

AGE-FRIENDLY
 COMMUNITY PLANNING
 BACKGROUND DOCUMENT



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1. Introduction

It has never been a better time to be a senior. Today's seniors are living longer and have more active lifestyles thanks to advances in medicine and increased understanding of what keeps us healthy. Such advances have created an environment where today's 65 year olds are more akin to a 57 year old from a generation ago. As the number of people entering retirement and living longer increases, the nature of our communities changes, placing new demands on the design of our built environment and the services and infrastructure that people depend on.

The aging of our population is a global phenomenon. The number of people aged 60 and over as a proportion of the global population will double from 11% to 22% by 2050 (WHO 3). In Canada, as we move into 2010, the baby boom generation of 1946 to 1966 will reach the ages of 44 to 64 - meaning even though Canada's median age is currently at an all-time high, the "official" retirement of baby boomers has not even started. In British Columbia, the proportion of the population aged 65 and over is 14.6% in 2009 and is expected to reach 24% by 2031. While this aging phenomenon is taking place across the world, including Canada and British Columbia, the trend is more pronounced in many communities across Canada and in particular, the Town of Comox.

The Town of Comox has a significantly high proportion of people aged 65 and over - about 23.3% compared to the provincial proportion of 14.6%. Comox is a desirable place for retirees due to its natural features and relatively affordable housing. Although Comox is perceived as an ideal place to retire, the Town is facing increasing pressure to satisfy seniors' needs, such as housing, transportation and safety. These needs will become more pronounced as the Town's population continues to age.

This background report is the first step of an Age-Friendly Community Planning process, being undertaken concurrently with the Town of Comox's Official Community Plan (OCP) update. This report will set the context for age-friendly community planning in Comox, by providing a description of the current and future demographic changes as they relate to Comox's aging population. The report will examine current literature regarding the expectations and demands of an aging population, discussing topics such as housing, transportation, safety and social inclusion. Finally, the report will discuss age-friendly policy options Town residents and municipal staff can evaluate for including in the OCP update.

2. Comox’s Aging Population

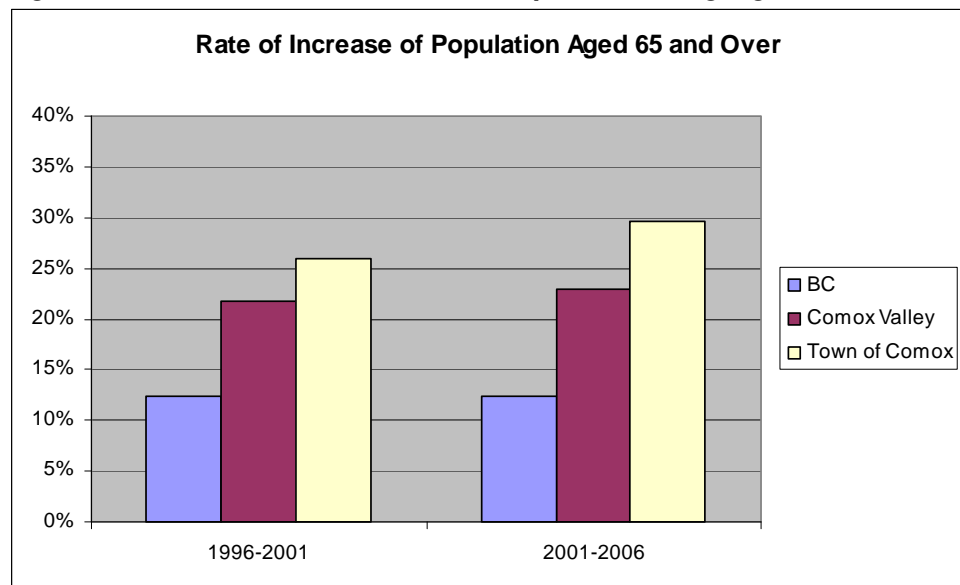
As previously mentioned, Comox has a large proportion of people aged 65 and over and the proportion is growing. Table 1 below illustrates the Town’s current age distribution compared to British Columbia.

Table 1 - Comox Age Distribution (2009)

Age Distribution (BC Stats 2009)			
Age Group	Comox	% Distribution Comox	% Distribution BC
All ages	12,140	100	100
0-14	1,965	16.2	16.5
15-24	1,250	10.3	13.1
25-44	2,620	21.6	27.4
45-64	3,460	28.6	28.4
65+	2,835	23.3	14.6

Not only does Comox have a high proportion of older people but also the rate at which the population is aging has been increasing. Figure 1 illustrates and compares the rate of increase of people aged 65 and over between the last three census periods for the Town of Comox, the Comox Valley region and British Columbia.

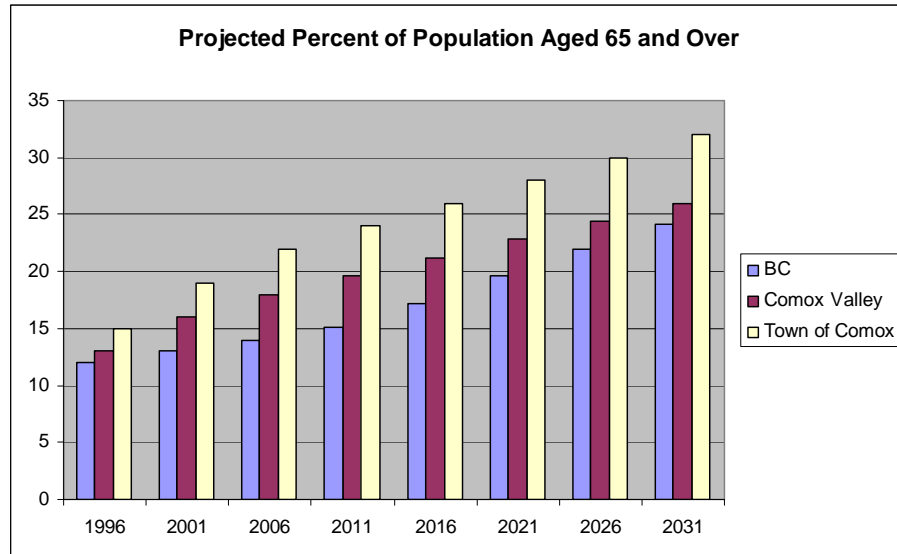
Figure 1 - Comox and Comox Valley Rate of Aging



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This aging population is a product of the baby boom phenomenon which started after World War II. However, as people born just after WWII have not yet reached 65, the most drastic affects of the baby boom retirement have not even started and we can expect population to age at an even higher rate. Figure 2 shows the projected percent of the population aged 65 and over for BC, Comox Valley and the Town of Comox. Data for years 1996, 2001 and 2006 are actual numbers from Census data. The Town of Comox's projection is a conservative projection, assuming the Town's rate of population aged 65 and over will slow to the same rate as Comox Valley's projection. Using this conservative assumption, we estimate the Town of Comox will have about 32% of its population aged 65 and over by 2031 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 - Projected Aging Population Proportions¹



Not only will the Town of Comox have more people aged 65 and over but also more of these seniors will be over the age of 80. Seniors are not a homogeneous group. Health problems, mobility and housing needs tend to increase with age. For example disability rates jump from 31% among seniors aged 65 to 74 years to 53% for those age 75 and over (HRSDC quoted in F/P/T 6). As the Town's population of seniors increases, so will the average age of population, placing even more demand on the services that seniors require.

¹ *BC projections are from Statistics Canada, Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories, 2005. Available online at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-519-x/2006001/t/4122016-eng.htm>. Comox Valley projections are from the draft Regional Growth Strategy.

3. Current Initiatives for Seniors in Comox

Comox's OCP is the Town's primary planning document for guiding decisions that affect the built environment and as such is a starting point for age-friendly initiatives. The current OCP mentions seniors and acknowledges the need for adequate public facilities and services for seniors' needs. Sections 1.0, 1.2 and 1.3.2 acknowledge the Town's appeal to retirees and the need for different types of housing and services to specifically accommodate seniors. The OCP also observes the need for interaction among seniors and between seniors and younger age groups in section 1.3.4. Section 1.4 specifically observes increasing demand for more multi-family housing to provide housing choices for an aging population. Although the current OCP contains and discusses age-friendly issues, the extent to which the current OCP deals with these issues is limited to one or two general policies and general observations, goals or objectives. The current OCP, therefore, omits any substantial policy to effectively govern land development choices in favour of the age-friendly population.

Despite the Town's light treatment for planning for an aging population, Comox's residents, including seniors, are quick to point out the Town's many benefits. At the first Town meeting for the Age-Friendly Community Planning Component of the OCP update, residents spoke avidly about what they like about Comox. Some of these features included: the natural environment, walkability and scooterability and the variety of services available. Although the Town already enjoys many age-friendly features, a conscious effort to plan for and entrench effective policies in the OCP will help ensure the Town continues to be a great place for seniors and that new development considers and helps satisfy the needs and desires of an aging population.

4. Literature and Information Review

There is significant collection of literature and studies that examine the phenomenon of the aging populations across Canada. Much of this work is based on the World Health Organization's (WHO's) Age-friendly Cities Programme, an international effort by WHO to help cities around the world prepare for the rapid ageing of populations and urbanization.

An analysis of this literature follows the review. The analysis includes two general but important findings. Seniors, or elders, are not a homogenous group. The needs and desires of those in their 60s are very different to those in their 80s and 90s. Any effort to promote age-friendly planning must recognize this fact. Also, the principles and characteristics of age-friendly planning concerning the built environment are very similar to contemporary planning initiatives such as sustainable growth, smart growth, Transit Oriented Design and other contemporary efforts to design our built environments in a way that is sustainable, efficient and agreeable. Therefore, age-friendly planning is also people-friendly planning. It is good for everyone because it includes affordable housing options, transportation choices, and safe environments, which benefit people of all ages.

The Union of British Columbia Municipalities Age-Friendly Communities Website

The Age-Friendly Communities Website (<http://www.seniorsincommunities.ca/>) is a resource for learning and accessing tools about Age-friendly Communities in British Columbia. The site recognizes the important role of policies, services and the physical environment to support and enable older people to be active. The site is a product of the cooperation between the Union of BC Municipalities, the Ministry of Community Services and the Ministry of Health and is intended as a resource to local governments and communities for adapting communities to become age-friendly.

The Age-friendly Communities website builds on the findings from two age-friendly initiatives, one by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the other by the Ministers Responsible for Seniors across Canada. These initiatives are discussed in more detail below.

Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide. Published by the World Health Organization in 2007

This Guide is a product of a research project the WHO started in 2005. The project seeks to identify physical, social and environmental barriers to active aging and provides suggestions for improving the environment for older people. The Guide's purpose is to help cities see themselves from the perspective of older people, in order to identify where and how they can become more age-friendly. A checklist is included, which summarizes the results covered under eight categories of urban living. The project covered a total of 33 cities from all continents and relied on older people and caregivers to provide first-hand experiences regarding age-friendly features of their city, what problems they encounter, and what is missing from the city that would enhance their health, participation and security.

The Guide provides a comprehensive introduction to the issues surrounding age-friendly cities and is an excellent starting point for further community specific studies or initiating a program to make a community more age-friendly. Some of the checklist indicators are very useful and provide detailed measures that could be used with development applications for evaluating the age-friendliness of development projects. For example, the Outdoor Spaces and Buildings checklist category includes a checklist indicator on Outdoor Seating and asks, is outdoor seating available, especially in parks and transit stops? However, in parts, the Guide and checklist are general and detail could be added to make it more useful to a particular municipality. One checklist indicator for Housing asks simply, is affordable housing available for all older people? This does not seem to be a very helpful question as the answer across every municipality would be, "no".

The Guide's eight categories of urban living are also used in the Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities guide and are described below.

Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide

The Healthy Aging and Wellness Working Group of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial (F/P/T) Committee of Officials conducted the Canadian Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities project. The project builds on work by the WHO on the Global Age-Friendly Cities Project by engaging 10 rural and/or remote communities across the country to identify features that make communities more age-friendly.

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Like the WHO's Global Age-Friendly Cities project, the F/P/T's project uses first hand experiences of older adults and caregivers of adults to support its findings. Focus groups were used to gather information, which concentrated on the following:

- The aspects of the community that are age-friendly;
- The barriers and problems that show how the community is not age-friendly; and
- Suggestions to improve the problems or barriers identified

The Guide acknowledges each community is distinctive and has a unique set of needs, circumstances and options for improving age-friendliness. However, one general finding observes that seniors wishing to age in place in rural or small town communities may face additional barriers than those living in more urban settings. Smaller communities often lack the economies of scale that help support housing and transportation options and seniors in remote areas may be required to travel further to reach medical facilities or other needed services.

Although the Town of Comox is not a "rural or remote" community, the Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities Guide provides valuable information and strategies for making any community more age-friendly.

Findings and discussions from both the WHO and the F/P/T projects are summarized in the eight categories below:

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Outdoor spaces and buildings are ideal issues for age-friendly community planning to be included in the Town of Comox OCP update. The features in this category are largely controllable by policies that could be part of an OCP. Some examples include ensuring future development is safe, has accessible washrooms and rest areas and readable signage. These features can be entrenched in the OCP as general policies, which provide a basis for more specific planning tools such as density bonus zoning and direct control zoning for private development. The OCP can also encourage these features through public initiatives, such as commitments to public investment in facilities and infrastructure.

Transportation

This is another main topic for age-friendly planning. Transportation is a key issue because the ability to move is essential for other age-friendly planning themes such as social participation and accessing health services. Car owners reported that good roads, light traffic flow, prompt snow removal and generally adequate parking options were among the positive aspects of driving in rural and remote communities. Many seniors expressed concerns about their future as older drivers, fearing the

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loss of independence that would accompany giving up their license. Transportation options are less in rural communities and seniors often have travel patterns which do not coincide with public transit peak hours when buses run more frequently. Many older people in the F/P/T study said they are not aware of the transportation options available and that where such services exist they lack details about cost, hours of operation and who is eligible to use them.

Housing

Housing is an important issue for everyone as it helps fulfill one of our most basic needs, shelter. Appropriate housing forms allow seniors to age in place and move to different types of housing as their needs change. Housing is a particularly important topic for Comox and the current OCP recognizes the need for more multi-family housing, to accommodate the changing needs of seniors.

Some seniors recognize their older homes are not practical for an aging person; however, many cannot afford the upgrades and adaptation required to meet their changing needs. The biggest financial barriers facing seniors who want to remain in their homes appears to be related to heating and home maintenance costs. Government programs that help finance retrofits to homes for mobility and accessibility issues do not appear to be well known. Smaller homes and condos were identified as desired forms of housing for those who can afford to move as well as options for assisted living, both semi-assisted living and full assisted living.

Social Participation

Participating in social activities such as leisure, cultural and spiritual activities in the community creates a feeling of belonging and active participation. Being socially integrated into the community is an essential component of active aging. Older people consulted by WHO indicated they are concerned with having adequate access to transportation, facilities and knowledge of social activities as well as offers of the actual activities available.

Three major social activities mentioned in the F/P/T study are:

- Physical recreation or sports activities, including spectator sports;
- Church or school-related events or programs; and
- Events that include food, such as potlatches, community dinners and even funerals

One innovative program mentioned was the “seniors, moms and tots” swimming program, which has the benefit of bringing together different generations of people. Again lack of

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transportation options was cited as an issue with respect to allowing seniors to participate.

Respect and Social Inclusion

Respect and social inclusion of seniors can depend on a community's behavioural norms, lack of contact between generations, and widespread ignorance about ageing and older people. Factors such as culture, gender, health status and economic status also play a role.

As a whole, the project found that older people are respected in the cities studied. Examples of how communities can show respect is by giving older people priority in businesses and public places. For example, in businesses in Jamaica, older people can sit and wait to be served directly by employees assigned to sitting areas.

The F/P/T study found that in general, older persons in rural and remote communities are treated with a great deal of respect, kindness and courtesy.

Isolation is often the result of health or mobility issues; however, some older adults and service providers identified that the reason some seniors are lonely is because of the changing times in which we live, such as unfriendly neighbours.

Civic Participation and Employment

Seniors are quite capable of voluntary work for their families and the community. Communities that are age-friendly provide options for seniors to continue to work, volunteer and participate in different activities. Participants in the WHO project expressed interest in having more opportunities to work and volunteer and would like to see these opportunities better tailored to their needs and interests. In Melbourne, there is a project under way to use the internet to match volunteers to opportunities, which helps overcome a noted barrier to volunteering, namely, finding out about opportunities. Getting to and from volunteer activities was also reported as a barrier.

Many volunteer services delivered by older people provide support to other older persons. This provides a good opportunity to set up a Time Banking program. Time Banking is a simple method for earning support for people when they get older. For every hour one spends doing something for someone in their community, that person earns one Time Dollar. Then, a person has a Time Dollar to spend on having someone else do something for them. Volunteer or Time Banking opportunities in schools and recreation centres would help promote intergenerational meetings, which was noted as desirable at the November 17, 2009 Comox Age-Friendly Community Planning Meeting.

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Communication and Information

Staying connected with each other and events and getting timely, practical information to manage life and meet personal needs is key to active aging. The project found that rapidly changing information and communication tools are both welcomed but criticized about their role in social exclusion. During the first Town of Comox Age-Friendly Community Planning meeting, some attendees expressed concern over the use of the online website as a tool for communication during the OCP update, suggesting an information bulletin board at the downtown shopping mall would be more helpful for receiving information.

Affordable access to communication tools is essential but so is access to education on how to use new and emerging communication tools such as the internet. The two Guides report that the single biggest barrier to communicating with older people is the visual and auditory presentation of information.

Consideration should be given to hosting a workshop/tutorial to provide basic lessons in internet use, including how to set up an email account, how to access the Comoxocp.ca website, how to use internet search tools and general navigation through the internet. Research from the F/P/T study showed that many were very satisfied with courses for improving computer proficiency.

The F/P/T study also found that the most used methods of communication for focus group participants are the more traditional methods such as, word of mouth, telephone, bulletin boards, newspapers, radio and community events.

Community Support and Health Services

As people age, the importance of good quality and accessible health care increases. The WHO research found health care costs are generally perceived as too high. In Comox, as with most other places, the organization and supply of health care is provided at the provincial level rather than at the municipal level. Despite this fact, there are opportunities at the municipal level for supporting health services including preventative measures such as opportunities for exercise. Time banking is another option for providing and receiving community support and health services.

Both the WHO and F/P/T documents include checklists in their respective documents. The checklists are intended to provide a measure against which community members can evaluate their town or city for age-friendliness. Some of the checklist indicators will be useful for the Town of Comox in choosing policies and objectives to include in the OCP to encourage age-friendly development; however, some of the checklist indicators deal with issues that cannot be addressed in an OCP. Some of the more

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useful checklist indicators from both the WHO and F/P/T documents are listed in Appendix 1.

Communicating with Seniors: Advice, Techniques and Tips

This is a Canadian federal government document, published by Health Canada's Division of Aging and Seniors in 1999. As the title suggests, this document is designed as an aid to communicating with seniors.

The document is divided into four sections:

- The Senior Audience: Large, Growing, Diverse - provides background information about Canadian seniors and facts that may influence communication choices;
- Choosing the Communication Medium - explores the suitability of new and traditional communication mediums;
- Formulating Your Message - provides on effective means of communicating messages in terms of content and design; and
- Advice from the Experts - provides sources for further information.

The document suggests that senior friendly communication is also just *good communication* and is easy to understand by everyone.

The first section, The Senior Audience: Large, Growing, Diverse, begins with some interesting facts such as:

- 57% of Canadians over 65 and 70% of Canadians over 85 are women;
- Many seniors have some level of difficulty with reading;
- Seniors have more leisure time and disposable income than members of other age groups; and
- Almost two thirds of those aged 80+ report needing no help with daily tasks such as grocery shopping and meal preparation, housework and personal care.

The document is quick to point out the economic opportunities available to businesses that can effectively communicate to seniors. Seniors hold varying ranges of values, beliefs and opinions based on their life experiences. For example, seniors who have grown up during the depression or World Wars may have unique ideas regarding a variety of topics that affect how they communicate.

The guide suggests groups or organizations could appoint an advisory committee or group to conduct research on age related issues and act as an intermediary between organizations and

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seniors. An advisory committee representing seniors in Comox may be an option for later stages of the OCP update.

Choosing the Communication Medium

Face-to-face communication and personal contact is very important to seniors. When faced with a problem, seniors are likely to look for help from informal information networks such as family, trusted friends and neighbours. This is even more pronounced in aboriginal cultures, which are based more (or entirely) on oral tradition.

Print media should use large fonts that are easy to read and simple, plain language that avoids jargon. TV, video and radio are not always effective ways for communicating to seniors as these mediums do not allow users to set the pace at which they acquire information.

Communicating on the internet is similar to print media. Administrators of internet websites should avoid small fonts and dots and wavy lines. Internet use will expand with new generations on seniors.

Formulating Your Message

In formulating a message for seniors you should ask:

- What does the audience want to know?
- What does the audience already know and how much more do they need to know?

Messages should be kept simple and a phone number or address should be provided for clarification and questions. Focus-testing your draft work with seniors is a good idea before sending messages out to the larger audience.

The Communicating with Seniors document also contains a resources section with a detailed bibliography of sources of information on issues related to seniors.

WHO Age-Friendly Cities Project Methodology: Vancouver Protocol

This document describes the methodology for assessing the age-friendliness of cities and towns or communities. The methodology is the same as used for the 33 cities that were consulted in developing the WHO Global Age-Friendly Cities Guide. The methodology claims to help identify strengths and weaknesses regarding age-friendly issues and relies on seniors themselves as the primary source of information, leading to an active engagement process, ownership of the final product and a base for seniors to implement and monitor the results of the research.

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The underlying premise of the project is that an age-friendly city promotes active ageing. Active ageing is "the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age" (WHO Active Ageing quoted in WHO Age Friendly Cities 3).

An age friendly city:

- Recognizes the great diversity among older persons;
- Promotes their inclusion and contribution in all areas of community life;
- Respects their decisions and lifestyle choices; and
- Anticipates and responds flexibly to aging-related needs and preferences.

The document continues with a description of how to organize and conduct focus groups with seniors and caregivers and provides copies of consent and participant information forms. A qualitative questionnaire for seniors to evaluate their community for age-friendliness is also provided.

The Geography of Aging: Preparing Communities for the Surge in Seniors by Gerald Hodge

In his book, Hodge points out that communities wanting to become senior-smart must understand there is limited experience to draw upon. Few Canadian cities and towns have initiated plans for seniors and there is no official process for doing so, unlike preparing Official Community Plans.

Senior-Smart community planning should include four components. Firstly, it should be holistic and appreciate all the facets of seniors' activities and community needs. This will assure all needs are addressed and that interdependence and synergies between these needs are acknowledged and built upon. The second component is to have a multiplicity of responsibility and involvement. Many agencies must be involved such as local governments, provincial agencies and local non-profit groups. Thirdly, a comprehensive technical base of knowledge must be established including: number of seniors; age composition; gender composition; living arrangements; income levels; and housing conditions. This knowledge base will help establish any areas for concentrated focus and which neighbourhoods need special support. The final component is to make sure the policy development process involves those who are most affected by the planning decisions, seniors. Ways to involve seniors include: public meetings, focus groups, surveys and personal interviews. After describing these necessary components of Senior-Smart planning, Hodge provides a structure or framework to formalize

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policies and programs for seniors into a “Seniors’ Plan”.

Hodge’s Senior-Smart planning framework consists of the following four steps:

1. Seniors’ Plan Assessment: (a) determining the needs and preferences of community seniors and (b) acquiring demographic and other background data about them.
2. Seniors’ Plan Development: establishing goals for the well-being of community seniors and developing an action plan to implement those goals.
3. Seniors’ Plan Implementation: taking the necessary steps to carry out the plan. Hodge suggests the key to effective implementation is to actually assign someone or some group to this task, preferably someone from the seniors’ group.
4. Seniors’ Plan Review: reviewing at regular intervals the success of the plan, the appropriateness of goals, and changes in seniors’ needs and characteristics.

Hodge provides detail for each of the framework’s steps and then provides some general principles to guide the planning process. The chapter, and book, concludes with some more specific age-friendly ideas regarding different types of communities such as bigger cities, smaller towns, suburban neighbourhoods and retirement communities. Some interesting ideas include:

- Developing senior citizen “playgrounds”, which might include giant chess boards and bowling etc.;
- Establishing an adult daycare; and
- Collaborating with a local school to provide recreation and education programs.

Hodge’s book is a good source of ideas and is a comprehensive look at how Canadian communities can plan for the future increase of seniors. It is also noted, Hodge’s book is more scholarly and academic than many of the other information sources reviewed in this report.

Aging as a Social Process: Canadian Perspectives by Barry D. McPherson

This book covers a wide range of topics concerning aging in Canada. Topics include: history, culture, support, health and economic security and demographics. Of particular concern to the Town of Comox Age-Friendly Community Planning initiative is the chapter on housing - “The Lived Environment: Community and Housing Alternatives in Later Life”. The chapter examines housing alternatives and community care services, which help to delay and

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prevent the use of extended or long-term care facilities.

The Lived Environment chapter also has a detailed section on housing options for seniors. McPherson states, historically, housing options for seniors wishing to age in place included only moving in with their children or institutionalization. Now, however, housing options for seniors range from fully independent to supportive housing and fully dependent housing. Housing for older adults can be categorized along three dimensions: from independent to dependent, from age-integrated to age-segregated and from low; to high-quality. Some of these housing options include:

- Granny flats;
- Single Resident Occupant (SRO) hotels;
- Trailer homes;
- Age-integrated (or age-segregated) congregate housing;
- Retirement hotel;
- Nursing home; and
- Long-term care.

McPherson concludes by stating that postponing the use of institutionalized housing for seniors and giving them a range of housing options beyond either, living on their own or living in an extended long-term care facility, allows individuals to be more independent and alleviates inconveniences on families and the state to care or subsidize seniors' living.

An Age-Friendly Plan for Revelstoke and Area 2009

The Age-Friendly Plan is a product of a Senior's Housing and Support Initiative (SHSI) Age-Friendly Community Planning Grant. The grant enabled Revelstoke to ensure their new OCP is age-friendly and helped consolidate and supplement previous planning initiatives by completing the Age-Friendly Plan for Revelstoke and Area.

The Plan's guidelines are based on WHO's "Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide" and correspond to the WHO's eight categories of age-friendly communities:

- Outdoor spaces and buildings;
- Transportation;
- Housing;
- Social participation;
- Respect and inclusion;
- Employment and Volunteering;
- Communication; and
- Community support and health.

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The Plan examines each of the eight features of age-friendly communities and describes them in terms of common barriers, current initiatives and recommended actions. The results of a survey are also described, which rate the importance and success of Revelstoke as it relates to each of the eight features of age-friendly communities.

The most interesting section of the plan is Part Three where a draft text is presented to be incorporated into the City's OCP. The text includes a narrative of seniors' experiences in Revelstoke, and a list of goals, policies and implementation strategies. The list of goals sets a good, general foundation for age-friendly initiatives; however, the policies and implementation strategies lack specificity and commitment, endangering them to be little more than good ideas, which developers and municipal staff may choose not to follow.

Creston Valley Age-Friendly Assessment 2008

This document describes the results of a research project conducted to determine whether Creston and outlying communities are places where seniors feel included, secure and valued. The second objective was to develop recommendations for initiatives to improve seniors' lives. The document mentions the "Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide" and "Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide" from which the research seems to be based on with respect to seniors' issues.

Creston Valley has a very high proportion of the population 65 years and older, even significantly more when compared to the Town of Comox's 23%. The 2006 census identified 31% of the Town of Creston's population of 4,837 as seniors (65+). In unincorporated Yahk, the figure increases to 38%, in Riondel to 46%.

The results of the project show most seniors in Creston Valley who are moderately healthy and active, enjoy the slow pace of life, beautiful scenery, low volume of traffic, relative lack of crime and supportive friends and family found in the area. A reluctance of these seniors to move to a different location where more services are available is also noted. For the most part, seniors feel respected and included in their communities. Areas that respondents felt were lacking in the community were:

- Housing availability;
- Housing costs;
- Public washrooms; and
- Information about local programs was not reaching seniors. For example, 49% of seniors were not aware of the scope of health services and supports in the community.

5. Analysis of Literature

A common thread running through all the literature and work on age-friendly initiatives is the influence of the World Health Organization (WHO). All of the contemporary studies and plans reviewed here are based on the WHO's research, making comparisons of the literature relatively easy. The WHO's eight categories of age-friendly living are recurring themes and measures of age-friendliness in communities.

One particular fact of age-friendliness that relates specifically to the Town of Comox OCP update is that not all age-friendly features popular in the literature are pursuable through an OCP. Age-friendly features such as convenient placement of transit stops, issues of land use and building design are among many features that can be addressed in an OCP. However, some age-friendly issues such as seniors' employment, some forms of communication and respect for seniors may find limited opportunities for support in an OCP. Therefore the scope of age-friendly initiatives for the Town's OCP update will be limited to those features which can be addressed at the OCP level. If the Town of Comox wishes to pursue a complete and comprehensive scope of age-friendly initiatives, it may have to be done through an age-friendly plan, perhaps something similar to Revelstoke's An Age-Friendly Plan for Revelstoke and Area.

Another important lesson to learn from age-friendly planning initiatives is that these initiatives are generally a benefit to people of all ages. The features of age-friendly community planning are very similar to popular contemporary theories of planning such as New Urbanism, Smart Growth and Sustainable Development.

"Age-friendly cities are not just "elderly friendly". Barrier-free buildings and streets enhance the mobility and independence of everyone from people with disabilities to young as well as old. Secure neighbourhoods allow children and younger women to go outside in confidence to participate in physical activity and social activities. Families experience less stress when they know their older members have the community support and health services they need"
- .WHO: A Guide 6.

Hodge gives an example of how Okotoks, Alberta developed an age-friendly policy that provides housing options for seniors. The policy requires that 30% of new housing be "non-traditional", including apartments, granny flats, secondary suites etc.

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This policy provides seniors with options to remain in their neighbourhoods while their housing needs change; however, this policy is just as beneficial to many other people seeking more affordable housing options and for achieving sustainability targets through more compact forms of housing. In this case, an improvement made for seniors is just as much a benefit to other members of the community who also need affordable housing options. The community wide benefits of age-friendly community planning should be highlighted at every opportunity to encourage support of these initiatives from the whole community.

One last item to remember is that seniors are not a homogeneous group. Seniors require a varied spectrum of services as they grow through the aging process. As it relates to the Town of Comox OCP, this has implications for all issues related to age-friendly planning. Housing for seniors must reflect a set of varied needs and move beyond the dichotomy of independent living versus institutionalized nursing homes. A variety of service levels for assisted living are needed. Seniors' needs for transportation, social inclusion and safety also vary.

Age-Friendly Policy Options for the Town of Comox's OCP Update

We have drafted a checklist of age-friendly features and ideas based on the findings of the literature reviewed in this document. These features and ideas are initial thoughts for seniors, the Town of Comox staff and stakeholders to review and evaluate as possible candidates for inclusion in the updated OCP. The aim is to identify which issues are most important to pursue to be developed into more specific policy statements for the Town's OCP. The checklist is at the end of this document under Appendix 1.

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Appendix 1: Checklist of Age-Friendly Community Features

The Following May Be Considered for Including in the Town of Comox OCP Update

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Environment

- The city is safe and clean, with enforced regulations limiting noise levels and unpleasant or harmful odors in public places.

Green spaces and walkways

- There are well-maintained and safe green spaces, with adequate shelter (rain shelters), toilet facilities and seating that can be easily accessed.
- Pedestrian-friendly walkways are free from obstructions, have a smooth surface, have public toilets and can be easily accessed.

Outdoor seating

- Outdoor seating is available, particularly in parks, transport stops and public spaces, and spaced at regular intervals; the seating is well-maintained, shaded and patrolled to ensure safe access by all.

Pavements

- Pavements are well-maintained, clear of obstructions, smooth, level, non-slip and wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs with low curbs that taper off to the road.

Roads

- Roads have well-designed and appropriately placed physical structures, such as traffic islands, overpasses or underpasses, to assist pedestrians to cross busy roads.

Traffic

- There is strict enforcement of traffic rules and regulations, with drivers giving way to pedestrians.

Cycle paths

- There are separate cycle paths for cyclists.

Safety

- Public safety in all open spaces and buildings is a priority and is promoted by, for example, measures to reduce the

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risk from natural disasters, good lighting, police patrols, enforcement of by-laws, and support for community and personal safety initiatives.

Services

- Services are clustered, located in close proximity to where older people live and can be easily accessed (e.g. are located on the ground floor of buildings).

Buildings

Buildings for public use are accessible and have the following features:

- Elevators
- Ramps are accessible by wheelchairs and scooters
- Adequate signage
- Railings on stairs
- Stairs are not too high or steep
- Non-slip flooring
- Rest areas with comfortable chairs
- Parking that is near the building for easy access
- Sufficient numbers of public toilets.

Public toilets

- Public toilets are clean, well-maintained, easily accessible for people with varying abilities, well-signed and placed in convenient locations.

Additional Comments on Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

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Transportation

Affordability

- Public transportation is affordable to older people.

Reliability and frequency

- Public transport is reliable and frequent (including services at night and on weekends).
- Public transportation services are coordinated to decrease waiting time.

Travel destinations

- Public transport is available for older people to reach key destinations such as hospitals, health centres, public parks, shopping centres, banks and seniors' centres.
- All areas are well-served with adequate, well-connected transport routes within the city (including the outer areas) and between neighbouring cities.

Age-friendly public transit vehicles

- Public transit vehicles are accessible, with floors that lower, low steps, and wide and high seats.
- Public transit vehicles are clean and well-maintained.
- Public transit vehicles have clear signage indicating the vehicle number and destination.

Specialized services

- Sufficient specialized transport services are available for people with disabilities.

Safety and comfort

- Public transport is safe from crime and is not overcrowded.

Transport stops and stations

- Transport stops and stations are easy to access and are located conveniently.

Community transport

- Community transport services, including volunteer drivers and shuttle services, are available to take older people to specific events and places.

Roads

- Roads are well-maintained, wide and well-lit, have appropriately designed and placed traffic calming devices, have traffic signals and lights at intersections, have clearly marked intersections, covered drains, and consistent, clearly visible and well-placed signage.

Parking

- Affordable parking is available.
- Priority parking bays are provided for older people close

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- to buildings and transport stops.
- Drop-off and pick-up bays close to buildings and transport stops are provided for handicapped and older people.

Additional Comments on Transportation

Housing

Affordability

- Affordable housing is available for all older people.

Essential services

- Essential services are provided that are affordable to all.

Design

- There is sufficient space to enable older people to move around freely.
- Housing is designed for older people, with even surfaces, passages wide enough for wheelchairs, and appropriately designed bathrooms, toilets and kitchens.

Modifications

- Housing modifications are easy and affordable to accommodate seniors’ changing needs.

Maintenance

- Maintenance services are affordable for older people.
- There are appropriately qualified and reliable service providers to undertake maintenance work.
- Public housing, rented accommodation and common areas are well-maintained.

Ageing in place

- Housing is located close to services and facilities.



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- Affordable services are provided to enable older people to remain in their home, to “age in place”.
- “Alert systems” are available for seniors living alone (i.e., systems that alert someone when a senior needs help).

Housing options

- A range of appropriate and affordable housing options is available for older people, including a range of options for assisted living.
- Sufficient and affordable housing dedicated to older people is provided in the local area.
- There is a range of appropriate services and appropriate amenities and activities in older people’s housing facilities.
- Older people’s housing is integrated into the surrounding community.

Living environment

- Housing is not overcrowded.
- Older people are comfortable in their housing environment.
- Older people feel safe in the environment they live in.
- Financial assistance is provided for housing security measures.

Additional Comments on Housing

The Following Age-Friendly Features are Valuable but May Have Limited Application for an OCP

Social Participation

Range of events and activities

- A wide variety of activities is available to appeal to a diverse population of older people, each of whom has many potential interests.
- Community activities encourage the participation of people of different ages and cultural backgrounds.
- A wide range of educational courses is available and affordable (or free) and courses are offered in convenient locations that are served by public transportation.

Facilities and settings

- Gatherings, including older people, occur in a variety of community locations, such as recreation centres, schools, libraries, community centres in residential neighbourhoods, parks and gardens.
- Facilities are accessible and equipped to enable participation by people with disabilities or by those who require care.

Promotion and awareness of activities

- Activities and events are well-communicated to older people, including information about the activity, its accessibility and transportation options.

Fostering community integration

- Community facilities promote shared and multipurpose use by people of different ages and interests and foster interaction among user groups.
- Local gathering places and activities promote familiarity and exchange among neighbourhood residents.

Additional Comments on Social Participation

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Respect and Social Inclusion

Respectful and inclusive services

- Older people are consulted by public, voluntary and commercial services on ways to serve them better.

Intergenerational and family interactions

- Community-wide settings, activities and events attract people of all ages by accommodating age-specific needs and preferences.
- Activities that bring generations together for mutual enjoyment and enrichment are regularly held.

Community inclusion

- Older people are included as full partners in community decision-making affecting them.

Additional Comments on Respect and Social Inclusion

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Civic Participation and Employment

Volunteering options

- There is a range of options for older volunteers to participate.

Employment options

- Employers are encouraged to employ and retain older workers.

Training

- Voluntary organizations provide training for their positions.

Accessibility

- Opportunities for voluntary or paid work are known and promoted.
- Transportation to work is available.
- Workplaces are adapted to meet the needs of disabled people.

Civic participation

- Establish a committee of seniors to consult with the planning department.
- Other advisory councils, boards of organizations, etc. include older people.
- Support exists to enable older people to participate in meetings and civic events, such as reserved seating, support for people with disabilities, aids for the hard of hearing, and transportation.
- Policies, programs and plans for older people include contributions from older people.

Entrepreneurship

- There is support for older entrepreneurs and opportunities for self-employment (e.g. markets to sell farm produce and crafts, small business training, and micro-financing for older workers).
- Information designed to support small and home-based business is in a format suitable for older workers.

Additional Comments on Civic Participation and Employment

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Communication and Information

Information offer

- Regular and reliable distribution of information is assured by government or voluntary organizations.
- Information is disseminated to reach older people close to their homes and where they conduct their usual activities of daily life.
- Information dissemination is coordinated in an accessible community service that is well-publicized - a "one-stop" information centre.

Oral communication

- Oral communication accessible to older people is preferred, for instance through public meetings, community centres, clubs and the broadcast media, and through individuals responsible for spreading the word one-to-one.
- Individuals in public offices and businesses provide friendly, person-to-person service on request.

Plain language

- Print and spoken communication uses simple, familiar words in short, straightforward sentences.

Automated communication and equipment

- The display panel of bank, postal and other service machines is well-illuminated and can be reached by people of different heights.

Computers and the Internet

- There is wide public access to computers and the Internet, at no or minimal charge, in public places such as government offices, community centres and libraries.

Additional Comments on Communication and Information

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Community Support and Health Services

Service accessibility

- Health and social services are well-distributed throughout the city, are conveniently co-located, and can be reached readily by all means of transportation.
- Residential care facilities, such as retirement homes and nursing homes, are located close to services and residential areas so that residents remain integrated in the larger community.
- Service facilities are fully accessible to people with disabilities.

Offer of services

- An adequate range of health and community support services is offered for promoting, maintaining and restoring health.
- Specialists (including gerontologists) conduct age-friendly assessments on a regular basis.

Emergency planning and care

- Emergency planning includes older people, taking into account their needs and capacities in preparing for and responding to emergencies.

Additional Comments on Community Support and Health Services
