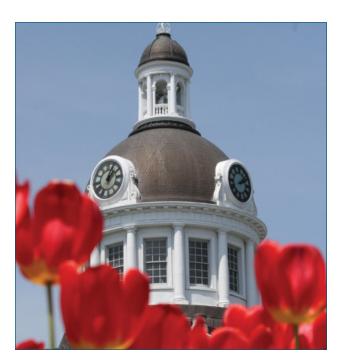# Age-Friendly Kingston

BUILDING A PLACE FOR PEOPLE OF ALL AGES TO LIVE, WORK AND PLAY

Every city wants to be welcoming, accessible and supportive for all its residents, regardless of their needs, lifestyle or age. The City of Kingston, Ontario, has made this goal an intrinsic part of its official policy, with the creation of *Age-friendly Kingston*: a comprehensive new strategy that is helping to make the city a better place for people of all ages to live, work, play and visit.

"There's a big difference between a 'Seniors strategy' and an 'Age-friendly strategy,'" explains Cheryl Hitchen, Manager of Social Policy and Strategic Community Development for the City of Kingston. "While most of the planning behind Age-friendly Kingston has focused on older adults and seniors, the recommendations that have come out of the process will have concrete benefits for all age groups throughout the community."

Kingston City Hall
Photo credit – City of Kingston

Quick facts

- Canada's population is aging at a faster rate than at any other time in our history. In 2016, close to one in six Canadians was over the age of 65 or older.

- In Kingston, seniors (age 65 or older) currently make up about 18% of the total population. That number is expected to rise to 25% by the year 2036.

- Within the next decade, approx. 44% of the city's total population is, or will be, classified as either "older adult" (age 45 or older) or "senior" (65 or older).

- Currently, Kingston is home to more than 2,200 seniors over the age of 85.

Source: City of Kingston

A locally-driven, bottom-up approach

The development of the strategy began in earnest in 2011, when Kingston's City Council committed to make their community a World Health Organization (WHO) "age-friendly" city. The first step involved carrying out an assessment of the city's current "age-friendliness," to establish a baseline and encourage older adults and seniors to take an active role in the planning process.

City staff prepared a socio-demographic profile of older adults in Kingston and hosted a series of six focus groups with seniors, other residents, caregivers, and community agencies and organizations. The goal of these sessions was to find out how well the City's current municipal programs, services and facilities were meeting the needs of its older residents.

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World Health Organization (WHO) Age-friendly Cities program

The World Health Organization (WHO)'s Age-friendly Cities program was established to help cities prepare for two international demographic trends: the increase in global urbanization, and the rapid aging of most of the world's populations. The program targets social, economic and environmental factors that influence the health and well-being of older adults across the globe. The City of Kingston joined the WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities in 2012.

"Throughout these initial stages, we followed the locally driven, bottom-up approach that was set out by the World Health Organization," Hitchen says. "This means starting with the real, lived experience of older people and seniors, and asking them to tell us what they feel is (or isn't) age-friendly about Kingston today, and what we can do to make our city more age-friendly going forward."

The insights and feedback that were gained during those focus groups were combined with the research compiled by staff, and published in a series of reports that became the City of Kingston Age-friendly Plan.

To keep costs at a minimum, the project leaders focused solely on areas for which the city was responsible and that it could implement and control. To further increase the odds of success, they also built the strategy on activities that would fit with other municipal priorities and could be accomplished within existing budgets or for little or no cost.

"This enabled us to carry out much of the work fairly quickly, and with surprisingly little funding," Hitchen adds.

WHO age-friendly framework: eight key domains

To help guide the consultation process, Kingston built its Age-friendly Plan on the eight primary "domains" outlined in the WHO framework for age-friendly communities. These include:

1. **outdoor spaces and buildings;**
2. **transportation;**
3. **housing;**
4. **social participation;**
5. **respect and social inclusion;**
6. **civic participation and employment;**
7. **communication and information; and**
8. **community support and health services.**

For each of these domains, city staff compiled information relating to several different factors, from the gaps in services that were identified by the focus groups to current strengths, plans and challenges. While a wide variety of opinions were received from the participants, the feedback from the focus groups centred on four key themes:

- **THEME 1: We want to stay in our homes.** The participants stressed the importance of making sure there would be sufficient homes and community support services in place to allow them to stay in their homes and neighbourhoods as they grow older.

- **THEME 2: We want to be actively involved in the community.** Residents also pointed out the need for accessible transportation options and affordable recreational, cultural and social opportunities across the city.

- **THEME 3: We want to know what is going on and where to get help when we need it.** Many of the focus groups expressed a desire for more clear, timely and accessible communication from the City on everything from upcoming events to community support.

- **THEME 4: We want to be respected.** In addition, the need to be active, engaged and respected was also highlighted by numerous participants in the focus groups. This included providing more opportunities for seniors to volunteer in their communities, training city service staff better on how to meet the needs of an aging population, and carrying out all municipal planning activities through an age-friendly lens.

Kingston's four key age-friendly themes

According to the focus group participants, older adults in Kingston want to:

• **stay in their homes for as long as possible.**
• **be involved in the community.**
• **know what's going on and where to get help.**
• **be respected.**

Focus group feedback
Photo credit – City of Kingston

Putting the plan into action

As a result of this feedback, staff presented the City Council with a total of 58 different recommendations ranging from potential changes in the way the City delivers its services to opportunities for partnerships with local business and community organizations. The status of each of those recommendations is then reviewed on an annual basis, with the results submitted to Council. In 2013, the Council created the Age-friendly Advisory Committee to work with city staff to assess all of the recommendations, and start putting together a plan of action.

"The Committee helped us identify which of the 58 recommendations had already been implemented and which still needed further action," Hitchen says. "This led to a short list of 20 core recommendations that could help make Kingston as age-friendly as possible."

One of those recommendations was to create a community-based, age-friendly committee, that could expand the mandate of the strategy beyond municipal programs and services and reach out to the broader community. To achieve this goal, in 2015, the City formed the Age-friendly Kingston Community Alliance (AFKCA).

"The goal of AFKCA is threefold," Hitchen explains. "First, to engage the community in assessing how age-friendly Kingston is, based on the eight WHO domains. Second, to build on the work that is already being done by the City to make Kingston more age-friendly. And third, to build greater awareness of, and provide more targeted support for, age-friendly initiatives across the city."

Next steps: the way forward

The AFKCA core planning group includes representatives from the United Way, Seniors Association Kingston Region, the Kingston Police, Kingston, Frontenac, Lennon and Addington KFL&A Public Health, the Alzheimer's Society of KFL&A, the Ministry of Seniors Affairs, the Centre for Studies in Aging and Health at Providence Care, the Ontario Age-friendly Community Planning Outreach Initiative, and the City. According to Hitchen, the group has already made several significant strides toward making Kingston friendlier to residents and visitors of all ages and abilities.

For example, shortly after it was founded, AFKCA hired Nanos Research to conduct a survey of 600 older adult households, to get their views on Kingston's age-friendliness. The results of that survey will help shape the priorities of the AFKCA and improve how it addresses age-friendly initiatives in the city.

"Thanks to the AFKCA, we've already been able to implement many of the recommendations that were presented to Council," Hitchen says. "Over the last few months, we've added more benches along city streets. We've adjusted the timing of pedestrian crosswalks so seniors won't have to feel rushed or stressed. And in partnership with the Downtown Business Association, StopGap ramps have been placed in several downtown businesses, and the program continues to expand beyond the downtown core to make more of our streets and businesses accessible to everyone."

"But I think the greatest success has been that city staff now carry out their planning and initiatives using an 'age-friendly' lens. I believe this will really help us maintain the momentum going forward, as we begin to set new priorities and recommendations to continue to improve the accessibility and age-friendliness of Kingston for years to come."

To find out more about Kingston's age-friendly strategy, visit the City of Kingston website at https://www.cityofkingston.ca/resident/seniors.

cmhc.ca