



Tompkins County Office for the Aging

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Strategic Planning 2014 Housing

A Consensus Conference on the topic of Housing was convened at the Country Inn and Suites in Ithaca on July 31, 2014. Rhoda Meador, Director of the Ithaca College Gerontology Institute facilitated the discussion.
The following individuals participated:

Esther Greenhouse, Environmental Gerontologist
Harriet London, Lifelong Board, constituent interested in options for aging in place
Joan and David Brumberg, constituents interested in City of Ithaca condo options
Joel Savishinsky, constituent interested in City of Ithaca condo options
Suzanne Kates, Sagework Massage Therapy
Lisa Holmes, Tompkins County Office for the Aging
Katrina Schickel, Tompkins County Office for the Aging
Eileen Savino, Tompkins County Office for the Aging
Erin Mulcahy, Occupational Therapy Intern, Tompkins County Office for the Aging
Chris Decker, Ithaca College Gerontology Institute
Teri Reinemann, Ithaca College Gerontology Institute
Megan McDonald, Tompkins County Planning Department
Christine Carreiro, Better Housing for Tompkins County
Jan Lynch, Finger Lakes Independence Center
Diane Dawson, Lifelong
Kerry Barnes, Longview
Billie Nordby, Titus Towers
Carol Mallison, McGraw House
Jane Segelken, McGraw House
Bruno Schickel, Schickel Construction Company
Peggy Haine, Audrey Edelman Realty
Becky Hawley, Alternatives Federal Credit Union
John Krout, constituent representing rural elders

The following is a summary of the discussion and findings of this Consensus Conference.

Introduction and Overview of Housing in Tompkins County

Presentations:

Lisa Holmes, Director of Tompkins County Office for the Aging

Between 2000 and 2010, the Census shows a 89% increase in people between the ages of 60-64 and a 34% increase in people over the age of 60. The growth of this demographic and of the Baby Boomers in particular, has tremendous implications for the future of housing needs in the County. The Office for the Aging's 2012 Needs Assessment indicated that 88% of older adults were home owners. Of these home owners, 1/3 indicated that their home was in need of a major repair and 38% indicated that the cost of that repair was prohibitive. Additionally, 13% said that they were planning to move within the next 5 years, and of those intending to move, 63% indicated that they wanted to stay in Tompkins County.

The Office for the Aging conducted a Housing Preferences Survey in the spring of 2014. This survey was available on-line and through paper copy. Additionally, the survey was made widely available at a Senior Housing Expo jointly sponsored by the Office for the Aging and the Ithaca College Gerontology Institute on May 3, 2014. There were 331 responses to the survey, with the average age of the responders being 67 years. The survey was not a random sample, but rather a survey of those interested in the topic. The survey yielded the following results:

- Nearly half of the respondents plan to move in the next 1-5 years. Another 31% plan to move in the next 5-10 years and 20% in the next 10-15 years.
- Respondents' top reason for moving is to reduce maintenance and upkeep/downsizing.
- Ninety percent of respondents plan to stay in Tompkins County when they move. Of these, 57% plan to move to the City of Ithaca, and 19% to the Town of Ithaca.
- Respondents were asked into what type of housing they plan to move, and the most frequently cited response was senior housing complex, followed by condominium and apartment.
- The top 3 factors that respondents considered when thinking about housing were; single floor design, affordable cost (with home ownership costing between \$150,000-\$250,000 and rental costs between \$500 and \$1000) and easy access to services and transportation.
- Consistent themes repeated throughout narrative comments included: the need for affordable housing options located downtown in the City of Ithaca, close to services and transportation; the lack of housing options for the middle class; and the desire for condominiums.

Megan McDonald, Tompkins County Planning Department

Tompkins County recently released its revised version of the Comprehensive Plan which is a "living document" to be revised periodically to reflect the desires and needs of the

community. The Comprehensive Plan attempts to reflect the values of the community. The most recent iteration of the plan emphasizes three areas:

- Sustainability – looking to the future
- Regional cooperation
- Fiscal responsibility

Tompkins County is an attractive place to live, but expensive. One third of the residents are burdened by the cost of housing and there is not a lot of housing stock available. People have an interest in supportive services. Tompkins County should be an affordable place to live and there is a need for a variety of different types of housing and the county needs to look holistically at the costs associated with living here such as transportation. There is a need for housing that meets the needs of the aging population. Older housing stock requires repairs and upgrades that are costly. Less dependence on cars can benefit both the citizens and the environment. Citizens who are less reliant on cars and have a more active life style as a consequence, are healthier. The County is committed to reducing carbon emissions by 80% by 2050.

Tompkins County has beautiful, natural settings, but public access to them is often challenging. Forty-five percent of our residents rely on ground water resources that are not protected.

Esther Greenhouse – Enabling Design

Design that is supportive and enabling can have a positive impact on the quality of life of seniors. The life span of a person should be considered when designing a home. The concept of “environmental fit and press” should be considered. A “Good Fit” equals independence and a “Poor Fit” equals press or a stress to adapt to an environment. Essentially, when there is good design, there is higher functioning on the part of the older adult. Many designs of environments for older adults do not take into account the use of abilities by the older adult. The result is lower functioning or loss of function. On the other hand, if the environment is too demanding, there is a stress that is created for the older adult. There needs to be a balance that meets the needs of each individual.

Visitability is another concept that is important. Single family homes need to accommodate people with walkers, wheelchairs and canes with zero-step entries and bathrooms that work for older residents

Strengths and Highlights

Tompkins County is rich in cultural capital and comparatively speaking, the County has an array of housing options which other small, rural communities do not have. There are a great number of supportive services in our community and as a County; we have the ability, through technology, to inform citizens about their housing options.

Challenges

There is a lack of affordable housing options in Tompkins County; however, municipalities and residents are often resistant to new development. Residents need to become comfortable with the concept of density in housing in order for development to occur and drive down the cost of housing. The current housing stock is old and often requires expensive retrofitting in order to make it accessible for older adults. Because the population in the County is bifurcated between students and non-students, it is difficult to create a housing stock that will meet the needs of both students and aging residents. It is also important to consider that the needs of aging residents will vary as they age.

Language in messaging can sometimes miss the mark. Today's 60 and older population often do not self-identify as "seniors," so this should be factored into marketing strategies.

Onerous regulations can impede the development of new housing. The risk to contractors is high as they navigate to meet the demands of these regulations. The time frame from inception to approval can be as long as 3-4 years and the contractor's risk is high as prices and needs change over that time period.

The relationship between the County and municipalities needs to improve so that both the municipality and the County are meeting the needs of residents.

When developing new housing, safety and walkability are major concerns. Location and accessibility to needed services is also key. Many older adults would like to "age in place" and retrofitting accessibility into older homes is costly.

Prioritized Recommendations

- Increase the supply of housing in order to reduce housing costs. Several strategies and ideas were offered around this concept, including:
 - Develop a coalition or mechanism to disseminate accurate information and to have other voices heard when discussion of new development takes place in the community. Develop a mechanism to counteract the anti-development mentality.
 - Shorten the approval process for new housing development. Streamline the bureaucracy as much as possible.
 - Encourage Tompkins County to lead housing efforts and demand participation from the municipalities. Create a coordinated Housing Commission that represents both the City and County.
 - Create more affordable assisted living in Tompkins County, including a Medicaid funded assisted living program (ALP).
 - Cluster housing around services and change the zoning, if needed, to make this possible. Create living environments that do not rely on transportation.
 - Create intergenerational housing options.
 - Identify available land for development.
 - Promote universal design in all new construction.

- Provide small builders with technical support on grant applications and funding opportunities.
- Utilize college students in housing efforts. Such efforts may include:
 - Conduct a cost/benefit analysis of what can be easily changed to make Tompkins County a liveable community. Tackle the “low-hanging fruit.” For example, changing speed limits where needed.
 - Conduct an inventory and analysis related to existing housing stock and support services to determine where there are gaps.
- Educate and encourage community-building, especially in rural areas, to enable people to age in place. Such efforts may include:
 - Educate the community on new paradigms for aging.
 - Educate community about the transition to retirement well before retiring.
 - Explore “Village” concept where groups of people share/provide services to one another, or purchase needed services together.
 - Explore local barter system such as Tompkins Time Traders.
 - Explore home sharing programs.
 - Educate public on tax benefits of home ownership and energy improvements.
 - Educate the public about the range of transportation options, including carshare. Promote walkability. Enforce pedestrian laws and walkways.
 - Educate County Legislature about housing market and the needs and desires of citizens.
 - Explore the “Age Friendly Community” designation for Tompkins County
 - Promote intergenerational programming opportunities. Partner with existing programs such as Youth Employment Services (YES)
 - Secure grant funding for people with limited incomes to retrofit their homes.