

Planning for Livable and Age-Friendly Communities

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Nevada has one of the nation's fastest growing senior populations and Washoe County is one of the fastest growing senior populations in the state. More than 35% of Washoe County's residents are age 50+ and continue to move here at a steady rate. As our senior population ages and people stay healthy and active longer, we must plan for their needs.

Well-designed, livable communities promote health and sustain economic growth, and they make for happier, healthier residents — of all ages. They help people live easily and comfortably in their homes and communities as they age. They encourage older adults to take a more active role in their communities and have their voices heard. Initiatives focus on areas such as housing, caregiving, community engagement, volunteering, social inclusion and combating isolation among older citizens.

An excellent model that is research-based, uses best practices and has proven successful over time is the international planning effort begun by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2006 called the Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Program. <http://agefriendlyworld.org>

This program currently operates in over 1,000 communities in more than 20 countries. WHO has identified eight domains of liveability that are used in planning: outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, community support and health services. The planning and implementation process is designed by the local community, and can take up to five years to complete.

In the United States, AARP is the official affiliate of WHO's international program and works with local officials and partner organizations around the country to identify communities for membership in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities. <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/>. Currently over 185 US cities are part of the AARP Network, including Henderson and Winnemucca in Nevada.

The Reno Senior Citizen Advisory Committee and the Washoe County Senior Advisory Board are actively discussing how Reno, Sparks and/or Washoe County could become the next Nevada community to join. We want our communities to focus their resources to become more age-friendly, tapping into national and global research, models and best practices that are provided by WHO and the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Livable Communities.

We are currently working with AARP Nevada staff and meeting with our city council members and county commissioners to describe the benefits of joining the network and to gain their support. Next, we will apply for membership in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities. Once the application is approved, we will begin a five-year planning process to commit to a continuous cycle of improvement to become a more age-friendly community. The planning phase takes about two years, and begins with organizing a group of stakeholders who represent our non-profit organizations, businesses, government agencies, community partners and age-50+ citizens who will conduct community assessments to identify what residents view as important for successfully aging in place and will develop a 3-year action plan based on assessment findings. The second phase of implementation and evaluation lasts about three years and is monitored by WHO and AARP.

The AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities program is a tool that we can use to help our local leaders prepare and ultimately change our communities to become great places for everyone to live. If you would like more information or would like to participate with the Reno or Washoe County senior advisory groups in planning to make Reno, Sparks and Washoe County more age friendly livable communities, please contact Donna at 775-240-2745, donnanorm1@yahoo.com.