Bangor Livable Communities Discussions

Prepared for the City of Bangor

By the UMaine Center on Aging

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Community discussion participants

The City of Bangor

AARP Maine

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Photos courtesy of the City of Bangor
Executive Summary

Community discussions were conducted with 105 community members from the Bangor area to better understand perceptions of Bangor’s strengths and challenges as an age-friendly and livable community in eight different domains of livability ranging from transportation to access to information. The following are key findings to emerge from these community discussions:

**Outdoor Spaces and Buildings:** Bangor was highly praised by community members for the quality and accessibility of its outdoor recreational spaces, including the waterfront, parks, and numerous other recreation areas. Priority areas for infrastructure improvement centered around sidewalks in a number of Bangor neighborhoods. Additionally, some public facilities including the city hall and post office could benefit from accessibility improvements.

**Transportation:** Participants noted that transportation is a key component of ensuring livability in Bangor, and challenges with convenience of the bus system were highlighted as potential barriers to greater ridership. The other challenge voiced by participants related to transportation was limitations in parking, particularly in the downtown area.

**Housing:** Concerns about affordability and maintaining older housing stock dominated discussions of housing. Perceived gaps were particularly noted in the supply of subsidized housing, as well as housing options for low-to-middle income individuals.

**Social Participation:** Discussion participants were very positive about the ample supply of cultural, food, and entertainment options available in the Bangor area. A challenge repeatedly noted by participants was the lack of a senior center in Bangor resulting from the closure of Hammond Street Senior Center. Numerous participants expressed a desire for a senior center that builds on the services formerly offered by Hammond Street.
Respect and Social Inclusion: Feedback about the extent to which older adults in Bangor are respected and included in community life was minimal, but the feedback given was generally positive.

Civic Participation and Employment: Participants indicated that there is a wealth of volunteer opportunities available in Bangor. Additionally, while some employers offer flexible paid work to older adults, others do not. Increased part-time and flexible hour positions at local businesses are wanted.

Communication and Information: Although there are respected sources of information in the Bangor community such as local television stations and the Bangor Daily News, there was a general perception that it was difficult to easily obtain comprehensive information about services, supports, and events in the community. There is no one “go-to” clearinghouse for this type of information.

Community and Health Services: Participants in the discussions had a great amount of praise for the range and quality of medical and community services that are available in the Bangor region. The only stated concern about health services across more than one group was turnover of physicians. When discussing “big ideas” for improving health and community services, there was a strong emphasis on the development of integrated community and health service centers that incorporated a wide variety of social and health services under one roof.
Methodology

Seven community discussions were held in the Bangor area during the fall of 2016 to gather data about the strengths and areas for improvement of the city in the context of eight criteria of livable communities identified by the World Health Organization. Citizens were encouraged to share their opinions about aspects of the city that need improvement, as well as areas that are either meeting or exceeding expectations. Participants also contributed ideas about what the city could do to become more age friendly - their “big ideas,” which are highlighted throughout the report. Participants were asked to complete voluntary demographic forms and 79 were submitted. Participants were 59% female and 41% male. Participants averaged approximately 70 years of age and had lived in Bangor an average of 34 years. Participants came from multiple income groups with 56% of participants having a household income of less than $60,000 dollars, 33% having a greater household income, and 11% declining to answer.

A thematic analysis was conducted with a focus on identifying strengths and areas for improvement which were repeatedly raised across multiple community discussion groups. For quotes presented in this report, the numbers proceeding each quote indicate the particular community discussion group the quote was drawn from.

The Eight Domains of Livability

The eight domains of livable communities is a framework developed by the World Health Organization and promoted by AARP. The eight domains of livability framework allows communities to organize their work to become more age friendly and livable; not just for older adults, but for people of all ages. Each domain focuses on a different aspect of livable communities.

- **Outdoor Spaces and Buildings** refers to the public places of gathering in the community. Public buildings and spaces should be easily accessible and welcoming to people with limited mobility.
- The **Transportation** domain covers public transportation and all of the various ways that people move about the community.
- The **Housing** domain asks communities to ensure that there are ample housing options for older adults in the community, including handicap accessible private homes, subsidized housing for seniors, and affordable assisted living.
• **Social Participation** refers to the availability of accessible, affordable, and enjoyable activities for people of all ages to enjoy.

• Domain five, **Respect and Social Inclusion**, asks communities to foster opportunities for intergenerational activities that bring older adults into the fold and views their unique perspectives as an asset.

• The **Civic Participation and Employment** domain tells us that an age friendly community provides seniors who are interested with post-retirement paid work and volunteering opportunities.

• **Communication and Information** asks communities to ensure that they communicate information about events, services, and public safety in a multitude of ways that are accessible to everyone, not just those with an internet connection.

• Finally, **Community and Health Services** acknowledges that even in an age friendly community some people will become sick or injured and will need affordable and accessible community services.

AARP and the World Health Organization tell us that an age friendly community acknowledges all of the above domains and makes a commitment to growing in them.
Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Bangor’s public spaces like the Waterfront and the City Forest were highly praised by community members and are seen an asset to the community, providing a variety of places for people of all ages to recreate.

- “It’s a great walking city, we’re close to the woods, trails, places where you can ski, walk, walk your dog. The waterfront is an absolutely beautiful place to be for all ages.” (1)
- “I think the waterfront is great. I love the waterfront. I go down there and walk, be there and look at the water.” (2)
- “The waterfront is a great place to walk because there is so much parking there and you can walk winter, summer. And the Bangor Forest too is really good.” (3)
- “The best gift in the city is the waterfront. Absolutely the best. I recently retired and have a dog. I have plenty of land, but I visit twice a week at least so I meet people and she meets dogs.” (4)
- “One thing that I think is a real asset to Bangor is we have really pretty incredible access to some really high quality outdoor areas, we are an hour plus a little bit from a national park, an hour plus a little bit from Baxter State Park…I think for active people as they age, this is just a really incredible home base.” (5)
- “I think the city has done a great job with the waterfront with making that accessible.” (7)
- “I think that they also do a good job with open land and maintaining it for public use like the city forest.” (7)
The Downtown area has sidewalks that are in disrepair, making walking dangerous for older adults or people with limited mobility. People identified the sidewalks on Hammond Street, Union Street, Fairmont Street, Central Street, Main Street, and Hayward Street as the areas in need of most improvement. In the wintertime, sidewalks may not be reliably maintained, causing a buildup of ice and snow that makes walking difficult for older adults and people with physical disabilities and limited mobility.

- “Well when I try to walk, the sidewalks are so bad, I have to walk in the street. So it would be nice if the sidewalks could be a little better for [Little City] residents.” (1)

- “All the downtown sidewalks should be promptly and carefully sanded after snowstorms. I’ve had a lot of difficulty with the Downtown sidewalks.” (1)

- “I have friends who are disabled, not necessarily elderly, but out here even getting into stores, the bump of the bricks is very hard to walk with any types of challenges.” (2)

- “One thing I noticed when I first moved to Bangor is that people were walking in the street, and I thought to myself, why aren’t they walking in the sidewalk, why are they walking in the street? It turns out they’re walking in the street because the street is so much smoother than the sidewalk. It’s a safety issue.” (3)

- “Downtown is all brick in the sidewalks and it gets very shaded because of the buildings and the ice doesn’t melt very well.” (4)

- “The brick work down on Central Street. There are some of the bricks that are uneven, they’re missing. People walking with Canes, it’s very, very difficult.” (6)

- “The sidewalks on Hammond Street are really bad too. If you’re not watching where your feet are going…you’ve really got to watch where your feet are going, otherwise you are going to trip and fall down.” (7)
City Hall and the Post Office are not convenient for older adults or people with limited mobility. The Public Library was recently updated and is now very accommodating.

- “The recent upgrade of the Bangor Public Library has made it much more handicap accessible. You are able to go in at the ground floor elevator and go to all branches of the library.” (4)
- “I think the library is improving constantly…it’s a wonderful library.” (6)
- “The improvement of the library seems to be one of the best things we did in this community because many people make use of it.” (4)
- “I liked it where it was before [post office].” Noted an individual who goes to a Brewer post office, because “I don’t have the problem of getting out, getting in. There’s nowhere to park [in Bangor]. Coming out [of the parking spaces] you can’t see behind you.” (1)
- “The post office isn’t that good either, getting in that in Bangor.” (4)
- “The only way to get into the handicap accessibility [at city hall] is to come up a steep ramp and go up a ramp to the door. Other than that, you’re climbing twenty or so stair steps to get into the ground level.” (4)
- “Access into city hall, there is wheelchair access into city hall, it’s not necessarily ideal, you have to go through a parking lot to get to it…City Hall is approachable but difficult.” (5)

The majority of comments on safety in Bangor indicated people feel it is a safe community.

- “I feel safe there” - Little City resident (1)
- “I feel safe when I’m walking.” (2)
- “It’s a safe place, and there are a lot of agencies that collaborate together to make this a better place.” (4)
- “It feels very safe here. I’ve walked around Chapin park with my dog at 10 o’clock in the evening and felt safe.” (6)

Big Ideas: Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

- “Better accessibility downtown year round…smooth sidewalks, doorways that are accessible. If Downtown merchants want the business, they’ve got to make it easy for people to get there.” (2)
- “Safer sidewalks, better infrastructure. There are so many places where sidewalks are uneven or there aren’t sidewalks.” (6)
Transportation

Mobility and its role in supporting an age-friendly community was a key theme that was identified across discussion groups as a priority need for ensuring the age-friendliness of Bangor into the future.

- “I’m 92. I don’t drive, but if somebody takes me, I can go take care of my knees, but I’m forever trying to plan so that somebody can take me.” (1)
- “We need buses on more routes, we need buses with longer hours…People can’t drive or can’t always get a ride to go to something even if they want to.” (2)
- “I know people who are homebound. I have a friend who would love to come to the Y to the pool programs, but he just can’t get there - he doesn’t drive.” (3)
- “If you live in Hermon, how are you going to get here [Bangor]? There’s no bus service. A lot of small towns around here – there’s no services.” (4)
- “People don’t realize that two blocks at eighty is a hike.” (6)

Given the visibility of Bangor’s Community Connector, it was unsurprisingly a focal point of discussion. The bus system has several areas that were suggested as needing improvement. Some people do not understand the bus routes or know where to catch the bus. Some participants indicated that getting to the bus stops presents a challenge for older people and people with limited mobility. Participants also felt that the limited hours of operation in the evening and on weekends restricted the usefulness of the bus system.

- “The bus schedule is limited, it’s not one of these buses that comes along every 10 minutes. It really prolongs my trip.” (1)
- “I ride the bus about three hundred odd-times a year. At the ripe old age of 49 I decided to give up my car. So we definitely need longer hours. I think the business community needs to be encouraged to get on board. The colleges, Husson and University of Maine provide bus transportation for their employees and their students. It gets into a kind of chicken and the egg thing. The City Council says that more people need to use the bus to justify...
spending money on it, but there are people who would ride the bus if there were more hours and more frequent routes.” (2)

- “The bus service for the city runs from 6:15 in the morning until 6:15 in the afternoon. If you live in someplace like Old Town and you want to go to the Bangor Mall, you need to be out of there no later than 4:00 to catch your bus.” (3)

- “I can ride the bus, I guess, but the hours are very limited, the service is very sporadic. You might have to wait 45-50 minutes for a bus depending on how long your trip takes. Transit in a rural area is always very hard…the bigger issue than transit is that we're just not built in a way to facilitate transit or to facilitate people who want to live without a car.” (5)

- “There is no labeling on where the bus lines even are unless you want to get on the internet.” (5)

- “We need more public transportation on nights/weekends.” (7)

Generally, discussion participants were positive about driving in Bangor, indicating that it was relatively easy to get around by car, although there are a few areas of the city which can be confusing for drivers who don’t regularly drive in these areas. Broadway and Downtown Bangor were areas where congestion or confusion about traffic flow were identified as potential issues.

- “There are a number of streets that become busy, particularly if you have to make a left turn coming out of the place. Broadway, which is near us, is a good example of that during the busy times. I assume there are others, probably Stillwater.” (1)

- “It’s also a very easy city to drive in. The roads are a little confusing, but once you get used to that, there is no traffic and it moves right along. Even in the snow, they clean the streets up very well.” (3)

- “[Driving is] not bad if it’s not all tied up with construction.” (2)
Challenges related to parking tended to be focused on the Downtown section of Bangor, with individuals identifying limited street parking or parking that resulted in dangerous situations such as having to back out of a space into traffic.

- “There is literally no parking [on Central Street]. You circle the block for three blocks wide half a dozen times, and it’s hit and miss to get parking.” (4)
- “I hear from some people that parking is an issue for some older people who generally don’t want to park anywhere but a few doors down from where they are going…Parking can be an issue for people that, again, want that convenience or possibly need that convenience.” (5)
- “There really was no parking…god forbid you try to get there [Hammond Street], there was no parking.”

Several group participants noted that the parking garage is an option for individuals, although it may not be perceived as a convenient option, or be feasible for someone with limited mobility.

- “The parking garage is not filled.” (2)
- “There is also the parking garage. You get your first two hours free. It’s a little walk, but at least you’re close by.” (3)
- “There is a gigantic garage that I never once had a problem parking at.” (5)

**Big Ideas - Transportation**

- “I think transportation, it’s key. It really is. Better forms, better sidewalks, bike lanes, and all sorts of things.” (5)
- “Consistent ride/delivery service to do grocery shopping or get them rides to get it. Not have to walk down the street to catch a bus.” (6)
- “The bus service in Orono does a circular shuttle bus that goes around Downtown Orono and the University every half hour. In Bangor, Downtown Bangor would really benefit from the same thing. Just a little bus going around to Shaws, to the parking garage, library, post office. That would alleviate some of the need for parking.” (2)
Priorities related to housing can be identified by two words: affordability and maintenance. Across all community discussions, participants voiced concerns about a lack of affordable housing, especially to meet the needs of individuals who have limited incomes but do not meet eligibility requirements for subsidized housing. Subsidized housing itself was identified as an area where there is a perceived shortage of availability. Intimately connected with affordability is maintenance. Discussion participants voiced concerns about physical challenges in being able to maintain homes, as well as the affordability of maintaining aging houses which may face more significant challenges than newer housing stock. The following are a sampling of comments related to housing:

- “If you’re planning on pursuing public housing, you should do it about two years before you plan on moving.” (1)
- “There are programs for low income housing. We have fabulous places for people who have a lot of income…but there is this place right in the middle that there is nothing.” (2)
- “The majority of homes in Bangor are older homes. We live in an older home from 1886 – and it takes a lot of upkeep…it’s really pricey to take care of an older home.” (1)
- “I own my own home and I’m concerned as we age, it just makes it harder and harder to maintain our home and yet can’t afford to go into any of these nice senior housing places.” (3)
- “There is no real place for people like her or myself who have our own home [and are neither low or high income]. My house is an 1888 model. It’s adorable, it is not handicap accessible, it is not particularly friendly for older people.” (3)
• “One of the issues we face like any other older community is the age of the housing stock. Much of the larger housing stock is pre-WWII or right after the war, 1940’s. Much of that means if it hasn’t been redone, it needs some type of remodeling, particularly taking care of energy issues, insulation, better heating, those sorts of things.” (4)

• “We have quite a few [affordable housing], but it’s just not enough, it’s nowhere near enough. When you are spending 60% of your income on housing costs, you suffer with food or suffer with transit.” (7)

• “More affordable housing mixed into communities…taking those houses that are out of commission and doing something great with them.” (1)

• “I see some of these wonderful old buildings that are empty. It just seems to me that if there were the resources and we could do it, many of those could be made into senior apartments. It would be more attractive for people if they came with a parking spot.” (3)

• “I’d revitalize all of the buildings. One so that seniors living in houses, if they choose to live on their own because it costs way less than a nursing home, aren’t paying $400 per month on heat, aren’t living in a 50 degree house all year long. If you upgraded the housing stock, we’d all be in better positions. The people move to the suburbs because the houses are cheaper, they are better built out there, but it destroys our community in the process.” (5)

• “One of the things that will continue to be needed is reasonably priced housing, particularly for people who want to give up their big old house that’s hard to heat.” (4)
Social Participation

Bangor was praised for the wealth of opportunities for cultural engagement and entertainment in the city. Regularly mentioned were Bangor’s free summer concerts and movie showings Downtown, as well as the Penobscot Theatre and art exhibit offerings.

- “There's always a lot going on, we can go to the theater and we really enjoy the city. It's a great area to live in.” (1)
- “It has a thriving downtown that has a lot of potential still…the downtown is not hollowed-out like many small cities are.” (2)
- “Our theatre is very accommodating, because they have that pay as you wish on Thursday. A lot of people do ushering, so that’s a free admission.” (4)
- “We have pretty music during the summertime, the downtown concerts on Thursday nights, and they have the outdoor movies Friday night. They ask for donations, but it’s free basically if you want it.” (3)
- “The City of Bangor does a concert series every Thursday night that’s free.” (7)
- “I do rather enjoy being downtown. It’s great to get around. I’m always surprised by the number of quaint little shops.” (1)

The largest gap identified by individuals was the absence of a senior center, especially with the closing of Hammond Street Senior Center. Individuals from multiple groups noted and appreciated the role of the Bangor YMCA in filling some gaps left by the closure of Hammond Street, but a more comprehensive set of affordable community services in a single location was endorsed.

- “I really miss the senior center, really.” (1)
- “I didn’t go to the senior center, but my mother was there and I see the value of a Center like that, but I also, for me, see the value of integrating in with people of different ages. That is a key thing for me.” (1)
- “The Senior Center [Hammond Street]. That’s a concern for me. I’m working with my
mom, but I’m also on this path, so that was a big blow in this area, because it was such a wonderful place and the fact that we could not figure out a way to support that place on its own, I find appalling.” (2)

- “I remember when the senior center closed, and I thought that was tragic because it took away that center of gravity for a number of people, who could get information, who could share where different organizations could go to present what we do, how we can help.” (7)

- “Many from the senior centers join the Y and they interact and go there now.” (6)

- “I’d just like to say, how much I appreciate what they Y has done for us, that we are previous members of the senior center and it closed and we were just wondering what we were going to do.” (3)

Big Ideas - Social Participation

- “They ought to do something about resurrecting some variety of senior center. Not just to do crafts that you’ve done before, but maybe it’s for people to dabble with things they never did before.” (1)

- “I think the town really needs to have the senior citizens center.” (2)

- “I think that [a new senior center] would be great, however, I think to have a van that would pick people up and bring them there, because the city bus to walk two blocks, for some people, is too hard.” (4)
Respect and Social Inclusion

Opinions about respect for older citizens and social inclusion were limited and varied, but were generally positive, mentioning general feelings of respect and having perks that allow older adult inclusion such as senior discounts. If there was any discontent with social inclusion or respect, it was voiced in terms of how older workers can be devalued for various reasons such as a perception that they lack technological skills, or are overqualified for positions.

- “I’m a volunteer. I get treated with respect. I got treated with respect when I worked.” (1)
- “In general, I’m treated with respect, but if I experience disrespect, it’s usually from another senior.” (1)
- “I’ve gone to places to buy something, and they ask if you were a senior, and they gave you a different price, it was cheaper.” (2)

A common thread across the eight domains of livability is the desire for intergenerational activities and services:

- “We tend to discount that, just because you’re old you’ve lost your mind or skills and things. It’s just not true. It’s certainly a stereotype that needs to be broken down. You can do that by getting kids involved in some of the senior things.” (7)
- “My daughter had to do volunteer work as part of things when she was in high school, which was a while ago. But, one of the things she did was take care of and transported our elderly neighbors to their doctors’ appointments, to restaurants at times. She did shopping for them on Thursdays, so she has a regular thing that she did for about a year and that would be a good thing for teenagers to do to both learn from us now, a kind of a give and take thing.” (1)
Big Ideas: Respect and Social Inclusion

• “It would be to influence people to integrate. I don’t like segregated housing; I think we should all be integrated with all ages...it’s not the young, the old, the middle, we are all a community here...” (3)

• “There are a lot of young people here. They are at Husson and Beal, University of Maine, so we have a lot that are coming. It’s how do we keep them here. And the idea of having them do some sort of internships or working with people in their homes I think would connect them very nicely.” (6)

• “If I had all the money in the world, we’d have parenting classes and they would start at a very young age and maybe having some sort of daycare facility that the elderly could be part of to show proper parenting skills.” (6)

• “I think we are losing so much of our youth or young people that I don’t necessarily want to live in a place that is mostly elderly either.” (7)

• “So now you have a senior center for people with dementia and that type of stuff that the loved ones can bring and now they are safe, another part of that is the Head Start daycare with the other people, then the other part is the senior center where everybody can go to play cards, play ping pong. It’s a three-pronged approach. That would be my honey do list.” (7)
Regarding volunteer opportunities and chances to participate in civic life, the overwhelming consensus was that Bangor has abundant volunteer opportunities that are available for older citizens to participate in. Regularly mentioned volunteer opportunities included Eastern Area Agency on Aging programs, Penquis, the Salvation Army, United Way, hospice, and food pantries.

- “There are lots of opportunities…there are no ends to community things you can get involved in.” (1)
- “For those looking to volunteer, there are a ton of places. There’s soup kitchens, churches, the list goes on and on and if someone can’t find a place, call Eastern Area on Aging and they’ve got a list of all kinds of places that want help.” (2)
- “Most churches need volunteers. I volunteer on a temporary basis at My Friends Place at First Methodist Church…they are always looking for volunteers.” (2)
- “I just retired, but I do know several places in the area that are hiring retirees. They would be more than happy to have them.” (1)
- “There are a lot of different places you can volunteer; they very much appreciate it.” (3)
- “The hospital has a volunteer group. They are always looking for people to volunteer.” (3)
- “There are all kinds of opportunities, there is Head Start that needs volunteers, volunteer drivers for Lynx.” (7)
In terms of paid employment opportunities, feedback was limited, but community discussion participants felt that there were generally opportunities for participation in paid work, often seasonal positions. Hotels, Hannaford, UPS, and various retail stores were held up as examples of businesses that did an excellent job of catering to the needs of older workers. Several participants in one group indicated concerns that employers don't have a good understanding of the needs and desires of older workers for fulfilling part-time work in retirement.

- “I think one of the problems here is that as you are transitioning out of a career oriented world, it's not that you want another job that is mentally challenging or emotionally draining anymore, you might just want to sit behind a counter and make change for people...they don’t want to continue to work, that’s why they retired, but they want to have something to do...a lot of employers might not catch that.” (7)

- “I’ve talked to several people and they all felt I was overqualified. So what? I don’t care if I’m overqualified. I just want to do something. I think communities overlook what older people bring to the table as far as experiences are concerned.” (2)

Big Ideas - Civic Participation and Employment

- “If we had a volunteer coordinator in the city of Bangor and they could identify people who need help, then it would be a more formal or safer way...that seems like a relatively small investment to invest in a coordinator.” (7)

- “It seems like it would be a good idea if there was some office, some central bureau to coordinate volunteers.” (1)
A significant theme across groups was the challenge of keeping community members up-to-date on existing services and supports in the community and events that are happening. A regular occurrence during these discussions were participants indicating that they had never heard of a particular service or support that was raised during the discussion. Participants didn’t identify one central source of information where they felt this information is being shared.

- “How do we get the word out to the people of not only events, but housing, changes in streets, anything? How are we able to get the word out in a way that is discernible to people so they know what the status is.” (4)
- “I find a lot of things on the news about events that are happening tonight or last night. They are always a day late and a dollar short. You can’t make any plans to go if you wanted to.” (4)
- “I think you can say ‘you can go on the internet and find anything,’ but that doesn't focus you in on it. You sort of have to know what your looking for. Whereas somebody is sort of giving you ‘here's something, here's something’, I think TV stations do that right now.” (6)
- “It’s all great that everybody is doing good work, but really the majority of folks have no idea, including myself…what really is out there to help, and I don’t know how you can fix that.” (7)
- “A lot of organizations are very reliant on posting things online…I think that a lot of organizations don’t realize that everyone is not on a computer or doesn't have a mobile device to find these things.” (4)
Although identifying gaps in communication and information, local television news, and especially the Bangor Daily News, were highlighted as reliable and valuable sources of information for people in the community. The recently produced Senior Yellow Pages by Gateway Seniors Without Walls was identified as a valuable resource by several discussion participants.

- “The local TV stations do a real good job of cycling through both programs for elderly and things that are out there for opportunities for entertainment.” (6)
- “Every day in the BDN, there is what to do in the area. It will have a dozen different things.” (3)
- “If it’s not in the Bangor Daily News, or on the television, she [participant’s mother] doesn’t have any access.” (6)
- “My mom reads the paper, gets the BDN faithfully and will never touch a computer. Just will not touch a computer, so she relies on that for her information…Is there a way to bring the newspapers on board with a section that is dedicated to seniors in the paper?” (1)

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Big Ideas - Communication and Information

- “I don’t know if this already exists. I don’t know if there is a really good newsletter that goes out that keeps people aware of issues that are important.” (2)
- “A directory for senior citizens that would have lists of how to access different services.” (2)
Members of the discussion groups were overwhelmingly positive about the quality of health services in the Bangor-area, particularly the wide array of medical care offered. The only complaint raised across more than one group was a perceived high turnover rate of medical professionals which was viewed as inconvenient.

- “I’ve been able to find better medical care in Bangor than where I lived before and I’m talking about Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, and so on.” (1)
- “The reason we moved to Bangor was for the health care and we’ve been very happy.” (2)
- “The other draw, is in my opinion, world class medical care.” (3)
- “I went for five years seeing PAs. Once you get a provider, many times they come from overseas or out of state, they are fulfilling a requirement to serve an underserved area. So they do their three years in Bangor and head to Boston or New York.” (3)
- “I’ve had three different nurse practitioners [over 14 years]. I have a so-called primary care doctor that I’ve never seen…Right now I have nobody because the last one I had, she left and they haven’t hired another one until November.” (1)

One of the cross-cutting themes of the discussions was the desire for being able to access multiple health and community services under one roof, which is reflected in the “big ideas” for community and health services.

- “The idea of having this core, where everybody could go, it’s not just for this group or for this group, it’s for seniors. Period. I might go to get some information or someone who doesn’t have housing might go to get information, or somebody who just wants to recreate may go and get information about what’s available. It needs to be all encompassing, so it is not stereotyped in anyway.” (7)

### Big Ideas - Community and Health Services

- “A single story, multi-functional healthplex. A facility that could have part of its space associated with rehabilitation or continuous care and another part associated with intramural or recreational activities. Just a huge multipurpose healthplex.” (2)
- “The ability to have sort of centralized services in neighborhoods, so that it’s not ‘you have to go downtown for this, you’ve got to go to this hospital for this, or you’ve got to go to this strip mall’…if every neighborhood were able to have a service center there that is accessible to it.” (5)
Summary

Community discussions revealed multiple areas of potential focus in the development of an age-friendly action plan, as well as suggesting important considerations for design and accessibility that may improve satisfaction with any new or improved service or support.

The participants identified health services, outdoor spaces, cultural opportunities, and opportunities for civic participation as particular strengths of Bangor. The array of health services offered are viewed as a valuable asset to the community, as are the significant opportunities for outdoor activity. Municipal parks, the waterfront, and trail systems in the city were all overwhelmingly praised. Participants in the discussions also viewed Bangor as having numerous social opportunities, from entertainment, to civic engagement. Concerts, theatre, the Folk Festival, waterfront concerts, and a variety of private and municipal-sponsored activities were viewed as some of Bangor’s significant assets. In the case of civic engagement, the consensus is that there is no shortage of opportunities for citizens to get involved in volunteer activities.

Across the groups, strengthened transportation infrastructure, affordable housing and maintenance, improved sharing of community information, and the establishment of a senior center, were identified as areas where Bangor can make strides in supporting age-friendliness and livability.

While acknowledging city efforts to repair and replace damaged or poorly built sidewalks, participants across the groups identified sidewalks as a continuing challenge. Although a variety of areas were raised, Downtown sidewalks tended to be the location that people perceived as being most inadequate. The second aspect of transportation infrastructure identified as an area for development was the city bus system, the Community Connector. Although seeing much promise in the service, as well as being mindful of the fiscal challenges of bus services expansion, discussion participants perceived that limits in the hours and routes presented challenges for accessibility across a broad population. Comments were not all specifically focused on the transit system either - it was clear from participant comments that there is a broad concern about access to transportation as a barrier to a livable and age-friendly community.

Affordable housing was another cross-cutting theme from community discussions. Concerns
about affordable housing included a perceived lack of options for low-income individuals in the form of subsidized housing, as well as options for low-to-middle income individuals who may not qualify for subsidized housing, but are not able to afford non-subsidized options. In addition to concerns of the amount of housing stock, there was a significant worry across group discussions about the quality of housing stock and the financial burden that homeowners face in maintaining older dwellings, especially on a fixed income and as functional ability decreases with age.

There were members from each group who had been participants in the Hammond Street Senior Center or had family members who were, and there was across the board concern about the closing of the senior center and what that meant for opportunities for a common space for older adults to socialize. Even while acknowledging that other community organizations had picked up some of the functions of the Center, participants stated that there is still a gap in the community from this closure. In thinking about a possible future senior center, participants acknowledged past challenges related to parking and affordability that should be addressed, and envisioned a space that would go beyond entertainment to include other services and supports.

Next, members from across groups identified that getting centralized and up-to-date information on services, supports, and other news relevant to community members is a challenge. Local TV and newspapers were commonly identified as valued sources of information, but there was also a perception that there is no one centralized resource to get information to community members. Even when not explicitly mentioned by group participants, a common occurrence in the discussions was that an individual would identify some resource or service in Bangor that others in the group would be unaware of.

Finally, participants provided valuable feedback about their preferences for the design and organization of any current or future services or supports. Consistently mentioned was the need for any strategy supporting a more livable Bangor to take into account affordability, as well as the significant barriers posed by a lack of access to transportation. Next, centralized services and supports were advocated by community discussion participants, who envisioned co-located educational, entertainment, health and other services. Additionally, many discussion participants were open to, or encouraged, opportunities for engagement between generations. Whether it was integrated housing among age groups, or engaging young professionals in training to meet needs of older adults, people highlighted that inclusion of multiple generations is important.