to services and supports. In Atlanta, for example, the Lifelong Communities project, a collaboration between the Atlanta Metropoli-
tan Planning Office, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), and Atlanta’s Area Agency on Aging focuses on promoting housing and transportation options, encouraging healthy lifestyles, and expanding information and access to services. This collaboration has resulted in the creation of ARC Guidelines for Promoting Housing Options for Older Adults through Zoning and in improvements to the Atlanta Region’s Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan (ARC, 2010). Making the link between mobility and other livability issues is an important tool for advocacy.²

Get Started

✅ What first steps would you take to begin a mobility assessment?
1. _________________________________________________
2. _________________________________________________
3. _________________________________________________
4. _________________________________________________
5. _________________________________________________

✅ Identify streets, intersections or corridors that could immediately benefit from a Complete Streets or other redesign.
__________________________________________________
__________________________________________________
__________________________________________________
__________________________________________________
__________________________________________________
Real Scenario

In Indianapolis, a coalition led by Health by Design, came together to ensure passage of a Complete Streets ordinance, and has gone on to help other communities in the state to do so as well.

Collaborative partnerships are critical to the success of the Indiana Complete Streets Coalition, a workgroup of Health by Design. Those relationships are what led to the unanimous adoption of the Indianapolis Complete Streets ordinance, later named the strongest in the nation, in August of 2012.

Complete Streets are safe, accessible and convenient for all travelers, whether they are on a bicycle, in a car, riding the bus, or on foot. A Complete Streets policy ensures that planners and engineers consistently design, build, operate and maintain roadways with all users in mind.

Passage of Indianapolis’ Complete Streets Ordinance began in June 2009, with a one-and-a-half day statewide workshop co-sponsored by AARP Indiana and Health by Design. An expert from the National Complete Streets Coalition provided a keynote speech and facilitated the discussion. More than 150 stakeholders participated in the event, envisioning together how Complete Streets would benefit Hoosiers and creating a roadmap for how to achieve policy successes.
Over the next two years, initial conversations about policy development were held, and ongoing education of community partners and key decision-makers took place. In addition, AARP Indiana was conducting walkability assessments in various locations around the state, including in the Indianapolis/Marion County area. Not only did this work engage neighborhood associations and local residents, it also brought greater awareness to City-County Council members and ultimately helped enlist their support for the ordinance.

Beginning in September 2011, partners began meeting regularly and discussing policy language with the Mayor’s Office, the Department of Public Works, the Office of Sustainability, community groups, and other advocacy organizations. Together, they drafted initial language for the ordinance and helped the City finalize strong ordinance language.

In March 2012, the campaign went into full advocacy mode, including sending letters to the editor, meeting with the editorial boards of major Indianapolis newspapers, reaching out to neighborhood associations, and circulating an online petition that gathered more than 1,000 signatures. The campaign met with Council members, used earned and paid media, and gathered signatures for a sign-on letter that eventually drew support from 61 local and statewide organizations. The letter was delivered to all 29 City-County Council members prior to a public hearing on the ordinance, and thank you notes were sent afterwards.

As this example shows, a strong network of advocates working together toward a common goal can have significant success. There are now 10 Complete Streets policies across Indiana, with several other communities in various stages of policy development. The work of the coalition continues: building relationships, educating decision-makers and mobilizing advocates to achieve healthier, safer, more active communities.
Learn the lingo! If you are doing transit advocacy, you need to know the terminology used by transit planners and engineers, such as Average Daily Traffic (ADT), Level of Service (LOS), etc.

Engage with a range of audiences such as families with children interested in Safe Routes to School, bicyclists, and others. Strategic collaboration will help you succeed!

Focus on a high profile site to engage the community in working toward better and safer access. Then, use success in getting design change in one site to encourage change in additional sites.
A vital component of livable communities is the availability of affordable, accessible housing for all. Having a variety of housing options in neighborhoods with good transit and/or pedestrian connections can greatly affect the ability of all residents to remain independent and actively engaged in their community. For older adults and persons with disabilities, being able to live independently for as long as possible requires stable, adequate housing and supportive services that meet individual needs. Housing is inextricably linked to quality of life, and provides shelter, comfort, and security. But, many older adults and those with disabilities are in homes that are not conducive to safety and independence due to barriers, hazards, and environmental demands. Some do not have access to affordable housing. Others are struggling to find housing that can be adapted to their needs.
It is becoming increasingly important for community housing advocates to inform, educate, engage, and develop partnerships with community officials, residents, developers, service providers, and other stakeholders to offer supports like home modification programs and to include visitability and Universal Design features in new construction. It will also be vital, because of an increasing aging population, to advocate for zoning law and building code changes, and to encourage adaptive reuse of old, abandoned structures to provide more diverse, affordable housing options close to supportive services. And, we know the same options are beneficial to others of all ages and abilities who need or want housing choices that meet personal needs, such as access to employment, cultural resources, and recreation.

**What Matters**

- Home Modifications
- Visitability
- Universal Design
- Affordable Housing
- Adaptive Reuse
- The Fair Housing Act
- Supportive Housing

**Home Modifications**

Home modifications are adaptations to living spaces to allow people to live safely and independently in their own homes and neighborhoods. Strategic changes to the home can create a safe, usable environment free from hazards and environmental demands. Home modifications can be simple changes such as installing grab bars in showers and tubs, replacing cabinet door handles with pull knobs, or installing stair rails. More extensive modifications, such as widening doorways, lowering countertops, cabinets, and light switches, or installing wheelchair ramps at entrances, can greatly extend the ability of older adults and persons with disabilities to remain in their homes as long as possible.
What Are Some of the Barriers to Home Modifications?

- Consumers often lack awareness of existing home modification programs.
- Consumers may lack knowledge about the potential effectiveness of doing home modifications.
- There is often a lack of assessment services to identify needs and appropriate modifications.
- There are insufficient funding sources or financing programs to help pay for modifications and repairs.
- Landlords may be reluctant to perform modifications for renters or lack awareness of home modification finance options.

What Can Be Done to Address These Barriers?

- Communities can increase financial support to help pay for home modifications, going so far as to operate their own loan programs to help low- and moderate-income individuals pay for needed repairs and modifications.
- Volunteer programs are bringing youth groups together with retired contractors, electricians, and plumbers.
- Functional assessments are being provided through aging and social service agencies, while environmental assessments are being performed by home inspectors as well as family, friends, and case managers.
- Communities can work to expand public awareness of the benefits and effectiveness of home modifications by holding health fairs and seminars.

Action

- Check to see if home modification programs exist in your community by contacting city planners, community organizations, or volunteer groups. If a program exists, how could you make it more visible and accessible to the community? If no program exists, how could you organize such a program?
- Organize volunteer programs to assist low-income seniors and people with disabilities with home modifications.
- Partner with community officials to develop block grants and funding sources that assist with home modification costs.
- Work with city housing departments to expedite permitting processes that enable modifications such as wheelchair ramps.
Here are some links to additional information on home modification:

- The site, offered through the University of Southern California Andrus Gerontology Center, links you to online courses, but also to extensive resources, such as a library and videos, on home modifications from the perspective of aging, disability, healthcare, and others. http://www.homemods.org/

- At this Indiana University website, you can download a guidebook detailing how to create a home modification initiative. http://www.lifetimecommunities.org/news-items/2010.06.16.html

Visitability

Visitability is an affordable and sustainable design approach for including basic accessibility features into existing housing stock, and in new construction. The concept of visitability was pioneered by Concrete Change, a Georgia advocacy group, to make homes more accessible for persons with disabilities. Visitability means that not only would you be able to visit friends or family in any home, but anyone would also have easy access to your residence—regardless of ability.

To be considered visitable, homes must include three basic elements:

- A zero-step entrance
- 32" wide doorways throughout the floor plan
- Access to at least a half bath on the main floor
These features are considered the most essential for a person with mobility impairments to visit or live in a home. If included during design and planning, these features are very cost-efficient and provide advantages to non-disabled individuals, as well. So, how do we make this a more common aspect of home design?

**VOLUNTARY OR MANDATORY BUILDING ORDINANCES FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION OR ADDITIONS TO EXISTING STRUCTURES.** A few communities have adopted mandatory visitability ordinances and require accessibility features to be included in all new construction. Other communities are approaching visitability through voluntary ordinances or incentive-based programs where builders are given expedited permitting, building certifications, tax incentives, or fee waivers for offering visitability features to home buyers. Key issues with the use of ordinances include:

- Contractor opposition (especially to mandatory programs) can be a challenge. Contractors often contend that design for visitability is impractical for certain cites and incorporating features of visitability can increase housing costs.
- Voluntary ordinances may be inadequate if the public is unaware of the availability of visitability features or they are not offered by contractors.
- Some communities may underestimate the need for accessible housing and may not support visitability inclusion.
- Lack of awareness of the visitability movement can also hamper efforts.
- Insufficient experience with visitability features may lead some contractors to overestimate costs.

**OTHER APPROACHES TO ENCOURAGING ACTION ON VISITABILITY.** Some visitability programs are allowing builders to submit a request for funds to cover the costs of providing visitability features in their homes. While the homes built under these demonstration programs are therefore subsidized, the intent is to generate builder expertise and public awareness that will lead to acceptance of visitability features in the unsubsidized market. Several ordinances require visitability features in housing receiving local public or state funding. The key is to educate communities to the benefits of visitability and accessibility features, and many localities have instituted consumer awareness programs to promote visitability.


**Action**

- Find out if your community has a voluntary or mandatory visitability ordinance.
- If city design codes for new construction include mandatory visitability, work to ensure consistent code enforcement by officials who have received training and guidance about visitability features.
- If no ordinance, mandatory or voluntary, work with other advocates to build support so city planners will work toward such an ordinance. Make the case that voluntary ordinances allow builders to experience incorporating visitable features in homes and help them become comfortable with visitability inclusion.
- Contact your local chapter of the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) to find out if they are taking action to include visitability or accessibility features in new construction.
- Educate the community on the benefits and cost effectiveness of visitability features. On a small scale, give a handout on visitability to a builder or advocate visitability to a friend buying a house. On a larger scale, do something to get the community’s attention. For example, work with home builders to showcase a home with visitability features.

These websites can help you learn more about visitability and strategies to make it happen in your community.

This is the website of Concrete Change, and it provides education, resources, and policy strategies for enacting visitability initiatives. [http://concretechange.org/](http://concretechange.org/)

AARP has an excellent report about the visitability movement, barriers to implementation, and strategies for creating community visitability initiatives. You can find it here: [http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/2008_14_access.pdf](http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/2008_14_access.pdf)
Universal Design

Universal Design concepts and features are usually incorporated into new construction and are usable by people of all ages or abilities. While Universal Design includes the three features of visitability, the design goes further in providing additional features such as wider internal doorways, larger kitchens and bathrooms, lower cabinets and countertops, and easily reachable switches and handles. These and other features enable individuals to remain in their homes throughout their lifespan, even if their needs change over time.

Why Support Universal Design?

- Universal Design considers human needs and abilities throughout the lifespan.
- Universal Design seeks to make the built environment usable to the greatest extent possible by everyone, regardless of age, size, ability, or status in life. Products and environments are designed for people without disabilities as well as for those with disabilities.
- Universal Design strives to introduce higher levels of access and usability within the constraints of affordability.
- Costs of adding Universal Design features in new construction are not necessarily higher because universally designed homes are marketable, attractive, and offer a comfortable, safe environment for the homeowner throughout their lifetime.

What Are the Barriers to Greater Incorporation of Universal Design?

- Many people, the public as well as building contractors, are not aware of the benefits and availability of Universal Design features.
- As with visitability features, the public and building contractors may believe adding Universal Design components will add costs to new construction.
- Voluntary approaches, while helpful in educating builders and consumers, may not be adopted at a rate to sufficiently increase affordable housing stock.
- Consumers may feel that mandatory Universal Design ordinances take away their freedom of choice when building or buying a home.
What Can Be Done to Further Support Universal Design?
Here are some actions that have worked in other communities:

- Offering model home shows featuring Universal Design components.
- Initiating voluntary ordinances requesting builders to offer Universal Design features as options in new construction. Voluntary ordinances, with incentives, have been more successful than mandatory ordinances in seeing less resistance from builders and developers.
- Using mandatory Universal Design ordinances. Where these have been successful, builders are required to provide a checklist of Universal Design features to potential homebuyers, providing an opportunity for individuals to choose accessibility features for their homes.
- Using incentives such as streamlined permitting, financial incentives, building certifications, and fee waivers to entice homebuilders to offer Universal Design features in new construction.

Action

- Find out what your community is doing to promote Universal Design inclusion in new construction. Does your community have an ordinance?
- Educate the public and community officials of the availability, benefits, and cost effectiveness of Universal Design inclusion by holding a model home show on Universal Design.
- Collaborate with local leaders to initiate voluntary Universal Design ordinances.
- Work with community housing officials to help establish incentive-based programs that offer financial incentives, building certifications, streamlined permitting, or fee waivers to builders who participate in voluntary Universal Design programs.

There is a lot of good information available about Universal Design. If you want to learn more, visit one of these websites:

The Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University hosts a website offering information about Universal Design principles providing links to resources, publications, education, and training about Universal Design concepts. http://www.ncsu.edu/ncsu/design/cud/
The Center’s website also includes this report which provides information about Universal Design concepts and the benefits of each. Knowing these benefits can help you promote Universal Design to builders and local policy makers. http://www.ncsu.edu/ncsu/design/cud/pubs_p/docs/UDinHousing.pdf

Affordable Housing

A significant component of livable communities is affordable and appropriate housing close to public transit, as well as within walking distance to amenities and services. Safe and appropriate housing is widely recognized as a key to sustaining health, dignity, and quality of life for older adults and those with disabilities and limitations. Communities are experiencing a general shortage of affordable housing due to strict zoning laws and building codes and the lack of diverse land use options. What are some communities doing to address this situation?

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS (ADUs), MICROHOMES, AND OTHER DIVERSE HOUSING OPTIONS. Many communities are addressing the shortage of affordable housing by providing a mix of diverse housing options. An accessory dwelling unit (ADU) is a small unit built on the same lot as an existing single-family home and is one housing type that communities are pursuing as a strategy to both create additional affordable housing and increase density in single-family neighborhoods. Other housing options include elder cottages, shared housing, and microhomes, which are small homes with an average size of 500 to 1000 square feet. Zoning ordinances that only allow for development of single-family homes on large lots can restrict the availability of smaller homes and rental units that tend to be more affordable. Land-use plans that include higher-density residential areas with a variety of smaller, more affordable housing types also create more walkable communities. To offer more diverse housing options and create higher density land usage, communities will need to ensure that local zoning is flexible enough to experiment with many types of housing.
Barriers to the provision of affordable housing limit housing choices, and place the burden of finding appropriate housing on those who can least afford it. And, gentrification efforts to revitalize downtown areas can many times displace low-income and elderly residents and increase housing costs. Communities are addressing these barriers in a variety of ways. How can local communities take action to increase the availability of affordable housing, and to ensure that it is available throughout the community?

- Change zoning laws and building codes to ensure more diverse land use. These changes allow options such as shared housing and the construction of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and elder cottages on sites with existing single-family homes.

- Use inclusionary zoning ordinances. Inclusionary zoning can either require or encourage developers—residential and commercial—to create affordable units as a part of any new development. Typically, these ordinances mandate a percentage of affordable units, designate an income level defined by median, and include a required length of time for these units to remain affordably priced. Developers may also receive incentives in return, such as a density bonus, expedited permitting, tax abatements, waivers of fees, and others.

- Use mandatory inclusionary zoning ordinances to produce more affordable housing by requiring a percentage of all new construction to be affordable to low- and moderate-income residents.

- Create Transit-Oriented Developments (TODs) to provide affordable housing near public transportation and within walking distance to services and amenities.

- Where downtown revitalization, through gentrification efforts, is occurring, address the retention of local residents by providing a percentage of affordable housing while maintaining the integrity and history of local neighborhoods.

- Preserve existing affordable housing units. Some, like Section 8 and 202, have expiring federal subsidies. Work with local advocates to make a list of these properties, and begin working well in advance of the expiration dates to encourage local leaders to explore options with property owners that would allow these units to remain.

- Whatever approach is utilized, it will be important for communities to remember to provide a range of affordable housing types, well located near transit, local amenities, and connected by safe, walkable pathways to encourage independence and community involvement.
Action

- Find out what is being done in your community to create more affordable housing.
- Do the zoning laws in your community allow for the addition of accessory dwelling units or elder cottages to sites with existing single-family homes? If not, how could you go about changing the zoning laws to allow more diverse land use?
- Does your community have minimum lot-size zoning which prohibits the construction of microhomes and other diverse housing options? If so, how could you go about changing these zoning laws?
- Does your community have an inclusionary zoning ordinance requiring a certain percentage of new construction to be reserved for low- and moderate-income residents? If not, how could you approach city officials or the zoning board to include such an ordinance?
- Are efforts being made to revitalize downtown areas? If so, find out if affordable housing is being included in the development plans.

To learn more, one particularly helpful website is that of the Affordable Housing Advocates based in Cincinnati, OH. Their site has not only general information about housing advocacy but also links to affordable housing initiatives in other states. http://www.ahacincy.org/

Another helpful guide is this product of the Regional Affordable Housing Initiative in Chicago, IL. The site shows a variety of tools communities can use to create more affordable housing. http://www.bpichicago.org/documents/CommunityGuidetoCreatingAffordableHousing.pdf

Adaptive Reuse of Housing

With a limited availability of affordable housing stock and dwindling space for new development, communities are placing an emphasis on sustainability by saving buildings from abandonment and demolition and incorporating them into plans for livable communities. Many vacant or abandoned buildings, such as hospitals, office complexes, schools, churches, and firehouses, are in centralized settings within walking distance to basic services and transportation. Communities are beginning to realize that an ideal way to utilize these resources is to adaptively reuse these structures to provide housing for older adults, persons with disabilities, and families.
What are some barriers to adaptive reuse?

- Hazardous material assessments can be costly and hinder reuse/redevelopment.
- The cost of meeting historic preservation requirements may hinder projects.

What are the benefits of building reuse?

- Adapting older structures for new use is a sustainable alternative to demolition and replacement. Adaptive reuse provides an opportunity to bring buildings up to current codes, make building systems and layouts more appropriate and efficient, and contribute to revitalizing neighborhoods.
- Reuse projects occurring in centralized locations can create more affordable housing near transportation, shopping, and other supportive services—all aspects of livable communities.
- The cost of adaptive reuse can be considerably less expensive than new home construction and can help revitalize economically depressed areas.
- Adaptive reuse may preserve historical architecture and stimulate economic investment in areas that may have lacked residential use.

A good example of adaptive reuse is the historic restoration of the Athena Center Senior Apartments in Crawfordsville, IN. In reusing the 1910 Crawfordsville High School, the exterior appearance and function of the historic structure were preserved by restoring all exterior doors and windows and retaining the architectural detail of the building. The classrooms were converted into 73 units of rental
housing for seniors and persons with disabilities while the gymnasium was redesigned as a health and fitness center for the residents with space available for social and civic activities.

**What Can Communities Do to Promote Adaptive Reuse?**

- Conduct a comprehensive survey to help identify the extent of adaptive reuse possibilities within a community.
- Use adaptive reuse ordinances to increase the inventory of affordable housing by using existing but underutilized structures, especially those near transit and employment opportunities. These ordinances typically provide for expedited approval processes and ensure that older and historic buildings are not subject to the same zoning and code requirements that apply to new construction.
- Revise zoning ordinances to encourage adaptive reuse through flexible zoning, such as mixed use, or by allowing residences in areas zoned for commercial or industrial use.

**Action**

- Find out what is being done in your community to adaptively reuse old, abandoned structures.
- Determine if your community has an Adaptive Reuse Ordinance. If no ordinance is in place, how could you work to include one?
- Work with other affordable housing advocates to inventory existing structures slated for review or demolition. Be prepared to provide public comments promoting adaptive reuse when hearings or other opportunities are announced.
- When reuse projects are being discussed, insist that persons with low incomes, the elderly, and those with disabilities are included in the planning for these projects. Too often developers are focused on financial gain, and fail to realize that adaptive reuse projects can create innovative, diverse, and affordable housing stock.

Both of the following websites include tools communities can use to promote adaptive reuse.


The Fair Housing Act—Accessibility

The Federal Fair Housing Act (FHA) was passed in 1968, originally to protect against discrimination. The law was amended in 1988 to include accessibility protections for persons with disabilities. FHA accessibility requirements include:

- An accessible building entrance or an accessible route
- Accessible public and common use areas
- Accessible routes into and through a dwelling
- Light switches, electrical outlets, thermostats, and other environmental controls in accessible locations
- Reinforced walls in bathrooms for installation of grab bars
- Usable kitchens and bathrooms

FHA accessibility requirements apply to all covered multi-family dwellings designed and constructed for first occupancy after March 13, 1991. Dwellings must be readily accessible and usable by persons with disabilities. Single-family homes constructed with federal, state, or local funds may also be subject to accessibility requirements. Lack of enforcement of accessibility requirements has failed to increase equal access for all persons, and individuals still struggle to find housing that meets their needs. In light of this, it will be especially important to advocate for FHA accessibility requirements at the local level.

Some Common Barriers to Accessibility Are:

- Some communities may have ordinances or zoning restrictions that prohibit housing for persons with disabilities from locating in a particular area while allowing other groups of unrelated individuals to live together in the same area.
- Communities may be unwilling to make reasonable accommodations in land use and zoning policies to enable persons, or groups of persons with disabilities an equal opportunity to locate in an area of their choosing.
- Existing buildings and residences may not have been modified in compliance with FHA accessibility requirements and may still pose barriers for persons with disabilities.
- Communities may lack awareness of or be uncertain of appropriate standards for accessible design.
**Action**

- Find out if your community buildings and structures are accessible in accordance with FHA accessibility requirements.
- Conduct a survey of available apartments in your community and the scope and nature of the units’ accessible features.
- Coordinate efforts between community apartment associations and the local fair housing council to initiate a voluntary fair housing testing and education program to educate property management personnel about required accessibility features.
- Work with your local zoning board to integrate interpretations of the FHA accessibility requirements into local building codes.

Fair Housing Accessibility FIRST is an initiative designed to promote compliance with the Fair Housing Act design and construction requirements. The site offers useful information, instruction programs, online web resources, and technical guidance and support. [http://www.fairhousingfirst.org](http://www.fairhousingfirst.org)

**Supportive Housing**

Supportive housing is a combination of housing and supportive services intended as a cost-effective way to enable people to live more independently. Owners and developers of senior supportive housing have anticipated the frailty of entering residents and have incorporated supportive elements into the design and accommodation of the residences. Developers are responding to the strong preferences of older adults to avoid repeated relocations by creating continuous-housing-and-care developments which allow older adults to remain in familiar environments as their need for greater levels of care increases.

Without assistance, some older adults and persons with disabilities cannot afford owner- or renter-occupied housing. While many older adults benefit from public housing, vouchers, and privately-owned subsidized properties, approximately 300,000 federally assisted housing units are reserved specifically for older adults through Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly Program. This program provides very low-income elderly with options that allow them to live independently in an environment with supportive services such as cleaning, cooking, and transportation. Section 811 Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities is the only federal housing program designated to create affordable, accessible housing for low-income persons with disabilities; by 2012, over 30,000 units had been produced.

The Federal Fair Housing Act (FHA) was passed in 1968, originally to protect against discrimination. The law was amended in 1988 to include accessibility protections for persons with disabilities.
through Section 811. Funds are provided to develop and subsidize rental housing with supportive services for low-income persons with disabilities to allow them to live as independently as possible in the community. Still, it is estimated that more than one million very low-income renters in the U.S. that include non-elderly persons with disabilities and “worst-case” housing needs are yet to be served. Section 811 is the only federal program to address this shortfall.

**Some Barriers to Supportive Housing Include:**

- A decline in funding for both Section 202 and Section 811 programs is leading to a decrease in construction of new units.
- Waiting lists of older adults and persons with disabilities continue to grow as the supply of suitable, affordable housing shrinks.
- There is a continuing gap in available housing for middle-income older adults who are not eligible for subsidized housing, and may not be able to afford market rate supportive housing.
- Some communities may object to the development of age-related housing or multiunit housing in residential areas.

**Action**

- Find out how many units in your community are reserved for older adults and persons with disabilities through Section 202 and Section 811 housing programs. Are there waiting lists for persons to obtain supportive housing?
- Does your community have other supportive housing options, such as public housing, voucher programs, or privately-owned subsidized housing? If not, how can you work with local leaders to create alternatives for supportive housing options?
- Check to see if your community uses Community Development Block Grants to expand supportive housing for persons with low- and moderate-incomes.

This link provides some good information on the importance of supportive housing: [http://www.aing.ny.gov/LivableNY/Resource-Manual/Housing/III1n.pdf](http://www.aing.ny.gov/LivableNY/Resource-Manual/Housing/III1n.pdf)
Get Started

✔ Identify a few local leaders and housing advocates in nearby communities to find out what best practices other localities are using to address affordable housing needs. In which communities might you start?

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✔ Identify one or two housing needs in your community which need more attention. Which would you begin to work on first?

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✔ Visitability ordinances are gaining momentum. Who could you collaborate with to work on passing an ordinance in your community?

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Real Scenario

In 1998, Edward Bannister, a person with a disability, resident of the Village of Bolingbrook, IL, and a member of the Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities, approached the Village council with the idea of including visitability features in newly constructed homes. The council thought this idea made sense and a meeting between Mayor Claar, Village staff, and community residents with disabilities resulted in staff being instructed to conduct a survey of all single-family home builders active in Bolingbrook. The survey was to determine the approximate cost of incorporating certain visitability features, such as no step entrances and 32” clear doorways into new construction. The cost analysis showed the average price increase would be approximately 1.5% per home.
Based on analysis of cost, the city drafted building code amendments and sent these proposed amendments to active builders in Bolingbrook. Open meetings were held to allow builders, architects, residents with disabilities, and all residents to voice their opinions of the purported changes. The Plan Commission unanimously approved the final draft on September 1, 1999.

Initially, the visitability ordinance was voluntary, and the Village offered technical assistance to builders in an effort to help them become familiar and comfortable with the inclusion of visitability. Having a long period during which the ordinance was voluntary built a climate of supportive change, allowed builders experience with incorporating visitability, and ultimately led to no resistance to making the ordinance mandatory. After experiencing no resistance to visitability inclusion, the Mayor passed the Visitability Code into law and it became a mandatory ordinance in 2003.

The Visitability Code of Bolingbrook has so far created approximately 3,000 visitable homes in subdivisions throughout the community, and new construction is still underway. This scenario is an excellent example of what can be accomplished when community officials, builders, and residents work together to include accessibility features in new construction.
When thinking about advocacy for affordable, accessible housing in your community, always be aware of the connections and collaborations possible with residents, businesses, city officials, service providers, and other stakeholders.

When approaching affordable housing, be creative in your thinking and consider options beyond public supportive housing. Be open to any and all ideas for changing zoning regulations and adaptively reusing buildings to offer more diverse housing options for all residents.

Remember that communities, no matter what size, face similar challenges in providing safe, affordable housing close to transportation, services, and amenities.

When approaching individuals about visitability or Universal Design ordinances, be prepared to take a good example to share with them.
Livability is not just about bricks and mortar planning. A livable community also supports residents’ access to opportunities for social activities. It is designed so that every person, of all ages and abilities, has access to the arts, culture and enrichment. This aspect of livability is really two-pronged. The built environment can support this access and encourage informal social aspects of the community. But it can also involve using effective tools of outreach and support to engage all members of the community in the arts and cultural activities.

What Matters
- Community Design & Social Sustainability
- Arts & Culture
- Linkage to Other Livability Features
It is too often the case that our cities and towns have embraced design and planning that does not really support the “social health” of the community. Some advocates call for including the idea of social sustainability, along with planning for environmental and economic sustainability. Yet, the social aspect seems to have been given less attention. The Young Foundation describes social sustainability this way:

“Social sustainability combines the design of the physical realm with the design of the social world—infrastructure to support social and cultural life, social amenities, systems for citizen engagement and space for people and places to evolve.”

Six areas have been seen as essential supports for social and cultural life. These include:

- A sense of community identity and belonging
- Tolerance, respect and engagement with people from different cultures, background and beliefs
- Friendly, cooperative and helpful behavior in neighborhoods
- Opportunities for cultural, leisure, community, sport and other activities
- Low levels of crime and anti-social behavior with visible, effective and community-friendly policing
- Opportunities for all people to be socially included and have similar opportunities

While just incorporating livability concepts cannot address every aspect of these areas, there are things that can be done to further the achievement of these supports.

**Physical Design to Support Social Life**

Many communities lack safe and inviting places for different generations, for those of all ages and abilities to gather naturally. These can be vibrant town squares, plazas, mini-parks, streets closed to vehicle traffic, and others. What advocates for livable communities envision is better use of the built environment to ensure residents have opportunities to interact and to be a part of the social life of their cities or towns. Advocates want spaces that attract people and give them a reason to stay. A few ideas will help you begin thinking about what could be done where you live.
**Place-Making**

Often our communities and neighborhoods lack people-friendly design, including car-free areas, eyes on the street, good lighting, “third spaces” such as cafes, and informal gathering places. What our communities need are good places. Such places are where people feel invited to participate in community life, where different cultures and ages interact, and where citizens feel they “own” their community and are an essential and welcomed part of it. We know that good public places support children and older people coming together; we know that places where many people gather provide safety, with many eyes on the interactions taking place. We know that places where families gather create stronger neighborhoods. Shared spaces reduce the sense of isolation. So, it is important that advocates for livability communities work to develop these “good places” and ease transit to them, with good walkways and other access routes. Good public places are also convenient (within a five to 10 minute walk from work or home), attractive, friendly and active.

One principle invoked for public spaces is the Power of 10. That is, any good public space should have ten good places each with ten good things for people to do.³

A few solutions for this kind of place-making may include:

**SQUARES & PLAZAS.** While some communities lack good squares and plazas, others have older ones in need of redesign. In addition to applying the Power of 10 principle, other features of good squares and plazas include:

- Good physical access, including pathways in and out, good lighting and extended hours of use
- Spaces are ones that encourage peers to invite others
- Destinations with multiple spots to visit
- Flexible space—can include movable stages, tables with umbrellas, movable chairs
- Public art—art can be “touched,” climbed on or makes you stop and think
- Opportunities to linger, through options like cafes, food carts, and other vendors as well as inviting spaces for relaxing in comfort
- A strategy for using the space in different seasons
- Good maintenance and management. People want to know the space is clean and well-maintained.

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“It is difficult to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished.” —The Social Life of Public Spaces, William H. Whyte (1980)
PARKLETS. These mini-parks are used to reduce the width of sidewalks or other areas with extensive concrete and create gathering places. Parklets can help to break up streets, offer places for pedestrians to rest, for people-watching, for eating, for playing a game of chess, or just to meet a friend. Typically parklets include these three features:

- Seating
- Landscaping
- Paving treatment

COMMUNITY GARDENS, FARMERS MARKETS & OTHER COMMUNITY PROJECTS. Developing community gardens and other community projects encourage inter-generational and inter-group interaction. Community gardens can also contribute to food security, to promoting healthy eating, increasing knowledge of plant science, and have many other benefits. Farmers markets support local growers and bring neighbors together.

IMPERMANENT SPACES. Some communities have developed short-term “place-making” events, turning streets into a safe, fun and car free space.

- Open Streets. Open Streets temporarily close a section of a street, so people can engage in socializing, walking, biking, dancing and other activities. These events are usually just a few blocks long, and activities are primarily led by local community members. The focus is on increasing opportunities for physical activity, to support local businesses near the event, and to bring people out by walking.
or biking to explore a new place. On a closed street day, you might see people doing a dance class, yoga, mini-races, or other organized activities.

► Sunday Bikeways/Parkways. Communities across the U.S. have events in which a set of streets winding through a section of neighborhoods or along a few corridors are closed for a few hours, when they are given over to pedestrians and bicyclists. Sometimes the route can link to parks or other sites where music, bicycle repair workshops, food and other community information booths are located. People of all ages can ride, walk, or roll, eating and drinking from roadside vendors along the way, be active and mingle with neighbors and other community residents.

Both of these kinds of events require advocacy with local planning and public safety offices to assist and ensure they are safe and well-organized. But once started they have proven to be immensely popular!

► Other Events. Holding regular neighborhood festivals, such as a block party, a “BIG LUNCH” day one Saturday a month, clean-up of a neighborhood park, or other local events can also help to create a sense of community. None of these things are costly, but as advocates you can share ideas like these with friends and neighbors or start something on your own.

Some websites for more information on ideas presented above include:
http://www.pps.org/reference/what_is_placemaking/
http://openstreetsproject.org/
http://www.sundaystreetssf.com/

Photo source: http://openstreetsproject.org/blog/2013/05/15/jackson-holds-mississippis-first-open-streets/
Arts & Culture

Often, art in public spaces is viewed as desirable, but when budgets are tight and public (and private) development projects are kept to a minimum, local leaders often eliminate or reduce the arts and cultural aspects of these projects. But, whether in new projects or in the redesign or revitalization of public places, arts and cultural events can be very inexpensive and should be an essential component of community planning. The Project for Public Spaces espouses the “lighter, quicker, cheaper” approach to improving public spaces, through amenities, art and events. Among their ideas:

► Movable kiosk art means art can be used multiple times in many places.
► Portable “book stalls” from the local library can get people making book recommendations to others who stop by.
► Temporary public art (e.g., chalk drawing contests—attracts all ages!) keeps people coming back to see new developments.
► Interactive public art, e.g., kinetic sculptures, even portable ones can surprise and delight when found in new places; they also build in education.
► Events, such as concerts, theater performances, a “public” potluck dinner, and others bring people together and provide opportunities for mingling and for shared enjoyment.
► Pop-up parks using portable umbrellas, tables and chairs can be used until a longer term development is possible (also can be responsive to seasonal use).

Libraries, Schools, Theatres

Ensuring access to cultural outings and support for engaging all residents in the cultural life of the community is a key component of livability. This means having access through both attending educational and cultural events and classes, but also being a part of these things. Older adults, people with disabilities, youth and adults need the opportunity to not just see a play, but act in a play, or write a play. Libraries, expertly suited to become neighborhood hubs, are expanding to provide continuing education (e.g., technology courses, language courses), events of cultural significance (e.g., host a Chinese New Year celebration), film viewings, play times, and special informational events for families, elders, and others to ensure local residents know how to access to needed services and supports.
These are just a few ways in which you, as an advocate, can begin to work for changes that will increase the social sustainability of your community. As you begin to explore possibilities, and talk to others, it is certain that your community will find creative ways to improve the social and cultural opportunities available to all.

**Linkage to Other Livability Features**

Even with great public places and many cultural and arts offerings, community residents may not have access to them. This reality speaks to important aspects of livability covered in other sections of the workbook, such as affordable and accessible housing near transit and in downtown or central community locations, the need for improved transit in all forms, and better linkages between transit and pedestrian walkways. Advocates for even the creative place making discussed in this chapter must be diligent about ensuring they work for all residents, of all ages and abilities. For example, a community garden with no raised box options for persons with disabilities only works for some. A parklet built with steps or a raised edge is not accessible for everyone.

Just developing good public places and hoping there will be a good social outcome is not enough. Advocates have an important role in being sure local decision makers consider these linkages when projects or places are planned.

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Get Started

✔️ What one place do you think of first in your community as a “good public place?” Why?

________________________________________________________________________

✔️ What one idea do you have for either improving an existing public place or developing a new one?

________________________________________________________________________

✔️ What first step would you take to get started on this idea?

________________________________________________________________________

✔️ Beyond a specific place or project, as an advocate, what one thing might you do right away to improve the social sustainability of your community?

________________________________________________________________________
Real Scenario

The city of Denton, TX, a college town, had a typical small town downtown square, with the old courthouse and small shops surrounding it. But the downtown lagged behind as the rest of the city grew. As part of a larger revitalization plan, the square received some improvements, including seating, landscaping, and creation of spaces that would encourage people to gather any time of the day or evening, and for larger events. Since the downtown includes restaurants and nightclubs, lighting the square for safety and access was also important. One unexpected change was that all of these improvements increased traffic, requiring a redesign of parking in the downtown area. One busy street now uses “back in” angle parking, which while requiring residents to get used to a new parking technique, is safer as drivers, when now pulling out, can easily see other cars, bicyclists, and pedestrians. The changes in Denton show how a once vibrant public place, it’s been around since 1896, can again become a place for residents to feel a part of the social fabric of their city.
Notes

Tips

- Any plan for advocacy with local leaders should include this message: High quality public spaces create economic, social and environmental value!
- In any new project or redesign, stress the need to include all age groups and social groups in ideas for the design, drawing on public consultation and involvement.

2. Ibid.
What does access to health and services mean to you? In the broad sense, health in our communities includes health promotion, opportunity for healthy activities, access to health, mental health and home health care, access to healthy foods, and to other services such as pharmacies. It can also mean access to day services for seniors or supportive housing for those needing more intensive care. There are a lot of issues to address in relation to health. The built environment can support good health, but other services are needed to ensure good access to healthy options and to needed services for everyone in the community.

What Matters
- Health by Design
- Health Care & Supportive Services
A recent summary prepared by Generations United and the MetLife Mature Market Institute noted that availability and affordability of quality health services are important to everyone. In their view, livable communities require the following:

- Adequate medical facilities
- Trained medical personnel
- Community education
- Wellness programs
- Doctors and specialists with expertise to care for and communicate with persons of all ages and abilities
- Support services to assist residents

To this list, we could add easy access to food stores or farmer’s markets, to pharmacies, and to places to exercise and engage in social activity, for the health of both body and mind. Let’s first look at some ways the built environment can support health, and then we will look more closely at care and services.

Physical Design to Support Health

When discussing livability and health and the built environment, we are often talking about health promotion, specifically increased physical activity and good nutrition. In earlier sections of the workbook, we have looked at designing pedestrian walkways and linking pedestrian, bicycle and rollable pathways to parks and to places we want to go in our communities. We can support healthy living by ensuring communities have safe, accessible and well-designed places for people to walk, roll and to play. There must be good access to public parks and facilities as well as to private businesses, such as gyms. Good cultural and social opportunities nourish our mental health and good local grocery stores with fresh fruit and vegetables nourish our bodies.

But, it is not enough to build paths and ensure good walkways and bicycle/wheelchair or “rollability” access. There has to be somewhere to go! The goal is to have access to needed services, such as food and medical care, as well as to other merchants, within a five to ten minute walk from one’s home. Most communities are far from reaching this goal, and some argue that in rural or suburban areas this is not even ideal, as most people still drive to their destinations.
Yet, if we keep this goal in mind—the five to ten minute walk—it will change our thinking about where and how we develop and re-design our communities.

**Health & Support Services**

In addition to supporting good health, a livable community has the capacity to meet the health care needs of all residents. Under this umbrella of health, there are several key components to be addressed in a livable community.

**ACCESS TO PROVIDERS.** This includes access to doctors and hospitals, to residential long term care if needed, to rehabilitation facilities, as well as to home health care. A livable community also provides access to preventive care and wellness programming, including health screenings and to supports for chronic disease management. Access also means having transportation available to medical care.

**EDUCATION & INFORMATION.** Residents in a livable community should have access to education about their health. This might be through health fairs where residents can learn more about how to stay healthy or find needed services. Information about services should be readily available, easy to access and available in alternative formats. A “single point of entry” is recommended to help residents and their caregivers find information about services and supports.

**HEALTH PROMOTION.** A livable community promotes good health not only through improvements in the built environment, but through making exercise and active living programs more widely available. This might be walking and rolling groups, exercise and wellness classes at a local recreation center, through senior centers, and in housing communities serving large numbers of older people, families, or persons with disabilities. Health promotion should also include promoting greater access to fresh food, fruits and vegetables, and to a choice of food providers. Farmers markets and “fresh food trucks” are great ways to get food to neighborhoods lacking good food access.
Get Started

✔ What is your community doing well in promoting healthy living and providing health care services?

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________________________________________________________________________

✔ What two actions are most needed in your community to better support access to healthy opportunities?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

✔ What two actions are most needed in your community to improve access to health care and support services?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

✔ What opportunities exist for an intergenerational response to these needs?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Tips

- Remember, many players are concerned about community health. Think broadly about who you can contact and potentially collaborate with, e.g., hospitals, walking groups, local food sources, city farmers’ market planners, and others, to work on health issues.

- Supportive services do not have to be provided by a formal organization. Explore things like Timebanking (http://timebanks.org/) and neighbor-to-neighbor efforts to help community residents meet their needs for assistance.
Access to parks and to recreation opportunities is essential for a healthy, vibrant and equitable—livable—community. The National Parks and Recreation Association has identified the following as some of the key roles parks and recreation facilities play:

- Contribute to physical and mental health, social well-being and economic development
- Increase physical activity to address growing trends in obesity and chronic diseases
- Address “play deserts” in many community

But parks and other recreation opportunities must be seen as part of the larger vision of a livable community, such that they connect all community members to the outdoors for physical activity, connect to public transportation, and contain safe biking, walking and accessible routes. Working with landscape architects, parks and recreation planners can also build in “green design” to make these spaces sustainable as well as inspirational for users.
Recreation Sites

Recreation sites can range from small, neighborhood or pocket parks, to large multi-purpose parks with a range of special facilities, such as soccer fields, swimming pools, tennis, basketball and volleyball courts, golf courses, playground equipment and picnic areas. In many communities, however, residents lack access to any park within walking, rolling, or biking distance. Not only is distance an issue, but residents and community planners are recognizing that recreation sites must be linked to pedestrian walkways and to biking paths, creating informal recreation, as well as access, to and from these “formal” recreation destinations.

Once in the park sites, there must be something for everyone. That is, pathways must make all areas of the park accessible; benches and seating areas should be located in key areas, e.g., where older adults and persons with disabilities can rest, observe children or others at play. But, there must also be opportunities for active engagement. One recent development to promote fitness for older adults is the advent of senior play equipment. Common in some countries in Asia and Europe, this low-impact equipment is designed to encourage older adults to stay active and to prevent falls.

These “senior playgrounds” are also intended to provide a place where older adults can stay active alongside their children and grandchildren. These multigenerational parks become a way for older adults to get fit, engage socially, supervise children and play with them, building social bonds while maintaining physical fitness. These multigenerational parks have also been shown to increase safety in parks where crime and lack of supervision of youth were creating neighborhood problems.
For persons with disabilities, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, along with additional legislation and litigation, paved the way for greater accessibility in public places, including parks. Parks in many communities have since designed spaces to accommodate children and adults using crutches, canes, walkers or wheelchairs, designed and built playgrounds featuring ramped play equipment, ground level play features, accessible swings, and wheelchair-accessible tables and drinking fountains. “Play for All” parks, largely focused on increased accessibility for children with disabilities, have been developed. But, parks in many older and smaller communities, and in communities struggling economically over the past several decades, have been slower to incorporate features (or unable to make any changes) that welcome and engage persons of all ages and abilities.

**Assessment**

You might want to start by assessing a single park or the entire park system of your community. Teams might split up to assess different single parks or recreation sites, and reconvene after these assessments to develop a community wide report. However you begin, be sure to involve a range of users in the assessment process. One simple checklist to use to assessing your parks and recreation facilities can be found here: [http://www.pcacares.org/Files/age-friendly_checklist_June_2011.pdf](http://www.pcacares.org/Files/age-friendly_checklist_June_2011.pdf)
In addition, find out if your community has a parks and recreation master plan. If it does, ask these questions:

- When was the parks and recreation plan last updated?
- Does it include connecting the parks to the community through bike and walking paths?
- Does it take into account all ages and abilities?
- Is there equitable placement of recreation facilities throughout the community?

**Action**

Based on the findings of your assessment, action steps might include:

- Advocate for incorporating universally accessible parks as a high priority in the parks master or comprehensive plan.
- Volunteer to serve on an advisory commission for parks planning. You can be the voice for universal accessibility and for creative ideas for engaging all ages and abilities.
- Educate local officials about the economic development benefits of enhancing parks and other recreational amenities so they are fully accessible and engaging for all.
- Focus on one or two key areas of improvement first. These might be the easiest or least costly “fixes” to gain visibility and allow advocates and residents to see improvement. Seeing success helps to build support and may even bring in new advocates for other changes.
- Find out what parks improvements are considered a priority in your community’s parks plan. For example, a top priority this year might be removing steps and installing a walkway to improve access to a picnic area. Or it might be installing accessible picnic tables in a heavily used area of the city’s biggest and most frequently visited park. Next year, it might be adaptive play equipment. Just find out how these priorities are decided and get involved in this decision-making.
In small towns and rural areas, include sites such as ball fields, stadiums, and informal “parks” in the assessment of recreational spaces. These are often important spaces—or even the only options—for outdoor recreation.

Another important aspect of assessing opportunities for recreation is inclusion. Questions which should be asked include:

- Physical inclusion: Can anyone enter and use the recreation areas or facilities?
- Social inclusion: Is anyone welcomed, appreciated and accommodated? Is full participation possible with natural supports?

Get Started

Before using an actual assessment tool, ask yourself these questions. They will get you started thinking about recreational access.

✅ Is there a park or other recreational facility I can walk or roll to in 15-20 minutes?

________________________________________________
________________________________________________
________________________________________________

✅ How far must I drive or take transportation to the nearest recreational facility?

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________________________________________________
________________________________________________

✅ At my favorite park, is there something for everyone?

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________________________________________________
________________________________________________

Get Started
Real Scenarios

Cabarrus County, NC developed an extensive “Livable Community Blueprint: A Plan for the Future of Parks and Bicycle/Pedestrian Transportation” as part of the county’s Active Living and Parks planning process. This ten-year plan is intended to drive improvements and projects to achieve specific goals, and it is worth noting that the focus not just on parks but on pathways and bikeways linking recreation sites which creates a broad vision of recreation. The plan is based on the position that “every citizen who resides in Cabarrus County should have access to quality parks and recreation services regardless of where they live.” You can read more here: http://www.cabarrus-county.us/government/departments/active-living-parks/Pages/Livable-Community-Blueprint.aspx.

Johnson County, IA has taken a comprehensive approach to planning for a livable community. Part of that effort is to make available “information for successful aging.” One piece of information is an extensive guidebook to “social, fitness, cultural and learning activities” to help keep older residents of their community active and engaged. You can check out their work here: http://www.livablecommunity.org/Default.aspx

Tips

- If you have an exemplary park or outdoor space in your community, identify what works there. Then think about how to replicate the best features of livability in that space in other sites.
- Map parks and recreation spaces in your community and think about how they could be linked to provide a recreation network with multiple entry points.
1. www.nrpa.org/research papers. See synopsis of 2010 Research Papers and others at this site.
Throughout the life span, individuals need the opportunity to learn, develop new skills and practice old ones, and earn a living in order to support themselves and their community. Most community residents also look for ways to contribute to their communities that do not involve formal work. Volunteering, serving on boards and commissions, mentoring, and many other civic engagement options provide residents a sense of belonging and of building and supporting the community.

What Matters
- Lifelong Education
- Access to Employment & Training
- Civic Engagement
Lifelong Education

Access to educational opportunities, both formal and informal, provides community residents many benefits. Education informs choices we make, our opportunities for work and advancement, and contributes to how we adapt over the life course. Increasingly technology is an educational tool we cannot do without. Yet often, older adults, persons with lower incomes, people with disabilities, and others have limited access to formal and informal education. Among the barriers to education is the lack of classes or other offerings of interest to a broad range of residents, income, language, physical ability, and mobility (e.g., lack of transit, walking routes to facilities).

So what is needed to ensure livability from an educational perspective? A livable community needs:

- Universities, colleges, junior colleges are available and offer affordable options.
- Access to educational facilities are accessible and support engagement of all ages and abilities.
- Lifelong learning opportunities are offered through libraries, senior centers, parks, faith organizations, and others. These sites are often centrally located and already provide many services to the community.
- Collaborative and intergenerational responses are used to support the learning of the whole community.

How does this work at the local level?

- Colleges and universities can offer reduced or discounted courses to adults and older adults.
- Design of buildings in all facilities goes beyond ADA requirements and encourages interaction and cross-learning among students of all ages and abilities.
- Libraries, for example, provide computer classes, reading groups, and other activities that stimulate lifelong learning.
- Young adults can help older adults stay up to date with new technology.
Advocates have a role in ensuring community leaders hear the voices of all residents when funds are being approved or denied for educational options, such as libraries. Advocates for livable communities can work to ensure educational opportunities are more widespread within the community and are inclusive of those who may be challenged in accessing them.

Employment & Training

A livable community provides opportunities for employment and job training to all who want to work and need to do so, regardless of age or ability. What hinders access to these opportunities?

- There is a lack of good jobs in areas where people live.
- Transit options make it difficult to get to work.
- Good jobs are not within easy access, by car, transit, walking, rolling or riding.
- Older workers and persons with disabilities are not seen as employment assets in the community.
- There is often little cooperation between funding sources, such as housing developers, transit funding, and environmental funding to create a comprehensive approach to improving access to employment and job training.

But, there is progress. The Partnership for Sustainable Communities, a federal initiative bringing together the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Department of Transportation, is intended to bring a more coordinated effort to improving the livability of communities. Through grants to local communities, they have shown that with coordination of effort big things can happen, including creating better access to employment and job training located near a range of housing options. See this report for some specific examples:


A “green corridor” can connect residential areas to regional job centers, encouraging walking, rolling, and biking and providing a “value added” amenity to working near the corridor.
Civic Engagement & Volunteer Opportunities

A livable community provides opportunities for all residents to put their skills, experiences, and passions to work. We miss many opportunities to engage strong and valuable leaders when older adults, persons with disabilities, and others are not seen as assets. To improve the community’s well-being and livability, communities need to find ways to tap into all of its assets. A livable community makes it easy for people to contribute their time, energy, and knowledge and engage in local decision-making. Intergenerational and inter-ability volunteering can not only address stereotypes and barriers to connection, but be effective in addressing local issues.

To better engage both older people and persons with disabilities as volunteers, communities and organizations can take these steps:

- Offer volunteer roles that appeal to all ages and that use volunteers’ experience and skills, including in roles of leadership.
- Offer information about volunteer roles in a variety of formats. Make sure materials and website are easy to read and use.
- Have volunteer policies that include a section on equal opportunities and promoting diversity.
- Ensure premises are accessible.
- Offer to reimburse volunteer travel expenses.
- Offer support to complete volunteer application and other forms.
- Provide mentoring and support to ensure new volunteers understand their role and have the confidence to perform fully.

What can advocates do?

- Work with local organizations to be sure they understand the needs and desires of the new generation of volunteers. Accommodations may be needed to ensure people of all ages and abilities can volunteer.
- Explore opportunities for funding new volunteer opportunities, including inter-generational ones, from community foundations. They are strong supporters of volunteerism and civic engagement.
- Become a volunteer so you can share what you know.
Real Scenario

The Community Experience Partnership, funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies, provided funds to nine community foundations, in a ground-breaking experiment to involve older adults as volunteers to help address local issues. This initiative, subtitled, “Engaging Older Adults for Civic Good” helped fund a project in Grand Rapids, Michigan which is bringing skilled older volunteers, working in many roles, together with seven agencies providing housing related services—

Habitat for Humanity of Kent County, Well House, Disability Advocates of Kent County, Degage Ministries, Congregational Partnership Program, Healthy Homes and the Salvation Army Booth Family Services—to address homelessness. By bringing together two initiatives, Creating Community for a Lifetime and The Vision to End Homelessness, and including a range of community partners, the project provides meaningful ways to engage older, experienced adults in helping achieve the vision and strategies in place to end homelessness in Grand Rapids. This project, now called “Experience Ends Homelessness,” is a multi-faceted, excellent example of using the skills of older adults and people with disabilities to help solve a community problem.

Get Started

✓ Identify organizations that currently coordinate volunteerism or use a large number of volunteers.

✓ Check with these organizations to see how they currently engage with older people and people with disabilities. Are there opportunities to do more?

✓ Are there any projects or issues you can identify where inter-generational or inter-ability volunteering might be especially effective? If so, what steps would you take to get started?
In this project, experienced adults are:

- Taking on critical roles in Habitat’s homebuilding work by providing skilled labor and moving into leadership roles
- Acting as ambassadors by making presentations on homelessness to congregations and community groups
- Offering relational support to families struggling to achieve housing stability

Through the Disability Advocates Experience Ends Homelessness project, volunteers are:

- Engaged in advocacy and community organizing to support the vision to end homelessness
- Engaged in examining accessibility issues and identifying affordable housing alternative for individuals’ with disabilities

What makes this example so exciting is that experienced adults and persons with disabilities are deliberately included in the community’s effort to end homelessness. Recognizing and using the assets of all residents gives the project an even greater chance of success and provides an opportunity for any resident to be a part of addressing this important issue. For more information contact: Kate Luckert Schmid, Grand Rapids Community Foundation, kluckert@grfoundation.org.
Tips

- Consider holding a CivicCamp to jumpstart civic engagement around specific issues in the community.
- Keep in mind possible “legacy barriers” to engaging community members. These historical issues will need to be addressed to overcome distrust and apathy among some residents.
Section 2
Effective Advocacy
What is a community advocate? There are many definitions but all involve taking action. You may choose to be an informal advocate, for example writing letters on your own behalf or attending a public demonstration, or you may choose to become a formal advocate, working with others in an organized fashion to create community change. Either way your role is important!

What Matters
- Definitions of an Advocate
- Roles for an Advocate
- Training and Improving Advocacy Skills
Definitions of an Advocate

There are many roles for an advocate. All involve becoming as educated as possible about your issue or vision, then using proven tools to bring about change.

Community advocacy includes developing collaborations and partnerships, creating programs and services, and changing public policies, laws, and practices to enhance livability for all. That is, a community advocate is not acting on behalf of his or her own personal ideas, but is fulfilling an obligation to the “Community” at large. An advocate is someone who is in a positive role of seeking change that will benefit another individual or a group of individuals. In livability advocacy, that includes all residents—all ages and abilities—of any given community.

The role of an advocate can involve all of the activities shown in the “circle of action” shown below.

![Circle of Action Diagram]

- Educate
- Advocate
- Serve
- Unite
- Engage
- Speak Out
Some examples of efforts in each of the action categories include:

**Educate**
- Frame the message effectively.
- Develop educational workshops for audiences with an interest in livability.
- Present at local organizations, churches, etc. to educate the community about your topic.

**Advocate**
- Organize a letter writing campaign or petition to local representatives.

**Unite**
- Organize a community-wide event to raise awareness and get residents to take action.
- Sponsor a social event to bring people together while also generating awareness or funds for an organization or project.
- Collaborate with new partners; widen the lens of livability advocacy—work with new groups of all ages and abilities.

**Speak Out**
- Share your research and ideas through theatrical performances or artwork.
- Hold a public action day on a specific issue, e.g., speakers might gather to comment on a specific location needing improvement in street design.
- Develop a PSA and post on social media or work with local media to get it on the air.
- Provide testimony at planning hearings and other public venues for resident and citizen input.

**Engage**
- Commit to change your behavior in some way and start a campaign to encourage others to as well.
- Organize a fundraising campaign for a non-profit working to advance your solution.

**Serve**
- Serve on a city or county board or advisory commission on a topic aligned with your advocacy efforts.

Not all advocates have all of these skills. But you can learn to do them well with training and practice. In the following chapters of the workbook, we will look more closely at each of these action categories to hone your skills and help you become a more effective advocate.
Remember, an Advocate:

- Uses his/her insights, talents, training and experience
- Stays informed
- Advocates for changes that improve communities for all ages and abilities
- Seeks to broaden implementation of the livable communities concept

Some websites which provide more tools for advocates:
This site is a fun and informative source to help you hone your skills.
http://www.casagordita.com/tools.htm

Using on-line tools is increasingly important for advocates.
These sites have some great ideas for incorporating on-line tools.
http://www.netaction.org/training/
http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/internet/index.cfm

Get Started

☑️ What skills do you have that might make you a good advocate?

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Tip

- You can learn to be a good advocate. Find people in your community who are good advocates; learn from their example.
A big part of being an advocate is getting your message out to others, informing them about the issue. Doing this involves not only actions, such as holding informational meetings or training sessions, but also, and perhaps most importantly, it involves “framing” the message as this will dominate the conversation going forward.

What Matters
- What is Social Issues Framing?
- Why is Framing Important?
- How to Educate Others in the Community
Social Issues Framing

What shapes public opinion about community issues? Are opinions shaped by the media, by advocates, or other sources? Most people get their information from a dominant frame, primarily news media. Once something is framed for us, any information coming in later is usually filed away in our thinking in this way.

As advocates, we need to ask three important questions: 1

- How do we get people to think about our issues?
- How do we get them to think about issues in such a way they will want to solve them through public policies/changes, not only through individual actions?
- How do we get them to think about issues in such a way that they want to solve them through our public policies?

In advocating for livable communities and the policy and planning changes required to bring them about, we have to think about framing our message in such a way that people want to support these changes.

Levels of Ideas & Issues

People understand issues at three different levels.

**Level One**
- Big ideas, like freedom, justice, community, success, prevention, responsibility, livability

**Level Two**
- Issue-types, environment, accessibility, education

**Level Three**
- Specific issues, like parks, transit services, technology courses

Usually advocates start their communication/education of the public at Level 3, talking about a specific policy right away rather than situating the specific policy issue in a larger vision of “what this is all about.” But the opposite approach is better. Start with the context—the big picture at Level 1.

Framing Changes Need to Create More Livable Communities

Let’s think about the bigger frame for the message of “livable communities for all.” We can ask what might first be the dominant frames from which community residents are getting their messages about
livable community issues. Typically this is from the media and from dominant community institutions. What we need to do is think about how we can **frame or reframe livability within larger values** so different ways of thinking are the outcome as well as different policy choices.

A lot of advocacy for livable communities began within age-specific frames (elder-friendly cities; child-friendly cities), but over time advocates have found that framing the message so that the benefits of livable communities policies benefit all is much more effective. Rather than framing the issue of the need for more livable communities as one that affects only individual subgroups, a more effective and inclusive message is that livable communities planning and policies benefit everyone.

This framing of the message applies as well when we advocate for specific actions, e.g., more sidewalks, better crosswalk design, increased transit. Rather than these actions benefitting only one group, persons with disabilities or older adults, we frame the issue as one that affects everyone in the community and improvements will thus benefit all residents. As an example, transit improvements help students get to school, persons without cars to get to work and needed services, and thus improves the economics and educational advancement in our community. Improved pedestrian safety through sidewalks and crosswalks benefits young children who walk and ride their bikes, adults who need and want to be active, as well as older adults and persons with disabilities. Many livability enhancements can be framed as cost-effective ways to address issues, e.g., sidewalks are a cost-effective approach to reducing auto traffic on busy streets. In other words define the social problem as public in nature.

**Moving from Episode to Theme**

Communications research has shown that when we use an episodic approach to framing an issue, it is not as effective as using a thematic approach. Episodic frames reduce life to a series of disconnected events or episodes. “Dale Winters was struck by a car while trying to walk across Michigan Avenue where there was no crosswalk.” This description focuses on one individual and his accident. It does not describe how many people have been hit on this same street over the past year, the causes of the accidents, or what has or has not been done to address the problem.
In contrast, a thematic frame of this message would focus on trends, not just individuals. It would identify lack of action at the community level that has contributed to the problem. “Another pedestrian was struck tonight on Michigan Road because of continued lack of action by the city to design and install adequate crosswalks along a stretch of road where pedestrian accidents are among the highest in the city. But the mayor says there is no budget for these improvements....” This gives readers the context of the event and places it within a larger frame of reference of a social problem needing intervention from the public sector.

What we know: Messages delivered using a thematic frame are more likely to lead citizens to think public actions should be taken than if episodic frames are used.

The Frameworks Institute (www.frameworksinstitute.org) has many more resources that can help you frame your message in the most effective way. A few additional tips in brief from their site include:

- Simplify your ideas; how will they work?
- Use few numbers. Just listing statistics and other data will not work. Try to use just a few numbers and incorporate their meaning in framing the message. As an example, rather than list all traffic deaths and pedestrian accidents last year, by intersection, along with other data such as survey responses, just one key fact will be better remembered by readers. Here is a quote to give you an idea of how this works:

  “Complete streets ordinances are used to make intersections and street travel safe for all users—bicycles, cars, pedestrians. With more than 75% of [city] residents saying they regularly feel unsafe crossing five or more busy intersections, isn’t it time to consider such an ordinance?”

- Make sure readers know the logic of your thinking. Show clear cause and effect between problem, outcomes of the problem, and solutions.
- Keep the tone of your communication reasonable and avoid “charged” language.
- Focus on the positive changes that will occur if your advocacy is effective; reiterate positive messages that will spur people to action.
Choose “messengers” to deliver the information who have credibility in the community. Also unlikely allies, those who might not be seen a logical supporters of your cause, can be powerful messengers.

Carefully choose any visuals, such as photos, so they fit clearly within the frame of your message.

Framing is an essential aspect of advocacy and is critical to the “Speak Out” activities outlined in Chapter 12 as well. So, refer back to this section when thinking about how you speak out for livability issues.

Activities to Educate Others

Once you have framed the issue, there are many ways to educate the community. The key is to think broadly. How can we reach the greatest number of people and the most diverse audiences? How can we bring our entire community into the conversation about livability and the planning and policies needed to increase livability for all ages and abilities? **Educate as many people as possible.**

A few ideas for educating the public as well as policy makers include:

- Develop short workshops for audiences with an interest in livability.
- Present at local organizations, churches, colleges and even informal groups.
- Hold public events such as a “Livable Communities” town hall where current issues and advocacy actions are discussed and ideas solicited.
- Be creative. Use short videos (YouTube, websites), photos, and guest speakers at events to show how similar communities have implemented changes to enhance livability. Seeing a “real” outcome shows what is possible if the actions you are advocating are taken.
- Develop what is called “shared meaning.” Rather than advocating for just “improved crosswalks,” take a group of interested residents to an intersection and show them, “improved means you will have a voice-activated crossing signal right here.”
Get Started

Let’s work on framing. Think about an issue you have tried to address in the past in your community. Then answer these questions:

✔ How was the message of this issue framed?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

✔ Was it a broadly stated as effecting all residents or more narrowly framed?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

✔ How might this have limited your effectiveness in advocating for change?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

✔ Rewrite the message given what you now know about framing.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Tips

- Use the expertise of fellow advocates in the community when framing an issue. For example, local architects can help frame the message about building pleasing common spaces and the effects on the community. Transit engineers can help frame the message about benefits of transit options.
- Different frames work for different groups. The same standard response will not persuade everyone, so be prepared to speak differently to different audiences.

Notes

1. This section of the workbook is adapted from Framing Public Issues, Ch. 1, p.4. Washington, DC: Frameworks Institute. Retrieved from http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/PDF/FramingPublicIssuesfinal.pdf
2. Ibid., p. 16.
No one person can do everything. Finding others who share your passion and can help carry the load, reaching out to someone different from you, listening to others tell what is important to them about the community, reaching out to neighborhood and city stakeholders, are all ways to realize the potential of successful collaboration. Groups and communities who do this successfully are able to change in ways they never thought possible.

What Matters
- What is Collaboration?
- Types of Collaboration
- How to Get Started in Building a Community Collaboration
- Who are Stakeholders?
What is Collaboration?

Collaboration is both a process and a relationship. “It is the process of bringing the appropriate people together to work in constructive ways and with good information, so they can create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of a community, an organization, etc.” Collaboration allows us to move beyond our own limited vision of what is possible.

Who are the appropriate people? This means people of all the perspectives involved in the issue, not just the “usual suspects” or those with whom you have always worked in the past. It is very important to include all community stakeholders when forming a collaborative effort. Without his or her contribution, the collaboration will not be as strong. In advocacy for livability, this means includes representatives of all ages and abilities!

Types of Collaboration

There are many types of collaborations. You may have or need more than one type to achieve your goals. For example, you might have a very extensive “livable communities” collaborative, and within it have specific work groups or individual task force groups to work on single components, e.g., biking, pedestrian issues, etc.

Think of these as a chain of options, but remember any or all must work to see how they integrate into the big picture of what you hope to accomplish.

- Networking
- Alliance or cooperative
- Partnership
- Coalition
- Task force
- Issue group
- Collaboration

Graphic source: http://www.glutenfreeedmonton.com/2013/04/a-different-type-of-patient-advocate.html
How Do You Build a Community Collaboration?

A collaboration is built on a shared sense of value or purpose. The purpose might be broad, such as improving livability, or it might be specific, such as mapping a single neighborhood for walkability. If these can be linked, neighborhoods or groups working on specific issues, such as bike lanes or a single Safe Route to School, working with community-wide planning for overall livability, the collaboration will likely have a greater and more far reaching impact than if each group works alone. But identifying the specific issues can help you identify the most important people to become involved.

Who Are Stakeholders?

- Anyone having interest or stake in the issue
- People from all over the community
- Those affected by the issue as it is, or who will be affected by the potential solutions
- Those who bring perspective or knowledge valuable to understanding the issue and to developing good solutions or strategies
- People who need to be identified, recruited, welcomed and included
- Those beyond the “usual” people associated with the issue

Bring Stakeholders Together

- Allow time for people to get to know and understand the issues, needs and passions of all of the members of the collaboration.
- Encourage building of relationships through shared assessment and shared action.

Build Trust Relationships

- Create, maintain and update practical mission and vision statements—what it is the purpose and vision of those collaborating.
- Review these over time to be sure that the collaboration stays focused on shared goals.
Coordinate & Organize: Obtain Needed Support

- You may need to gain support from different levels in order to be successful. Examples include city government, community and neighborhood planning councils, law enforcement, neighborhood associations, community organizations, etc.
- This may take time. But get a start on identifying these important stakeholders and cultivate their awareness of, if not participation in, the collaboration.

Develop a Working Agreement

- If the collaborative is to work effectively, especially over the long run, it is important to identify members, outline their roles, agree on the mission and vision, and establish ground rules for working as a group.

Set Goals & Objectives

- Even if your first effort as a collaborative is to focus on one goal, for example, conduct a community livability assessment, set objectives for the assessment, a timeline, and how you will know if you are successful.

Communicate Effectively

- Remember this is perhaps the most important component of collaboration.
- Use language everyone knows, or provide definitions of new words, phrases or ideas.
- Think about how you can use many forms of communication since people differ in how best to receive and send communication.
- Find out how stakeholders prefer to receive and send information and make these options available.
Resolve Conflicts
- Be prepared; conflicts are going to happen in any group.
- Have a conversation about how conflicts will be resolved. Focus on respect and equal sharing of ideas, but also on how decisions will be made once all input is acknowledged.
- Have a process for conflict resolution in place that is developed by the group or you might want to seek outside mediation when necessary.

Be Open-Minded, Share Ownership & Leadership, Empower Others
- Collaboration is not a single person or organization; it is a group of individuals working together for a focused purpose.
- Keep this thought always at the forefront of your working together.
- Every member of the collaboration should be empowered to fully engage in the process.

Stick with It . . . Persevere
- Building a collaboration and keeping it going is hard work.
- Keep going as the rewards will be so much greater than trying to work alone, for just your interests, or for that of a single group you represent.

Evaluate
- Now and then, check in on how your efforts are going. What is being achieved?
- What do we need to do from this point to continue to reach our goals?

Celebrate Success
- It is very important to celebrate success of the collaboration all along the way!
- Public celebration can be a great way to let people not involved in the collaboration know about the achievements and encourage them to become engaged.
Get Started

As you think about who the stakeholders are in your community, it will be very helpful to map those individuals and organizations, along with their possible interests, roles and responsibilities in the collaboration. Use the following table to begin identifying your community stakeholders. If you already have a group in place, fill in those stakeholders, then think about who you might add. A few examples have been filled in to start you thinking!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders/ Potential Stakeholders</th>
<th>Description of Partnership (interest, role, responsibility)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government</strong></td>
<td>Provide access to zoning and accessibility plans; can be visible voice for livability efforts in which city is engaged; needed support for actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City planner; ADA Coordinator, Mayor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schools &amp; Universities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intergenerational Groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aging Groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth Groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing</strong></td>
<td>Developers, affordable housing advocates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transit Providers</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health Care &amp; Mental Health</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Libraries</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-profit Organizations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foundations</strong></td>
<td>Local community foundations could provide grants or other support; community foundations looking for ways to have local impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Officers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Law Enforcement/Fire Department</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Real Scenario
Refer back to page 28 to review the story of the Complete Streets coalition. It provides an excellent example of building a collaborative structure to support change.

Tips
► Have a brainstorming session with initial group to think of new and unexpected stakeholders who might be engaged. Who cares about livability concepts, e.g., youth, teens, veterans, elders, bike enthusiasts?
► Ensure that all stakeholders in the community are engaged from the beginning.
► As a group set one or two short-term goals to build momentum and excitement, both in the group as well as in the community.
► Think about how you will keep the collaboration going and develop and cultivate leadership within.
1. This section adapted from the Organizer’s Workbook (with permission), Indianapolis Neighborhood Resource Center. [www.inrc.org](http://www.inrc.org)
Advocates often engage in speaking out for their cause. This might be through writing letters, giving interviews, or in making more formal presentations. If you are speaking to the local planning council or other decision makers about livability issues, you might do this in individual meetings, but more often you will provide public testimony at hearings or other venues for citizen input. Being an effective advocate means learning to do all of this well. The following suggestions are designed to help develop tools for speaking out in ways that are clear and concise, have emotional impact, and will be heard and remembered by public officials, city staff and community residents.

What Matters
- Developing Effective Letters to Staff & Officials
- Using the Media
- Creating Effective Public Testimony
- Exploring Online Tools for Speaking & Gathering Comments
Using Letters Effectively

Letters to an Agency

Let’s say your park needs new sidewalks. This is the kind of work that is supervised by the Parks and Recreation Department. A letter regarding the situation sent directly to the council member responsible for this Department or the Department head is a good start. While you might want to go straight to the Mayor, the person who is responsible for the Department that will deal with the sidewalks is your best bet. In the letter to the council member, you should:

▶ Be courteous. If you are seen as difficult in the first encounter, from then on every letter you write will be discounted as the work of a difficult person rather than a concerned citizen.
▶ Explain the problem concisely, with just enough detail to get their attention. Hopefully you will get a follow-up letter or call or meeting with a staff person who will allow you to fill in the details.

Letters to Public Officials

When public funds are needed to make the improvements you are advocating, especially for larger projects, it is tempting to go straight to the Mayor. In small communities this might be effective. But in small and large communities, the City Council members are also critical allies. Follow the same tips as those for writing to an agency—be concise and courteous—and if you have already spoken with or written to an agency, let the Council member know this has been done and you are looking for further help. If you are writing regarding a budget request, be sure to time your letter enough in advance to make a difference.

Using the Media

Letters to the Editor

Add your personal touch to an issue with a letter to the editor. Your local paper will have specific instructions on how to submit a letter, so be sure to check with your opinion page editors. Letters should state your point up front, be brief—no more than 250 words, keep to one topic, and include your contact information. This site has some good ideas for creating a good letter: http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/advocacy/editorials.htm
Opinion Editorials

Opinion editorials (or Op Eds) are brief letters written by community members that express opinions about issues of local concern and submitted to local publications. The opinion pages are some of the most popular sections in any local newspaper. A letter goes a long way and can be especially important when decisions or votes are imminent or when you want to educate the public about the issue. Editorials can be longer than a letter to the editor, and typically include more research/evidence on the issue as well as the view of the author. It is important to be accurate.

Let’s say you are concerned the community where you live has not passed a Complete Streets ordinance. The editorial would:

- Take a strong position and clearly state it in the opening and closing paragraph.
- Focus on one idea. For example, you might focus on why complete streets would reduce pedestrian and bicycle accidents in your community.
- Avoid trying to explain all sides of the issue.
- Be timely—what about this issue is newsworthy. For example, six other communities in your state have just passed a Complete Streets ordinance.
- Be accurate. Offer hard facts about the issue.
- Restate the issue; state what should be done and when.
- Be between 550-750 words.
- Include a brief bio, along with your phone number, e-mail address, and mailing address at the bottom. Newspapers will not accept anonymous op-ed pieces.

Local Radio or Television

If you have the opportunity to represent your cause on television, especially the local news channel, this exposure can help further your case. Letting television news channels know you will be, for example, doing a walkability and rollability assessment of a public space, neighborhood or the community with a team of “volunteer” assessors, is a great opportunity for news coverage. When they show up to film your team:

- Have a spokesperson ready and have some short phrases prepared, such as we are doing a “walk and roll assessment to see how our community shapes up in terms of accessibility and safety for pedestrians.”
Be able to quickly say what you will do with the findings of the assessment.

Be upbeat rather than critical. “We are doing this to make our city the best possible place for everyone to walk and roll!”

Explore talk radio as an opportunity to talk about your cause. If there is a local radio program, call in early and be prepared to make a quick point and make it energetically and positively.

Crafting Public Testimony

Testimony before commissions and councils is one of the most common means for you to present information on planning issues. The best testimonies share some common characteristics. They are dignified, logical, emotional, accurate, useful and short. Let’s take these one at a time.

**Dignified**

Dignity is expressed in testimony by paying attention to protocol. This means starting the testimony with a greeting: “Good evening ladies and gentlemen,” or Good afternoon Councilwoman Smith and members of the council.” The greeting is followed by introducing yourself and, if appropriate, the group or organization you represent. Close all testimonies by thanking the panel for their attention.

**Logical**

Logical testimony:

- Starts with a statement of the problem.
- States clearly the testifier’s position on the issue.
- Provides a resolution of the problem.
- Recommends action to be taken that is rational and feasible.
- Highlights, whenever possible, how addressing the issue will benefit the community at large, not just your interests.
**Emotional**
All good testimony hits on the gut level or goes for the throat. This happens when a “social” problem (for example lack of public transportation) is translated into human terms (for example, “I can no longer keep my job since I can no longer drive.”) Emotions are stirred most deeply in testimony delivered by people directly affected by the problem. However, all testimony has to contain an emotional appeal to be heard and remembered. A few tips:

- Relate stories of individuals, not of groups, but in the context of the whole community.
- Present multiple individual stories, representing the range of people who will be affected.
- Provide good testimony that is both logical and emotional.

**Accurate**
If you are using statistics and other evidence to back up your testimony, make sure the information is correct and up to date. Sound information and data (evidence) ensure that your advocacy and policy demands:

- Are realistic and representative.
- Provide evidence about the problem, likely impact of change, feasibility of possible solutions, and who is responsible to make change.
- Accurately represent needs, priorities and interests of your constituencies.
- Enhance your credibility and professionalism.

Accuracy also means addressing only the topic being addressed at the hearing—not straying into other issues. This is a common mistake in public testimony; advocates often want to give long details about their personal history with the issue. But decision makers—whether city or county commissioners, planning board members, legislators—want to know your thoughts on the current issue at hand. **Keep focused!**
Useful
The best testimony gives decision-makers something they didn’t have before that will, either now or down the road, help to resolve the problem at hand. This is the area where most testimonies fall short. Most testifiers are very good at stating the problem and why it is of particular concern to them. Very few testifiers actually provide concrete, usable suggestions to resolve the dilemma. Keep in mind:

► Useful suggestions can be short term—“We ask you to fully fund the four proposed, signaled crosswalks on Main street” or
► Suggestions can be long term—“Create a comprehensive bike and pedestrian plan that is tied to our local economic development plan.”
► Be accurate and sure your suggestions are not offensive to others on your side of the issue.

Short
If you can’t say it in three to four minutes, or less, you have a problem on your hands. Many public commissions, for example, limit speakers to three minutes. Short, concise and well-delivered testimonies are usually received favorably by time-pressed officials, and also serve to make the testifier appear competent and in-control. Long-winded and repetitive testimony has the opposite effect on everyone, including those waiting to testify. A few tips:

► Write out your testimony.
► Practice it until you have the essential points down to three to four minutes.
► Practice with a friend first and ask them to rate your short statement. Is it clear, logical, does it include evidence, does it have an emotional appeal, and is the suggestion being made realistic?

These suggestions will help you to develop good testimony. Remember there is strength in numbers and good testimony gets better as part of a coalition effort.

TIPS FOR COALITIONS: If members are all testifying to support a single action, craft statements that represent the effects of the action on the different groups you represent, but end the statements with how the action will affect all members.
Providing Comments Online

Many communities now offer citizens the option of commenting on proposed planning documents, ordinance changes or proposals, and other community decisions through an on-line comment process. As with public testimony, keep electronic comments, whether through a comment line or by e-mail formal, specific, and concise.

If you are an individual commenting on-line, be sure to identify yourself and any group you represent. If your coalition wants to send one comment, be sure to list all members, their titles if appropriate, and group affiliation at the end of the comment. In a group comment, focus on one or two emotional examples, but focus the summary sentence(s) on how the action your group supports affects all group members and the community at large.

Other Online Options

Increasingly advocacy involves engaging supporters using online tools. Individuals can discuss the issues and solutions they support with friends, including links to further educate them or bring them into the advocacy network. But a host of other tools, including free online platforms, are growing to help advocates collect evidence and build supporters online. One of these tools, http://www.causes.com/ has been used to allow individuals to find supporters, raise money, get signatures on a petition, and other actions to support social change. This might not be the ideal tool for your local efforts, but working with technology savvy people in your community can help you harness the online community in support of your advocacy.

Blog posts can also be effective. You might even start a livable [city] blog and encourage residents and other advocates to post their ideas. As with op-eds, blog posts should be:

- Pointed and have an opinion—tell a story.
- Use images if possible (for example, you might include a photo of a very bad sidewalk or street in need of redesign).
- Concise—400 words or less.
- Conversational and courteous.
Get Started

Developing good information on places in which you can speak out about your cause will save you time as often decisions or meetings come up quickly. Using the examples below, think of your community and key opportunities you have to speak out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speak Out Opportunities</th>
<th>District/Ward/Department</th>
<th>Past Support</th>
<th>Most Effective Way to Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mayor</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>City Council</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Member (Name)</td>
<td>3rd District</td>
<td>Some sidewalks expansion (2010)</td>
<td>Letter; phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Member (Name)</td>
<td>1st District</td>
<td>Crosswalk improvements on Elm (2011)</td>
<td>Phone, personal meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Commissioners</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Department Heads</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Print Media</td>
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<tr>
<td>Radio/Television</td>
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<tr>
<td>KPHR</td>
<td></td>
<td>Local Reporter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connie Davis</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>KSSK (Univ. stations)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online Outlets</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Tips

▶ Don’t give up if a letter you write is not published, a request for a meeting is turned down, or a television station doesn’t cover an event. Just keep trying and encouraging those interested in your issue to try as well.

▶ Your work in trying to encourage more livable communities design and practice is important. So keep searching constantly for ways to promote these ideas and practical steps to make them a reality.

Notes

1. This section and the one following adapted from www.ny4p.org
2. This section and the two following adapted from http://www.artswisconsin.org/research/activistcenter/publictestimony.cfm
There are many ways to engage in activity that will support your advocacy efforts and those of others. It is important first to be educated about local decision-making and planning. Knowing how local zoning and planning occurs, who is engaged in this work, and how you can affect these processes through advocacy is essential. Yet, land use planning, zoning ordinances and the laws that guide their application can be confusing to citizens. In this section, we provide a brief description of comprehensive planning, zoning ordinances and other rules along with some ideas for how you can have an impact on these tools used by community leaders and planners.

What Matters?
- Planning Tools: Master Plans & Zoning
- Decision-makers in Planning
- The Planning Process
- Citizen Engagement
- Livable Communities & Planning
Planning Tools

The Comprehensive or Master Plan

A community’s master plan, sometimes called a comprehensive plan or land use plan, is used to shape a community’s built environment, including the location of schools, roads, other public buildings, water and sewer lines, and more, for an extended period of time. Some cities take a very long view in the master plan, e.g., 20 years, but rapid growth or change can mean updating the plan every 5–10 years. The master plan lays the groundwork for zoning ordinance regulations (more below), which are then used to define or control land uses within the community. A plan is not a legally binding document, but is instead a strong guide which can be amended in response to things like changes in the local economy and other expected or unexpected factors.

A master plan addresses these elements of the development of a community:

- **Land use**—the general location and intensity of housing, business, industry, open space, education, public building and grounds, waste disposal facilities and other uses.
- **Circulation**—the location and extent of existing roads, transportation routes, terminals, and public utilities and facilities. It is correlated with land use.
- **Housing**—usually an assessment of current and projected housing needs and local housing policies and strategies to implement them.
- **Conservation**—a plan for conservation, development and use of natural resources (water, forests, soil, etc).
- **Open space**—plans for preserving open space, and for outdoor recreation, public health, safety as well identifying agricultural land.
- **Noise**—addresses noise problems and can guide requirements for location of noise-sensitive land uses.
- **Safety**—policies and programs to protect the community from risks associated with land (floods, wildfire, etc.)
A plan helps a community plan for how to grow. While it guides the future, it also places what is envisioned in the current context and in expectations. Typically this is in a section called Community Background/Description. This section may describe current housing, transportation, social characteristics of the community, the environment and other features. This section also includes future projections on which the plan is based. These projections could include changes in the size of the population, population characteristics (e.g., growth in numbers of citizens over age 65, increasing numbers of persons with disabilities, changes in the numbers of children and families, percentage of citizens with low-incomes, changes in diversity), the economy, housing, and others. A shift in the numbers of older residents may show a need for additional housing or more accessible housing. More low-income families may indicate a need for affordable housing units and public transportation.

Following this background information, a master plan typically includes:
- Goals & objectives. These are developed with a great deal of input from the community, setting priorities for the future and how the community will achieve its goals.
- Recommendations. These are the detailed steps recommended to achieve the goals and objects, i.e. what strategies will be needed.
- Future land use map. This too is developed after significant community input, and indicates what land uses are recommended in specific areas.
- Zoning plan (more on zoning below).

The master plan can be implemented in a number of ways, including:
- Zoning ordinances.
- Conservation of existing land for parks or undeveloped natural areas.
- Economic incentives. Local government can offer tax breaks, incentives, and establish land bank and other authorities to encourage development in certain areas.
- Partnerships with community organizations or other public governance entities. For example, a local government might partner with a conservation group to maintain trails or natural areas. Local government might also partner with state highway department to make changes to a state road that travels through the community’s main street.
Before a plan is final, communities typically follow a series of steps:

- The proposed plan is made available to the public.
- Hearings and other opportunities for public input are announced in advance, usually in the newspaper and on the city’s website.
- Public hearings are held to get input on the proposed plan.
- Based on public comment, the plan is revised.
- The plan is sent to local planning commission for approval.
- Final plan is forwarded to city council (or other legislative body) for adoption.

**Master Plans & Livable Communities**

The description below shows how communities use their master plans to comprehensively promote a broad range of goals and objectives to achieve more livable communities:

“The **Master Plan 2020** carries on its legacy, continuing to create and maintain sustainable communities for county residents by promoting compact, walkable, mixed-use, transit-oriented development along commercial corridors or at underutilized properties and enhancing economic development through continued workforce development and business attraction.”

The power of the master plans to shape a community for years to come makes it all the more important that advocates make sure their voices are heard when opportunities are available for community input on the plan. Communities vary in how they provide opportunities for citizen input, ranging from public visioning sessions, to town hall meetings, advisory committees or commissions, to now frequently having a website where citizens can view the plan and comment on-line. How can you get involved in promoting livable communities concepts and strategies into the master plan?

**Action**

- Attend visioning sessions or other sessions where citizens can voice their views.
- Serve on an advisory commission if one is formed.
- Attend and testify at the public hearing hearing where citizen input is taken on the final draft plan.
- Explore the city’s website when a new master plan or significant revision is in progress. Take the opportunity to comment on-line.
The Zoning Ordinance

A zoning ordinance is a law that defines how land can be used in different areas of the city (or county). Put simply, zoning divides the community into land use districts, such as residential, commercial, industrial, that govern the use of the land (what can be built and where), as well as property dimensions (e.g., size of buildings, density-how close together or tall they can be), and other features of the property (how far it must be set back from the street or sidewalk).

Cities zone to achieve certain purposes, such as separating uses to protect citizen’s health, safety and welfare. For example, zoning can be used to limit an industrial use with a risk of toxic exposure from being built next to a residential neighborhood or school. Cities also use zoning to achieve certain objectives in the master plan, such as more dense downtown development or mixed use development (residential with services and retail nearby), preserve open space, preserve neighborhood character, or encourage more housing options.

Zoning is undoubtedly the most common technique local governments use to influence the location and density of development.

A zoning ordinance includes both text and a map. The text describes the land use zones, density standards, allowable and non-allowable uses, development standards, and how the ordinance is applied (administrative process). The map shows the boundary of each district. There can be variances or special exceptions granted. A special exception might be made for a small convenience store to be located in an area zoned for residential use. These variances are usually made with details outlining hours of operation, lighting allowed, etc. so that the impact of “exceptional use” is minimized on the surrounding area. Targeted zoning ordinances also exist to govern the development of subdivisions.
Zoning & Livable Communities

Proponents of livable communities point to outdated zoning and planning as hindrances to achieving more livable communities. Low density requirements and outdated land use requirements keep shopping, recreation, work and residential buildings separate and far from one another. As it turns out, separating uses was not always beneficial to cities. It led to sprawl, increased dependence on car-travel, and added to the length of our car trips. Low density also makes public transit difficult to support.

There are many movements that encourage the use of zoning to achieve goals of livability, like relieving traffic congestion, encouraging walking and other forms of transit, expanding the type, accessibility and affordability of housing, preserving open spaces, and other changes we associate with increasing the livability of our communities. Some examples include:

- Smart Growth advocates have proposed “cluster zoning,” a method by which density is determined for an area rather than on a lot-by-lot basis. So, in a large area, a developer could have a lot of freedom in designing and placing structures as long as the overall density requirement for the area is met. This could allow the clustering of buildings on a smaller area of the site to preserve tracts of the areas for open or green space.

- Inclusionary zoning (as discussed in Chapter 3 on Housing) is used to increase the supply of affordable housing units in market-rate development projects. These zoning ordinances may also be combined with incentives, such as density bonuses or stream-lined processing of permits, to encourage developers to include affordable rate units in their projects.

- Incentive zoning is another way to encourage a developer to build a larger, higher density project that would be allowed under current zoning, in exchange for the developer providing something in the community’s interest, such as open space, a plaza, etc. Communities have used this approach to improve the visual appeal or urban project design, human services and better access to transit.

- Cottage zoning for many small units to be built densely or in close proximity can encourage housing development for specific populations in a community, such as older people, single parents, single people of all abilities, and others. Benefits can include a great sense
of community, access to affordable housing units uniquely suited to the needs of residents, potential for neighbor-to-neighbor support, and shared uses, such as gardens or a play area.

- Density, the number of units allowed per acre of land, can be varied to encourage certain objectives in a plan. This does not mean a community has to choose between very high density or very low. There are lots of opportunities to combine these in cities as well as in suburbs and small towns. For example, a small town might want to encourage higher density development around the town square to revive and or support retail and other uses in the downtown. A suburb with single houses on large lots could gradually encourage the use of, say, four homes on the same size lots without radically changing the character of the community.

Density has many benefits. It can:

- Increase street activity which can increase safety and a sense of community
- Increase access to destinations (e.g., shopping, medical, education, social activities, parks), and encourage biking, walking and rolling
- Support more housing types in given areas and in some cases reduce housing costs

There are barriers to all of these zoning options. Some residents may be concerned that zoning changes will affect their property values. Others do not want to see denser development or the addition of more transportation options on their roads. But if you are knowledgeable about these zoning options, and can present examples that may address their concerns, you can work to encourage support in the community.

**Action**

- Do your research. If you would like to see a better mix of residential and commercial uses in a specific area, find out what zoning ordinances apply.
- Advocate for zoning changes that will encourage a variety of housing options, easy and quick accessibility to services and other destinations, and other livability features in the community.
- Identify allies who want to create zoning ordinances that provide flexibility but also oversight so creative development can occur.
Who Are the Decision-Makers & How Does the Process Work

Each local entity has a governing body. Depending on the level (county or city) and location, it may be a board of supervisors, a city council, a town council or a board of alderman.

The Planning Commission is responsible for developing the comprehensive plan and any plan amendments. The Commission also reviews requests for variances to zoning ordinances, any formal amendments to zoning ordinances, and may also review subdivision plans.

Boards of Zoning Appeals are typically independent organizations who hear appeals or requests related to zoning ordinances. Members are usually appointed by the Mayor and serve for several years. They work closely with city departments, such as the office of planning, public works, and neighborhood development to get the information they need to make decisions on zoning appeals.

Planning Staff in a city or town’s office of planning reviews provide technical assistance and advice to the planning commission and help citizens who need information to comply with zoning ordinance and planning requirements. The planning staff also reviews subdivision and other development plans to be sure they comply with local regulations.

Action

- Become familiar with your local planning process. Find out when the planning commission meets.
- Identify steps in the planning process where you can have an impact.

The Zoning & Planning Game is Messy

Just knowing the formal planning process is not nearly enough. A zoning change or significant change in the comprehensive plan is not just about changing a document or a legal requirement. It is about changing the shape, the feel and the look of communities. Not everyone will be happy about change! It is important to understand that each actor—whether a planning commissioner, a citizen advocate, a developer—will bring values and a personal vision to the table that may not be shared. Read this quick blog post for a very good discussion of this issue: http://www.placemakers.com/2012/09/06/zoning-reform-who-do-you-think-youre-taking-to/
Summary

This chapter provides just a brief introduction to the planning and zoning process. Many cities and towns are re-visiting their comprehensive plans and zoning laws to remove barriers to more creative community design. New ideas, such as possible age-friendly zoning districts, and others are cropping up as advocates and planners work to find a way to help communities support design and development that will enhance quality of life for every resident.

Since zoning is such an important tool in refocusing the vision of livable communities and in making changes needed to improve livability, getting a good grasp of how the process works and how you as an advocate can get involved cannot be underestimated. Become a zoning and planning expert!!

Get Started

✓ Find out when the most recent comprehensive plan was put into place. When is the next review or revision planned?

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

✓ Explore the city’s website and identify where meeting dates and proposed zoning changes and other notices are posted.

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

✓ Identify a change you would like to see in your community (e.g., pedestrian safety; more housing downtown; use of vacant lots for small scale farming). Then ask: Is this something we could address through the comprehensive plan and zoning changes?

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________
Real Scenario

For several years, a number of Indiana cities and towns have been working to create “communities for a lifetime.” Advocacy groups have imagined a future in which Indiana neighborhoods and communities are transformed into places that promote physical, social, mental and economic wellbeing for persons of all abilities, across the entire lifespan.

In Bloomington, with financial support from the national Grantmakers In Aging organization, the community is exploring ways that public policy can support the kind of development that will create a lifetime community. Public policy takes many forms and it is essential to have support for change from both the public and the private sectors. Public policy can involve changes in the way land is zoned. It can involve decisions around the allocation of benefits to developers who are trying to achieve the vision in their development projects. It can involve the development of new sources of revenue to underwrite change. In this effort, the grantees worked on several things, including trying to ensure that a current revision of the city’s comprehensive plan included ways to support a “community” for a lifetime. In addition to serving on an advisory group to the comprehensive planning process, the Bloomington effort is also focused on a major community asset—the downtown rails-to-trails project called the B-line Trail. As a new “corridor” the trail has the potential to open up many services and amenities to people with disabilities and older adults who otherwise might be isolated. These might include people moving in to new affordable, accessible housing along the trail, as well as current residents in traditional neighborhoods adjacent to the three-mile section of the trail through the city.

What has become very clear is that to have an impact on the trail, and the larger vision of a community for a lifetime, public-private collaboration is essential. It is slow work to build a vision shared by the public and the private sectors of the community. Next steps will involve market studies to assess the potential for new housing, commercial and cultural/health related initiatives and the development of a formal district with an associated zoning code attached that will provide incentives for certain kinds of development over the next 20 years.

Among the ideas residents and others have proposed is developing the trail as a park. This could be a benefit for residents of all ages. In a neighborhood focus group, an older woman discussed the role of her
park in her life. Here’s a vignette from the notes to show how a park can be a benefit:

One woman had recently fractured her ankle. Her neighbors began to see another individual walking her dog and asked about her. Because she is in her neighborhood park each day with her dog, it was quickly identified that something was different or wrong and neighbors called her and asked how they could help. When asked if her neighbors helped her while she recovered, she stated they did and “if I didn’t have the park, it would have been a lot harder.” Another woman stated she often meets new people by walking her dog in the neighborhood each day and it provides a very safe and civil way for her to get to know and chat with her neighbors.

Advocates share these stories with local leaders—council members, planning commission members, and other residents—to illuminate the importance of incorporating communities for a lifetime goals in comprehensive planning. As one person on the grant project noted, “just seeing the light go on in the council member’s face” during a meeting makes it worth the effort. It may be some time before all aspects of the project can be assessed, but learning who has to be involved, building support through a variety of channels, and engaging in the local planning process can make a difference.

Tips

▶ Zoning is only one legal tool in the planners’ tool kit.” Remember, there are subdivision regulations, form based codes, design guidelines, building codes, etc., that can be used to shape your community’s form.
▶ Learn the lingo of planning. Maybe offer training for new advocates in your community on how to speak knowledgeably about zoning!
▶ The “Indiana Citizen Planners Guide,” can be found here: http://rebar.ecn.purdue.edu/ltap1/resources/Publications/Indiana%20Citizen%20Planner%27s%20Guide.pdf. This guide, prepared by the Indiana chapter of the American Planning Association, covers much of same material as in this chapter, but in detail and unique to Indiana.
Notes

1. Much of this chapter adapted from http://ceres.ca.gov/planning/planning_guide/plan_index.html
2. From http://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/planning/masterplanning/
Although we have touched on how to get involved through serving on a city or county board or advisory commission in earlier chapters, it is worth repeating the worth of service efforts. As an advocate you have a unique voice and experience to bring to the issues of ensuring the livability of your community. In planning, a diverse set of voices are needed to ensure that residents’ needs are met in as fair and balanced a way as possible.

What Matters
- Why Serve?
- Characteristics of Good Advisory Committee Members
- Overcoming Barriers
Why Serve?

Serving on a board or commission, especially with your training in advocacy for various aspects of “livability,” provides a lot of benefits to your community—and to you. Being a member of a board or advisory commission:

► Is an opportunity to give something back to the community
► Provides an opportunity for you to be seen as a valued, contributing member of the community
► Provides a voice for other residents who care about livability issues related to mobility, housing, recreation, work and education, social and cultural life, etc.
► Is an excellent way to learn more about how the planning process works and how you and other advocates can be effective in voices in shaping the livability of your community

Characteristics of Good Advisory Member on Committees/Commissions

You should also think about whether you would be a good member of an advisory board or commission. Here are some characteristics planning commissions and local advisory boards or committees look for in selecting members:

► Intelligence, social vision and leadership experience or potential
► Strong interest in the mission of the committee and in the view they represent
► Always seeks to ascertain the public interest and how best to further the interests of the community as a whole
► Willingness to promote, in a respectful way, their views and the voices of those they represent
► Ability to express ideas, defend convictions and listen to others
► Experience and knowledge about the people and the issues they represent
► Able to serve in terms of time, health, location
Barriers to Service

There can be barriers to serving on boards and commissions, including transportation to meetings, language and communication challenges, skills needed, and even just confidence. The barriers can be overcome. Self-advocates in the disability community have found ways to help boards and commissions be more inclusive, including some things as simple as rearranging the room so persons with wheelchairs, with vision issues, or other challenges can effectively engage in the process. Also, be sure members get the meeting agenda in advance. People with disabilities may need more time to read and prepare.

Get Started

✓ Explore opportunities to serve on your local planning commission or zoning board. When are members selected? What is the process? Find out how you can be considered for a position.

✓ Identify advocates who have served on the local planning commission or in an advisory capacity to other groups involved in local community planning.
**Tips**

- Become familiar with the topics and the organization before you commit to serve. Be sure you can provide value to the issues the organization addresses.
- Have experienced advocates train others; build some new advocates ready to serve!

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**Notes**
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