

DESIGN GUIDELINES

FOR A LIFESPAN COMMUNITY

What is an “elder-friendly community?”

It carries many labels: an elder-friendly community, a senior-ready community, a livable community for older adults, a lifespan community, a community for all ages, community for a lifetime.

They come down to one common goal — creating a good place to grow up and grow old.

This little booklet offers a set of “design principles” to help achieve that goal, with a focus on older adults — their strengths as well as their needs.

The principles are not meant to exhaust all the possibilities. A creative community of people will likely think of many more.

This list is built upon findings from the participatory research project called “Evergreen”, conducted in Bloomington, Indiana from 1995-98. (See back page.)

These principles apply across the range of experiences in which older adults find themselves— from the micro-

environment of the patient in a nursing home bed to the macro-environment of the neighborhood, the town, the city.

We encourage their use by anyone who may be in a position to influence the character of the environment — city officials, planners, designers, developers, health practitioners, merchants, housing activists and, of course, older adults, who can use these as a standard by which proposed environments can be evaluated.

Five Design Principles:

- NEIGHBORLINESS
- AN ENVIRONMENT FOR GROWTH, LEARNING AND AUTONOMY
- A POSITIVE IMAGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT
- DIVERSE HOUSING OPTIONS
- A COMMUNITY FOR ALL AGES



Principle One: Neighborliness

The neighborhood is a critically important concept for understanding the quality of older adult environments.

While neighborhoods often have fairly specific identified boundaries, it seems that people are the most important feature of a healthy neighborhood. Neighborly relations exist mid-way between intimacy and strangeness— at the fulcrum of the public and private life. Friendly, but not intrusive, neighbors are often the object of one’s giving, and

one may be the subject of others’ concern. Neighbors share pride in the neighborhood and belong to an identified commons. Some, but not all values are shared. One basic, shared value, however, is that neighbors help “keep the neighborhood up” so that it is an attractive place to live.

Neighbors are not family, nor even necessarily close friends. Friendships may, however, emerge from the field of neighborly relations. Neighbors are there when you need them,

but one doesn’t want to lean on them continuously. Neighbors do not substitute for family or intimate friends but, nevertheless, are extremely important to one’s sense of security and belongingness in a community.





“While I still imagine my family at the center, I also imagine, beyond our dumpy house and shaggy yard, circle upon circle of neighborhood and city and region.

... We need a larger vision of a good home, a vision that includes thriving schools and libraries, locally-owned stores, farmer’s markets, worthy public officials, decent jobs at a livable wage, adequate housing for every citizen, friendly streets, abundant parks, clean water, breathable air, topsoil, trees, fireflies, and butterflies, foxes, and deer...”

— Scott Russell Sanders, from the preface to the *Evergreen Writing Project Journal, Experiencing Place, 1996.*

Design Responses: Neighborliness

Promote opportunities for social interaction:

Social interaction is abetted by the creation of foils for conversation—elements in the environment that bring people together around a common interest or focus.

Adults often meet and interact around the activity of watching children or pets. Unusual architectural or landscape elements can also become common grist for conversation—fountains, gargoyles, topiary, flowers, signs, kiosks, pigeons.

The home itself can be a launching pad for interaction with others if properly distanced from public spaces.

Put porches and balconies within comfortable talking distance of others. Provide adequate interior space for entertaining one or two neighbors. Place certain “out of house” activities within talking distance of neighbors, yet away from “outsiders”, e.g. garbage cans, laundry lines, flower boxes, postal boxes.

The built environment can facilitate neighborly interaction in simple and relatively passive, inexpensive ways.

Orient housing to the street or a small number of front doors to each other. Place benches face to face or at right angles to facilitate interaction. Always provide benches in front of interesting neighborhood gathering places such as pocket parks, bus stops, small stores, churches, schools, library, post office, restaurants, newsstands. Place permanent chess tables/seats in places frequented by children, teens and older adults.

Design Responses

The “Known environment” promotes engagement rather than withdrawal.

Seeing your neighbors come and go daily promotes a sense of security. Transience of residents can retard the development of neighborly relations. Provide windows which allow for passive surveillance of the proximate environment. Provide mechanisms for enabling new residents of the neighbor-

hood to be introduced—welcoming committees, block parties, newsletters, work parties, pot lucks, memorial collections, tour guides. Develop policies to promote the vitality of neighborhood associations.

Create a neighborhood scrapbook to keep in a public place for newcomers to gain a sense of history.

Support neighborhood use of common and public facilities.

Encourage neighborhood groups to use churches, synagogues, parks, libraries, community centers, municipal facilities, restaurants, etc. for meeting space. Create events which bring people together in public spaces: pet parades, Halloween parties, card parties, picnics, garden parties.

Design Responses

Provide sufficient privacy to enable people NOT to interact when this is also desirable.

Provide adequate shielding from public spaces to enable a degree of personal and familial privacy.

Include sufficient sound-proofing insulation in common walls. Build foyer space with

lobbies and in apartments to enable a controlled transition into private spaces. Install peep-holes in front doors.

Include small informal lounges for semi-private gatherings in addition to larger lobbies and common rooms. Install landings on stairways to enable early scanning of public spaces prior to entry (after Victor Regnier).





Principle Two: An environment for growth, learning, autonomy

Most older people are prepared to deal with diminished capacity as long as they can personally manage that process independently and with dignity. These challenges call for new learning and certain elements of acceptance. People want to manage as best they can. Old age can be a period of psychological, spiritual, and social growth in spite of physical decline.

The environment should challenge people to stay as healthy and as strong as possible,

while making available adequate supports in areas of limitation. Supports should not become stigmata, however. The best form of “managing” implies an ability to meet one’s needs through direct bodily access to services, or when such is not possible, being the recipient of services brought into the home.

The environment should provide natural inducements to physical and mental exercise.

Draw people outdoors to work and play.

The environment should be both beautiful and interesting. It should have changing elements so that each new day, week, or season brings about something new to explore. Public works of art and recreation are essential. Quality of air and sound are critical elements of the external environment and should be enhanced. The environment should be stimulating in its use of color and texture.

More Design responses

The environment should encourage daily walking excursions.

Small refrigerators and neighborhood markets induce regular trips to the grocery for fresh foods. Friendly clerks who expect your return create social obligations to visit. Use of “general delivery” and post office boxes encourage daily trips to the post office. Cheaper newsstand prices

encourage non-delivery of newspapers and magazines.

The environment should be totally accessible while still being challenging.

Sidewalks to critical destinations especially should be smooth and barrier-free. Lighting should be keyed to critical corners and low to the sidewalk. Stores should be small and friendly. Entryways should

be barrier-free with doors which are not too heavy. Traffic must be calmed on critical pedestrian pathways (to grocery, church, library, retail). There must be well-planned perches to rest; ideally every block should have an elder-friendly/toddler-friendly bench (with back and side-supports). Pedestrians must dominate over cars and bicycles along critical pathways used by older adults and young children.

Basic services should be within walking distance (ideally, within three blocks at most).

Top priorities are grocery, pharmacy, church/synagogue, bank, general merchandise, restaurants, doctor, post office, cleaners, movies, and public restrooms.

More seniors would use bicycles and tricycles if paths were made available.

The environment should provide clear but non-stigmatizing choices between independent and prosthetic elements.

Put stairs within sight of elevators. Develop pre-adaptive environments—design for later ease of transition to access modifications (ramps, hand-rails, etc.).

Promote universal design, which aids those with disabilities as well as those without, in non-stigmatizing fashion.

Access to services should vary with changing health status.

Design services to promote ease of use during episodes of illness. Make services client-directed rather than “case-managed” by experts.

Pre-design environments to enable adaptations during periods of illness (emergency response systems, “Plug-in” medical services such as telemedicine, accessible doorways, tv-telephone cable access, etc.)

“I can just walk across the street (to the community center) ... I have a choice.

When I get to the steps, if I feel I am too tired, I may walk around and... take the elevator.”

*— Evergreen
Ethnography
Participant*



Principle Three: A positive image of the environment

My home?... It's "my wife, my kitchen with big bay window, history with children at home, the smell of cut grass."

— *Harmony School Interviewing Project*

Old people and young are able to articulate a clear image of neighborhood through verbal and visual expression. These images may have both positive and negative elements— an environment can be described from both directions. In a healthy community, that image should be largely positive, as it indeed is for most people whom we have met through the research.

"Image" is used in the broadest sense, to refer not only to one's picture of the natural and built environment, but also to one's personal place within that scheme. The clarity

of that picture is important, and depends significantly on the degree to which a person can explore and know his/her

environment. The known environment is much more comfortable and secure.



Design responses

The natural environment should be beautiful enough to instill pride, joy, and peace among residents

It should include water, birds, butterflies, bugs, pets, and other natural elements in a flourishing circle which brings together persons of all ages.

Flora can evoke memories of a valued past (peonies, lilies, lilacs, etc.). Trees should have

Design responses

Create an environment in which every individual is part of the circle.

Link people through reciprocal patterns of giving and receiving of services, food and kindnesses.

Promote the development of cooperatives. Identify and celebrate talents and contributions of all ages. Appreciate the "characters" in the commu-

character and be climbable. Pocket parks are preferable to wide green expanses. Avoid visual uniformity and promote diversity in the environment. Evoke wildness as well as stewardship of a tamed environment. Create an environment which uses sound to promote well being.

Facilitate way-finding in the interior and exterior environment.

nity. Develop expectations for members of the commons. Facilitate voluntarism and mentoring.

Make food a central and pre-eminent feature of the environment.

Develop policies that encourage and support gardening. Support small, distinctive and affordable restaurants. Support food events of all kinds.

Provide sensory cues leading to significant destinations— sound patterns, pennants, visual access to steeples, public symbols, kiosks, signage, linear parks, green walkways, corner features such as sculpture and benches.

Orient newcomers to the environment with maps, tours, historical markers. Use children and elders as tourguides, historians and interpreters.

Encourage food stands in parks and on corners.

Provide mud-pie kitchens for children. Support coffee shops and penny candy stores. Develop kitchen classrooms for children, adults and old people.

Celebrate ethnic cooking. Support the continued development of farmers' markets and regional food culture.



Principle Four: Diverse housing options

The older adult population of many towns and cities includes many persons who have lived over thirty years in one location as well as recent retirees moving in from elsewhere.

While the large majority of older adults want to “age in place”, the specific housing type preferences are diverse. Some see yard work as necessary to their well being; others see it as a burden. Some see lots of space as essential; others seek to “downsize”.

While public policy should support the development of a diversity of housing types and options, the character and

quality of those options should follow some general themes.

Promote senior housing in downtown areas.

There is a significant level of interest, a potential market, for downtown housing options. This housing should be within walking distance of basic retail services, church/synagogue, library and community centers for art, learning and recreation.

Residents of such housing anticipate being full-fledged members of the ongoing life of the community and do not want to be “stuck off” in a segregated senior housing com-

plex on the edge of town, away from the vital center of the community.

Provide housing which has some essential supportive elements to enable aging in place.

Service package might include easy access to meals or a meals program on site; access to public transportation or an escort service on site; optional house-keeping and access to affordable personal care services; all amenities on one level, especially laundry-living areas. Elevator for any facility above one story. Pre-adapted for accessibility—wired for emergency response, wide doorways,

Design responses

Provide housing options which are affordable to persons with low and moderate incomes.

Affordability is improved through access to public services such as transit, Title III meals, public arts and performances, municipal services, etc.

Promote affordability through provision of common spaces which allow for smaller square

footage per apartment in congregate senior housing.

Coordinate planning with municipalities to enable access to public funds for housing, including Low Income Housing Tax Credits, tax abatement, HOME, CDBG, Federal Home Loan Banking programs, etc.

Promote adaptive use of historic properties to enable access to historic preservation

tax credits. Utilize energy-saving tactics to reduce individual energy bills.

Provide third party counseling for seniors considering reverse equity mortgages.

Make sure your community CDBG and HOME funds include support for home repair and home modification.

Design responses

Promote mixed-use, mixed income congregate housing.

Mixed income housing permits development of options for moderate/low income due to potential for greater development returns at high end. Mixed-use, commercial and retail on first level and housing above, enables inclusion of supportive services and work opportunities for residents.

Explore intergenerational housing options .

Consider design forms in which older adults occupy ground level apartments and new families occupy second level. Explore support for gerontology student intern apartments in senior housing.

Promote development of non-traditional housing options for seniors.

Establish policies and programs to support development of group homes, shared housing, co-housing, housemate matchmaking, and accessory apartment. Flexible zoning can incentivize new forms of housing and in fill development options.

“There are all kinds of ways of being diminished but ...life can teach us how to approach the end of our lives.

And how can I do that unless you take elder people and shuffle them in like a deck of cards, with people of all ages. Not put them off in a corner and call it the elder place...”

— Milton Figen,
Evergreen Project
Collaborator



Principle Five: A community for all ages

We have been struck time and again by the desire of older adults to remain in touch with people of all ages. While many common interests cement relations among the community of older adults, and places such as senior centers are valued as centers of such interest, there is a clear expression of desire to remain involved with the total community.

Watching and hearing small children play, interacting with college students, even enjoying the sometimes wild styles of teens, are all values expressed by older adults in various ways.

We also acknowledge the real concerns older adults have

about losing their special opportunities to interact with peers and some fears expressed about dangers to the body in walking near roller skaters or boisterous young toddlers.

Hence, the community's approach to the promotion of intergenerational relationships must not be based on some facile philosophy that forces young and old together, but, rather, upon a cautious and realistic appraisal of the true common interests which can join young and old in a common bond. College towns have the potential to develop a truly unique form of retirement community—one which is intergenerational and in

which old people and young interact in an egalitarian and mutually beneficial way.



“Old people everywhere.”

— Christopher Alexander, et al., *A Pattern Language*

Design responses

Sustain retirees in downtown neighborhoods and make the downtown attractive to further development of senior housing options.

Do not encourage the standard development of seniors-only communities outside of the city's core neighborhoods. Rather, seek opportunities to develop senior housing in close proximity to public tran-

sit, retail services, health services, and traditional age-integrated neighborhoods.

Remove obstacles to the spontaneous interaction of older and younger persons in the community.

While specific programming for intergenerational interactions is worthwhile, the simple non-structured opportunities

for interaction are preferable. Create age-integrated spaces such as parks which offer amenities for all ages, from lawn bowls, to basketball, to tot lots.

Place senior housing options in close proximity to playgrounds, schools and day care centers. Build shared-site day care options for both frail elders and young children.

Design responses

Promote development of intergenerational activities and programs throughout the community.

Promote senior volunteer activities that enrich the lives of children and vice versa. Seek to fulfill the common recreational and cultural interests of young and old, such as tradi-

tional musics, food, arts, and hobbies. Seek to join young and old together around common political interests such as environment, age discrimination, peace, and cross-cultural understanding.

Create a serious community conversation around the idea of the senior center vs. the

community center for all ages.

If seniors are willing to expand the population served by their centers, are school systems and other public institutions prepared for the trade-off... prepared to become more elder-friendly places that bring together people across the lifespan?



“Every human community, if it is to last, must exert a kind of centripetal force, holding local soil and local memory in place.”

—Wendell Berry

For more information about the AdvantAge Initiative:

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The AdvantAge Initiative

In 1999, several philanthropic foundations came together to fund a project to be titled: **Benchmarks for an Elder-Friendly Community**, to be developed by the Center for Home Care Policy and Research at the Visiting Nurse Service of New York.

In the early days of the project, ten pilot communities around the US developed leadership to engage a range of stakeholders, conduct a standardized, randomized scientific survey developed especially for the project, and set action goals to create more elder-

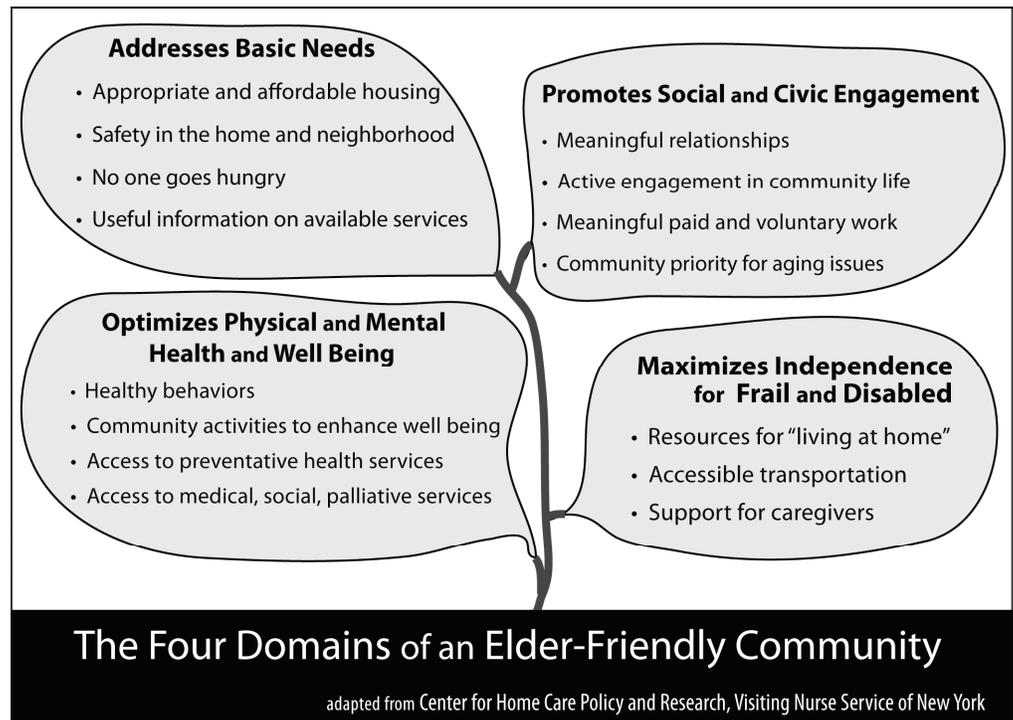
friendly communities.

The Benchmarks survey has subsequently been conducted in more than 25 communities nationwide and, in 2004, in a national sample, providing communities with invaluable guideposts they can utilize to understand how older adults are faring, set community priorities for action and put aging issues on the public agenda.

Research and innovations emerging from the Evergreen Project and the AdvantAge Initiative have helped spur

national conversations about the quality of environments for older adults.

Research conducted with AdvantAge Initiative communities has demonstrated the value of collaborative leadership, the usefulness of a data-driven approach to community planning, and the importance of gathering and engaging the broadest range of stakeholders, far beyond the typical aging network: public officials, educators, young people, planners, public safety officers, foundation funders, United Ways, and many others.



In 2008 the entire state of Indiana conducted the AdvantAge survey, contacting 5,000 randomly selected older persons to gauge the needs and contributions of older Hoosiers in their communities. Now, towns and cities throughout the state are utilizing the data and other engagement methods to plan for a future in which nearly 1 of 5 persons will be older.

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“Participation provides a collaborative process by which community inhabitants reach common goals, engage in collective decisions, and create places, and these places, in turn, serve as material expressions of their collective efforts.”

— Feldman, Roberta
M. & Westphal, Lynne
M. 2000.

Sustaining human
settlement: A chal-
lenge for the new
millennium.

Great Britain: Urban
International Press.

Visit the new website at
www.agingindiana.org

And the blog too!

Phil's Adventures
in Elderburbia

BLOG



Background on the Design Guidelines

These design guidelines emerged from the Evergreen Project (1995-1998), a participatory research program funded by the Retirement Research Foundation, with additional financial support of Bloomington Hospital and numerous collaborating organizations providing members to the Research Team.

Participatory research is based upon an appreciation for the “inside” knowledge held by those typically on the receiving end of so-called good works by experts.

Participation methods included a range of approaches, from a comprehensive, randomized household survey to multiple focus groups, ethnographic fieldwork, creative writing groups, other arts projects, and neighborhood charrettes.

Suggested readings on sense of place and participatory research:

By Wendell Berry

- *The Memory of Old Jack*
- *Another Turn of the Crank*
- *What are People For?*

By Tony Hiss

- *The Experience of Place*

By Gary Snyder

- *The Practice of the Wild*

By Yi-Fu Tuan

- *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*

By David Seamon and R. Mugerauer

- *Dwelling, Place and Environment*

By Gaston Bachelard

- *The Poetics of Space*

By Michael Jackson

- *At Home in the World*

By Scott Russell Sanders

- *Staying Put*

By William Least Heat-Moon

- *PrairieErth*

By Philip B. Stafford

- *Gray Areas*

- *Elderburbia*

By Luke Eric Lassiter

- *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*

- *The Other Side of Middletown*