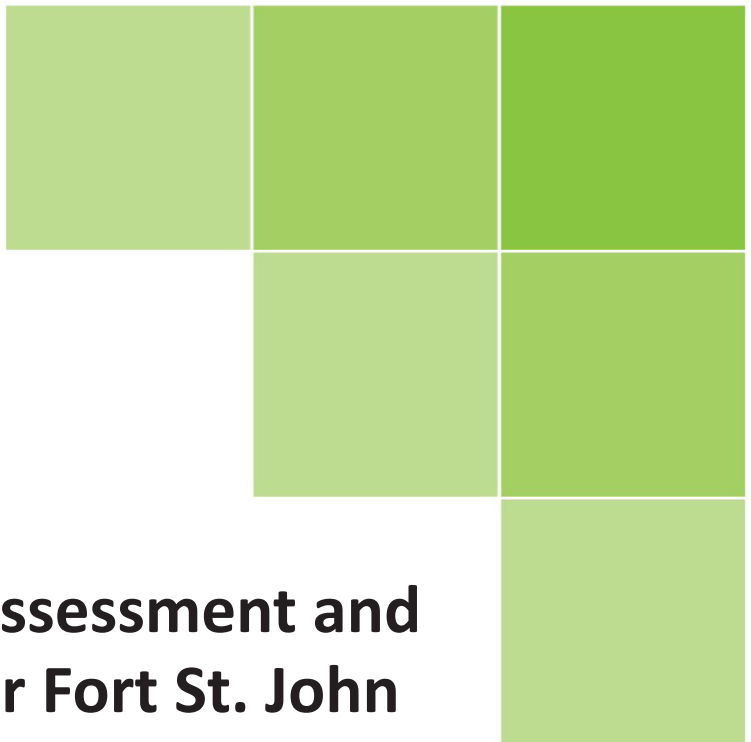


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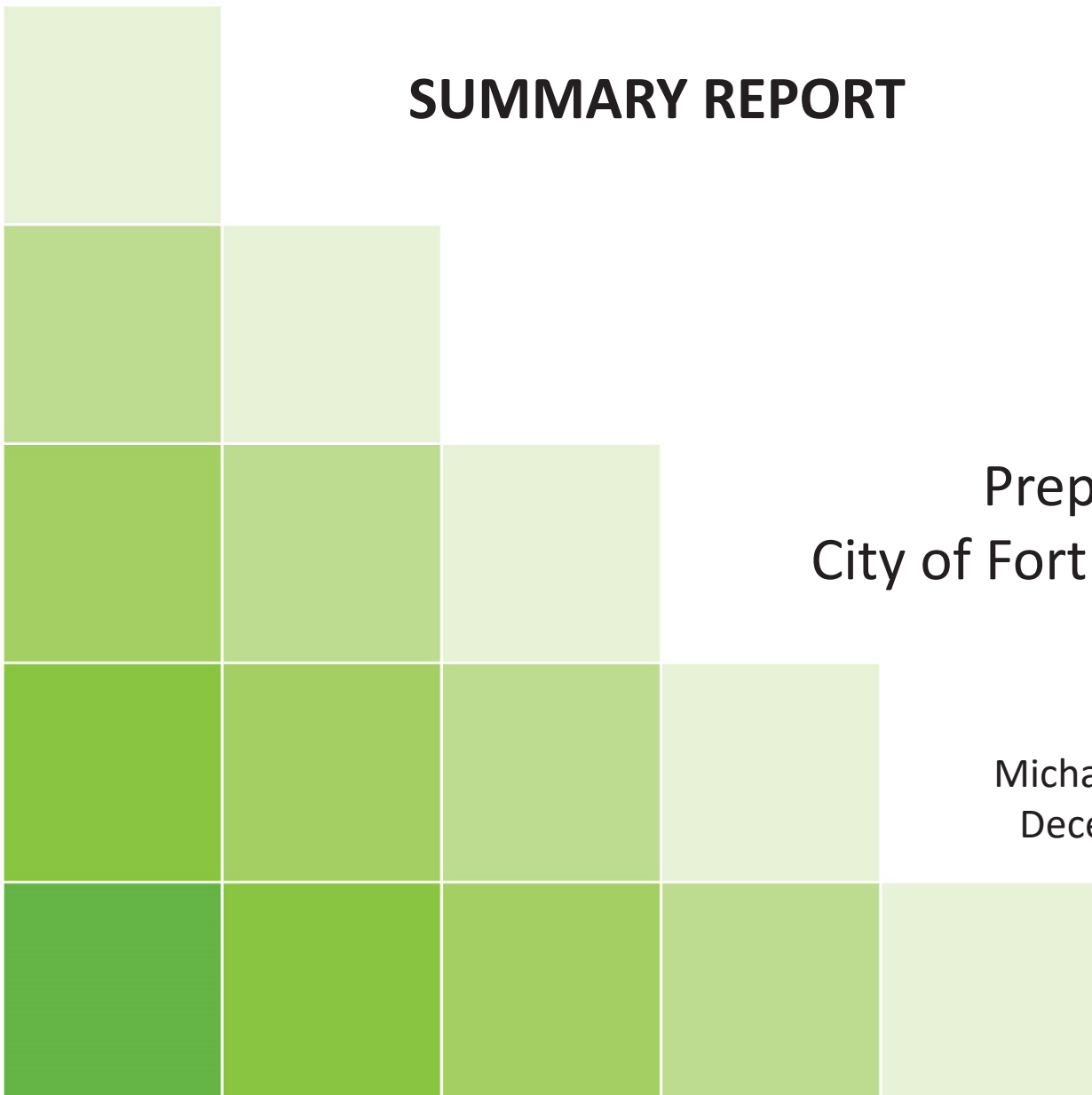


Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan for Fort St. John

SUMMARY REPORT

Prepared for
City of Fort St. John

Michael Lait, PhD
December 2018



Acknowledgements

The success of this project depended on the time, effort, and goodwill of the residents and community stakeholders who participated in the research process. We would like to express thanks to representatives and staff from the following groups and organizations:

The City of Fort St. John
Northern Health
Save Our Northern Seniors
North Peace Seniors Housing Society
Fort St. John Seniors Care Foundation
Fort St. John Friendship Society
Fort St. John Women's Resource Society
United Way

It is our hope that the findings from this project provide a fair and accurate reflection of the insightful and diverse perspectives that were generously shared with us.

The author wishes to express appreciation for the advice and feedback from members of the Forge's Advisory Committee. He also wishes to acknowledge the help of the CDI Co-Directors, Greg Halseth and Marleen Morris, and the research assistance provided by Laura Ryser and Carlos Yu. Any errors or omissions are solely those of the author.

Organization of Reports

The reports developed through the Fort St. John “Age-friendly Assessment and Action Plan” project include:

- Summary Report
- Survey Report
- Methodology Report

The reports are available on the Community Development Institute website at www.unbc.ca/community-development-institute and the City of Fort St. John website at <http://www.fortstjohn.ca/>.

About the Community Development Institute

The Community Development Institute (CDI) at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) was established in 2004 with a broad mandate in community, economic, and regional development. Since then, it has worked in partnership with communities across north and central BC identify and adapt to changes, opportunities, and challenges emerging in the new global / rural economy.

The CDI Office and Research Program in Fort St. John, located at The Forge, was established to work with the community to identify and take action on strategies for economic diversification and community resiliency. The CDI works in partnership with the City of Fort St. John and in collaboration with the community, industry, local business, community organizations, First Nations, and all levels of government with the objective of achieving greater impact of research, planning, and innovating at the community, regional, and program level. This community-based work will focus on enhancing the quality of life and growing a sustainable economy in Fort St. John.

For further information about this program, feel free to contact Greg Halseth or Marleen Morris, Co-Directors of UNBC's Community Development Institute.

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Executive Summary

With a median age of 31.2 years Fort St. John has a relatively young population. As of the 2016 Census, Fort St. John seniors, persons aged 65 years and over, constituted 7.25% of the population. This is a smaller proportion compared to the seniors populations at provincial (18%) and national levels (17%). However, as with many northern and remote communities in British Columbia (Hanlon and Halseth 2005), seniors are the fastest growing demographic in Fort St. John. Over the last three decades, the number of Fort St. John seniors has more than doubled (Community Development Institute 2018: 5). The City of Fort St. John has taken a proactive approach to “age-friendly planning” which means ensuring that the community has the social and physical infrastructure necessary to accommodate this growing number of Fort St. John seniors, and that steps are taken to address barriers to healthy and active aging.

This Report contains the results of an Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan (AFAAP) project that was carried out in Fort St. John from September to November 2018. This Report fulfills a strategy set out in the *Official Community Plan* (City of Fort St. John 2018: 105). The Report follows the framework set out by the World Health Organization (WHO) in its 2007 *Global Age-friendly Cities Guide*. As a result, the assessment is organized according to the eight dimensions of the WHO age-friendly communities, and an analysis is made in each dimension of Fort St. John’s age-friendly “assets” and “barriers.”

The research conducted for this report consisted of primary and secondary data collection. The primary research involved three data collection methods. First, interviews were conducted with representatives (n=9) from community groups as well as health, housing, and social service providers (North Peace Seniors Housing Society, Save Our Northern Seniors, Northern Health, Fort St. John Senior’s Care Foundation, United Way). Second, a community walkthrough was conducted on November 1, 2018 to locations in the community frequented by seniors, including shopping areas, the hospital, pool, library, hockey arena, etc. Third, from late October to November 20, 2018, a survey was administered to older residents, aged 55 years and over. The survey received a total of 118 responses.

The secondary data included a review of the various age-friendly guides in addition to that of the WHO (2007). To start, we consulted the Guide on *Age-friendly Rural and Remote Communities* produced by the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors (2007). Northern Health's (2015) *Healthy Ageing in the North: Action Plan* provides important guidance with respect to the goals and initiatives of the regional health authority. The City of Fort St. John's (2018) *Official Community Plan* and *Strategic Plan: 2018-2023* (City of Fort St. John 2017) were reviewed for the purposes of situating the AFAAP in the context of the City's goals and initiatives.

The following recommendations form the Action Plan component of this research. Implementation of these recommendations will help ensure that, going forward, Fort St. John becomes a *more* age-friendly community, one that not only overcomes the barriers that have been identified, but also a community that supports its existing age-friendly assets.

Global Recommendations

- That the City of Fort St. John establish an Age-Friendly Advisory Committee to provide perspectives and advice on future plans and current initiatives related to being an age-friendly community. It is suggested that this committee be made up of representatives of existing organizations and that it function as a coordinating and advocacy body.
- That the City of Fort St. John, recognizing that age-friendly policies, investments, and programs are good for the entire community, commit to reviewing current and future policies and programs through an age-friendly lens to ensure that they support ageing-in-place in Fort St. John.
- That the City of Fort St. John develop and adopt universal design policies and bylaws for all new construction and that these are a condition for approval for all new Official Community Plan (OCP) and/or Zoning Bylaw amendments.

Recommendations specific to each WHO Age-friendly “dimension”

1. Housing

Action:

- That the City of Fort St. John identify preferred locations for seniors housing, ensuring that new developments are located close to the services and amenities that seniors need. This could include identifying land as part of the “Vacant No More” initiative that is a component of the *Downtown Action Plan* (City of Fort St. John 2015a).

Advocacy:

- Work with BC Housing and local media on communications that can provide ongoing information about programs and services that are available to assist low- and moderate income seniors. These programs include Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER), which provides a rent subsidy to eligible seniors renting in the private market and the Home Adaptations for Independence (HAFI) program which provides financial assistance for home modifications that help eligible low-income British Columbians with mobility or health issues continue to live in their home.
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce to reach developers, builders, and renovators to make them aware of emerging seniors housing needs in the community and the business opportunity this represents. One important starting point will be in raising awareness about, and implementation of, solutions for homeowners to have more accessible main entrances to their homes.
- Work with Northern Health, BC Housing, and other housing providers toward having the full spectrum of seniors housing options available, including independent living, supportive housing, assisted living, complex care, respite care, and palliative care.

2. Transportation

Action:

- Recognize the key role that sidewalk and road maintenance plays in seniors mobility and prioritize maintenance, particularly snow clearing, in areas identified as locations for seniors housing.

Advocacy:

- Work with BC Transit to expand the availability and hours of operation of the handyDART service so that it better meets current demand in the community. In addition, work with BC Transit to plan for future needs given the anticipated increase in the seniors population.
- Work with the existing taxi services in Fort St. John to make them aware of emerging seniors transportation needs in the community and the business opportunity this presents.
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce to encourage retailers and office management firms to recognize the key role that walkway and parking lot maintenance plays in seniors mobility.
- If the current public and private (taxi) services are unable to meet the transportation needs of seniors, consider supporting the establishment of a non-profit seniors transportation service in Fort St. John.
- Work with BC Transit to improve bus stops by installing shelters in those areas and locations that are frequented by seniors.

3. Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Action:

- Take action to incorporate age-friendly design in City-owned public buildings in Fort St. John, including ramps, covered entrances, curb cuts, automatic doors, and enhanced lighting.
- Take action to incorporate age-friendly design in City-owned outdoor spaces, including installing benches and covered shelters, enhancing

lighting, and widening and paving pathways in order to make them more accessible for people with mobility challenges.

Advocacy:

- Work with building owners to increase the number of handicapped parking spaces available at locations frequented by seniors and ensure that these are located close to building entrances.
- Work with building owners to introduce a 'seniors only' parking designation, similar to the designation that has been developed for pregnant women and young families.
- Work with building owners to establish 'drop off areas' close to the entrance for all future public and private buildings.
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce to encourage building owners to incorporate age-friendly design in private buildings, including ramps, covered entrances, curb cuts, automatic doors, and enhanced lighting.

4. Community Support and Health Services

Action:

- Develop a seniors program and service guide so that seniors know which organizations they can call on for services.

Advocacy:

- Work with non-profit organizations to encourage them to work collaboratively to provide the full range of support services and programs required by seniors in the community.
- Work with service organizations and others to encourage volunteerism that could help non-profit organizations provide the full range of services and programs required by seniors in the community.
- Work with Northern Health toward having the full range of health programs and services for seniors available in Fort St. John, including specialist care, associated allied professional care, home care, and nursing care.

5. Social Participation

Action:

- Develop an information program to ensure that seniors are aware of the social programs that are available in the community.

Advocacy:

- Encourage facilities that seniors already visit frequently such as the cultural centre, public library, Pomeroy Sports Centre, and the pool to offer programs specifically for seniors.
- Support the Seniors Hall to increase its programming and hours of operation.
- Support multi-generational social programs that would allow younger family members to participate in programs with older family members.

6. Civic Participation and Employment

Action:

- Using an age-friendly lens, review current City public participation and consultation activities and processes to identify innovative and inclusive ways to increase the involvement of older residents in the community development and planning debates that will reshape the city for the decades to come.
- Employ age-friendly best practices to ensure that seniors are able to, and feel comfortable in, participating in public consultations and meetings, for example, ensuring that written material uses larger type fonts and has ample white space, that public meetings employ sound systems, that easily accessible venues are selected, and that meetings are held at times of the day that are convenient for seniors.
- Appoint a “seniors liaison” position to engage with seniors and community groups to facilitate regular ongoing communications between seniors, seniors groups, City staff, and City Council.

- For seniors who do not drive, provide a central number that they can call to arrange for a ride to public consultations and meetings.

Advocacy:

- Work with the Chamber of Commerce and local employment agencies in continuing to highlight the valuable resource that older residents bring to today's economy.

7. Communication and Information

Action:

- Continue to ensure that City communications employ a diverse range of strategies and tools to communicate with seniors, including traditional media, posters, social media, emails, and word of mouth.

Advocacy:

- Work with community-nonprofit organizations and local media outlets to continue supporting the development of routine seniors communication tools.
- Work with the Fort St. John Public Library and the Northern Lights College to offer on a routine basis training courses that provide an introduction to, and build familiarity with and awareness of, various social media platforms among older residents and those with limited information technology skills. This will include providing accessible computer stations in public areas for those older residents unable to afford to purchase their own computers/smart phones/tablets.

8. Respect and Social Inclusion

Action:

- Undertake an assessment of civic facilities to identify needed investments with respect to parking, sidewalk, and doorway entrance modifications that will be needed to improve accessibility for seniors and those with mobility challenges.
- Review all civic programming that involves public participation, use, involvement, or access through an age-friendly lens to ensure that

they are provided in a way that reduces as many barriers as possible for older residents.

Advocacy:

- Work with public agencies and community non-profit organizations to encourage and develop respite programming for family and friends engaged in the provision of various forms of visiting, home, and health care provision for older residents.
- Work with public agencies and community non-profit organizations to encourage and develop various forms of visiting programming that supports social engagement for older residents.
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce to develop and deliver information and training workshops on becoming an age-friendly business, highlighting those elements that seniors have identified as important (e.g. more benches and chairs, staff training for assisting older residents, larger font on printed material, delivery and assembly services, seniors parking, automatic entrance doors, etc.)
- Work with the school district to develop inter-generational programs and learning opportunities that will help young people understand and appreciate older citizens in the community.

Introduction

In 2007, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched the *Global Age-friendly Cities* initiative in recognition of the global trend of population ageing. The WHO (2007: 3) projects that, between 2006 and 2050, the worldwide population of seniors (defined as people over age 65) will double.

The main concept behind the *Global Age-friendly Cities* initiative is that, through policies, planning, and design, the physical and social environments of cities can be made to facilitate and support the “active ageing” of persons of all ages. As explained by the WHO (2007: 1), active ageing is “a life-long process shaped by several factors that, alone and acting together, favour health, participation and security in older adult life.” The most influential factors have been identified by the WHO are the eight “dimensions” of the *Global Age-friendly Cities* framework. The dimensions include Housing, Transportation, Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, Community Support and Health Services, Social Participation, Civic Engagement and Employment, Communication and Information, Respect and Social Inclusion.

Governments around the world have embraced the WHO *Global Age-Cities* initiative, such that there are now thousands of cities with an age-friendly designation. In Canada, federal, provincial, and municipal governments have adopted the initiative by carrying out age-friendly assessments and community development projects that directly address the needs and concerns of older residents. In British Columbia, the provincial government has adopted a four-step designation process for cities to be recognized as Age-Friendly Communities. The Age-Friendly British Columbia designation process (see Appendix A) requires, among other things, the completion of an assessment and action plan, as well as the establishment of an advisory committee that includes the participation of senior citizens.

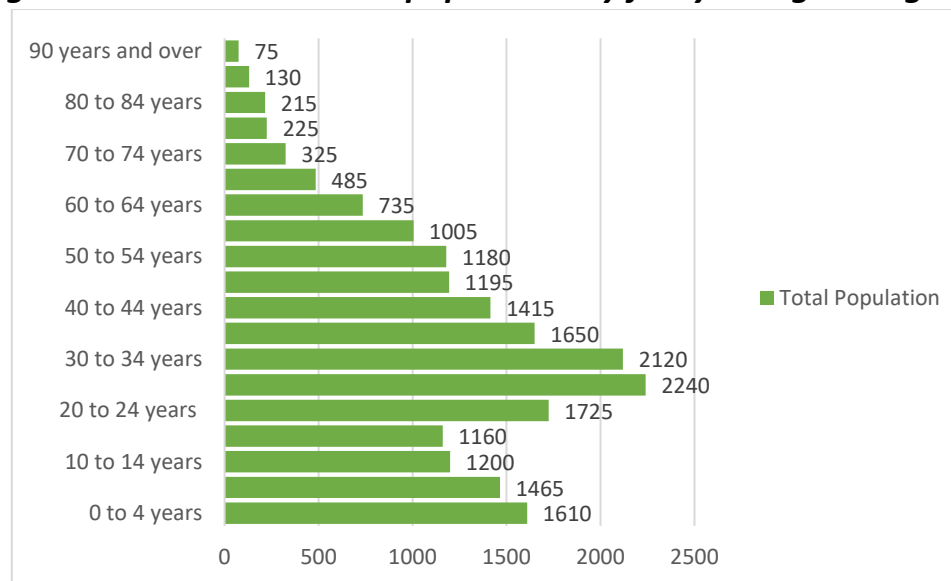
Fort St. John (population 20,155) is a resource-based community located in northeast British Columbia. Its population has been growing since the mid 1980s (Table 1).

Table 1. Fort St. John, population, 1981 to 2016

	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016
Total population	13,890	13,360	14,155	15,020	16,035	17,405	18,615	20,155
Seniors pop.	450	630	775	920	1,010	1,085	1,210	1,465
Seniors as % pop.	3.24	4.72	5.48	6.13	6.30	6.23	6.50	7.27

Source: Statistics Canada. Census of Population. 1981-2016.

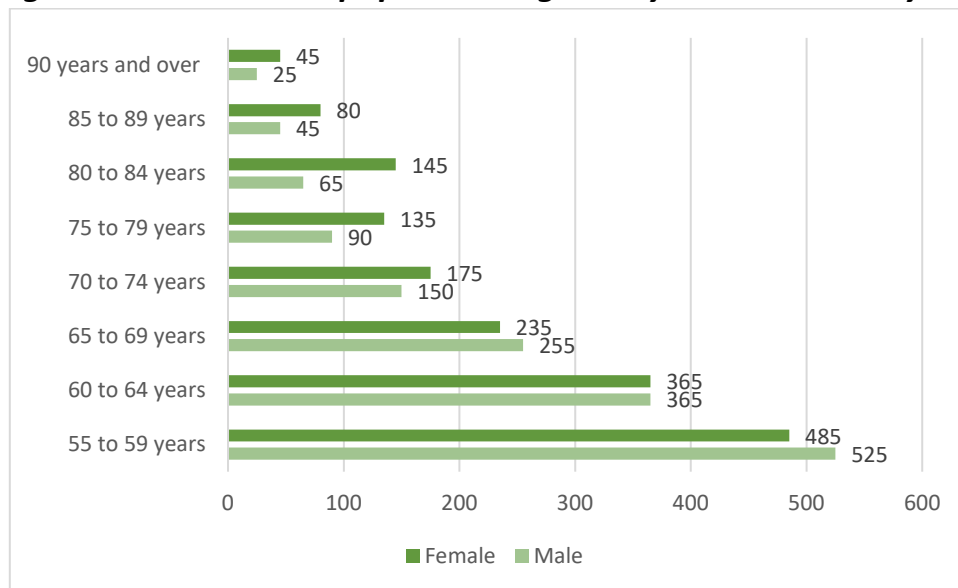
With a median age of 31.2 years, the population of Fort St. John is largely made up of younger working-age families, and the City boasts one of the highest birth rates in the country (Figure 1). However, as with most communities across Canada, the population of Fort St. John is ageing. Between 1981 and 2016, persons aged 65 years and over grew to represent a greater share of the total population than before; increasing from 3.24% to 7.27% of the total population. In absolute terms, during that same period, Fort St. John's seniors population grew by 225%.

Figure 1: Fort St. John total population by five year age categories

Source: Statistics Canada. 2016. Census Profile of Fort St. John.

Figure 2 shows that, among the baby boom generation (55 to 69 years) in Fort St. John, there are slightly more men than women. However, in every subsequent age group, women outnumber men, which is an indication that women have a higher life expectancy than men.

Figure 2: Fort St. John population aged 55 years and over by sex



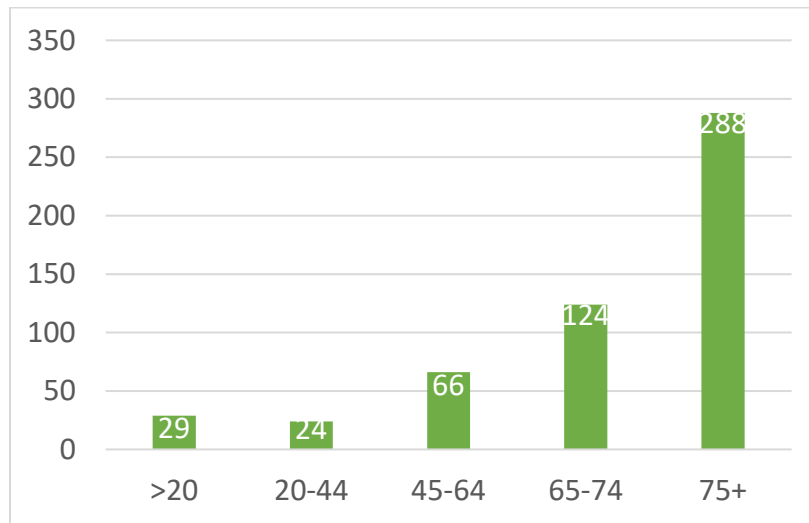
Source: Statistics Canada. 2016. Census Profile of Fort St. John.

Population Forecast

BC Stats’ P.E.O.P.L.E. program forecasts population change by 5-year cohorts at the geographical level of the Local Health Area. Fort St. John is located within the Peace River North LHA (60) which also includes the District of Taylor and Hudson’s Hope. Fort St. John is the largest community in Peace River North LHA and is a regional hub. For this age-friendly assessment, the Peace River LHA is used for the purposes of forecasting changes in the size of age cohorts.

Between 2011 and 2041, the population of the Peace River North LHA is expected to increase 47%, from 34,513 to 50,893 persons. As shown in Figure 3, the growth in the seniors population will be the largest, with a 124% in the number of people aged 65 to 74 years, and a 288% increase in the number of people over 75 years.

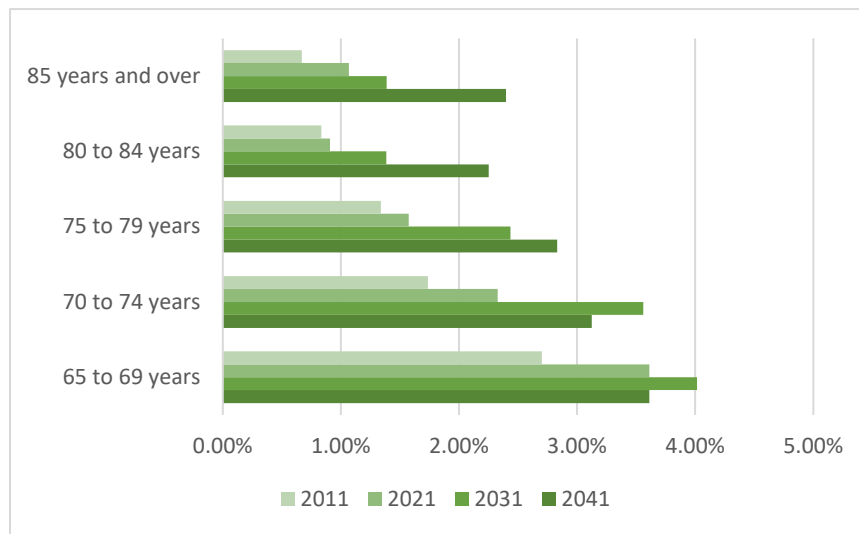
Figure 3: Peace River North LHA population change by age cohort, 2011 to 2041



Source: BC Stats. 2018. Peace River North. Sub-Provincial Population Projections P.E.O.P.L.E.

Figure 4 shows the predicted percentage increases in the seniors population in the Peace River LHA, with the largest increases occurring among the oldest age groups. Between 2011 and 2041, people aged 80 to 84 years are expected to increase from 0.9% to 2.3% of the Peace River LHA’s total population, while persons aged 85 years and over increase from 0.7% to 2.4% of the total population.

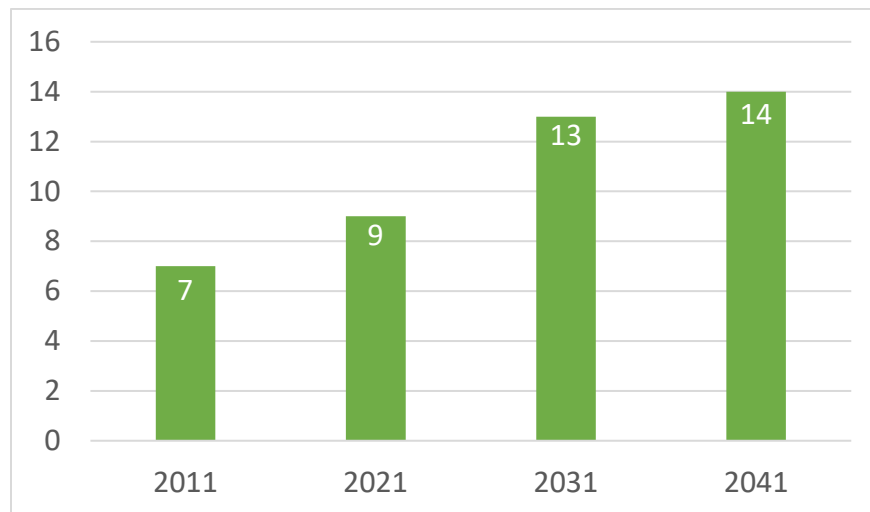
Figure 4: Peace River North LHA population group percentages



Source: BC Stats. 2018. Peace River North. Sub-Provincial Population Projections P.E.O.P.L.E.

Figure 5 shows that the greatest increase in the proportion of the Peace River North population 65 years and over will occur between 2021 and 2031. This coincides with the further aging of the baby boom generation (born 1945-1964). The slowest period of growth for the seniors population occurs between 2031 and 2041.

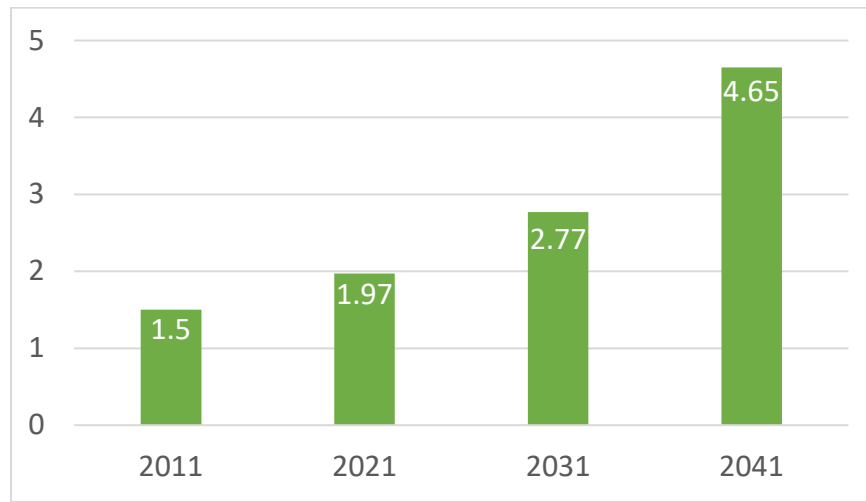
Figure 5: Peace River North LHA, persons aged 65 years and over as percentage of total population from 2011 to 2041 (expressed in %)



Source: BC Stats. 2018. Peace River North. Sub-Provincial Population Projections P.E.O.P.L.E.

Figure 6 further highlights the ageing of the baby boom generation in accelerating growth of the population of persons aged 80 years and over. By 2041, it is expected the persons aged 80 years and over will represent 4.65% of Peace River North LHA's total population.

Figure 6: Peace River North LHA, persons aged 80 years and over as percentage of total population from 2011 to 2041 (expressed in %)



Source: BC Stats. 2018. Peace River North. Sub-Provincial Population Projections – P.E.O.P.L.E.

Research Process

Following the WHO *Global Age-friendly Cities* framework, this research pursued four research questions:

1. What are the existing age-friendly assets in Fort St. John?
2. What are the barriers to healthy and active ageing in Fort St. John?
3. What actions or practices could be implemented to make Fort St. John a more age-friendly community?
4. What are the priorities for meaningful change with respect to ageing in Fort St. John?

In addition to an environmental scan of the planning context of Fort St. John and a review of academic articles on age-friendly communities (Menec et al. 2015) and resource frontier ageing (Ryser and Halseth 2011; Skinner and Hanlon 2016, eds.), there were three primary data collection methods (see the Methodology Report for a full description of the research process).

First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives (n=9) of local organizations that included Northern Health, Save Our Northern Seniors (SONS), North Peace Seniors Housing Society (NPSHS), the Fort St. John's Seniors

Care Foundation, and United Way. The interview guide was structured according to the WHO's age-friendly dimensions, and interviewees spoke to us about their experiences and/or areas of expertise with respect to Fort St. John seniors.

Second, a community walkthrough was organized on 1 November 2018 with participants from the UNBC Community Development Institute, SONS, NPSHS, the Fort St. John Friendship Society, and Fort St. John Women's Resource Society. In snowy conditions with a temperature of -5°C , participants in the community walkthrough assessed the physical environment of Fort St. John. The participants visited a number of locations, identified in conversation between the CDI and participants, to be those most frequented by seniors. A summary of the observations that were recorded during the walkthrough was circulated to participants for feedback, and this document informed the preparation of this Summary Report.

Third, an survey was administered to residents of Fort St. John aged 55 years and over. While the survey was conducted primarily online, paper copies were available and were distributed through various seniors housing and social gathering locations, Fort St. John City Hall, and The Forge. A public notice was issued and coverage was provided by the local media, the [Alaska Highway News](#) and [Energetic City](#). The survey was open from October 25 to November 20, 2018, and received a total of 118 responses.

The survey questions (n=60) were structured according to the eight dimensions of the WHO Guide. The survey was not representative of the population, as it was weighed towards seniors who owned their own homes and were married. While there was a good distribution of incomes among the survey respondents, homeowners have far greater financial security than renters in Fort St. John. Survey respondents are attached to Fort St. John in that, of those respondents who had yet to retire, 60% indicated their intention to retire in Fort St. John, with 30% unsure and only 10% indicating that they did not intend to retire in Fort St. John. Of the 68% of survey respondents who indicated that they were retirees, 92% live year-round in Fort St. John.

It should also be noted that the survey intentionally included a broader age demographic than seniors, who are defined in this Report as persons aged 65 years and over. We were interested in the retirement plans, not only of people

who are currently seniors, but also of those who are about to become “seniors.” Thus, 21% of survey respondents were employed, a number that would have likely been lower had the survey been limited to those over age 65.

1. Housing

1.1. Introduction

Housing is one of the major determinants of a person's quality of life, health, and social participation. A widely held notion among policy-makers is to encourage ageing-in-place, that is, to establish services and supports that allows older people to live in their home for longer, as "older people [want] to remain independent for as long as possible" (Ministers Responsible for Seniors 2007: 18). As pointed out to us the interviews, the preference for ageing-in-place does not apply to everyone equally. The single detached residence that is the norm in Canada can lead to the social isolation of seniors, especially if they are experiencing the onset of chronic health and/or mobility issues.

In Canada, the main indicator used to assess housing conditions is "core housing need." This indicator has been measured by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) since the 1991 Census of Canada. Households are deemed to be in core housing need when their housing does not meet any one of the three following criteria: adequacy, suitability, and affordability. Housing is inadequate if the main living structure is in need of any major repairs, as reported by the resident. Housing is unsuitable if there are not enough bedrooms for the residents of the household as set out by the National Occupancy Standard. Housing is unaffordable when a household's shelter costs exceed 30% of their total before-tax household income.

Data on seniors in Fort St. John shows that a majority of Fort St. John's seniors are *not* in core housing need. In the latest Census, 14% of seniors households in Fort St. John were in core housing need. This represents the lowest level of core housing need among seniors in Fort St. John since CMHC started reporting on this indicator. There are, however, differences between seniors households who rent versus those who own their homes.

Given this long-term trend, it can be said that housing conditions are, for the most part, adequate for seniors in Fort St. John. Homeownership has always been the primary form of housing tenure among seniors, and people generally in Fort St. John. Between 1991 and 2016, there was a 530% increase in the number of owner seniors households, compared to only an 89% increased in the number of

renters seniors households. Table 2 shows that only a small number of seniors households who own their home in Fort St. John are in core housing need. One reason includes that many older homeowners have often completely or mostly paid off their mortgages. As a result, they generally have lower shelter costs when compared to seniors who are renting.

Table 2: Fort St. John homeowner households, persons 65 years and older

	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016
Total homeowner households	275	380	440	860	810	805
Not in core housing need	250	335	370	770	705	760
Not in core housing need (%)	91%	88%	84%	90%	87%	94%
In core housing need	25	45	70	90	105	45
In core housing need (%)	9	12	16	10	13	6

Source: Statistics Canada. Census of Population. 1991-2016.

Table 3 shows the vulnerability of seniors who rent in Fort St. John. In 2011, when a strong local economy was driving higher rents, the proportion of seniors in core housing need reached a record high of 68%. The proportion of seniors in core housing need has since dropped to 44% largely because the recent economic decline has pushed a lowering of rents. Table 4 underscores the continued vulnerability of seniors who are renting in Fort St. John, as the average shelter-to-income (STIR) ratio among seniors renters has climbed steadily to 48%.

Table 3: Fort St. John renter households, persons 65 years and older

	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016
Total renter households	230	205	240	235	300	319
Not in core housing need	145	130	170	100	95	170
Not in core housing need (%)	63	63	71	43	32	53
In core housing need	85	75	70	135	205	140
In core housing need (%)	37	37	29	57	68	44

Source: Statistics Canada. Census of Population. 1991-2016.

Table 4: Fort St. John renter households, persons 65 years and older, Selected household statistics

	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016
Total renter households	230	205	240	235	300	319
Not in core housing need	145	130	170	100	95	170
Avg. household income (\$)	19,428	21,554	26,690	51,159	52,975	62,253
Avg. shelter cost (\$)	328	357	498	683	823	730
Avg. STIR (%)	23	23.2	25	22.2	21.2	18
In core housing need	85	75	70	135	205	140
Avg. household income (\$)	10,173	13,389	15,127	16,696	19,445	23,410
Avg. shelter cost (\$)	291	433	501	567	773	913
Avg. STIR (%)	34	38.5	40.7	43.2	47.9	48

Source: Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. 2018. Housing In Canada Online (HICO).

Not surprisingly, among the seniors housing providers and seniors housing advocates that we interviewed, there was a unanimous consensus concerning the shortage of affordable rental housing units for seniors. Indeed, the advocacy group, Save Our Northern Seniors (SONS), was formed in direct response to the issue, and has since campaigned to increase the supply of affordable seniors housing in Fort St. John. In a survey of the general population conducted as part of Fort St. John's housing needs assessments, 56.7% of respondents identified "seniors/assisted living units" as the most needed housing type (City of Fort St. John 2011: 11).

1.2. Age-Friendly Assessment Survey Results

The survey conducted for the Fort St. John Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan explored several questions related to housing.

To start, residents were asked about the type of housing that they occupy. Just over 75% of respondents lived in a single detached dwelling, with senior's housing, townhouses, and duplexes occupied by less than 20% of respondents.

When asked if their dwelling was owned or rented, just over 80% of respondents indicated that they owned their own home, while 20% rent their

accommodations. High rents can become an important concern for older residents with limited or fixed incomes.

As people age, mobility often becomes an issue and homes with stairs can lead to challenges. Homes with stairs between the main living areas of the home and the bedrooms can be particularly difficult. In this case, over 70% of survey respondents reported that their home did not have stairs between these two areas. However, over 60% responded that there were stairs at the main entrance to the home.

Home repairs can put a strain on the household budget of seniors who are living on fixed incomes. When asked about the condition of their residence, just under 70% of respondents indicated that only regular maintenance was needed. This was followed by just under 23% of respondents who indicated that minor repairs were needed to their dwelling and just under 8% of respondents who occupied housing that required major repairs for plumbing, electrical wiring, or structural issues.

When asked about the kind of housing they may be looking for in five years, what emerged was the anticipation of a significant change in housing need. From the current situation, where over 70% of seniors live in a single detached home, respondents indicated that in five years just under half would be looking for independent living units, such as private apartments. This was followed by just over 27% of respondents who would be looking for supportive living units, as well as smaller groups who expressed interest in assisted living and long-term care options. About 23% of respondents noted that they would not be seeking any other housing options in the near future.

When asked about seniors housing in Fort St. John generally, almost 90% of respondents indicated that the currently available housing does not meet the needs of older residents. When asked whether Fort St. John needs more housing for older residents, close to 100% of respondents said 'yes'.

1.3. Age-Friendly Assets

- Existing seniors housing facilities
There are several good examples of affordable seniors rental housing, both privately-run (for profit and not-for-profit) and publicly subsidized. In the

recent past, the City has shown itself to be aware of the need for greater seniors rental housing as it formed a successful partnership with BC Housing to build more affordable rental housing for seniors. The existing seniors housing facilities are affordable, secure, accessible, and provide community living spaces and opportunities for social participation. With the exception of Abbeyfield House, the seniors housing facilities are centrally located, and are close to some of the most important community amenities for seniors (such as grocery stores and pharmacy).

- Homeownership among seniors

Among seniors, homeownership is, and has always been, the primary form of housing tenure in Fort St. John. Fort St. John seniors who own their home tend to be more financially secure than seniors who are renters. Seniors in Fort St. John often have accumulated considerable property assets. In our interviews, seniors housing providers suggested that criteria for affordable housing used by BC Housing is not suited for seniors living in, or hoping to retire in, Fort St. John. Subsidized units at Heritage Manor I and II, for instance, are not offered to low income seniors with over \$100,000 in equity, which disqualifies most if not all senior homeowners, who assume higher costs of living when they leave their homes (City of Fort St. John 2011: 24).

1.4. Age-Friendly Barriers

- Seniors living in the old housing stock

Fort St. John seniors have aged in, and along with their homes. The CDI's (2018: 38) *Community Profile of Fort St. John* shows that 48% of the community's housing stock was built before 1980. The older residences that seniors typically occupy are not only less energy efficient and more expensive to maintain than newer residences, but they are also quite difficult and costly to adapt in tandem with the changes in physical abilities and mobilities of ageing homeowners. Fortunately, the City of Fort St. John has already recognized this barrier in the housing stock; the *Official Community Plan* (2018: 57) will encourage future development to be guided by the principles of universal and adaptive design, which refers to housing that is designed to be conducive for the ageing-in-place of the

occupants, and built to be responsive to changing mobility and accessibility needs.

- Shortage of affordable rental housing for seniors

The shortage of affordable seniors rental housing is supported by the waitlist number. In 2018, SONS reported that 256 seniors were on housing waitlists, and that there were 346 units of dedicated seniors housing in Fort St. John. The waitlist number, however, is likely an overestimate as the number of people registered on multiple waitlists cannot be accounted for.

1.5. Recommendations

Action:

- That the City of Fort St. John identify preferred locations for seniors housing, ensuring that new developments are located close to the services and amenities that seniors need. This could include identifying land as part of the “Vacant No More” initiative that is a component of the *Downtown Action Plan* (City of Fort St. John 2015a).

Advocacy:

- Work with BC Housing and local media on communications that can provide ongoing information about programs and services that are available to assist low- and moderate income seniors. These programs include Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER), which provides a rent subsidy to eligible seniors renting in the private market and the Home Adaptations for Independence (HAFI) program which provides financial assistance for home modifications that help eligible low-income British Columbians with mobility or health issues continue to live in their home.
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce to reach developers, builders, and renovators to make them aware of emerging seniors housing needs in the community and the business opportunity this represents. One important starting point will be in raising awareness

about, and implementation of, solutions for homeowners to have more accessible main entrances to their homes.

- Work with Northern Health, BC Housing, and other housing providers toward having the full spectrum of seniors housing options available, including independent living, supporting housing, assisted living, complex care, respite care, and palliative care.

2. Transportation

2.1. Introduction

As noted by the Ministers Responsible for Seniors in their Age-friendly Communities (2007: 14), seniors living in Canada's rural and remote communities have relatively limited transportation options. The level independence of seniors in rural and remote communities is directly related to whether or not they own and drive a car, not only to travel within town but also to travel throughout the surrounding region (Council of Canadian Academies 2017: 42). Seniors who are no longer able to drive their own vehicle will often experience difficulties, not only in transitioning to alternative modes of transportation, but in accessing their friends and family, and the services they need.

The City of Fort St. John recently completed a *Transportation Master Plan*. Comparing the results of this seniors survey with the one administered for the *Transportation Master Plan* (TMP) illustrates that, with the exception of reduced walking among seniors, there are limited changes in the travel behaviours of Fort St. John residents as they age. The TMP survey found that 88% of respondents normally travel by car (City of Fort St. John 2015b: 13), and only 12% indicated that they use transit (City of Fort St. John 2015b: 20).

2.2. Age-Friendly Assessment Survey Results

The survey conducted for the Fort St. John Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan project explored several questions related to transportation.

The survey asked respondents how they normally get around in Fort St. John. The most prominent form of travel for almost 85% of respondents was private vehicle; a car or truck. About 30% of respondents indicated that they walk or rely on friends and family for transportation. Between 10% and 20% of respondents use handyDART or transit, while a smaller group said they use taxis, carpool, or bicycle to address their transportation needs. About 90% of respondents indicated that they have a valid driver's license.

When asked if the roads are well maintained in Fort St. John, roughly 59% of respondents said 'no'. That number jumped to almost 66% when respondents were asked about winter road maintenance. When asked whether sidewalks are

well maintained in Fort St. John, close to 66% said 'no'. That number jumped to more than 75% when respondents were asked about winter sidewalk maintenance.

Anticipating an increase in the number of people using scooters in the future, the survey asked whether roads and parking areas are set up to accommodate scooters. In response, just over 82% said 'no'.

2.3. Age-Friendly Assets

- handyDART

It was generally agreed in the interviews and among survey respondents that BC Transit's handyDART bus is a reliable and affordable service for seniors, and that handyDART drivers were reliable and professional in the delivery of this service. For instance, even though the BC Transit website explicitly states that drivers do not assist with packages, several interviewees remarked that it was not uncommon for drivers to help seniors with their packages.

- Ample accessible parking spaces

The community walkthrough noted that, at the locations that were visited and more generally in Fort St. John, there is a sufficient number of accessible parking spaces, with good signage, dimensions and proximity to main entrances. The only issue raised is that accessible parking spaces are often occupied by vehicles without a disabled parking permit, and there seems to be little in the way of Bylaw enforcement to deter the widespread abuse of accessible parking spaces.

2.4. Age-Friendly Barriers

- Inadequate maintenance of roads and sidewalks

The survey revealed that seniors feel road and sidewalk maintenance needs to be improved in both summer and winter months. Several survey respondents specified that roads outside of the downtown core were the most problematic for walking and scooters.

- Limited handyDART hours and availability

The hours of operations of the handyDART was raised as an issue by all the interviewees. The limited hours of handyDART prevents many seniors from attending events, meetings, and appointments in the evenings and weekends.

- Inadequate transit coverage and bus stops

Interviewees and participants in the community walkthrough asserted that improvements should be made to the public transit system in Fort St. John, including increasing the number of bus stops, such as a bus stop at the airport, and upgrading those bus stops that do not yet have a shelter or bench, such as the bus stop next to Peace Villa.

- Taxi service

In Fort St. John, there is limited use of taxi service by seniors, who generally view taxi services in Fort St. John as expensive, unreliable, and inaccessible. Only one survey respondent indicated that they took the taxi as a normal way of getting around Fort St. John. Taxi providers in Fort St. John have only one handicapped accessible taxi in their fleets, and there are complaints about reliability. The report author does, however, note and wish to express thanks to Teco Taxi for providing the handicapped taxi and a courteous and professional driver for the duration of the community walkthrough.

- Limited regional bus service

It was widely recognized among interviewees, some of whom were seniors, that the loss of the Greyhound bus service has affected seniors who commute to neighbouring communities by bus for non-medical purposes. Northern Health provides its wheelchair accessible regional Northern Connection bus service that is offered to anyone over 60 years of age travelling to neighbouring communities / hospitals. However, this is now the only affordable transit option for seniors as the cost of airfare is prohibitive for many seniors.

2.5. Recommendations

Action:

- Recognize the key role that sidewalk and road maintenance plays in seniors mobility and prioritize maintenance, particularly snow clearing, in areas identified as locations for seniors housing.

Advocacy:

- Work with BC Transit to expand the availability and hours of operation of the handyDART service so that it better meets current demand in the community. In addition, work with BC Transit to plan for future needs given the anticipated increase in the seniors population.
- Work with the existing taxi services in Fort St. John to make them aware of emerging seniors transportation needs in the community and the business opportunity this presents.
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce to encourage retailers and office management firms to recognize the key role that walkway and parking lot maintenance plays in seniors mobility.
- If the current public and private (taxi) services are unable to meet the transportation needs of seniors, consider supporting the establishment of a non-profit seniors transportation service in Fort St. John.
- Work with BC Transit to improve bus stops by installing shelters in those areas and locations that are frequented by seniors.

3. Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

3.1. Introduction

The physical / built environment of Fort St. John affects the quality of life of seniors, including their safety, mobility, health, and social participation. To get a better understanding of Fort St. John's physical environment, CDI researchers conducted a community walkthrough on 1 November 2018, with seniors and representatives from local organizations. During the walkthrough, participants toured several locations on a typical November day in Fort St. John with a temperature of -5°C and snow flurries. A more complete description of the community walkthrough, and its general findings, is found in the Methodology Report.

Through conversations between CDI researchers and research participants, including the Forge Advisory Committee, the locations chosen were identified as those frequented by seniors on a day-to-day basis, and those of importance to seniors, such as the hospital. The specific locations which were visited and assessed through age-friendly and accessibility lenses include:

1. The North Peace Seniors Housing Society apartment complex
2. Parking lot of Shoppers Drug Mart / Save on Foods
3. Street frontage of ABC Medical
4. Pomeroy Sports Centre
5. North Peace Swimming Pool
6. North Peace Arena
7. Kids Arena Field House (Indoor Soccer Facility)
8. North Peace Cultural Centre / Fort St. John Public Library
9. Fort St. John Hospital

3.2. Age-Friendly Assessment Survey Results

The survey conducted for the Fort St. John Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan project explored questions related to outdoor spaces and buildings.

Respondents were asked to reflect on physical barriers that prohibit mobility around the community. The most commonly named physical barriers were snow (84%), ice on sidewalks (80%), and weather (69%). However, roughly half of the

respondents also listed stairs (52%), loose gravel (52%), distances (51%), lack of sidewalks (48%), and concerns about safety (48%) as key issues affecting mobility for older residents in the community. Concerns about limited handicap / parking for older residents and accessible doorways and buildings were also listed by just over 40% of survey respondents.

The survey asked a follow up question about recommendations to improve mobility around the community and local shopping areas. More than 82% of participants indicated that they would like to see more snow removal and ice clearing from parking lots and sidewalks. This was followed by strong support for more accessible washrooms (60%), benches (57%), wheelchair ramps (55%), and handicap / parking for older residents in the community (51%). More sidewalks (44%), curb cuts (41%), covered entrances (35%), lighting (35%), and elevators (23%) were recommended by smaller groups of respondents. Such investments will help to improve perceptions of safety and reduce the isolation of older residents in the community.

3.3. Age-Friendly Assets

- North Peace Seniors Housing Society (NPSHS) apartment complex
The NPSHS has made numerous accessibility and safety improvements to their seniors apartment complex. Every entrance now has a ramp and is monitored by CCTV. There are indoor connections between all the NPSHS buildings so that residents do not have to go outside during the winter months in order to move between the buildings. Walkers are widely available and there is room for scooter parking and charging. The apartments have several common living spaces and activity rooms, such as a games room and workshop. The NPSHS offers residents and seniors recreation program and organizes special events, such as workshops on elder abuse.
- Pomeroy Sports Centre
With an elevated walking track and skating oval, the Pomeroy Sports Centre is a key age-friendly asset in Fort St. John, one used by residents of all ages. Among survey respondents, the Pomeroy Sports Centre was the most used facility on both a daily (5%) and weekly basis (13%). Further, the Pomeroy

Sports Centre is one example, among several in Fort St. John, of safe and accessible public buildings. At the main entrance, there are automatic doors. In the hockey rink and skating oval, there are wheelchair ramps and/or wheelchair elevators. There are walkers available at the walking track. The walkthrough participants noted that, although there are ample handicapped parking spots in the parking lots of the Pomeroy Sports Centre, they are located far from the main entrance, and there are no accessible parking spots located at the rear entrance. They also noted that more benches along the walking track would help those who need to rest more often.

3.4. Age-Friendly Barriers

- Limited wheelchair accessibility at the North Peace Arena and Kids Arena Field House

The North Peace Arena has accessibility aids such as automatic doors, a wheelchair elevator, and seating for caregivers. Despite this, there are no automatic doors to the bleacher area and the wheelchair spaces are located on the far side of the hockey arena. Seniors in wheelchairs will also have face challenges watching soccer games in the Kids Arena Field House as the bleachers are not wheelchair accessible, and there is no wheelchair access to the second floor where meetings and community events are held.

- Limited wheelchair accessibility at the North Peace Cultural Centre and Fort St. John Public Library

There are some accessibility supports in the North Peace Cultural Centre, such as three handicapped designated seats in the theatre. However, there was no push button door to the gallery or theatre, nor are there any wheelchair accessible tables in the cafe. Outside of the North Peace Cultural Centre building, there is only one accessible parking spot on 100th Street, and only one curb that is wheelchair accessible. As for the Fort St. John Public Library, the aisles are very tight and there is no place for walkers.

- Street frontage of ABC Medical
ABC Medical is a downtown walk-in medical clinic with no parking lot or bus stops. As ABC Medical is surrounded by commercial establishments, on-street parking is very sparse.
- Parking lot layout and maintenance
There are parking lots in Fort St. John that are poorly designed (Shoppers Drug Mart / Save on Foods) or in need of repair (Wal-Mart). Both parking lot issues can introduce mobility issues for older residents – something that can be made worse by snow and ice during the winter months.

3.5. Recommendations

Action:

- Take action to incorporate age-friendly design in City-owned public buildings in Fort St. John, including ramps, covered entrances, curb cuts, automatic doors, and enhanced lighting.
- Take action to incorporate age-friendly design in City-owned outdoor spaces, including installing benches and covered shelters, enhancing lighting, and widening and paving pathways in order to make them more accessible for people with mobility challenges.

Advocacy:

- Work with building owners to increase the number of handicapped parking spaces available at locations frequented by seniors and ensure that these are located close to building entrances.
- Work with building owners to introduce a ‘seniors only’ parking designation, similar to the designation that has been developed for pregnant women and young families.
- Work with building owners to establish ‘drop off areas’ close to the entrance for all future public and private buildings.
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce to encourage building owners to incorporate age-friendly design in private buildings, including ramps, covered entrances, curb cuts, automatic doors, and enhanced lighting.

4. Community Support and Health Services

4.1. Introduction

The WHO *Global Age-friendly Cities* framework assesses the variety of community and health services provided to seniors in their homes and in the community. Throughout Canada's rural and remote communities, a common barrier to aging is the shortage of health care professionals (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors 2007: 33). Interviewees confirmed that Fort St. John also experiences a shortage of health care professionals, though there was relief expressed at the recent arrival of new doctors to the community.

As shown below, Fort St. John seniors have a wide variety of community support and health services available to them. This section focuses on age-friendly assets that are run by volunteers and non-profit organizations that aim to assist low-income seniors.

4.2. Age-Friendly Assessment Survey Results

The survey conducted for the Fort St. John Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan project explored questions related to community support and health services.

Respondents were asked about which services are needed to help older residents maintain their health and independence in Fort St. John. All of the services listed in the survey were deemed to be important, indicating the significant value that these health and community services have in the quality of life of older residents. Services that were deemed to be of greatest importance included home care, house cleaning, and personal care. This was followed closely by strong support for respite care, home repair and maintenance, assistance with medical trips, meals on wheels, transportation to the doctor, nursing care, yard work, and delivery services respectively. There was also strong interest in help with shopping and visiting. Assistance with meal preparation was not deemed as important by survey respondents.

Respondents were also asked whether they had experienced any barriers when trying to access services for older residents. The most commonly mentioned barrier mentioned was waiting lists, followed by the lack of services in the

community and costs to access services in the community. Limited hours, days of operation, and inconvenient locations were also issues for a number of respondents.

4.3. Age-Friendly Assets

- Fort St. John & Area Seniors Care Foundation
Established in 1994, the Fort St. John and Area Senior Care Foundation aims to encourage seniors to remain independent in their home, and offers services, such as light housekeeping and meals on wheels, to help seniors maintain their quality of life.
- Better At Home – Fort St. John and Area
The United Way’s Better at Home program also offers light housekeeping, lawn mowing, snow shovelling, and volunteer visitors to Fort St. John seniors to help them to remain in their home.
- North Peace Seniors Mouth-Eye-Foot Care Foundation
A newly incorporated charitable foundation with a mandate is to provide seniors with information and financial support for health services in dental care, vision care, and foot care.

4.4. Age-Friendly Barriers

- Waitlists for health and medical professionals
The most common barrier to services identified by survey respondents (87%) was waitlists for health and medical professionals. These waitlists reflect the shortage of health care professionals working in Fort St. John. Interviewees almost always recognized the staff retention problems of Northern Health.
- Limited medical specialists in Fort St. John
Seniors frequently have to travel out of town to see medical specialists. 78% of survey respondents indicated this as a barrier to health services in Fort St. John.

4.5. Recommendations

Action:

- Develop a seniors program and service guide so that seniors know which organizations they can call on for services.

Advocacy:

- Work with non-profit organizations to encourage them to work collaboratively to provide the full range of support services and programs required by seniors in the community.
- Work with service organizations and others to encourage volunteerism that could help non-profit organizations provide the full range of services and programs required by seniors in the community.
- Work with Northern Health toward having the full range of health programs and services for seniors available in Fort St. John, including specialist care, associated allied professional care, home care, and nursing care.

5. Social Participation

5.1. Introduction

Encompassing the social life and social networks of seniors, social participation affects the health and well-being of persons (WHO 2007: 38). Social participation can include activities that promote wellness and quality of life in the physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of life. In many rural and remote communities, a common barrier to social participation is the lack of transportation options, which limits the ability of seniors to participate in social events (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors 2007: 25). As shown in the Transportation dimension, this applies to Fort St. John seniors as well, particularly those who rely on the handyDART bus service.

5.2. Age-Friendly Assessment Survey Results

The survey conducted for the Fort St. John Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan project explored questions related to social participation.

To begin, survey respondents were asked about their use of community facilities. The question specifically asked about frequency of use. The facilities in Fort St. John that are used most frequently by seniors are the cultural center and the public library. These were followed by the senior citizen's hall, fitness facilities, and museum. The swimming pool and golf course were also occasionally used by survey respondents. Community facilities that were more rarely used included tennis courts, baseball diamonds, cross-country ski trails, curling rinks, and hockey rinks.

The survey also asked if people actively participate in community groups. Almost half noted that they engage with voluntary organizations. This was followed by respondents who engage with community groups (43%), recreational groups (35%), churches (32%), and arts groups (24%). A smaller number of people also actively participate in cultural organizations (11%).

5.3. Age-Friendly Assets

- Seniors Hall
Offering a place for seniors to engage in games and food-related activities,

the Seniors Hall is ideally situated in close proximity to the main seniors housing complexes. The only drawback to the Seniors Hall is that it is only open twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays.

- Cultural facilities

Cultural facilities such as the North Peace Cultural Centre, Fort St. John Public Library, and Fort St. John – North Peace Museum are regularly frequented by seniors. The hours of operation of these facilities facilitates visits, with the cultural centre and museum open six days a week and the library open five days a week.

5.4. Age-Friendly Barriers

- Cost of social events

The cost of attending social events is a barrier cited by Fort St. John seniors to social participation. If more events were free of charge, this could encourage greater social participation among seniors.

- Cost of Living

Although there is a wide spread in the annual incomes of survey respondents, 72% answered that the cost of living was not reasonable for older residents, and 90% of respondents indicated that the cost of living affects the quality of life of Fort St. John seniors. The seniors demographic is widely seen to have more disposable income than the general population; however, this appears not always be the case for seniors living in Fort St. John. Attention to the costs of housing, transportation, and community events/activities will go a long way to supporting greater social participation by older residents in Fort St. John.

- Recreation and sporting facilities

Fort St. John has ample recreation opportunities and sporting facilities available to seniors. Survey respondents reported low utilization of some recreation opportunities and facilities, and this underutilization could be an indication of physical inactivity among seniors. The interviews and the community walkthrough highlighted barriers around access, mobility, and parking that need to be addressed at numbers of locations in the city.

5.5. Recommendations

Action:

- Develop an information program to ensure that seniors are aware of the social programs that are available in the community.

Advocacy:

- Encourage facilities that seniors already visit frequently such as the cultural centre, public library, Pomeroy Sports Centre, and the pool to offer programs specifically for seniors.
- Support the Seniors Hall to increase its programming and hours of operation.
- Support multi-generational social programs that would allow younger family members to participate in programs with their older family member.

6. Civic Participation and Employment

6.1. Introduction

The Civic Participation and Employment dimension concerns the involvement of seniors in the local economy, governance, and not-for-profit/voluntary sector. According to the WHO (2007: 56), “[a]n age-friendly community provides options for older people to continue to contribute to their communities, through paid employment or voluntary work if they so choose, and to be engaged in the political process.”

In rural and remote communities in Canada, it has been noted that voluntarism among seniors is quite widespread; indeed, in some of these communities, there is an over-reliance on senior volunteers. Over-commitment and burnout have been reported to be among the key barriers to effective civic participation, especially when seniors are volunteering on multiple organizations, (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors 2007: 31).

6.2. Age-Friendly Assessment Survey Results

The survey conducted for the Fort St. John Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan project explored questions related to civic participation and employment.

When asked whether there are adequate opportunities for older residents to be involved and participate in the community, roughly 62% of respondents said ‘yes’. However, when asked specifically whether seniors are involved in community development and social planning initiatives, about 66% said ‘no’.

6.3. Age-Friendly Assets

- Save Our Northern Seniors (SONS)
Survey respondents often pointed out SONS as an example of seniors involvement in community development and social planning. Established in 2004, SONS is primarily focused on improving the housing options for Fort St. John seniors, but the advocacy group has also undertaken other initiatives as well, such as a public information campaign and health guide.

- Fort St. John Seniors Care Foundation
This charitable group organizes social and fundraising events to support the services that it provides to seniors. Seniors volunteer with the Foundation and help organize the events.

6.4. Age-Friendly Barriers

- Limited participation of seniors in community development and social planning
Among survey respondents, only 28% indicated that older residents were active in community development and social planning initiatives. This is a barrier to helping service providers to understand seniors needs and priorities.
- Lack of opportunities for skills (re)training
The issue of employment opportunities is definitely a serious one for low-income seniors, those who need to secure paid part-time employment to afford their living expenses and rent in Fort St. John. To assist them with securing part-time work, there needs to be more training offered to seniors, particularly to enhance their online and computing skills. Training in these skills will also benefit seniors in their day-to-day life and volunteering activities.

6.5. Recommendations

Action:

- Using an age-friendly lens, review current City public participation and consultation activities and processes to identify innovative and inclusive ways to increase the involvement of older residents in the community development and planning debates that will reshape the city for the decades to come.
- Employ age-friendly best practices to ensure that seniors are able to, and feel comfortable in, participating in public consultations and meetings, for example, ensuring that written material uses larger type fonts and has ample white space, that public meetings employ sound systems, that easily accessible venues are selected, and that meetings are held at times of the day that are convenient for seniors.

- Appoint a “seniors liaison” position to engage with seniors and community groups to facilitate regular ongoing communications between seniors, seniors groups, City staff, and City Council.
- For seniors who do not drive, provide a central number that they can call to arrange for a ride to public consultations and meetings.

Advocacy:

- Work with the Chamber of Commerce and local employment agencies in continuing to highlight the valuable resource that older residents bring to today’s economy.

7. Communication and Information

7.1. Introduction

An age-friendly community is one that provides seniors with timely, reliable, and accessible information. It was noted in a 2007 report from Canada’s Ministers Responsible for Seniors that seniors in Canada’s rural and remote communities mostly receive information about community initiatives and events through “more traditional methods---words of mouth, telephone, bulletin boards, newspapers and radio—as well as through community events” (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors 2007: 27). This, however, is changing as seniors in the baby-boom generation are increasingly comfortable using online technologies and computers as opposed to their predecessors (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors 2007: 28). Growing Internet connectivity in rural and small town Canada is also making it more likely that seniors in the future will use online communications platforms and technologies to access information.

7.2. Age-Friendly Assessment Survey Results

The survey conducted for the Fort St. John Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan project explored methods related to communication and information.

Among the survey respondents, friends (72%), social media (54%), newspaper (45%), and family members (43%), and acquaintances (39%) were identified as key information sources.

7.3. Age-Friendly Assets

- Local media outlets in Fort St. John

There is a strong local media presence in Fort St. John with the publication, in print and online, of *Alaska Highway News* and *Energetic City* (online only). Moose FM is a radio station that provides updates on local news.

7.4. Age-Friendly Barriers

- Providing information to seniors' families
Families need more information so that they are not in a difficult situation when a senior family member is in need of care.
- Social media is an ineffective communication tool for oldest seniors
While many seniors are completely comfortable with computer and smart phone technology, some do not use social media at all. As a result, they are left out of many communications 'loops' and are not aware of many community events. Rather, those without social media are made aware of such events through children and grandchildren.

7.5. Recommendations

Action:

- Continue to ensure that City communications employ a diverse range of strategies and tools to communicate with seniors, including traditional media, posters, social media, emails, and word of mouth.

Advocacy:

- Work with community-nonprofit organizations and local media outlets to continue supporting the development of routine seniors communication tools.
- Work with the Fort St. John Public Library and the Northern Lights College to offer on a routine basis training courses that provide an introduction to, and build familiarity with and awareness of, various social media platforms among older residents and those with limited information technology skills. This will include providing accessible computer stations in public areas for those older residents unable to afford to purchase their own computers/smart phones/tablets.

8. Respect and Social Inclusion

8.1. Introduction

The Respect and Social Inclusion dimension of the WHO *Global Age-friendly Cities* framework assesses how older persons are treated by other residents and in the broader cultural milieu. Exploration of this dimension in Fort St. John is thus concerned with the attitudes and behaviours that are directed at seniors by other residents, and seniors' self perception.

As with many rural and small town communities in Canada, Fort St. John seniors are generally treated with respect, kindness, and courtesy by other residents. Ageism and elder abuse were not especially flagged among survey respondents or among the interviewees.

8.2. Age-Friendly Assessment Survey Results

The survey conducted for the Fort St. John Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan project explored questions related to respect and social inclusion.

A network of family and friends can make a significant difference to the degree to which seniors feel connected, involved, and engaged in the community. When asked about whether they had family in the area, approximately 75% said 'yes'. When asked whether these connections made them want to stay in the area, about 86% said 'yes'. The same two questions were asked about close friends; about 87% said they had close friends in the area and just under 80% said that those friend make them want to stay.

Family and friends were also important in providing help with chores and errands. Respondents were asked if they had needed help from another person or an organization in the past 12 months. Roughly 57% of the respondents who said 'yes' were seeking assistance for some of their routine activities. The most predominant tasks that people sought assistance for were house cleaning (31%) and home maintenance (31%). These were followed by assistance shopping for groceries (24%) and obtaining rides in the community (16%). There was also a smaller number of people who sought help with laundry (13%), meal preparation (12%), banking and paying bills (11%), and managing medications (9%). Most

often, this assistance was provided by a family member (42%), a friend (25%) or a neighbour (14%).

When asked whether businesses, facilities, and services were making adjustments to accommodate older residents, just under 66% said 'no'. When asked about the kinds of services that would be valuable, all of those listed were deemed to be important. The most predominant areas requiring attention included more benches and chairs for resting and staff training for assisting older residents. This was followed closely by recommendations to invest resources in large print brochures and menus, delivery services, and assembly / installation services. There was also strong interest for expanded seniors / handicap parking and accessible doors and entrances to buildings, as well as more outdoor lighting and large print signs to ease mobility throughout the community. Lastly, a smaller group of respondents felt that more attention was needed to improve restaurant portion sizes and indoor lighting.

Lastly, when respondents were asked whether they felt the cost of living was reasonable for older residents, about 72% said 'no'. Further, when asked whether the cost of living affects older residents' quality of life, roughly 90% said 'yes'.

8.3. Age-Friendly Assets

- Fort St. John Women's Resource Society
This community organization assists older residents experiencing abuse with legal advice and resources.
- Fort St. John Friendship Society
This community group assists Indigenous elders and hosts events with, and on behalf of elders.

8.4. Age-Friendly Barriers

- Lack of understanding
Older residents living on their own are at risk of social isolation. Housing design, service providers who reach out to seniors living on their own, and the social planning aspects of new or renovated seniors specific housing all need to keep this concern for balancing independence with social

interaction in mind. Similarly, offices, shopping complexes, and individual need to provide site improvements and staff training so that older residents are better accommodated in the retail and service sector.

- Exclusion of pet guardians from seniors housing
Dogs and cats are allowed to visit some seniors housing facilities, however, no seniors housing provider allows residents to keep animal companions.

8.5. Recommendations

Action:

- Undertake an assessment of civic facilities to identify needed investments with respect to parking, sidewalk, and doorway entrance modifications that will be needed to improve accessibility for seniors and those with mobility challenges.
- Review all civic programming that involves public participation, use, involvement, or access through an age-friendly lens to ensure that they are provided in a way that reduces as many barriers as possible for older residents.

Advocacy:

- Work with public agencies and community non-profit organizations to encourage and develop respite programming for family and friends engaged in the provision of various forms of visiting, home, and health care provision for older residents.
- Work with public agencies and community non-profit organizations to encourage and develop various forms of visiting programming that supports social engagement for older residents.
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce to develop and deliver information and training workshops on becoming an age-friendly business, highlighting those elements that seniors have identified as important (e.g. more benches and chairs, staff training for assisting older residents, larger font on printed material, delivery and assembly services, seniors parking, automatic entrance doors, etc.)

- Work with the school district to develop inter-generational programs and learning opportunities that will help young people understand and appreciate older citizens in the community.

Conclusion

The Age-friendly Assessment and Action Plan (AFAAP) project is a key step in the age-friendly planning process. This Summary Report details the observations of Fort St. John's age-friendly assessment according to the eight dimensions of the WHO (2007) *Global Age-friendly Cities* framework, with the Action Plan consisting of recommendations linked to those eight dimensions. The project is further supported by a Survey Report and a Methodology Report.

This report includes recommendations to support the continued development of Fort St. John as an age-friendly community. The most important and impactful of these are the Global Recommendations. By implementing these recommendations, the City of Fort St. John will be able to assess their plans and actions using criteria that will promote age-friendly actions.

Global Recommendations

- That the City of Fort St. John establish an Age-Friendly Advisory Committee to provide perspectives and advice on future plans and current initiatives related to being an age-friendly community. It is suggested that this committee be made up of representatives of existing organizations and that it function as a coordinating and advocacy body.
- That the City of Fort St. John, recognizing that age-friendly policies, investments, and programs are good for the entire community, commit to reviewing current and future policies and programs through an age-friendly lens to ensure that they support ageing-in-place in Fort St. John.
- That the City of Fort St. John develop and adopt universal design policies and bylaws for all new construction and that these are a condition for approval for all new Official Community Plan (OCP) and/or Zoning Bylaw amendments.

It is our hope that the Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan project has raised awareness about a host of issues concerned with healthy ageing, has provided a venue for the views and opinions of older residents in how processes of ageing-in-place can be supported, has highlighted some of the many key age-friendly assets

and barriers in Fort St. John, and has identified some important action steps that can be undertaken to continue improving the community for its older residents. As found elsewhere, investments to support older residents also support a better quality of life for children, young parents, and others. It is also our hope that these recommendations may go some way toward ensuring that there is a range of affordable, suitable, and adaptable housing and service options available for seniors in Fort St. John.

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Appendix A: Achieving Age-friendly British Columbia status

1. Establish an age-friendly advisory or steering committee that includes the active participation of older adults. An existing committee with a mandate that aligns with the age-friendly initiative and includes older adult representatives can serve this purpose.
2. Pass a council or district board resolution to actively support, promote and work towards becoming an age-friendly community. As an alternative, or in addition, local governments may choose to strengthen a commitment to being age-friendly through specific goals, objectives or policies in an official community plan or strategic plan.
3. Conduct an age-friendly assessment in consultation with older adult.
4. Develop and publicize an action plan.

Source: Seniors Health Living Secretariat. 2011 (updated 2014). *Becoming an Age-friendly Community: Local Government Guide*. Victoria: B.C. Ministry of Health, page 14.