

## Is York County Really Taking Action to Improve Livability?

*Cathy Bollinger, managing director of Embracing Aging*

If you were asked to grade York County's efforts in helping you live more easily in your home and community, what grade would you give to those efforts? Are you aware York County is trying to improve livability for all ages? Do you know what this means? Do you care?

Those are some important questions.

Everyone wants to live long and joyful lives. Everyone deserves to have opportunities and accessibility to the people, places, and experiences that help them live the best quality of life possible.

Since fall 2013, York County Community Foundation's Embracing Aging initiative has been working to improve how people experience aging. In 2020, because of this work, and with the support of the York County Commissioners, York County applied for enrollment in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities.

Enrollment in this network means our county is committed to proactively working to improve **The 8 Domains of Livability**, as outlined in the included diagram.

After being accepted into AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, communities engage with planners, business leaders, non-profit organizations, healthcare, academia, senior centers, and municipalities to discuss the goals they will commit to over the next 3 years to make York County more livable.

This information is used to create an *Action and Evaluation Plan*, that is submitted to and reviewed by the network to ensure it adheres to the requirements set forth to communities making this commitment by AARP.

York County's plan was submitted and approved in July 2021.

As the administrator of the plan, Embracing Aging is responsible for tracking the progress of the goals and reporting the update to the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. We also work to recruit more stakeholders to join the plan.



More importantly, Embracing Aging is committed to sharing the status of this work with York County residents. We do this because we want residents to hold us accountable for creating a York County where they can have the best life possible as they grow older.

York County is 910 square miles and contains 71 boroughs, townships, and its central city, York City, each with its own municipal government and taxing authority. The county is home to approximately 450,000 people, of which nearly 40% are age 50 and older. It is comprised of 16 separate school districts, each with its own school board.

Improving livability across a county of this size is a huge undertaking. This is especially true because there are no one-size-fits-all solutions to ensure the domains of livability work for all people.

We are grateful for the 21 businesses and organizations that joined YCCF's Embracing Aging in the plan, and for the 29 goals they are working on to help residents live more easily in their homes and communities.

Some highlights include:

- As a result of a webinar AARP-PA hosted, several zoning officers are looking at changing existing ordinances to allow for senior housing developments and amending accessory dwelling ordinances from conditional to permitted use and increasing the allowable size of the ADU.

For example, Jefferson Borough amended their ADU ordinance to remove the requirement that occupants be certain family members. This allows for different types of "family" units not necessarily a traditional husband/wife and their direct blood decedent's. This also allows for a live in caretaker. The amendment now allows for adult children to reside in the ADU so the ADU can be used through all stages of life.

- York County Planning Commission's goal to increase the variety of quality and affordable housing options has led to creating *Municipal Profiles* to help with housing decisions. They also re-organized The LGAC – The Local Government Advisory Council and implemented a monthly newsletter that contains contents to help municipalities learn about resources to improve livability.
- The York County Economic Alliances wants to increase the ability for residents to age in place through the York County Trail Towns program. At the trail corridor through Glen Rock, they improved ADA-compliant access between Ruins Hall and the Heritage Rail Trail and enhanced trail crossings of two streets. In the borough of New Freedom, they improved signage and crossing where borough streets intersect the trail. They also awarded \$49,000 in grants to small businesses to launch or expand

services within the 7 trail town communities, with benefits to both residents and visitors within the walkable downtowns.

- rabbittransit is working to increase older adults' accessibility to do the things they need and want. As a result, they launched the *Stop Hopper* program in two geographical areas. This service is like other ride-share services. Customers can use a smartphone app to request a ride to and from places they wish to travel within the service zone boundaries. Following a ride request, the app provides an estimated pick-up time, tracks rides in real-time, and provides an alert upon arrival. *Stop Hopper* is only \$2.00 per one-way trip and is FREE for seniors with a registered Free Fare ID card.
- Wanting to increase intergenerational activities between older adults and college students, Penn State York developed a new course titled *Perspectives on Aging*. Additionally, they developed an *Adult Development and Aging* class and invited older adults to participate alongside the students.
- DEMENTIA FRIENDLY YORK/ADAMS' is focusing on increasing knowledge of first responders to improve service to York County's older adults, and people living with dementia and their care-givers. Ten (10) first responders were certified through the pilot training, which included learning on the impact of ageism and participating in a dementia assimilation and another ten will be trained this fall.

Although there is progress being made, there are also barriers in this work.

The impact COVID had on organizations' operations and capacity, the dwindling pool of volunteers to help move forward initiatives, the competing priorities for funding dollars, and the continued stigma around aging have hindered progress.

Still, we stand committed to doing all we can to make York County both a great place to grow up and grow older.

September marks the beginning of Embracing Aging's tenth year of focus in improving how people experience aging. We want to make sure the next ten years lead us towards a community where people of all ages thrive.

Here's how you can help:

1. **Learn about the goals and metrics in York County's Age-Friendly Action Plan.**

[Click here to see the full plan.](#)

[Click here to see the summer 2022 progress report.](#)

To request a hard copy, call 717.848.3733.

2. **Tell us your thoughts. What grade would you give us?** Let us know what you think about the goals – what you like and what is missing. Share your ideas on how we can improve livability and what about the plan is most meaningful to you.

3. **Help us spread the word.** We know there are many more businesses doing great work. We want to highlight them in this plan. In addition to being recognized for their leadership in creating a better York County, organizations that are part of the plan gain access to the resources and knowledge of the other 676 communities and states across the country who are committed to this work.
4. **Advocate for your needs and wants.** Are there barriers you face in doing the things you need and want in York County? Are your elected leaders doing all they can to help ensure all ages can live more easily in their homes and communities? Speak up to Embracing Aging, your local officials, school districts, planners, businesses, and philanthropists and make your needs known.

***One final takeaway....***

An easy way to evaluate if something is livable, which means accessible, safe, comfortable, and welcoming, is to ask ***does this work for people of all ages?*** If the answer is yes for someone age 8, and yes for someone age 80, it will benefit everyone, and make our community a better place to live, work, and play.

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