



MetroBridge Project Memo
Town of Easton – Livable Community Survey

To: Department of Health and Community Services, Town of Easton
From: Urban Research Methods Course, City Planning & Urban Affairs Department, Boston University
Date: May 2020
RE: AARP Livable Communities Survey Results

Introduction

Throughout March and April 2020, students in Prof. Yesim Sungu-Eryilmaz’s Urban Research Methods course at Boston University conducted AARP’s Livable Communities Survey for the Town of Easton. Our goal was to better understand the lived experiences of Easton’s residents aged 50 and older. Despite minor data collection setbacks from the Covid-19 pandemic, we were able to gather sufficient survey information from Easton residents. These survey results were analyzed and translated into action items, which will act as a guide for the Town of Easton officials as they work to meet the demands of Easton’s growing 50+ population. This memo summarizes our research conducted over the Spring 2020 semester.

Research Question & Methodology

The Town of Easton is projected to reach a total population of 25,000 by 2024 (U.S. Census, 2020). This projected rate of growth is double that of surrounding towns in Bristol County. An in-depth analysis of Easton residents by age suggests that the town is trending in the direction of a swelling 50+ population by 2024.

Our research question for this project was the following: To what extent do the Town of Easton’s current facilities and services meet the needs and desires of its 50+ population? At Easton’s request, we employed the AARP Livable Communities Survey. This survey assesses the needs and expectations of community members through the World Health Organization’s Eight Domains of Livability.

We used publicly available voter registration records of Easton residents aged 50+ to prepare the survey recruitment and sampling frame. The voter registration record list identified 9,298 potential participants, of whom 368 were randomly selected to be contacted. We sent postal questionnaires in late March enclosed with an introductory letter explaining the purpose of the survey and why

residents' voluntary participation matters. In addition to the mailed questionnaires, we created an online version of the AARP survey hosted on the Qualtrics platform. The online version went live in late-March and remained open until mid-April.

Key Findings

Based on data from the 260 survey responses (45 postal and 215 online), we were able to identify some of the most pressing needs facing Easton residents in the 50+ population. Our key findings from the results of AARP's Livable Communities Survey include:

Characteristics of Survey Participants:

Almost two-thirds (62.5%) of survey respondents were between the ages of 50 to 69 years-old, and over one-third (37.5%) were aged 70+. Almost all (98%) respondents reported their race as white, Caucasian descent.

The median income of respondents falls within the \$100-149k range, and over a third of the survey respondents hold a graduate or professional degree. Just under half (45%) of respondents said they were retired, and 41% mentioned they were likely to work as long as possible.

Twenty-one percent (21%) of respondents reported having a spouse or partner with a disability.

Survey results also reveal that 93% of respondents own their primary housing, and 84% listed "single-family home" as their primary housing arrangement (compared to apartment, condominium, or duplex).

Lastly, all survey respondents believe it is important to stay healthy and active as they age.

Overall Survey Highlights:

The respondents have deep roots in their community. Many (87%) rate Easton as a good place for people to live as they age, and 77% of Easton's 50+ population want to continue to live in their community, or in their home, for as long as they can.

Among residents considering a move outside of Easton, the top three influencing factors include: 1) a home that will help them live independently as they age, 2) a different home size that better meets their needs, and 3) an area that offers a lower cost of living.

Another notable factor was a disdain for the town's purported high property taxes. Other factors on the subject of housing include the preference for well-maintained homes and properties, and the availability of trustworthy and affordable home repair contractors.

Finally, Easton’s residents aged 50+ also indicated a clear preference for public facilities that are accessible to people of different physical abilities, well-maintained sidewalks, and clean public restrooms.

Gap Analysis - Community Needs and Action Areas:

Our analysis of survey responses revealed a number of unmet needs among residents aged 50+. We used a “gap analysis” approach to generate the top areas in need of improvement. In order to identify these community needs or gaps, the survey asked a series of paired questions structured as:

- 1) How important is a community feature or service (e.g., housing, transportation, etc.)?; and,
- 2) Does this community feature or service exist in the community?

Analyzing the difference between the *importance* of a feature or service and its *existence* in the community reveals the level of need – or gap – for each feature or service, as perceived by the survey respondents. In other words, the features or service areas that were rated as highly important, and also as unavailable or non-existent, are the ones the Town of Easton should focus on as priorities.

The percentage listed next to each item indicates the specific gap level for that service category, with numbers closer to -100% indicating a larger gap. The survey results are provided below in two formats: the top ten areas for improvement are highlighted first, and then a broader set of results is organized by the Eight Domains of Livability.

Ten Largest Gaps – Community Needs and Action Areas:

The list below shows the top ten service gaps, or top community needs, as identified through the survey.

1. Job training opportunities for older adults who want to learn new job skills within their job or get training in a different field of work (-90%)
2. A home repair service for low-income and older adults (-87%)
3. Public parks with enough benches (-86%)
4. Well-maintained public transportation vehicles (-86%)
5. Jobs that are adapted to meet the needs of people with disabilities (-86%)
6. Reliable public transportation (-85%)
7. A range of flexible job opportunities for older adults (-85%)
8. Safe public transportation stops (-84%)
9. Affordable home health care providers (-83%)
10. Community information that is delivered in-person to people who may not be able to leave their home (-83%)

Gap Analysis Results Grouped by Domain of Livability:

A broader set of results are provided below, organized by the World Health Organization's Eight Domain's of Livability: housing, outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, volunteering and civic engagement, job opportunities, health and wellness, and community information.

Housing

- A home repair service for low-income and older adults (-87%)

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

- Public parks with enough benches (-86%)
- Well-maintained public restrooms that are accessible to people of different physical abilities (-79%)
- Neighborhood watch programs (-79%)
- Separate pathways for bicyclists and pedestrians (-76%)

Transportation

- Well-maintained public transportation vehicles (-86%)
- Reliable public transportation (-85%)
- Safe public transportation stops (-84%)
- Affordable public transportation (-82%)
- Accessible and convenient public transportation (-81%)
- Audio/visual pedestrian crossings (-78%)

Volunteering and Civic Engagement

- Volunteer training opportunities to help people perform better in their volunteer roles (-81%)

Job Opportunities

- Job training opportunities for older adults who want to learn new job skills within their job or get training in a different field of work (-90%)
- Jobs that are adapted to meet the needs of people with disabilities (-86%)
- A range of flexible job opportunities for older adults (-85%)

Health and Wellness

- Affordable home health care providers (-83%)

Community Information

- Community information that is delivered in-person to people who may not be able to leave their home (-83%)
- Clearly printed information with large lettering (-82%)
- Community information that is available in different languages (-78%)

- Access to community information in one central location (-73%)

Recommendations

Our gap analysis highlights the areas that are ***most in need of improvement***, according to the survey respondents. We recommend that the Town of Easton considering addressing these high-needs areas.

Additionally, we reviewed the survey findings to determine which service gaps could be addressed in the ***short versus long term***. Our list of short-term recommended actions, which could be addressed through existing resources and town authority, are as follows (also provided as an infographic in the **Appendix**):

Short-Term Recommended Action Items:

- Explore the creation of a home repair service for low-income and older adults
- Increase the number of benches in public parks
- Ensure public restrooms are well-maintained and accessible to people of different physical abilities
- Establish neighborhood watch program(s)
- Update pedestrian crossings to include both audio and visual signals
- Consider offering training opportunities to help people perform better in their volunteer roles
- Examine ways to ensure community information is: clearly printed with large lettering; available in one central location and in different languages; and delivered in-person to people who can't leave their home

Conclusion

The survey results and our analysis generated several action areas that the Town of Easton can consider when creating their action plan to become an age-friendly town. We recommend as a next step that the Town of Easton hold focus groups and interviews with their residents aged 50+ to help explain the results of the survey and to obtain further insight into the needs of residents in this age group. With this data, the town will have a starting platform to shape its community into one deserving of the prestigious AARP Age-Friendly certification. For more information about this project, please contact BU's MetroBridge program (www.bu.edu/ioc/metrobridge).

Appendix – Infographic on Easton's Age-Friendly Community Needs

The following two pages are an infographic depicting where the Town of Easton should focus efforts to become a livable, age-friendly community.