

2005 LIVABLE COMMUNITIES FOR ALL AGES COMPETITION

What makes a community “livable” for people across their lifespan? What are some of the most livable cities and counties in the United States for people of all ages? How can we meet the needs of residents who have invested a lifetime in their communities and want to grow older in their own homes?

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging (AoA) sponsored a competition in 2005 to answer these questions and to honor some of the country’s most livable places. Cities and counties of all sizes submitted applications for the awards, and a distinguished panel of judges including urban planners, city managers, and other professionals chose the seven winners profiled here.

WHAT IS A “LIVABLE COMMUNITY?”

Livable communities are places where people of all ages can live comfortably. For the competition, they were defined as cities and counties that have taken specific, collaborative actions and made significant, measurable improvements in six key areas. Livable communities:

1. Provide affordable, appropriate, accessible housing
2. Adjust the physical environment for inclusiveness and accessibility
3. Ensure access to key health and supportive services
4. Ensure accessible, affordable, reliable, safe transportation
5. Provide work, volunteer, and education opportunities
6. Encourage participation in civic, cultural, social, and recreational activities

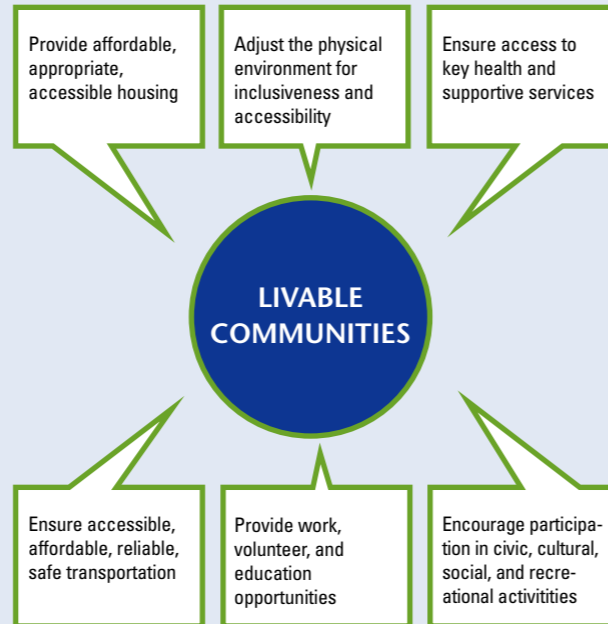


FIGURE 1.

THE SEVEN WINNERS

Two types of awards were presented. Winners of Specific Category awards were recognized for excellence in one of the six key areas (see above). Winners of Overall Excellence awards were recognized for an outstanding, comprehensive, and integrated approach to improving multiple components of community livability. Community size was also taken into account.

The summaries inside describe just a few of the initiatives that make these communities livable.

For more information, visit the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging website at <http://www.aoa.gov/> or call (202) 619-0724



THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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The Livable Communities for All Ages competition was administered by the Center for Home Care Policy and Research, Visiting Nurse Service of New York, with the participation of the American Planning Association and the International City/County Management Association.



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Center for Home Care Policy & Research





LARGE COMMUNITIES (POPULATION 900,000 AND UP)

ATLANTA, GEORGIA *Winner, Overall Excellence*

Atlanta is facing rapid suburban sprawl and an aging population. In response, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) created a comprehensive, coordinated set of programs to address livability and “aging in place” issues. Aging Atlanta is a public-private consortium devoted to increasing affordable housing and transportation options for older adults. ARC’s Aging in Place program helps local jurisdictions integrate healthcare delivery with housing and planning initiatives; improve availability and accessibility of housing through better urban design; and use planning and zoning to accommodate a choice of housing types to make neighborhoods more elder-friendly. The EasyLiving Home program encourages builders to use step-free entrances, wide hallways, and larger rooms to maneuver wheelchairs on the main floor of new homes. ARC is also piloting an innovative, neighborhood-based service delivery program in two naturally occurring retirement communities.

MILWAUKEE COUNTY, WISCONSIN *Winner, Overall Excellence*

Milwaukee County has built extensive partnerships among service providers, government agencies, foundations, businesses, universities, and other organizations to improve the county’s livability for older adults. ElderLink is the county’s single point of access to long-term care information and services. Wellness Works, a community-based program, operates five fitness centers free of

charge for seniors. The Mature Worker Resource Center comprises nine employment agencies that match older workers with employment opportunities. The Senior Statesmen program educates older people about public policy and trains them to represent senior viewpoints at the local and state levels. As a result of the Lapham Park Venture, which provides health care and other services on site to elders in a public housing complex, new low-income housing built in Milwaukee County must have a supportive service component.

NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK *Winner, Overall Excellence*

The New York City Supportive Service Program (SSP) for Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) supports the health and well-being of 46,000 residents in 27 housing developments across all five boroughs. NORC-SSPs rely on a mix of public and private funding, in-kind support, and partnerships of government, housing corporations, residents, and service providers to address the safety, security, and service needs of NORC residents. Each NORC housing partner has installed wheelchair ramps and handrails in public areas, repaired sidewalks, and removed hazards and other barriers to mobility. On-site social workers help residents access services, provide assistance with entitlements, and coordinate care for residents who need it. Most programs have dedicated nurses who provide health care services and help residents negotiate the health care system. NORC-SSPs offer educational, recreational, and volunteer opportunities, as well as social and cultural activities for residents, such as theater trips, fundraisers, thrift shops, teas, and holiday celebrations. Many residents are active in the governance of the NORC-SSPs.



MIDSIZE COMMUNITIES (POPULATION 100,000-250,000)

BROOME COUNTY, NEW YORK *Winner, Specific Category*

Since 1996, the Broome County Community Alternative Systems Agency (CASA) has helped more than 3,000 residents of all ages and abilities move out of nursing homes and back into the community. CASA staff work closely with residents, nursing home staff, health care providers, and home care consultants to prepare a discharge plan that will ensure continued, appropriate in-home care following a nursing home stay. In addition, CASA educates both nursing home and county residents receiving in-home care about their rights and responsibilities and assists them in managing their power as consumers of services.

CENTRAL VIRGINIA *Winner, Overall Excellence*

The Jefferson Area Board for Aging (JABA), which works in five counties surrounding Charlottesville in central Virginia, has headed an extensive community-wide effort to make the region more livable for its growing population of older residents. This effort has helped JABA secure low-interest capital improvement funds, technical assistance, rental subsidies, and policy changes that are resulting in more available and affordable housing for seniors. A pilot project to enhance the pedestrian-friendliness of a dangerous roadway has resulted in improved sidewalks, crosswalks, and bus stops. A focus on intergenerational relationships has enhanced mutual understanding and communication among youth and seniors. Older adults also volunteer and share their knowledge in local schools. Collaboration with university-based experts has resulted in the creation of a senior advocacy clinic and complementary research plans that will help inform and improve JABA’s efforts in the future.

SMALL COMMUNITIES (POPULATION 100,000 AND UNDER)

DUNEDIN, FLORIDA *Winner, Specific Category*

Dunedin is working to make the city safer and more accessible, engage older residents in community life, and provide opportunities for strengthening intergenerational ties. The city launched a sidewalk improvement program, installing ramps on 90 percent of city sidewalks. It increased the size of street signs to improve visibility and established satellite post offices to provide access to postal services in more neighborhoods. Dunedin instituted traffic calming measures in the downtown area, conducted a full examination of all modes of transportation serving the city, and developed a pamphlet describing available transportation options for people who no longer drive. New programs and opportunities have also been created to engage older people in community life and for younger and older people to spend time together. For instance, young people will teach older people computer skills such as how to use email and to conduct research online.

TAMARAC, FLORIDA *Winner, Overall Excellence*

The city of Tamarac, Florida, provides a rich array of programs and services that make it a well-rounded and livable community for older adults. Tamarac provides affordable and well-integrated public bus service, which has introduced innovations such as providing free trips to the library for seniors who show a library card. To support housing affordability, Tamarac does not tax the first \$50,000 in property value for seniors. The Department of Parks and Recreation provides activities such as computer courses, field trips, and concerts. Numerous health and social services are also geared directly to seniors, including the annual Fun and Fitness Fair, monthly health lectures, monthly health screenings, a lecture series on cancer awareness, and a mobile mammography van. The community also provides Meals on Wheels, free 911 cell phones for qualifying seniors, and courses and support groups related to anger management, anxiety, bereavement, and other issues.