

A Summary of Age-friendly Philadelphia

Philadelphia Corporation for Aging

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As Philadelphia has the highest proportion of older persons (age 60+) of any of the ten largest cities in the United States, Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA), the city's Area Agency on Aging, has developed an agenda based on a model that integrates both active aging and smart growth within the context of various city-wide and regional planning efforts. The premise of this agenda is that changes made to the physical and social environments of the city will benefit Philadelphians of all ages.

BACKGROUND

Over the past ten years, Philadelphia's elderly population has grown and become increasingly diverse with respect to race, ethnicity, income, educational attainment, health status, and national origin. These elders, from all walks of life, are expressing interest in contributing to the betterment of their neighborhoods. When considering policy and planning actions that can be implemented to assist this diverse population, one common fact is apparent: the impact of the physical and social environments is a critical component to an individual and community's health and well being.

PCA's research agenda on urban aging has demonstrated that 1) availability of fresh fruits and vegetables, 2) living in a home in good repair, 3) having access to transportation, and 4) trusting in one's neighbors (high social capital) are not only related to positive physical and mental health outcomes, but are also related to whether an older adult is physically active, how long that older adult wants to remain in their current home, and their ability and desire to continue to be part of their community. This is also true of younger persons (age 59 and younger) in Philadelphia, and has widely been recognized through efforts to engage and retain creative individuals and to promote youth development. These environmental changes can provide venues for young and old to meet, to interact, and to build the trust that is so important to keep people healthy and build stronger communities for persons of all ages.

CATALYZING AN AGE-FRIENDLY CITY

Since 2008, PCA has built a broad coalition of private, not-for-profit, and government agencies committed to creating an age-friendly city through recognizing the importance of 1) government policies that provide a high quality of life for persons of all ages, 2) a built environment that facilitates social connectedness, 3) an aging network that considers the affect of the environment on the well-being of their consumers, 4) universities that partner with the community to create cutting edge research, 5) and emerging leaders from all fields who incorporate older adults in their work. PCA is catalyzing and steering this effort through the lens of the U.S Environmental Protection Agency's Aging Initiative principles (from A Guide to Smart Growth and Active Aging - www.epa.gov/aging). The following examples illustrate ways that PCA has encouraged this effort, and ways that other organizations can promote the age-friendly movement:

✓ Identify Age-friendly Policies that the City of Philadelphia Should Adopt

Example: PCA worked with the Zoning Code Commission to incorporate Accessory Dwelling Units (subordinate residences within a single family residence that will allow an older person to downsize their home, while remain in the community) into the code recommendations that will be sent to the City Council November 2010 for a vote. This supports flexible housing, compact building design, walkable neighborhoods, adaptive reuse, and increasing density. PCA is also working with the Mayor's Office of Sustainability (*Greenworks*), the City's Planning Commission, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission on integrating older adults into their plans and policies.

- ✓ **Ensure Aging Issues Are a Regular Part of Community Planning and Advocacy Efforts**
Example: PCA is currently working on an *Age-friendly Parks Checklist* with the Fairmount Parks Conservancy to look at ways to design parks that will encourage usage among seniors. PCA is also collaborating with the Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations (PACDC) to develop a workshop on age-friendly neighborhoods, and PCA is working with Penn Future/Next Great City, an environmental advocacy organization, on other environmental issues, such as promoting the need for more age-friendly bus shelters.

- ✓ **Encourage the Adoption of Active Aging and Smart Growth Principles by Organizations in the Aging Network, Especially Senior Centers**
Example: PCA is working with senior centers and other organizations serving older Philadelphians (the Aging Network) to foster new collaborations around the environment and aging. It has informed the Aging Network about walkability, zoning, and City planning efforts through its e-News Bulletin and face-to-face meetings. PCA has connected centers with the Food Trust, the Fairmount Parks Conservancy, the Zoning Code Commission and other organizations to promote and maintain their community garden/urban farm.

- ✓ **Provide Support for the Continued Growth of Intergenerational Understanding**
Example: While emerging leaders are not usually associated with age-friendly efforts, without a competent workforce and without a focus on aging among those working in related fields such as city planning, environmental advocacy, transportation, and housing, these efforts will not be sustainable in the long-term. PCA administratively supports GenPhilly, a peer-led network of emerging professionals whose work touches on aging issues. GenPhilly now has over 120 members who come from a wide range of disciplines including urban planning, social work, public health, the law, and the arts.

- ✓ **Conduct Research on Smart Growth and Active Aging on Health Outcomes**
Example: Using Philadelphia's unique Public Health Management Corporation bi-annual Household Health survey, PCA will identify baselines and measure changes city-wide and in target neighborhoods. Topics include social capital, physical activity, access to services, and healthy eating. In addition to PCA's own research efforts, staff are working with an investigator at Drexel University a project to improve mobility for elders.

CONCLUSION

PCA's Age-friendly Philadelphia agenda integrates research, planning and practice to facilitate initiatives that will enable seniors to remain in their homes and neighborhoods for as long as possible. By encouraging diverse networks to independently and consistently embrace this effort, the agency is inspiring citizens of all ages to contribute to Philadelphia becoming a lifelong community.

WEBSITES OF INTEREST

Learn about the Environmental Protection Agency's Aging Initiative: www.epa.gov/aging

Learn about zoning and community planning in Philadelphia: www.citizensplanninginstitute.org

Help Philadelphia become the Next Great City: <http://www.nextgreatcity.com>

Find a community development corporation (cdc) near you: www.pacdc.org

If you are an emerging leader, join GenPhilly: www.genphilly.org

Learn about the Mayor's sustainability plan: <http://www.phila.gov/green/greenworks>

Become a member of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission's Regional Citizens Committee: www.dvrpc.org/GetInvolved/RegionalCitizensCommittee

Find a park "friend" group near your senior center: www.fairmountpark.org/FormVolunteerGroup.asp

Find out what amenities are in your service area that seniors can walk to: <http://commonsplace.us>