

Age-Friendly Appleton: Livable Communities Action Plan



Photo Credit: Appleton Downtown, Inc.

2026



Age-Friendly

APPLETON

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Photo Credit: Appleton Downtown, Inc.

Executive Summary

In 2022, AARP designated Appleton, WI as an "Age Friendly Community" because we have made a commitment to creating an inclusive and supportive environment for residents of all ages, particularly older adults.

This designation from the AARP signifies that the City of Appleton has taken concrete steps to address issues such as accessible housing, transportation, health care, social engagement, and other factors that contribute to aging well. By prioritizing the needs of older adults, these age-friendly communities are not only helping their older residents to thrive but also building a stronger and more vibrant community for everyone.

Older adults experience loneliness more acutely than any other age group. Helping older adults remain meaningfully engaged is critical to senior health and the health of our communities. Loneliness in older adults can be associated with mental health issues as well as with poor physical health including heart attack or stroke.



Photo Credit: Appleton Downtown, Inc.

First, we brought together a diverse group of individuals to create the Age Friendly Team and apply to be recognized by AARP as an Age Friendly Community. Then, we conducted the survey to learn more about and prioritize the needs and preferences of older adults in their planning and decision-making processes, with the goal of promoting healthy aging and improving the quality of life for all residents. To better understand specific survey responses, we also hosted focus groups with members of People of Progression and members of Long Cheng Marketplace, along with one for the general public at the Appleton Public Library.

Executive Summary

The following is not a comprehensive overview of all of the survey results - mainly those that most stuck out and also aligned with parallel ongoing data collection of Appleton's Community Health Assessment along with the Tri-County Community Health Assessment and Improvement Plan.

Similar to those plans, we also hope to highlight and work on the topics of Affordable Housing for all Ages along with Social Participation, Belonging and Connection.

Action Items				
	Action Item	Domain	Goal	SMART Objectives
1	Silver Platters Voucher Program Development at Long Cheng Market	Social Participation	Provide healthy meals for older HMong adults	By winter 2026, increase participation by 50% in the Silver Platters Voucher.
2	Housing Affordability Presentations by the Fox Cities Housing Coalition	Housing	Educate the community on affordable housing needs	By winter 2026, Fox Cities Housing Coalition will present at least 10 times about affordable housing with diverse audiences.
3	Senior Disaster Kits	Communication and Information	Promote safety and awareness regarding emergency preparedness	By Winter 2025-2026, distribute 100 Senior Disaster Kits to residents age 55 and older.
4	Valley Transit Development Plan	Transportation	Create a transportation plan that supports people of all abilities	By winter 2026, Valley Transit will have a final Transit Development Plan.

Message from the Mayor



Photo Credit: City of Appleton

This initiative reflects our city's deep and ongoing commitment to creating a welcoming and livable community for residents of all ages, especially our older adults, whose contributions continue to enrich the fabric of our city.

The Age-Friendly Action Plan is the result of thoughtful and collaborative work among city departments, local organizations, and residents. Through this effort, Appleton is honored to join the national movement of Age-Friendly Communities. By becoming part of this network, we align ourselves with cities across the country that are working to ensure people of all ages can live well, stay engaged, and age with dignity.

This plan outlines actionable steps to enhance accessibility, promote health and well-being, and strengthen social inclusion across the lifespan. It reflects our shared belief that aging should be celebrated and that every resident deserves the opportunity to thrive, stay connected, and remain actively engaged in community life.

We look forward to the positive impact this action will have on our city. Together, with the support of AARP and the dedication of our community, we are shaping a future that values and supports every generation.

Jake Woodford, Mayor

Community Profile: Appleton, WI

TOTAL POPULATION 74,873



30,860
Number of Households
Census Reporter

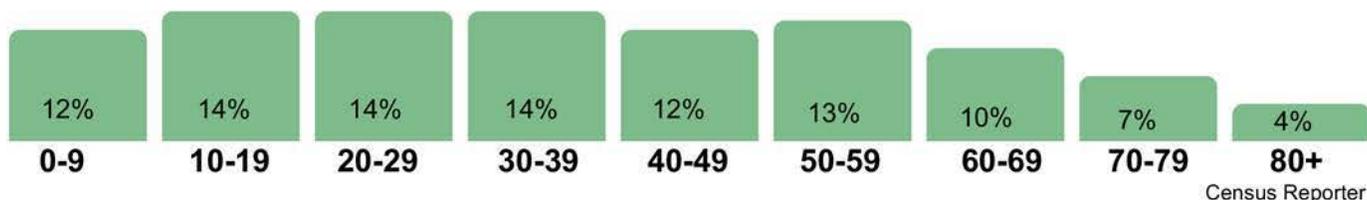


2.4
Persons per Household
Census Reporter



36.9
Median age
Census Reporter

Population by Age Range



Gender



50%
Male



50%
Female

*too little data is collected on all other genders to report on
Census Reporter

Ability Status



of the population have a disability, including a hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care and independent difficulties
Census Reporter

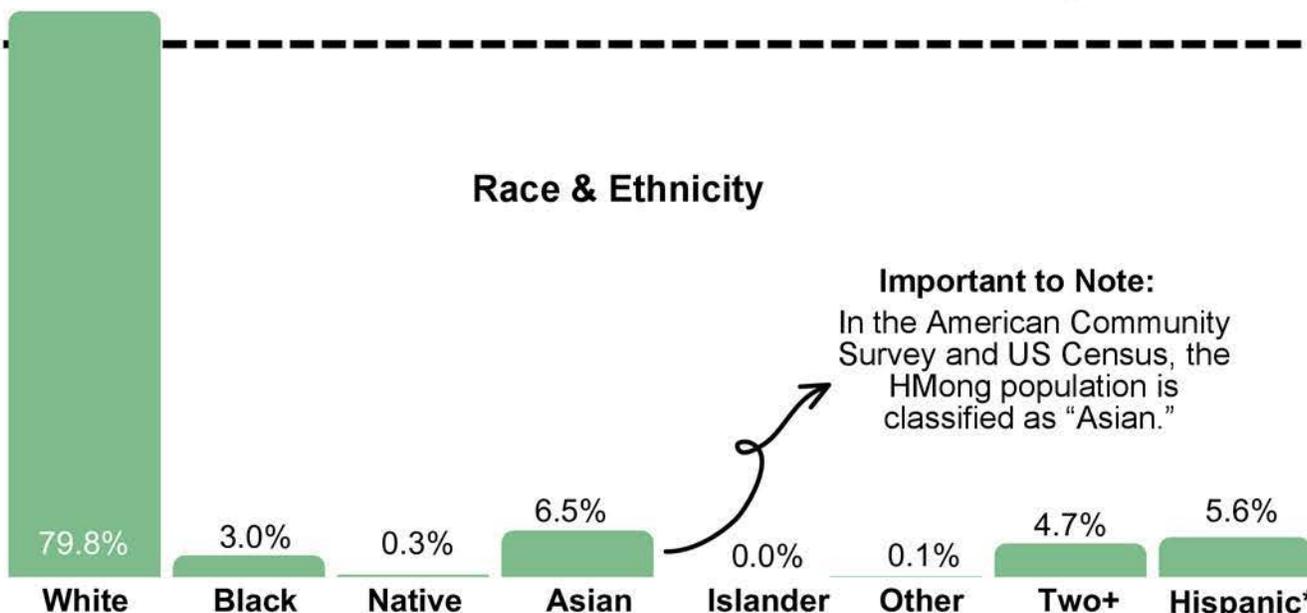
Languages



After **English**, the next most common primary languages spoken in Appleton households are: **Spanish, HMong, Dari/Farsi, Swahili, and Kinyarwanda.**

Appleton Area School District (2024)

Race & Ethnicity



Important to Note:

In the American Community Survey and US Census, the HMong population is classified as "Asian."

*Hispanic includes respondents of any race. All other categories are non-Hispanic.
Census Reporter

Community Profile: Appleton, WI

Overview

Nestled along the Fox River in the heart of the Fox Cities, Appleton is a vibrant, welcoming community of over 75,000 residents known for its blend of small-town charm and urban energy. The city boasts a strong sense of civic pride, exceptional schools, thriving businesses, and an ever-growing arts and cultural scene. Appleton continues to balance innovation and tradition, rooted in history yet forward-looking in spirit.

Nature and Recreation

Appleton is a community that values its connection to nature. With more than 30 parks, an extensive network of walking and biking trails, and the scenic Fox River running through the city, there are countless opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. Residents and visitors alike can kayak on the river, take a peaceful stroll, or participate in one of the city's community gardens. Seasonal favorites like Art in the Park and the Downtown Farmers Market bring people together, celebrating the natural beauty and strong sense of community that define Appleton.



Investing in the Trades -
Appleton A-Tech Academy Charter School
Photo Credit: Appleton Post Crescent

Arts, Music and Culture



Investing in the Trades -
Appleton A-Tech Academy Charter School
Photo Credit: Appleton Post Crescent

From live music to public art, Appleton is alive with creativity. The city is home to the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center, a regional treasure that hosts Broadway productions, concerts, and local performances throughout the year.

The Trout Museum of Art, Lawrence University Conservatory of Music, and the annual Mile of Music Festival further highlight Appleton's strong artistic traditions and its commitment to making the arts accessible to everyone in the community.

Community Profile: Appleton, WI

Community and Events

Appleton takes great pride in its welcoming spirit and strong sense of community. Signature events such as Oktoberfest, the Flag Day Parade, one of the oldest and largest in the nation, and Light Up Appleton bring people together to celebrate local traditions and shared values.

Neighborhood associations, volunteer opportunities, and civic engagement are at the heart of life in Appleton, creating a place where residents of all ages can connect, contribute, and feel a genuine sense of belonging.



View from the State - Appleton's Oktoberfest
Photo Credit: Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce



**Investing in the Trades -
Appleton A-Tech Academy Charter School**
Photo Credit: Appleton Post Crescent

A Place to Belong

What truly sets Appleton apart is its people: diverse, kind, and engaged. Whether through local service clubs, community outreach, or neighborhood gatherings, Appleton's residents work together to make the city a safe, welcoming, and forward-thinking place to live, work, and play.

Innovation and Opportunity

Appleton's economy thrives on a blend of manufacturing heritage and modern innovation. It's home to major employers in healthcare, education, and technology, while small businesses and startups add vitality to the local economy.

With accessible transportation, affordable living, and a strong commitment to sustainability, Appleton is a place where people and ideas flourish.



Children's Karate Demonstration - Karate America
Photo Credit: Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce

Mission, Vision & Values

Mission

To recognize and support the people, programs, and organizations working to make Appleton a safe, connected, and inclusive place for residents of all ages.

Vision

A thriving and inclusive community where every stage of life is valued.

Value Statements

Collaboration: We bring together organizations that are creating positive change, helping them connect and share their impact.

Inclusion: We celebrate the diversity of Appleton's people, cultures, and abilities, ensuring everyone feels represented and valued.

Connection: We strengthen relationships across programs and neighborhoods to enhance social connection and community engagement.

Preparedness: We support initiatives that help residents live safely and confidently through education, planning, and shared resources.

Service: We uphold the City of Appleton's values of integrity, responsiveness, and community partnership in all efforts.

Sustainability: We focus on maintaining and amplifying existing programs that already serve the community well.



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Community Assessment Results

Survey Result Overview

After a community is designated as Age-Friendly, AARP provides a survey to help local leaders better understand residents' needs. Appleton's survey was live between June and September 2023. The survey was available online and in paper copy in English, Spanish and HMong.

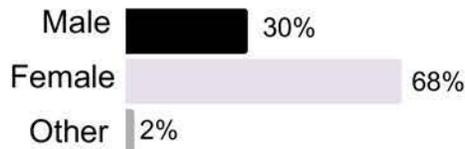
Marketing for the survey included a social media campaign, personalized emails, a designated webpage, and a city-wide mailing to residences in Appleton. Additionally, community partners shared the survey at local events, such as Appleton Pride, Appleton Farmer Markets, and Art in the Park. In total, 946 people took the survey, 99% of whom live in Appleton. The majority of respondents are straight, white, English-speaking married women.



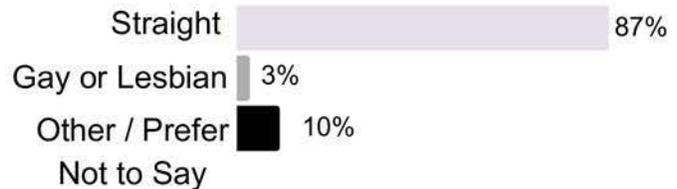
89% of survey respondents say they are in good health



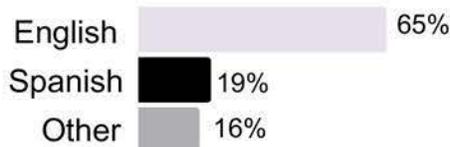
Gender



Sexual Orientation



Language



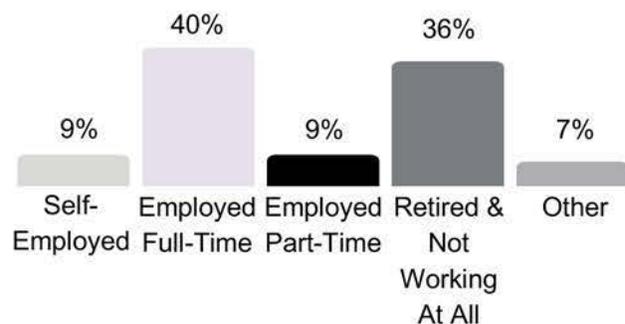
Race



Marital Status



Employment Status



Community Assessment Results

The 8 Domains of Livability



Overview

Using AARP's 8 Domains of Livability is a powerful way to think through how to make a community more age-friendly. These domains help communities take a broad, thoughtful look at the many factors that affect people's ability to age well. By using this framework, leaders and residents can identify strengths, spot gaps, and plan improvements that benefit everyone, not just older adults.

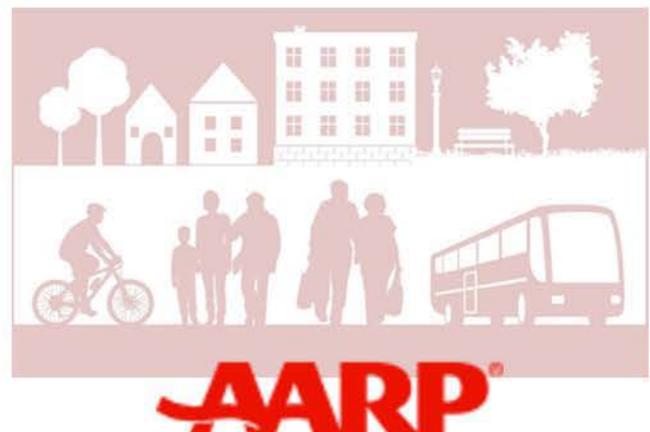
Each domain focuses on a different part of community life, such as housing, transportation, health services, and social participation. When we look at our

community through these lenses, we can better understand how things like sidewalk conditions, public transit, or access to information impact people's daily lives. This approach encourages us to think beyond just one issue and instead consider how all the pieces fit together to support independence, safety, and connection.

The real benefit of using the 8 Domains is that they help communities plan in a more inclusive and coordinated way. For example, improving outdoor spaces not only helps older adults stay active but also supports families with young children. Making communication more accessible helps people with hearing or vision challenges, but also benefits newcomers and non-native speakers.

In this way, age-friendly planning becomes community-friendly planning.

By using the 8 Domains as a guide, communities can create action plans that are practical, people-centered, and forward-thinking. It's not just about aging; it's about building places where everyone can live well, at every stage of life.



Community Assessment Results

Domain: Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

People need public places to gather — indoors and out. Green spaces, seating and accessible buildings (elevators, zero-step entrances, staircases with railings) can be used and enjoyed by people of all ages.

AARP Livable Communities



Participants rate Appleton as very good for “well-maintained parks” and “safe parks.”



Appleton rated unsure in “availability of neighborhood watch programs.”

Domain: Transportation

Driving shouldn't be the only way to get around. Pedestrians need sidewalks and safe, crossable streets. Dedicated bicycle lanes benefit nondrivers and drivers alike. Public transit options can range from the large-scale (trains, buses, light rail) to the small (taxis, shuttles or ride share services).

AARP Livable Communities



The majority of participants get around by driving themselves.



Overall, participants reported their opinions of public transportation as “fair” to “very good,” though a significant portion of participants were unsure about the quality of public transportation in Appleton.



Appleton rated highly for “easy to read traffic signs.”

Domain: Health Services & Community Supports

At some point, every person of every age gets hurt, becomes ill or simply needs some help. While it's important that assistance and care be available nearby, it's essential that residents are able to access and afford the services required.

AARP Livable Communities



Appleton rated highly for health care facilities



The focus group at Long Cheng Marketplace expressed concern with financial insecurity related to the unpredictable landscape of government support programs for healthcare and medications.

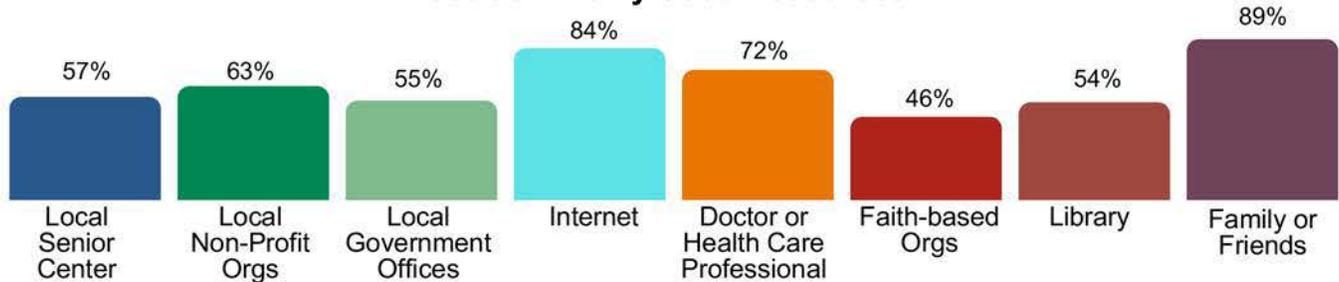
Community Assessment Results

Domain: Communication & Information

We now communicate in ways that were unimaginable a decade ago. Age-friendly communities recognize that information needs to be shared through a variety of methods since not everyone is tech-savvy, and not everyone has a smartphone or home-based access to the internet.

AARP Livable Communities

Most Commonly Used Resources



Domain: Respect & Social Inclusion

Everyone wants to feel valued. Intergenerational gatherings and activities are a great way for young and older people to learn from one another, honor what each has to offer and, at the same time, feel good about themselves.

AARP Livable Communities

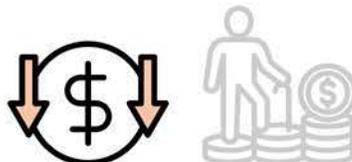
Do you use the following sources for continuing education or self-improvement classes or workshops in your community?



Domain: Work & Civic Engagement

An age-friendly community encourages older people to be actively engaged in community life and has opportunities for residents to work for pay or volunteer their skills. AARP Livable Communities

Concerns about cost of living are shared across income levels but felt more acutely by those earning under \$100,000.



Lower-income respondents express more uncertainty about job quality and opportunities in Appleton.

Higher-income respondents are more likely to be retired or working by choice.

Community Assessment Results

Domain: Housing

AARP surveys consistently find that the vast majority of older adults want to reside in their current home or community for as long as possible. Doing so is possible if a home is designed or modified for aging in place, or if a community has housing options that are suitable for differing incomes, ages and life stages.

AARP Livable Communities



Appleton rated highly as a "place to grow older."



Appleton rated poorly for having "affordable housing options."



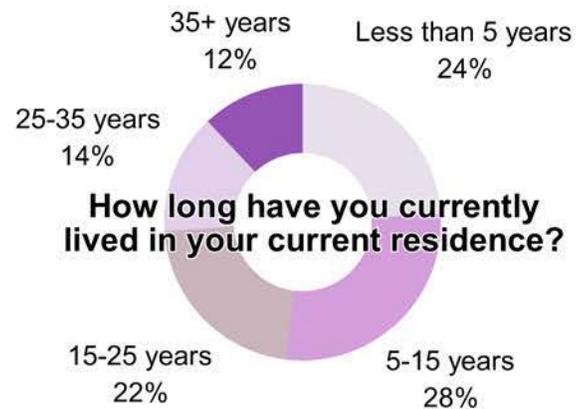
Appleton rated average for having "well-maintained homes and properties."

91% of survey respondents feel strongly about **living independently in their home as they age** yet only about

half of survey respondents believe they can age in place without making major modifications to their current residence



Individuals with lower income face more barriers to modifying their homes because the modifications often can become expensive quickly



How long have you currently lived in your current residence?

Reasons for Moving



- Top reason: finding a home that supports independent aging
- Least likely reason: moving to a larger home
- Personal safety is the most important factor

Things that Help People Age Independently at Home:

- Grab bars in bathrooms and showers
- Walk-in showers or tubs
- Ramps or stairlifts for easier access
- Non-slip flooring
- Good lighting throughout the home
- Lever-style door handles and faucets
- Lowered kitchen cabinets and counters
- Bedroom and bathroom on the main floor
- Emergency alert systems or medical alert devices
- Wide doorways for walkers or wheelchairs

Focus group participants at the Appleton Public Library shared the following about housing:

- Many cannot downsize due to rising housing costs across the housing spectrum
- Airbnb's and other short-term rentals affect neighborhoods, including housing availabilities
- High costs of making homes senior-friendly (accessible laundry, bathrooms, stairs, etc.)

Community Assessment Results

Domain: Social Participation

Regardless of a person's age, loneliness is often as debilitating a health condition as having a chronic illness or disease. Sadness and isolation can be combated by having opportunities to socialize and the availability of accessible, affordable and fun social activities. AARP Livable Communities



The majority of participants do not feel alone or lonely.



Appleton rated highly with "conveniently located entertainment venues."



Appleton rated okay on "activities geared specifically towards older adults."



Appleton rated poorly on having "activities that are affordable to all residents."

10%

say they "have contact with family, friends, or neighbors who do not live with them" once every two or three weeks or less.

9%

say if they were in trouble, they do not have family or friends who could help them at any time of day or night

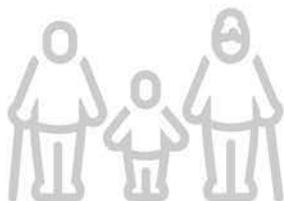
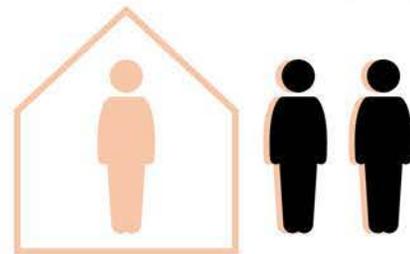
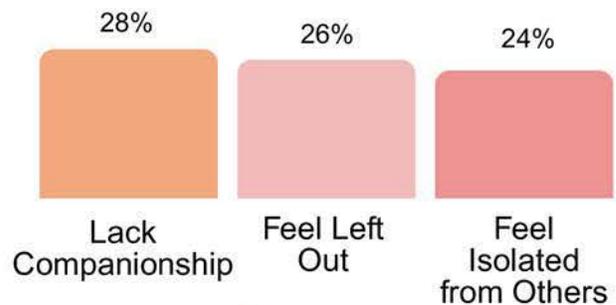
16%

say they are already caregiving for an adult loved one

66%

say it's likely they provide unpaid care for an adult loved one in the future

Survey Respondents Sometimes or Often...



Focus group participants in the session led by People of Progression want more opportunities for active and social engagement through environments that promote beauty and play.

Action Items

Action Item 1

Silver Platters Voucher Program Development at Long Cheng Marketplace

Domain: Social Participation

Lead Agency: Outagamie County Nutrition Program

The Outagamie County Nutrition Program is dedicated to supporting the nutrition and socialization needs of older adults, aged 60 and above. In partnership with May's Kitchen in Appleton, located in Long Cheng Marketplace, the program offers a flexible dining option through the Silver Platters Voucher Program. This program allows participants to enjoy nutritious meals at convenient times and locations, promoting both health and community connection.

Goal: Through this initiative, Outagamie County continues its commitment to enhancing the well-being and quality of life for older adults in the community, specifically in the HMong community. The Silver Platters Voucher Program aims to provide

- Access to healthy, balanced meals
- Opportunities for socialization and fellowship
- Greater flexibility in dining times and locations

In order to increase participation by 50%, enhance choice and inclusivity, the program will expand the Voucher Program by offering another location in an underserved area of Outagamie County.

By broadening the program's reach, Outagamie County reaffirms its commitment to ensuring that older adults have the opportunity to enjoy healthy meals, social engagement, and a sense of belonging within their community.

Eligibility: According to the Older Americans Act guidelines, the following individuals may participate on a voluntary contribution basis:

- Adults 60 years of age or older
- A spouse or domestic partner under 60 who resides with an eligible individual aged 60 or older
- A disabled adult under 60 who resides with an eligible individual aged 60 or older



Photo Credit: Outagamie County Nutrition Program

Action Items

Action Item 2

Housing Affordability Presentations by Fox Cities Housing Coalition

Domain: Housing

Lead Agency: Fox Cities Housing Coalition

The Fox Cities Housing Coalition is a compilation of more than 30 agencies working together with one vision: to educate, empower, and unite our community towards ensuring housing for all. Together, they strive to break barriers, provide resources, and advocate for equitable access to housing, fostering a stronger, more inclusive society.

The Fox Cities Housing Coalition subcommittee on Affordable Housing has prepared a PowerPoint presentation to be shared with groups in the Fox Cities to provide information about the need for affordable housing.

Goal: They hope to let people know the reasons for the lack of housing and actions they can take to improve access. We also hope to develop a core of Housing Champions who will advocate for more housing at local, state and national levels.

Timeline: The subcommittee has presented approximately twenty educational sessions from January 2024 – December 2025, to churches, several service clubs including Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis primarily in Outagamie County, Outagamie County Human Services Board, Noon-hour Philosophers, and at the FCHC Report to the Community. They will continue these presentations for the foreseeable future. They have also developed a one-page resource guide that we hand out at presentations. The presentation and the resource guide are on the Fox Cities Housing Coalition website.

By December 2026, we hope to present at 10 or more community presentations about affordable housing with diverse audiences throughout the Fox Valley region.

What types of Housing are needed?



Mixed housing that includes more dense housing combined with single family homes



Having a variety of rental units for various income levels helps diversify and stabilize housing developments as a whole



Housing that allows for first time homeowners to afford units to purchase

Action Items

Action Item 3 Senior Disaster Kits

Domain: Communication and Information

Lead Agency: Appleton Fire Department and Appleton Emergency Management

The Senior Disaster Preparedness Kits project strengthens Appleton's communication and emergency readiness efforts by providing older adults with essential supplies and guidance for home safety. Led by the City of Appleton Fire Department and Emergency Management, the program partners with ADRC, Friends of the Appleton Fire Department, and Appleton Police Department to distribute kits and share preparedness information through community networks and senior facilities.

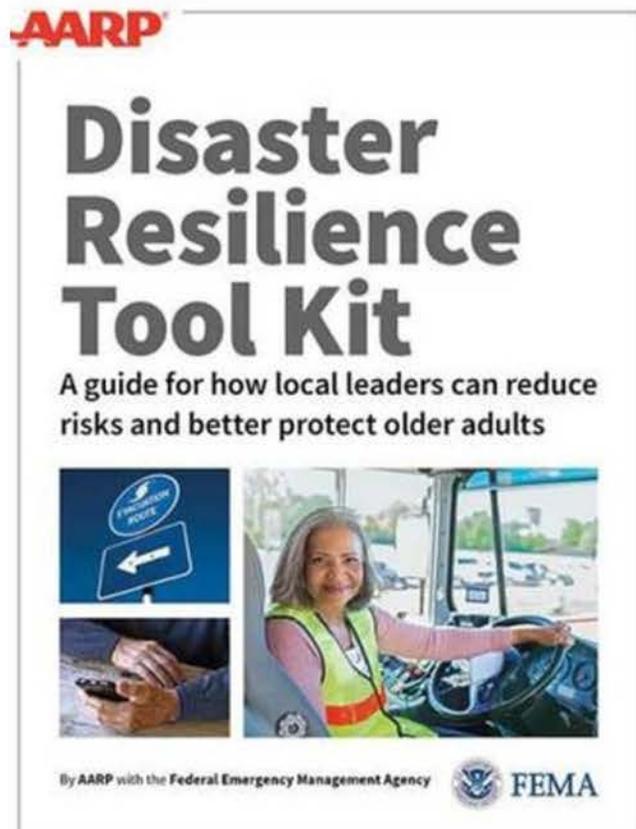
This project builds on existing partnerships and resources to improve communication, preparedness, and community resilience for older adults in Appleton.

Goal: To promote safety, awareness, and confidence among Appleton's older adult population through improved access to emergency information and resources.

Timeline: By winter 2025-2026, distribute 100 Senior Disaster Preparedness Kits to residents age 55 and older, increasing participant confidence in emergency preparedness by at least 25 percent, measured through post-program surveys.



**EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT**



Action Items

Action Item 4 Valley Transit Development Plan

Domain: Transportation

Lead Agency: East Central Regional Planning Commission and Valley Transit

The Valley Transit Transit Development Plan (TDP) is a comprehensive study led by the East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (ECWRPC) in partnership with Valley Transit, the public transportation provider serving Appleton and the Fox Cities region. The TDP process was most recently completed in 2019. This project is intended to evaluate the current state of Valley Transit's service offerings and to develop a strategic roadmap for the next five to ten years. With the region undergoing demographic shifts, changes in travel behaviors, and an emerging transportation landscape post-pandemic, the TDP presents an opportunity to ensure that transit service is aligned with evolving needs and community priorities.

Goal: The TDP serves as a vital strategic roadmap over the next five to ten years to address the Fox Cities region's demographic shifts, particularly the growing aging population. The resulting system-wide and route-level recommendations are specifically designed to

1. **Enhance Accessibility:** By aligning service with the "evolving needs and community priorities," the TDP will improve access and reliability for non-driving seniors.
2. **Optimize Connectivity:** The plan's review of Major Destinations and Trip Generators will ensure that routes efficiently connect residential areas favored by older adults to critical resources like medical centers and pharmacies.
3. **Future-Proof Mobility:** By evaluating the "emerging transportation landscape post-pandemic," the TDP will develop sustainable strategies to maintain the independence and civic engagement of the aging community for years to come.

Timeline:



Members & Affiliations

Age Friendly Appleton Action Plan Team

Breanna Mekuly - City of Appleton, Department of Public Health

Cassidy Walsh City of Appleton, Emergency Management

Kali Kiehl - Outagamie County, Aging Unit

Jennifer Stephany - Appleton Downtown, Inc.

Vaya Jones - Common Council, City of Appleton; Board Member, Mary Beth Neinhaus Activity Center



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Additional Age Friendly Appleton Members

Carrie Peters- City of Appleton, Police Department

Timber Smith - City of Appleton, Office of the Mayor

Djuanna Kath - The Thompson Center on Loudres (past position)

Kim Biedermann - East Central Regional Planning Commission

Beth Flaherty - Community Volunteer

Kate Yates - YMCA of the Fox Cities, ForeverWell Program

Melanie Thurber - Appleton Public Library (past position)

Jessica Titel - City of Appleton, Community and Economic Development (past position)

Andy Anaam - City of Appleton, Office of the Mayor

Chuck Sepers - City of Appleton, Department of Public Health