

# **Age Friendly City Project: Transportation and Housing Assessment Findings**

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**Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts  
July, 2019**



# **Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts**

## **Health Equity Statement**

A historic legacy of social, economic and environmental inequities, such as racism and gender-based discrimination, are embedded in societal institutions and result in poor health. These unjust inequities affect communities differently with some bearing a greater burden of poorer health.

These inequities can influence health more than individual choices or access to healthcare.

The Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts recognizes its responsibility to dismantle these injustices by promoting health through research, program evaluation, and coalition building that inform policy, organizational practice and system change that benefit all.

We encourage others to join in these efforts.

## **About the Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts**

The Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts (PHIWM) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based out of Springfield, MA whose mission is to build measurably healthy communities with equitable opportunities and resources for all through civic leadership, collaborative partnerships, and policy advocacy. PHIWM is committed to improving the public's health by fostering innovation, leveraging resources, and building partnerships across sectors, including government agencies, communities, the health care delivery system, media, and academia.

# Executive Summary

The Age Friendly City Assessment on Transportation and Housing was a collaborative effort among the Public Health Institute of Western MA (PHIWM), two Springfield Resident Advisors, a multi-sector/stakeholder Advisory Committee, and the University of Massachusetts Civic Engagement & Service Learning Program. The assessment and its activities were co-designed by all partners, and carried out predominantly by PHIWM and the Resident Advisors, with contributions by the UMass students and regular input and feedback by the Advisory Committee.

The assessment was guided by three overarching questions:

1. At what age do housing and transportation benefits become available to older adults?
2. What housing and related supportive services are available for older adults in Springfield?
3. What transportation services are available for older adults in Springfield?

The main objectives of the assessment were to

- gain a deeper understanding of older adults in Springfield (e.g., demographics, where they live, places they frequent);
- identify current housing and transportation situation for older adults in Springfield, including community assets and needs;
- engage older adults and those who work with older adults in a process of understanding transportation and housing needs of older adults in Springfield; and
- provide a basis for future Age Friendly City project priorities.

Assessment activities took place in 11 Springfield neighborhoods and resulted in the engagement of over 300 older adults from across the City of Springfield. The following assessment activities were carried out between Fall 2017 and Spring 2019:

- Consultations with **six transportation, housing, and senior living subject matter experts/stakeholders** (Alzheimer's Association, Springfield Housing Authority, Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Greater Springfield Senior Services Inc., Department of Elder Affairs).
- **Secondary data analyses** of existing transportation data sets.
- **Seven walk audits of built environment and infrastructure conditions around senior housing** in seven Springfield neighborhoods.
- **Six listing and ranking exercises with older adults about transportation and housing priorities** (70 participants) in four neighborhoods (in English and Spanish).
- **Public transportation survey with 121 Springfield respondents aged 50 and older** (38% of total respondents; survey was available in English and Spanish).

- **Two focus group discussions with providers working with older adults** in their homes (one with Personal Care Assistants and one with Baystate Health Geriatrics, Palliative Care and Post-Acute Medicine, with a total of 19 participants).
- **Four focus group discussions with older adults** (33 participants) in two neighborhoods about current housing needs and priorities for older adults (one conducted in Spanish and three in English; one with Latinx older adults, one mixed race/ethnicities, two with low-income Black male older adults).
- **Three key informant interviews** with three Springfield Housing Authority Tenant Council Presidents about current housing needs and priorities for older adults (one in Spanish and two in English).
- **Four workshops** (56 participants) in four neighborhoods to present preliminary findings and receive additional community input/feedback.
- **Interviews with Older Adults living in Springfield** (14 participants) at two locations in two different neighborhoods.

## Key Findings

### *Transportation*

The key findings of the housing assessment fell into three main themes: availability, affordability, and city infrastructure improvement needs.

Community members who participated in assessment activities expressed many concerns with regards to the affordability of public transportation, especially shuttle/van services for older adults that complement the public bus system, which have become unaffordable. Older adults shared that public transportation is critical, but often timing is challenging when planning trips for medical appointments or trips to the grocery store. Limited transportation to the new senior center was also discussed as an obstacle for older adults in accessing the senior center and social activities.

Based on observations during the walk audits and reports from the Resident Advisors - who ride the public buses daily - and other community members, there are a lack of benches at bus stops throughout the city. There is also a distinct need for infrastructure improvements to ensure safe road/intersection crossing for older adults and individuals with disabilities. There are numerous intersections around the seven senior housing complexes examined during the walk audits where there were no crosswalks or they were faded, no pedestrian signals, no pedestrian-controlled signals, and very short pedestrian cross-times.

### *Housing*

The key findings of the housing assessment fell into three main themes: affordability and availability of housing, home safety and maintenance, and housing support resources.

Housing assessment participants included homeowners as well as renters living in senior housing or other private and public housing. Homeowners who participated in assessment

activities shared their struggles with aging in place (i.e., staying in their homes as they age) due to the many unmet needs for home modifications, upkeep, and maintenance. They also identified the property tax burden and the difficult choices they are forced to make when balancing living and medical expenses without sufficient income.

Renters, particularly those in public housing expressed concerns with cleanliness of buildings; outdated units; unreliable elevators; the lack of availability of multi-bedroom units for older adults; and resistance of landlords to making accommodations for older adults, such as for fall prevention in rental units. Other renters and transient and homeless older adults spoke of a lack of affordable units, especially units of high quality, and long wait-lists for subsidized housing units. Men of color, in particular, shared their frustrations of spending years on waitlists for affordable housing without placement due to CORI checks.

Another common theme heard from residents is the desire to know what, if any, social services exist in the community for housing support and how to navigate the system. The two professional groups supporting older adults in their homes who participated in the assessment spoke to this stating older adults' need for advocates who know what services are available to navigate them.

### ***Social Isolation***

Lastly, social isolation came up repeatedly as a concern for older adults in both the housing and transportation assessments. PCAs provide support and caring relationships, but for older adults who do not receive these services, social isolation is a persistent problem. Older adults also expressed the need for more activities, particularly in the evening.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings from the report, the assessment team identified recommendations representative of the needs and desires of the assessment participants.

### ***Transportation***

- **Affordable Transit.** Ensure affordable, available, reliable, safe, and comfortable public and alternative transportation options that assist older adults in remaining active and social as they age as well as attending medical appointments in their community.
- **Benches and Shaded Spaces.** Ensure spaces and opportunities for older adults to sit/rest at bus stops under shaded coverings, supporting their ongoing use of public transportation.
- **Well Maintained Roads and Sidewalks.** Ensure roads and sidewalks are well maintained and managed (repaired).
- **Nearby Bus Stop to Housing.** Ensure bus stops are within walking distance from older adult communities (5 blocks radius).

## *Housing*

- **Affordable Housing.** Ensure rent/mortgage do not exceed 1/3 of older adults' livable income after paying medical expenses, protecting them from financial hardship as they age.
- **Age-Friendly Modifications.** Ensure living environments for older adults have safeguards like railings, single floor/first-floor occupancy, walk-in shower/tubs, body alarms, and emergency call buttons that help to facilitate their ability to age in place.
- **Good Maintenance.** Ensure access to programs/services that will allow older adults to maintain livable and safe conditions of their home either through landlord/ housing authority /community based program offered in the community that is readily available.
- **Access to services.** Ensure older adults are well-informed about the availability of housing, related services that are provided by the city, nonprofits, or individual donors.
- **Safety/ Comfort.** Ensure streets and sidewalks are well lit, maintained and monitored by the City.

## *Social Isolation*

Because our focus was on Housing and Transportation, we did not dive into solutions for social isolation. We will consider this issue as part of our next level of work on housing and transportation as well as in our assessment of Community and Health Services.

## Demographics of Springfield's Older Adult Population

There are more than 25,700 older adults aged 60 and older living in Springfield. They make up nearly 17% of the city's population. Of those 65 and older, 30% have less than a high school education, 54% graduated high school and/or have some college education, and 17% have a college degree. Thirty-four percent of older adults 65 and older in Springfield live alone. Thirteen percent of those 65 and older were living below the poverty line in the year prior to the census, and 15% reported spending more than 35% of their household income on rent.<sup>i</sup>

A number of racial/ethnic health inequities are highly prevalent in Springfield.<sup>ii</sup> Life expectancy rates vary across Springfield with as much as a nearly 10 year variation between a neighborhood populated predominantly with people of color compared with one populated predominantly with people who are white.<sup>iii</sup> This disparity can also be seen when comparing the racial and ethnic make-up of Springfield's population overall compared with the racial and ethnic make-up of Springfield's older adult population. White Springfield residents, of all ages, make up one-third of the Springfield population, whereas Latinos/as represent 44% of Springfield residents and Black residents 19%.<sup>iv</sup> However, of Springfield residents aged 65 and older, 72% are White, 20% are Latino/a, and 19% are Black.<sup>v</sup>

Based on the Healthy Aging Community Profile for Springfield, older adults in Springfield fare worse than older adults statewide in at least 35 healthy aging indicators (e.g., dementias, diabetes, COPD, asthma, chronic kidney disease) and fare better in at least eight indicators (e.g., annual physical exams, cholesterol).<sup>vi</sup>

# Transportation Assessment Background and Methods

Access to transportation is an important factor to consider when assessing the ability of elders to thrive in their communities. Public transportation services are a critical resource for older adults without access to personal transportation methods. In the city of Springfield, the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority provides all public transportation services and provides senior ride services, Dial-A-Ride, which is available during weekdays from 8am to 4:30pm. Additionally, if older adults are eligible under the Americans with Disabilities Act, they can also request rides from the PVTA paratransit services.

Findings in this report reflect the secondary data analyses of publically available transportation and population surveys and studies, as well as primary data collection and analysis of the 2018 Transportation Survey and interviews, walk audits, and community forums conducted during the Age Friendly City Project assessment process. These collective findings were analyzed to better understand public transportation use, obstacles, and needs among older adults in the City of Springfield. Data sources used in this assessment include:

- 2017 American Community Survey
- 2015 PVTA Onboard Customer Survey
- 2015 Pioneer Valley Coordinated Public Transit- Human Services Transportation Plan
- 2015 Brightwood Community Walk Audit
- 2014 PVTA Paratransit Service Analysis Study
- Pioneer Valley Regional Data Portal
- 2018 Transportation Survey, Age Friendly City
- 2018 Springfield Age Friendly City Walk Audits
- Key informant interviews
- Listing and ranking activities at community forums and public gatherings of older adults in Springfield
- Publically available information about current transportation options for older adults in Springfield

## Transportation Assessment Findings

### Existing Transportation Services for Older Adults in Springfield

#### *Public Transportation*

At age 60, older adults in Springfield (and throughout the service area of the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority) may purchase a Senior ID card for \$3 that allows them to pay a senior reduced fare of \$0.75 and transfer of \$0.10 or a monthly (31 day) pass for \$26 to ride PVTA's public buses. PVTA also offers a Senior Van Service which is a shared ride, demand-responsive,



ADA accessible service for older adults aged 60 or older. This service is available Monday through Friday from 8:00AM to 4:30PM. The costs are per ride (each way):

- Trip within town: \$3.00
- Trip to a surrounding town: \$3.50
- Trip within PVTA's service area: \$4.00

### ***Private Transportation***

Greater Springfield Senior Services Inc. (GSSI) has a few private transportation companies that provide specialized non-emergency medical appointments and can accommodate wheel chairs listed in their Greater Springfield 2018 ElderGuide. Pricing listed for two of the companies is \$50/hour for one and a \$40 minimum for another.

### ***Medical Transportation***

MassHealth provides transportation services to non-emergency medical appointments with the completion of a Prescription for Transportation (Form PT-1) by each medical provider the patient sees for individuals with MassHealth Standard or CommonHealth. Older adults with cancer may also be able to access free transportation through the American Cancer Society of Massachusetts. Older adults who are veterans may also be able to access specialized (Special Mode) transportation as approved by a VA physician in advance of appointment and/or be reimbursed for transportation to medical appointments.

## **Older Adults' Transportation Use**

### ***Public Transportation Use***

Between 2015 and 2016, the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) collected important information about adult riders over the age of 50 using a full system rider survey. There were approximately 429 respondents who were 50 years of age or older. The following are some key findings on these older adult PVTA riders who utilized services in the southern region which includes Springfield:

- 55% (227) of respondents identified as female and 45% (186) identified as male (only 413 of respondents answered the question on gender)
- 28% of respondents reported having a disability that prevented them from driving
- 32% of respondents stated shopping as the purpose of their PVTA trip and 23% of respondents said their trip was to get to a medical appointment (Figure 1)
- 59% of respondents identified as people of color (Figure 2)
- 67% reported not having other means of transportation such as a car or a driver's license as the primary reason for using public transportation

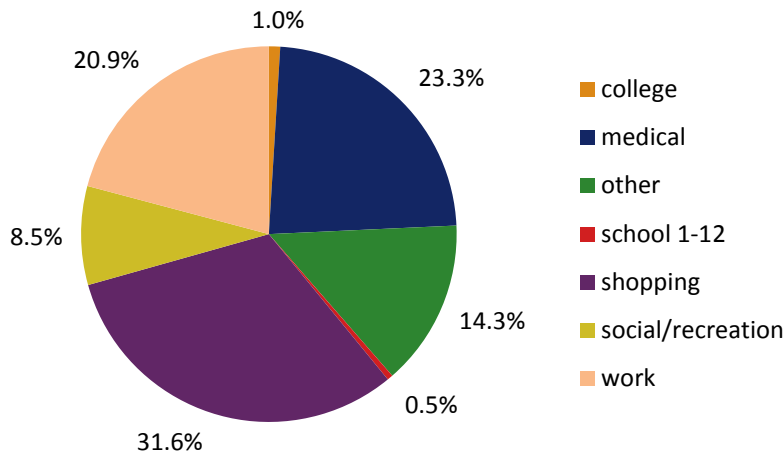


Figure 1. Trip Purpose for Older Adults Using PVTA

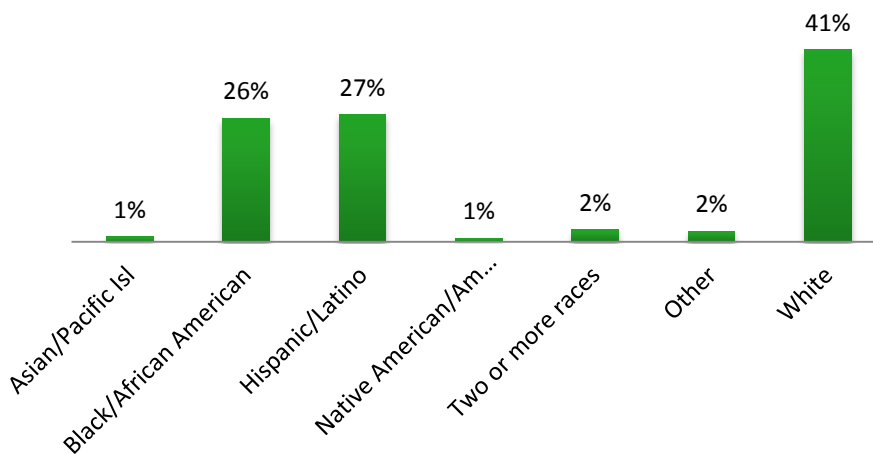
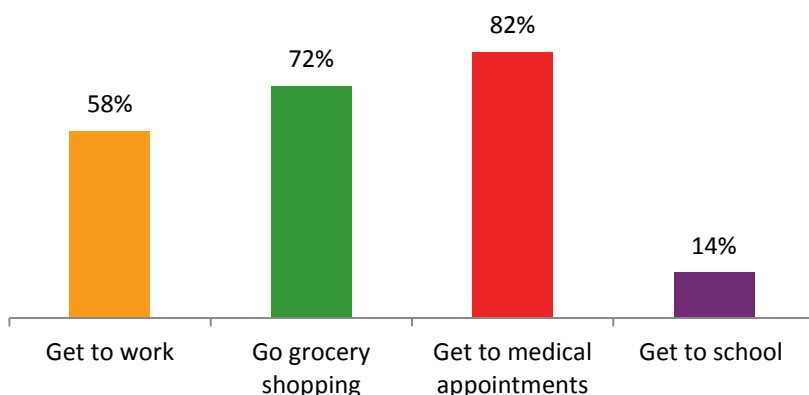


Figure 2. Race/Ethnicity of Respondents Aged 50 and Older

In the spring of 2018, the Springfield Age Friendly City Project conducted a public transportation survey to understand utilization of PVTA services, which were under the threat of major cuts through the MA State budget. The 2018 Transportation Survey was distributed among Springfield residents of various ages at public community events and at the Springfield Union Station. There were a total of 316 respondents, of which 121 were 50 years of age or older (of which 55% were aged 60 and older). Consistent with the PVTA survey, this survey demonstrated the clear need for public transportation among older adults in Springfield. Approximately 97% of older adult respondents (aged 50 or older) reported using public transportation and 83% reported using public transportation at least three to four times per week. Fifty-eight percent reported using public transportation at least daily. Ninety-two percent of older adult respondents said that they depend on public transportation and use it to take care of their daily needs. Respondents aged 50 and older, who completed the 2018 Age Friendly City Project Public Transportation Survey, reported the most frequent purpose for using public transportation is to get to medical appointments (Figure 3). These results are consistent with the

Paratransit Service Analysis study which identified that **the primary reason for traveling on the PVRTA vans is for medical appointments.**



**Figure 3. Trip Purpose for Older Adults Using Public Transportation**

When comparing the route use reported in the PVRTA Onboard Survey (representing the PVRTA Southern region) and the 2018 Age Friendly City Public Transportation Survey (representing Springfield), there are clear overlaps in those most frequently used. For both surveys older adults most frequently reported using G1, G2, G3, and B7 routes (Figure 4).

### ***Availability, Affordability, and Appropriateness of Public Transportation***

In assessing older adults’ access to public transportation it is critical to take into consideration the availability, affordability, and appropriateness of that transportation in order to fully understand obstacles to access. To understand these three factors associated with access the assessment team looked at the results of the walk audits conducted around seven senior housing communities and asked questions about cost and use of public transportation options through the survey, community forums, interviews, and focus group discussions. At the time of the assessment, public transportation options in Springfield were limited to the city buses and paratransit van services, both of which older adults without their own cars or rides from family/friends reported using in order take care of their everyday needs.<sup>1</sup>

The Age Friendly City Project conducted walk audits around seven senior housing communities in various neighborhoods in Springfield. Table 1 shows the seven walk audit sites along with a list of the bus routes available in walking distance of each senior housing community. The audits found that not all nearby bus stops were easily accessible to individuals in wheelchairs or with limited mobility. In addition, although there is at least one bus route available by each senior housing community, they do not necessarily offer direct access to older adults’ basic needs, e.g., grocery store, doctors’ offices, pharmacies, senior center.

<sup>1</sup> Bike shares with electric assist were made available in Springfield after the survey and community forums were conducted. No information was gathered on the use or intended use of these bicycles among older adults.

Walk Audit Site	Available Bus Routes
Forest Park Manor	G-2, G-1
Independence House	B-7
Mason Wright	X-92
Riverview Apartments	B-4
Gentile	G-1,G-2, G-5, X-92
Milton Court	B-6
SAAB Court	G-3

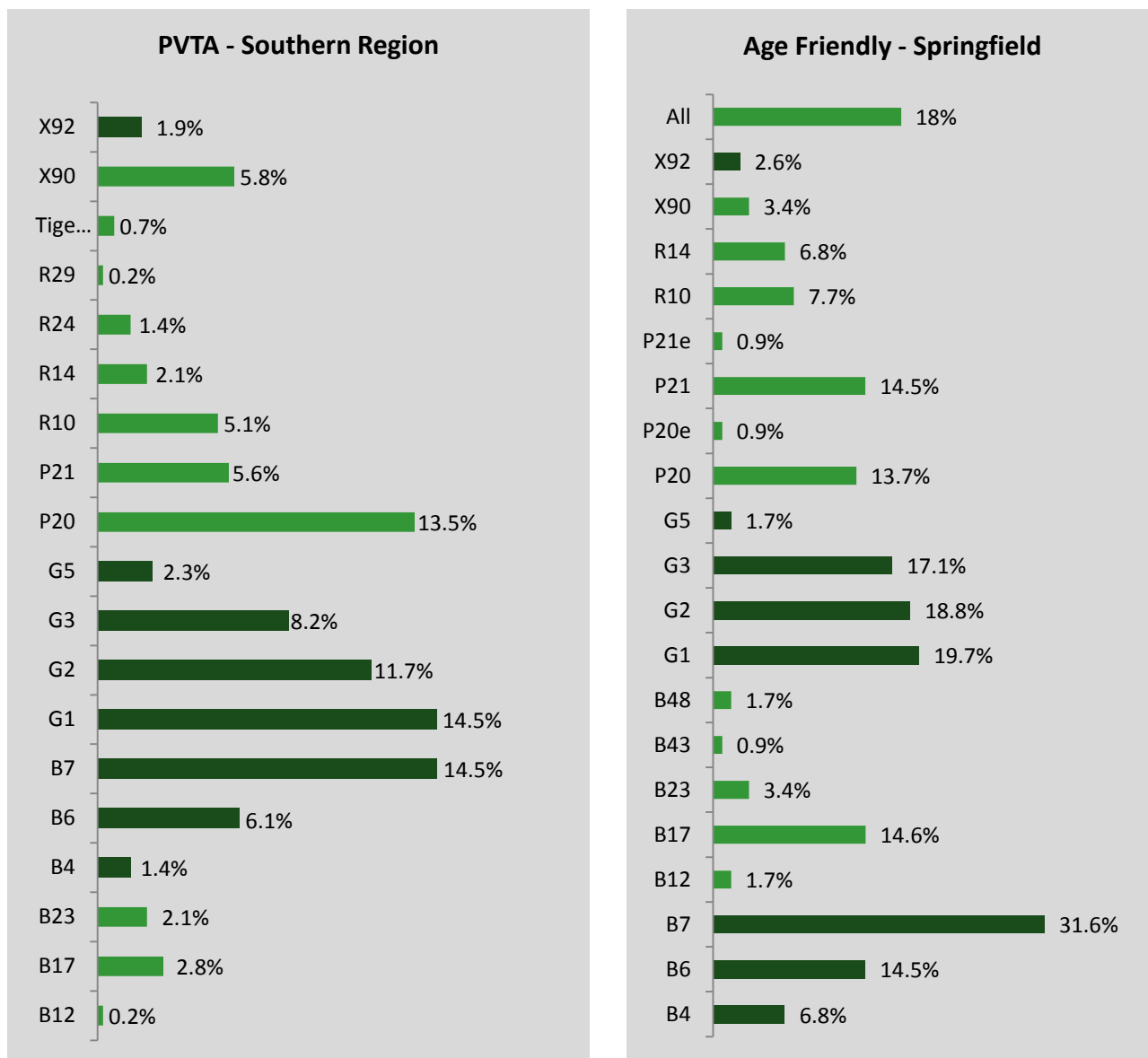
**Table 1. Walk Audit Sites and Available Bus Routes**

The PVTA Paratransit Service Analysis conducted in December 2014 provided information regarding use of senior dial-a ride (DAR) services and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) eligible rides for qualifying older adults. PVTA reported that between 2013 and 2014 there were declines in DAR trips made and an increase in ADA eligible rides provided. The current ratio of ADA to DAR trips is 3 to 1. According to the PVTA customer surveys conducted, approximately 54% of respondents over the age of 60 indicated that they were eligible to use the PVTA van service as a senior citizen without requiring ADA eligibility. Additionally, 30% of respondents indicated that they were both over 60 and ADA eligible. Over half (59%) of older adult respondents (aged 50 and older) to the Age Friendly City Transportation Survey indicated that they or someone in their life over 60 used paratransit services; 57% specifically to go to an adult day health center.

Although many older adults aged 60 and older qualify for paratransit (van) services either through DAR or ADA rides, these services are not free of charge nor are they equivalent in price to riding the bus. Older adults who qualify for Senior Van Services (or DAR) and participated in assessment activities (e.g., a focus group discussion) expressed concerns about the cost of these rides. The 2018 Age Friendly City Transportation Survey highlighted older adults' financial concerns about the potential increases in Senior Van Services fares. Approximately 76% of respondents felt that an increase in paratransit fares would make it harder for them or someone they know who uses paratransit services to access transportation. Ninety-four percent of older adult respondents said the proposed (and now implemented) fare increase for the bus would make it harder for them to afford public transportation.

During the assessment both older adults and professionals who serve them shared that public transportation is critical, but often timing is challenging when planning trips for medical appointments or trips to the grocery store. They spoke about the ongoing need for affordable

on-demand options for older adults in Springfield, especially for attending medical appointments. Participants in the Baystate Health Geriatrics, Palliative Care and Post-Acute Medicine focus group discussion said that aside from transportation being unaffordable for some older adults, it can also be late picking up clients/patients causing them to miss



appointments or wait for long periods before being seen or picked up. Limited transportation to the new (Raymond A. Jordan) senior center was also discussed as an obstacle for older adults in accessing the senior center and social activities.

(Dark green bars illustrate the ridership near Age Friendly City walk audit sites in Figure 5.)

**Figure 4. Older Adults' Use of Specific Bus Routes in the PVTA Southern Region Compared to Springfield Alone**

### ***City Infrastructure Obstacles***

The walk-audits conducted during the assessment revealed a number of obstacles and safety concerns for older adults and individuals with physical disabilities who want to use public transportation and/or access community services and amenities near to their housing. Based on observations during the walk audits and reports from the Resident Advisors - who ride the public buses daily - and other community members, there are a lack of benches at bus stops throughout the city. There is also a distinct need for infrastructure improvements to ensure safe road/intersection crossing for older adults and individuals with disabilities. There are numerous intersections around the seven senior housing complexes examined during the walk audits where there are no or faded crosswalks, no pedestrian signals, no pedestrian-controlled signals, and very short pedestrian cross-times. Participants also described roads that are not drivable and in desperate need of repair and regular maintenance. Others expressed a desire for better lit streets so they would feel safe walking in the evenings near their homes.

## Housing Assessment Background and Methods

Understanding housing options, needs, and obstacles for older adults is critical to understanding their health and well-being and supporting their safety and comfort. The affordability, availability, and acceptability of housing for this age group often determines how, where, and with whom older adults live. However, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), “The nation’s existing housing stock—in terms of options, affordability, and accessibility—is ill-suited to meet the housing needs of an increasingly older population that overwhelmingly wishes to age in place.”<sup>vii</sup>

Although adults aged 60 and older are eligible for public housing and subsidized housing through Springfield Housing Authority and other private housing providers, there is a distinct lack of affordable and appropriate housing for an aging population in Springfield. According to the *City of Springfield Housing Study, 2018*, Springfield’s housing stock is older with little new construction over the past couple of decades and many rental units are in desperate need of repair and remodeling. About 5% of rental units are in violation of state sanitary code. This captures only those code violations reported by tenants.<sup>viii</sup> The study also speaks to the concentration of low-income housing in the City of Springfield which is primarily occupied by Blacks and Latinos and the racial/ethnic inequities that persist in housing across the country and region due to a history of racially discriminating laws and policies. Unfortunately, the study does not mention specific housing needs of older adults in Springfield.

According to census data, 63% of Springfield residents aged 60 and older own their homes. Just over 15% of older adults aged 65 and older renting their homes spend more than 35% of their income on housing. Nineteen percent of older adults who own their homes spend more than 35% of their income on housing. More than a third of older adults have household incomes of less than \$20,000.<sup>ix</sup>

The Age Friendly City Housing Assessment explored existing housing and related services for older adults in Springfield as well as gaps. This was done through a number of activities:

- Seven walk audits around housing communities predominantly serving older adults
- Listing and ranking of housing issues and priorities for older adults at community events and forums (70 older adults)
- Key informant interviews with older adult services and housing experts and three public housing tenant council presidents
- Focus group discussions with older adults in two Springfield neighborhoods (four groups totaling 33 older adults); Personal Care Assistants (10 participants); and Baystate Health Geriatrics, Palliative Care and Post-Acute Medicine which conducts home visits with older adults (9 participants)

Data from these activities along with reviews of local housing studies were analyzed to understand current housing for older adults and identify common themes about gaps and challenges related to housing for older adults.

## Housing Assessment Findings

Older adults who participated in housing assessment activities identified as both renters and homeowners living in “senior housing” as well as other types of private and public housing. Assessment data analysis identified three main, overarching themes:

1. Availability, affordability, and appropriateness of housing
2. Home safety and maintenance
3. Housing support resources

## Availability, Affordability, and Appropriateness of Housing

### *Existing Housing Options for Older Adults in Springfield*

The Springfield Housing Authority (SHA) maintains 1,337 low-income units for adults with disabilities and those aged 60 and older, who qualify, in six developments across the city. More broadly, there are 2,397 SHA public housing units, 240 MA rental vouchers, and 2,733 Housing Choice Vouchers for low income, eligible Springfield residents. There are 19 additional, privately owned apartment complexes/communities that participate in Housing Choice Vouchers for low-income older adults and families through the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.<sup>x</sup>

Additional housing options specifically for older adults living in the City of Springfield include

- three assisted living facilities (designed to support older adults as they age with a range of supportive services provided on-site);
- one congregate housing facility (designed to provide older adults with physical limitations, not requiring 24-hour medical care, a shared housing experience—shared kitchen, living, and dining rooms—that allows them to maintain a level of independence and privacy);
- three nursing homes (designed for those older adults who need regular medical care overseen by a physician and may be short- or long-term care);
- two rest homes (designed for older adults who are generally independent, but may need some assistance with housekeeping, meals, assistance with bathing and dressing, and paid privately or by Supplemental Security Income (SSI)); and
- one independent living community rental facility (designed for older adults who want to live independently in their own apartment with a variety of services and amenities—may include contracted service providers to help with bathing and dressing).



More of each of these options exist in surrounding communities both in Hampden County as well as regionally throughout Western MA.<sup>xi</sup>

The City of Springfield 2018 Elder Guide provides information on housing options and housing-related resources in the area or state such as financial assistance for homeowners (e.g., information on reverse mortgages), legal concerns, and home modification/rehabilitation loan programs.

### ***Affordability, Availability, and Appropriateness of Housing***

Homeowners who participated in assessment activities shared their struggles with aging in place (i.e., staying in their homes as they age) due to their many unmet needs for home modifications, upkeep, and maintenance. They also identified the property tax burden and the difficult choices they are forced to make when balancing living and medical expenses without sufficient income or when they are on a fixed income. Focus group participants shared their desire to stay in their current homes, but challenges because the layout of their older homes are no longer appropriate (and safe). For example, a couple focus group participants spoke about only having one bathroom on the second floor of their home, but no longer feeling like they can safely negotiate stairs. However, renovating the home to address this issue or moving to a new home were not affordable options.

Consistent with the 2018 *City of Springfield Housing Study*, renters and transient and homeless older adults spoke of a lack of affordable units (especially units of high quality) and long waitlists for subsidized housing units. Some expressed displeasure with the lack of availability of multi-bedroom units for older adults making it challenging to age with other family members. Men of color, in particular, shared their frustrations of spending years on waitlists for affordable housing without placement due to CORI checks. They discussed the injustice in having “done their time” as younger men and continuing to have to struggle in older adulthood to find work and housing because of the CORI. These were not concerns shared by the Latinx focus group participants from Riverside. That group expressed more satisfaction with their living conditions - both rental and owned properties - and was more concerned with the need for city-wide services for older adults to socialize and maintain their health (see section on Additional Findings).

## **Home Safety and Maintenance**

Participants who were renting their homes, particularly those in public housing, expressed concerns with cleanliness of buildings; outdated units; unreliable elevators; and resistance of landlords to making accommodations for older adults, such as for fall prevention in rental units. Personal Care Assistants (PCAs) spoke to the need for special accommodations for some of their clients and the challenges that older adults face either getting the equipment they need covered by their insurance and/or getting assistance with or approval for making necessary changes to their homes to accommodate the equipment. This could be in the form of having to

hire someone to help and not being able to afford that service and/or convincing a landlord to allow the accommodations to be made.

## Housing Support Resources

Another common theme heard from older adult Springfield residents was the desire to know what, if any, social services exist in the community for housing support and how to navigate the system. Older adults in the focus group discussions said they were unaware of services in Springfield that could help them financially or with maintenance or repairs needed to make their homes more livable and safe as they age. The two professional groups supporting older adults in their homes (PCAs and the team from Baystate) also mentioned this critical need for advocates or case managers who know what housing-related services are available to older adults and are able to navigate challenging processes and systems and help complete online forms to receive those services. The PCAs shared that they often end up taking on this role in order to ensure their clients receive the services or equipment they need to safely stay in their homes.

## Additional Finding: Social Isolation

Social isolation when aging in place and alone was another theme that emerged from multiple sources. The PCAs and Baystate Geriatrics Team spoke to the importance of home-visiting programs and PCAs for the social and emotional support of older adults as well as to help them to regularly leave their homes for fresh air or a short walk. Among older adults who do not receive these services, often because they are ineligible through Medicare, social isolation is a persistent problem. For many of the PCAs who participated in the focus group discussion, their relationships with their non-relative clients lasted over the course of many years and they spoke about the depth of those relationships and the support they provided to spouses who also lived in the house but were not officially their clients. They developed deep, caring relationships that they felt were critical to the health of their older adult clients.

Older adult focus group discussion participants expressed feeling that activities for older adults in the city are limited. Organized activities for older adults supported by the City of Springfield generally take place through the senior centers. The few remaining neighborhood senior centers close at 3:00 or 4:00 p.m. and the main senior center in Blunt Park closes at 4:30 p.m. Some older adults spoke about their desire for evening activities to assist in reducing social isolation and providing opportunities and spaces to gather with others.

The walk audits showed close proximity between multiple older adult housing communities and schools. Although this assessment did not explore this opportunity, the assessment team was unaware of any programs specifically capitalizing on this to develop programs that may be mutually beneficial to older adults and children/adolescents.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings from the report, the assessment team identified recommendations representative of the needs and desires of the assessment participants.

### Transportation

- **Affordable Transit.** Ensure affordable, available, reliable, safe, and comfortable public and alternative transportation options that assist older adults in remaining active and social as they age as well as attending medical appointments in their community.
- **Benches and Shaded Spaces.** Ensure spaces and opportunities for older adults to sit/rest at bus stops under shaded coverings, supporting their ongoing use of public transportation.
- **Well Maintained Roads and Sidewalks.** Ensure roads and sidewalks are well maintained and managed (repaired).
- **Nearby Bus Stop to Housing.** Ensure bus stops are within walking distance from older adult communities (5 blocks radius).

### Housing

- **Affordable Housing.** Ensure rent/mortgage do not exceed 1/3 of older adults' livable income after paying medical expenses, protecting them from financial hardship as they age.
- **Age-Friendly Modifications.** Ensure living environments for older adults have safeguards like railings, single floor/first-floor occupancy, walk-in shower/tubs, body alarms, and emergency call buttons that help to facilitate their ability to age in place.
- **Good Maintenance.** Ensure access to programs/services that will allow older adults to maintain livable and safe conditions of their home either through landlord/ housing authority /community based program offered in the community that is readily available.
- **Access to services.** Ensure older adults are well-informed about the availability of housing, related services that are provided by the city, nonprofits, or individual donors.
- **Safety/ Comfort.** Ensure streets are well lit, maintained and monitored by the City.

## References

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- <sup>i</sup> 2018 Massachusetts Healthy Aging Community Profile. Springfield (Hampden). Available at: [https://mahealthyagingcollaborative.org/wp-content/themes/mhac/pdf/community\\_profiles/MA\\_Towncode281\\_Springfield.pdf](https://mahealthyagingcollaborative.org/wp-content/themes/mhac/pdf/community_profiles/MA_Towncode281_Springfield.pdf).
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