

Age-Friendly Carbon County Survey Results

Updated 6/1/2018

Introduction

The purpose of this survey is to determine, in the context of age-friendliness, the primary concerns and opportunities for improvement as identified by Carbon County residents, especially the older residents. The results of this survey will guide the Age-Friendly Steering Committee of the Red Lodge Area Community Foundation on how to make Carbon County more livable for seniors.

Methodology

Using the eight domains of livability from the AARP website, I drafted an outline for a survey on age-friendliness in Carbon County. The survey draft was revised and approved by the Age-Friendly Steering Committee.

The eight domains of livability were used because they are recognized by the World Health Organization and AARP as an important metric for assessing age-friendliness. The survey was designed to be brief and insightful to maximize response rate yet still be informative. We also provided a handout on the eight domains of livability to clarify the definition of each domain.

The survey was available in print and online. Print versions were made available at each senior center in Carbon County, as well as local clinics (Beartooth Billings Clinic, St. Vincent's Hospital, and RiverStone Health clinics in Bridger and Joliet), local libraries, post offices, and a few local churches. The online version of the survey was advertised through Facebook.

Our primary focus was to reach senior centers because that is where we felt we could best reach our target population, seniors. I gave a presentation at each of the senior centers in Carbon County (Belfry, Bridger, Boyd, Fromberg, Joliet, and Red Lodge) and at local churches (Red Lodge, Calvary Episcopal Church, Red Lodge Community Church, and Red Lodge Messiah Lutheran Church) to introduce the age-friendly initiative, define the eight domains of livability, and explain the purpose of the survey.

The survey officially closed on November 20, 2017. Responses received after this date were still considered but not be included in the official list of responses.

Results

Table 1. Mean Responses for Meeting My Needs and My Community's Needs*

Eight Domains of Livability	How well the community meets my own needs	How well the community meets my community's needs
Outdoor spaces and buildings	2.09	2.30
Transportation	2.83	3.31
Housing	2.48	2.96
Social Participation	2.10	2.35
Respect and Social Inclusion	2.13	2.28
Civic Participation and Employment	2.29	2.71
Communication and Information	2.38	2.61
Community Support and Health Services	2.06	2.27

*Scale of 1 to 5: 1 = Very Satisfied, 5 = Very Dissatisfied

Graph 1. Mean Responses for Meeting My Needs and My Community's Needs

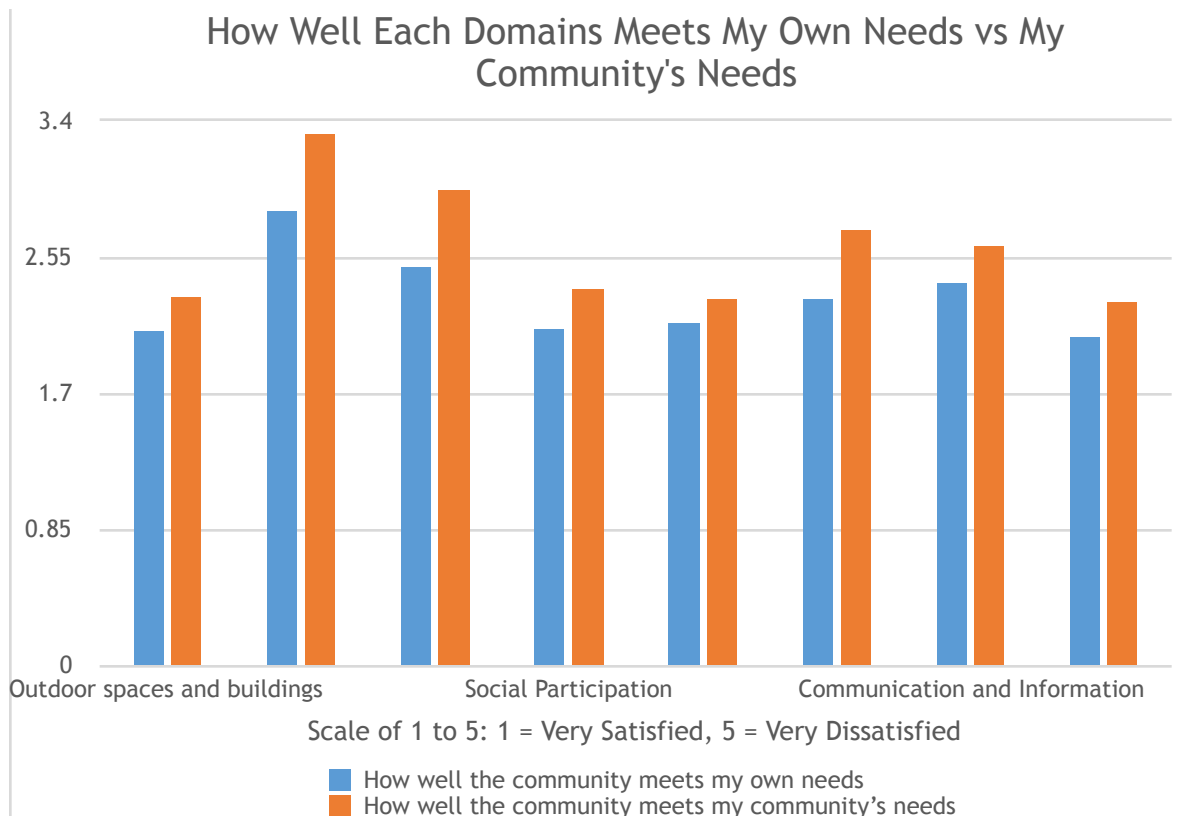
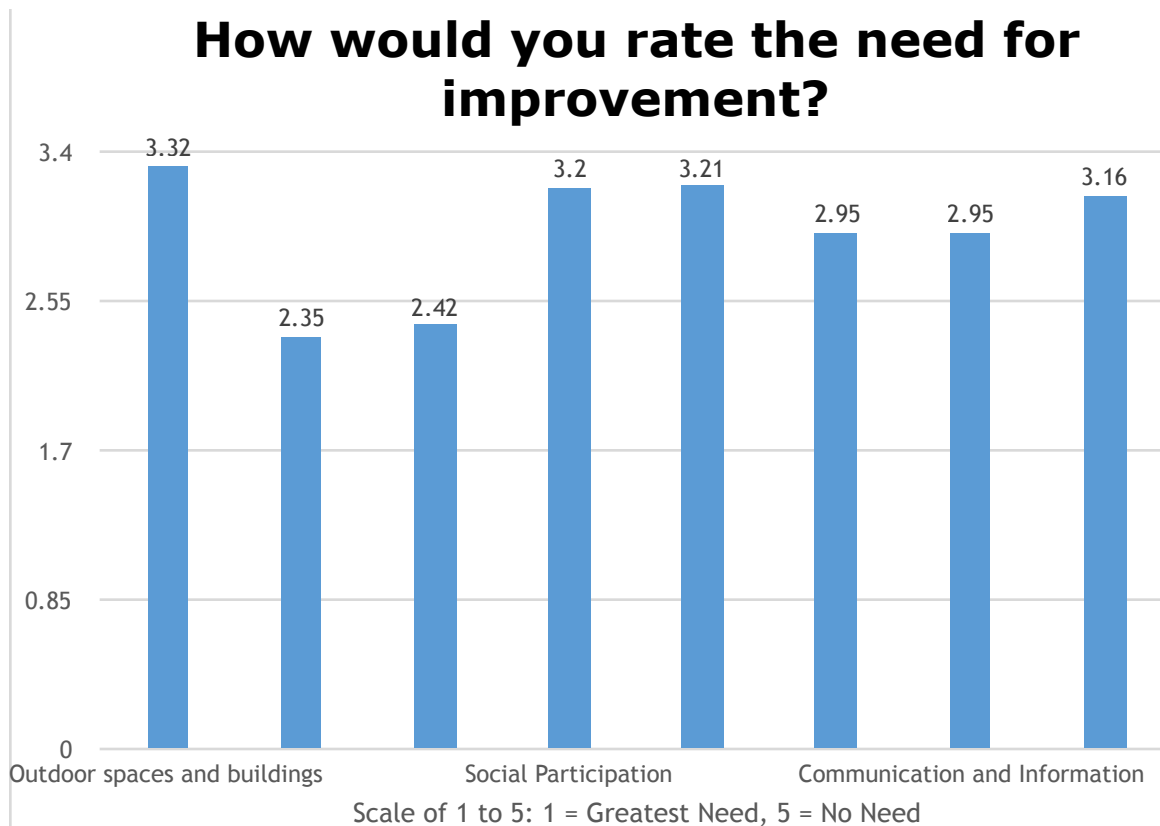


Table 2. Mean Responses for Need for Improvement

Eight Domains of Livability	How would you rate the need for improvement?
Outdoor spaces and buildings	3.32
Transportation	2.35
Housing	2.42
Social Participation	3.20
Respect and Social Inclusion	3.21
Civic Participation and Employment	2.95
Communication and Information	2.95
Community Support and Health Services	3.16

Scale of 1 to 5: 1 = Greatest Need, 5 = No Need

Graph 2. Mean Responses for Need for Improvement



Priorities List:

(1) Transportation; (2) Communication and Information, (3) Housing.

Discussion

Across nearly all communities surveyed, transportation came in as the top concern and responses generally did not vary much from community to community. Furthermore, transportation to Billings was a specific concern mentioned multiple times around the county. While the majority of written comments addressed the need for transportation, a few people expressed that those unhappy with what the community offers should not expect much more and should move to Billings instead. The Red Lodge Senior Center was the only senior center where respondents stated that there was a greater need for improvement in housing than in transportation.

In revisits to senior centers, one location claimed that transportation was not a big need. This was surprising because the responses from that same location had identified

transportation as their primary concern. This points to a shortcoming in our survey methodology. Although we visited each community, the responses received during that particular visit is not necessarily representative of the community. All other locations that were revisited expressed greater interest in developing a transportation service for Carbon County.

Factors that contribute to transportation needs include dispersed towns, aging drivers who may have difficulty seeing, poor driving conditions in the winter due to ice and snow, and residents who do not have a license or vehicle. Lack of transportation may contribute to difficulty finding jobs, missed doctor's appointments, unfilled prescriptions, and many other challenges.

Although there are strong social ties in Carbon County communities, people still often find themselves without a ride to the places they need to go. Providing a countywide transportation service may promote the overall well-being of local residents and increase traffic to local businesses.

Communication and information was repeatedly mentioned during visits to senior centers. The Red Lodge Area Community Foundation has been working on Carbon County Connect, a community services directory. This directory can be accessed online and hard copies have been distributed around the county. The Age-Friendly Steering Committee is also considering a column in the paper or a similar format for publishing topics on healthy aging.

Housing was another major concern. However, housing was not brought up often in written comments. In addition to senior housing, there was quite a bit of concern for affordable housing in general. The importance of single level housing was verbally mentioned during a visit. One possibility is promoting universal design in housing.

Conclusions

From my findings through surveys and talking with seniors during my visits, transportation is the greatest concern for Carbon County seniors. They require transportation for medical visits, groceries, the pharmacy, and getting around in general.

Providing transportation will increase access to jobs, medical care, food, and important services. Furthermore, it can help reduce social isolation, a predictor of mortality. The benefits of accessible and affordable transportation are physical, social, and economic.

We plan to create a Transit Development Plan to gather specific, technical baseline data to assess how transportation is used and how it benefits Carbon County residents of all

ages. A vendor will conduct the assessment and provide a plan for a committee to approve and use.

Housing is an area that the Age-Friendly Steering Committee feels unequipped to address while we are focusing on transportation and communication and information. We are open to partnering with other organizations but are unable to take the lead at this moment. There is currently an affordable workforce housing initiative at the Red Lodge Area Community Foundation

Our second priority will be improving access to information around Carbon County. Communication and information is an area where we feel we can improve without compromising our work on accessible and affordable transportation for Carbon County. The Age-Friendly Steering Committee is considering a periodical that will publish articles and share information on healthy aging and livable communities. This periodical may be published in the Healthy Communities newsletter (part of the Foundation), in Carbon County News, or independently.