

Aging in Place



BY **SUSAN NOACK**, CHAIR, TUALATIN AREA AGING TASK FORCE

On June 29th, four members of the Tualatin Area Aging Task Force attended the “Livability for All Age-Friendly Washington County Roundtable” presented by AARP of Washington County. Following the guide lines set by the World Health Organization’s (WHO) Global Age-Friendly Cities and Communities, a project was created by WHO to help cities prepare for the rapid aging population. Washington County is the second fastest growing county in the state. The 65+ population makes up 12.2% of the total population, compared to 16.4% for the rest of Oregon. This same 65+ population in Tualatin makes up around 15% of the community’s total population.

AARP defines a “livable community” as one that is safe and secure, has affordable and appropriate housing and transportation options, and offers supportive community features and services. AARP Research developed a survey instrument that captures WHO’s eight areas of livability in order to: (a) help communities establish a baseline with regards to older adults being able to age in place, and (b) conduct a community needs/gap analysis to identify and prioritize areas of focus. The eight areas used to examine a community’s “age-friendliness” are: 1) outdoor spaces and buildings 2) transportation 3) housing 4) social participation 5) respect and social inclusion 6) civic participation and employment 7) communication and information and 8) community and health services.

The survey showed that 87% of those surveyed said it is extremely or very important

to stay in their own home as they age. Health and Wellness, Transportation and Safe Streets, Outdoor Spaces are also important. On the other hand, “gaps” – difference between desired community features and services and what is perceived to exist in the community – primarily across the areas of Job Opportunities, Volunteering and Civic Engagement, Housing and Community Information are identified.

While those surveyed view many aspects of their community as “age-friendly” and conducive to living independently, based on the gaps identified, AARP Oregon suggests local governments, nonprofits and advocates consider the following actions/solutions:

- Establish programs to assist older residents make home modifications to allow safe aging in place
- Require new residences to be built to include age-friendly features, e.g. wide doorways, no step entries
- Promote greater housing options, especially for lower income residents
- Engage older adults in training for and participating in paid and volunteer work
- Ensure that high quality and affordable health care is available
- *Provide greater transportation options for those that don’t drive
- Made pedestrian facilities (sidewalks, street crossings, trails) safe, wide enough and well-lit

- Ensure public transit stops are safe and easy to access

- Improve communications with older adults about community activities, including addressing public safety issues that might arise.

The Tualatin Aging Task Force has been working with AARP/Washington County and the City of Tualatin to address these areas and to work towards being more “age-friendly” in Tualatin for all of our residents. An important element in addressing these issues and possible solutions is your input. We need to brainstorm the steps and policies that can be taken to improve livability in Tualatin. Please join us at our next meeting, Monday, August 8, 3 pm, Juanita Pohl Center, or email me at susancnoack@hotmail.com with your comments, suggestions, concerns.

Susan Noack has lived in Tualatin for 15 years. Before retirement, she was a development director/event planner for non-profits. Now as an “Aging in Place” senior, her passion is being an advocate for seniors and giving back to the community. She is a member of both the Meals on Wheels People and Juanita Pohl Center advisory committees and chair the Tualatin Area Aging Task Force committee.

