



## **Tri Town 55+: An assessment of the assets and needs of the Madison and Chatham communities**

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**Submitted to:**

Lisa Gulla, Health Officer, and Samantha Bunsu, Health Educator, of the Madison Health Department on behalf of the Tri-Town 55+ Coalition

**Submitted by:**

Center for Research and Evaluation on Education and Human Services (CREEHS)  
College of Education and Human Services  
Montclair State University



**The following individuals contributed to this report:**

Eden N. Kyse, Ph.D., Director, CREEHS

Rebecca Swann-Jackson, M.Ed., Senior Research Associate

Kelsey Wilson, Research Assistant

Juliana Ardizzone, Graduate Research Assistant

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**Contact CREEHS:**

Center for Research and Evaluation on Education and Human Services (CREEHS)

Montclair State University

University Hall, Suite 3124

One Normal Avenue

Montclair, New Jersey 07043

Tel: (973) 655-4247; Fax: (973) 655-4048

Email: [evalcenter@montclair.edu](mailto:evalcenter@montclair.edu)

Website: [www.montclair.edu/cehs/creehs](http://www.montclair.edu/cehs/creehs)

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## Table of Contents

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Table of Contents .....	4
Introduction .....	1
Methods.....	1
Key Findings .....	2
Assets Identified.....	2
Asset Map .....	7
Prioritizing Needs .....	8
Conclusion .....	12
Recommendations .....	12
Appendix A: Data Collection Methods .....	A-1
Resident Survey .....	A-1
Focus Groups .....	A-2
Community Forums.....	A-3
Appendix B: Survey Results.....	B-1
Appendix C: Demographics of Respondents .....	C-1
Appendix D: Asset Map.....	D-1

## Introduction

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Through a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process, the Madison Health Department was awarded one of four planning grants from the Grotta Fund for Senior Care. The main objective of Madison Health Department's grant was to conduct a needs assessment to gain a better understanding of the characteristics, assets, needs, and future plans of community residents aged 55 years and older in Madison, Chatham Borough and Chatham Township.

The Center for Research and Evaluation on Education and Human Services (CREEHS) at Montclair State University (MSU) was contracted by the Madison Health Department to conduct a needs assessment and create an asset map of Madison, Chatham Borough, and Chatham Township. The Madison Health Department's expertise and experience with these three communities was key to the successful completion of the needs assessment. CREEHS is a university-based research and evaluation center designed to conduct state-of-the-art evaluation and applied research for enhancing program planning and success in order to foster a better educated, healthier, and more just society; to provide high-quality evaluation training and education; and to advance evaluation science by bridging the research and practice communities. CREEHS collaborates with and provides services to educational agencies and institutions, community organizations, and health-related government and human services agencies. Although CREEHS is housed within MSU's College of Education and Human Services, it is an independent, revenue-generating, and self-supporting entity.

One of the first actions of the Madison Health Department was to form a coalition of community stakeholders, named Tri Town 55+, whose membership included key staff from the Madison Health Department, Madison Senior Center, Senior Center of the Chathams, Madison Downtown Development Commission (DDC), Madison Senior Citizens Advisory Committee, Madison YMCA, Friends of the Madison Senior Center, government officials of all three communities, as well as CREEHS, which served as the research partner. This coalition met over the six months of the planning grant to discuss the progress of the needs assessment, provide feedback on data collection tools, participate in data collection activities, and review the results.

## Methods

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The needs assessment began with planning and instrument development in January 2016 and continued through analyses and final reporting in June 2016. The needs assessment employed both quantitative and qualitative methods including a resident survey completed in English by 360 adults aged 55 or older from Madison, Chatham Borough, and Chatham

Township , four focus groups (3 with residents and 1 with community partners), and two community forums. The survey was available online and in print; paper versions could be obtained at the Madison Senior Center, Senior Center of the Chathams, Madison YMCA, Madison Public Library, and Chatham Borough Hall. The community forums were open to all residents and community partners (i.e., members of community organizations, representatives from local businesses, and municipal leaders). The goal of the community forums was to share preliminary findings from the needs assessment survey and focus groups and engage residents and partners in prioritizing these findings based on importance. More information about the data collection methods used for this needs assessment are available in Appendix A, including the sampling plan, description of the instruments, and their respective participation rates. Further, Appendix B presents complete resident survey results.

## **Key Findings**

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The CREEHS team reviewed data collected from resident surveys; focus groups with residents and community partners; and community forums to determine and prioritize next steps. In order to increase reliability and credibility of this assessment, each of these data sources was analyzed individually and then synthesized with findings from the other data sources to identify patterns. Consistent patterns that were found among multiple data sources were considered key findings and are described in this section.

### ***Assets Identified***

Assets are the positive and effective people, programs, and places that help make a community a safe, healthy, and pleasant place to live. Survey and focus group participants were asked to name specifically the people, places, and things that they consider assets of the Tri-Town community and identify the most positive things about living in their town as they grow older. The following list presents the top 10 assets of the Tri-Town community as reported by participating residents in descending order:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Quotes were selected from survey and focus group participants who are residents or stakeholders of either Madison, Chatham Borough, or Chatham Township. It is important to point out that focus group participants could represent any of the three towns; thus, it cannot be assumed that a respondent from the Madison YMCA lives in Madison.

## 1. Libraries

Respondents indicated that the town libraries are great resources for the community.

Residents cited library events, informational programs, and lecture series as significant benefits for seniors. Community members also stated that it was an excellent place to go to stay up-to-date on community events, as the libraries have many flyers and

information posted on bulletin boards. Focus group participants stated the libraries act as a gathering place, which is particularly useful if the power goes out because the libraries have backup generators. While many positive things were reported regarding the libraries, participants suggested that an increase in the parking spaces at the Library of the Chathams would better accommodate all of the residents.

*“The Chatham Library sends a booklet, I think it’s [every] two months, and they mention a lot of things at least going on in the library that’s very helpful. Otherwise I wouldn’t have known anything about what was going on.”*

*–Madison Y focus group participant*

## 2. Senior Centers (of Madison and the Chathams)

Similar to libraries, respondents indicated that the best characteristics of the senior centers include the communal atmosphere, informational programs, transportation, and social events. The senior centers also host trips and have various classes for older adults in the community. Additionally, the senior centers are conveniently located and also have much diversified information on what is happening in Madison and the Chathams. Participants also stated the senior centers collaborate with other town entities, such as libraries, schools, and the health department. In one such case, the Madison Senior Center collaborated with the Health Department to distribute free flu shots to older adults in the Madison and Chatham communities.

*“...and the senior center is wonderful. Lectures, watercolor, I know they have bridge...They have a lot of nice offerings at the senior center. They have a little bus, it only costs a dollar. It’s brilliant.”*

*–Madison Y focus group participant*

### **3. People**

Citizens of Madison, Chatham Borough, and Chatham Township listed the people of the town itself as a strong asset. Neighbors, volunteers, town officials, police officers, and firefighters are all included in this category as respondents indicated that these people have a positive impact on the community and are willing to help others. Focus group participants stated there is a high level of generosity from neighbors and friends. For example, neighbors are willing to keep an eye on each other's homes as well as offer to watch children and drive others places if needed.

*"...The police department works very well with the older people and you can have a service so that if they don't get a call from you, they go and find out what's wrong. And that can be [a] tremendous service to somebody...Project Reassurance."*

*– Chatham Board of Trustees focus group participant*

### **4. Atmosphere**

Survey respondents designated the town ambience as a positive asset. Respondents stated the towns were quiet, safe, clean, and visually appealing as well as well-maintained in terms of landscaping and infrastructure. Respondents also reported feeling comfortable in this area because of its small town and family-oriented atmosphere. For example, participants reported that neighbors are friendly and care about one another and that they enjoy a high degree of safety on streets and in other common areas.

*"I feel very safe and I like the small town feel to both Madison and Chatham, because it's almost like we're one town we're so close to each other, and we've two police forces which makes you feel even safer."*

*–Madison Y focus group participant*

### **5. Location**

Geographical location was also listed by respondents as an asset. Citizens cited the close proximity to New York City as well as the abundance of medical facilities as community benefits. Additionally, residents liked that there are a number of close by shopping and restaurant options.

*"I think it's a small town atmosphere but yet it's in a big... area where you have access to everything—big city, beach, mountains—so I think maybe location and the small town feeling."*

*–Madison SCAC focus group participant*

## 6. *Schools*

Public schools in Madison and the Chatham were listed as an asset by survey respondents. K-12 schools in both towns are high achieving, in terms of the New Jersey Department of Education standards, and have a reputation for delivering an outstanding public school education. In addition to the K-12 schools, this area has three universities nearby: Drew University, Fairleigh Dickinson University, and the College of Saint Elizabeth. Residents stated that having the college students in and around the area adds a positive aspect to the town. Participants also discussed collaboration between the senior centers and local schools. The schools offer special programs at discount prices for older adults, as well as host informational classes regarding specific topic areas, such as technology.

*“...There’s a very big relationship between the [high school and senior center], where the high school offers special times for the seniors to come see the plays and I think they offer discounts on sporting events that they can come see. So there is a very big connection between the two of them.”*

*–Chatham Board of Trustees focus group participant*

## 7. *Madison-Area YMCA*

The YMCA in Madison brings people together by providing opportunities for older adults to socialize and connect others from all age groups and backgrounds. They also have healthy-living programs that are geared towards older adults, including fitness classes and water-based exercise classes. Additionally, the YMCA offers community programs such as informative lectures and health screenings to its members. As such, residents listed this a positive asset.

*“A lot of socialization and they get healthy and we have a lot of special need programs that are coming in. We have a Parkinson's program. We have a Live Strong for cancer, a diabetes program, and for MS we're starting a new program so you know it's a great place for people to come.”*

*–Madison SCAC focus group participant*

## **8. Walkability**

Particularly in Chatham Borough and Madison, walkability was presented as a positive feature of the town. The downtown area, grocery store, post office, pharmacy, library, and restaurants were all places that respondents indicated that they could walk to and around with ease. Additionally, Chatham Borough residents stated that there were more sidewalks available there compared to Chatham Township. This was an added safety benefit for key locations in town.

*“I love Chatham Borough, I can walk to everything...in the town, bank, restaurants, drug store, grocery store, happy as a clam.”*

*–Madison Y focus group participant*

## **9. Community Programs**

Community programs and activities at schools, the libraries, senior centers, and YMCA were all listed as positive assets to the Madison and Chatham communities. These programs include educational courses for older adults, social events, as well as healthy eating and active living initiatives.

*“[The Senior Center has] a balancing program now. So many seniors have fallen and it's taken a lot of lives and we just started--the senior center just added a balancing program to help prevent that from happening and we've gotten a terrific response of people for that. So, it'll be interesting to see how that works out.”*

*–Chatham Board of Trustees focus group participant*

## **10. Train/Rail Service**

Residents in Madison and the Chathams indicated that public transportation into the city via train was a positive aspect. The New Jersey Transit train provides a direct route to Midtown Manhattan and offers a discounted ticket price for seniors. Many commuters rely on the train to travel to New York City without having to drive. Additionally, seniors reported that the train service comes in handy for social and personal excursions.

*“Plus one big asset is the railroad...our trains into the city. Train goes from Dover to New York City so people who don't drive anymore have that aspect.”*

*–Chatham board of Trustees focus group participant*

## Asset Map

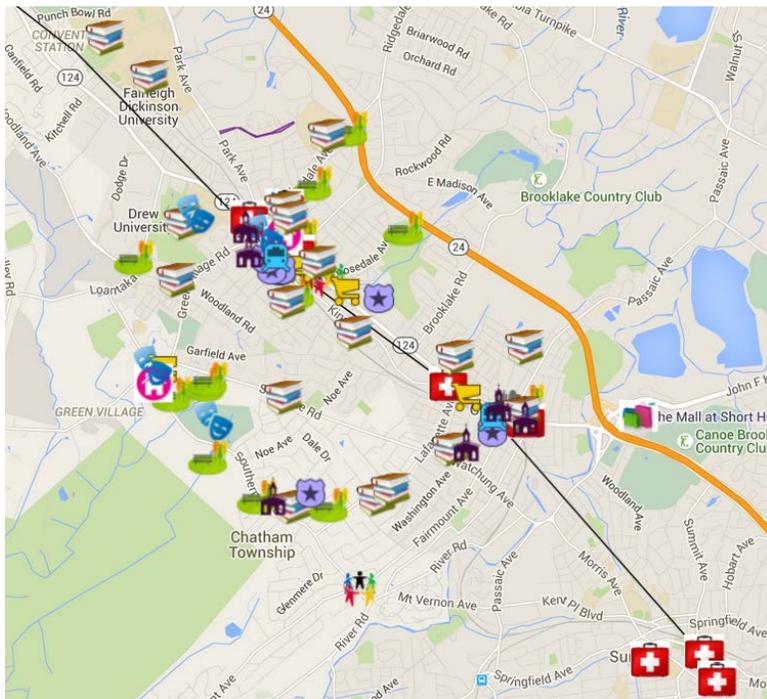
An asset map provides visual information about the strengths and resources of a community. More importantly, it displays in physical space key locations in a community.

CREEHS created an asset map through a feature called 'My Places' in Google Maps, a Web-based service that provides detailed information about geographical regions and sites around the world. This feature allows users to customize maps by adding markers, comments, routes, and other indicators. These maps can easily be shared with others and are accessible from multiple web browsers. The mapped assets were identified through survey and focus groups responses only; other locations that exist in the three towns but were not mentioned are not included. These assets were organized into the following ten layers (or categories) of the map:

1. Recreation and outdoor spaces
2. Healthcare and services
3. Community involvement and socialization
4. Shopping and restaurants
5. Housing
6. Education
7. Public safety and services
8. Entertainment
9. Transportation
10. Places of worship

The asset map, presented in Figure 1, is accessible at: <http://tinyurl.com/TriTown-Map>

**Figure 1. Tri Town 55+ Asset Map**



It is important to note that some community assets were unable to be mapped. These included people, town atmosphere, programs and activities, and walkability. Screenshots of each layer of the map and directions for navigating the map can be found in Appendix D.

## Prioritizing Needs

Initially, eight needs generated from survey and focus group responses were presented to the participants at the community forum, including *two* need statements for each of the following areas: communication, housing, transportation, and walkability. Community forum attendees were each given a packet with these eight preliminary need statements along with three green sticker dots and one yellow dot. Posters with these need statements were hung around the room at the community forums. Participants were asked to identify the needs most important to them by attaching the green dots on the corresponding poster. For the yellow dot, participants chose the need to which they were willing to commit their personal time and energy (e.g., sitting on or leading a committee). The following figure presents the aggregate results of the priorities of Tri-Town residents attending the community forums:

After this prioritization activity, further conversation ensued that helped the research team to better understand the needs of residents in all three towns combined. The research team honed the eight needs statements and reduced them by half addressing the following four areas: communication, housing, transportation, and walkability. Each of these need areas is presented in greater detail the following section.

**Figure 1. Priority Areas Identified by Community Forum Participants in All Towns (Total Number of Participants Indicating each Area as a Priority or Area of Commitment)**



As shown in Figure 1, the availability and affordability of appropriate housing was of highest importance to seniors in the Tri-Town communities. Community forum participants also identified transportation as an issue important to them.

## Housing

### **Need Statement 1: Tri Town residents would like to stay in town but are unable to find housing appropriate for their needs and budgets.**

Participants stated that there is a lack of appropriate senior housing in the Tri Town area. This includes smaller homes, one-level ranch style homes, and apartment complexes geared towards aging adults.

Residents stated that existing smaller homes were being bought, demolished, and turned into larger homes for young families, and therefore older adults are unable to downsize to smaller homes and stay in town.

Additionally, participants recommended, if a senior community were to be built, that ideally it should be in an area that is walkable to main areas of town so seniors who cannot drive will be able to access basic needs, such as the grocery store, post office, and transportation options.

Affordability was a common theme in the focus groups, survey, and community forums. Residents expressed concern that the cost to own properties and their related taxes in Madison, Chatham Borough, and Chatham Township are too high to sustain long-term, and make it almost impossible for older adults on fixed incomes to age-in-place. As such, residents suggested fixed-price housing communities, or tax freezes and rebates for older adults. Respondents also noted that the Tri Town area has a lot of positive qualities, in terms of programs, services and locations; although they do not want to leave the area, they may be forced to because of affordability concerns.

*“I’m not sure if I could afford to have the kind of housing I would like, i.e. a nice, small house or townhouse that affords some privacy, but within walking distance of downtown and transportation to other areas of NJ.”*

*– Madison survey respondent*

*“People would like to stay in their homes or nearby and be able to access all the things we have available, and I just read recently that they were supposed to build a 55 and older community on Park Avenue eventually but I don’t think I’ll still be alive [by] the time they get it done. But the property in this area is so expensive that they ... can’t afford to do that.”*

*– Madison YMCA focus group participant*

## Transportation

**Need Statement 2: Seniors who no longer drive may lose their sense of independence and be further isolated because current transportation options are limited in terms of times available, days available, and places accessible.**

Focus group participants noted that the Tri Town community currently has some existing options for transportation. Some seniors currently drive themselves as a primary form of transportation; however, these adults realize that this may not be a long-term option for them and recognize the need to identify affordable alternatives for transportation when they can no longer drive. In focus groups and the community forum, participants discussed senior bus services, ACCESS Link availability, the Morris Area Paratransit System (MAPS), taxi services, and local train stations that go to and from New York City. While they noted these options were satisfactory there is a need for more availability and flexibility of these existing options. Seniors noted that expanding the dates and times of the available Senior Bus or van service would help to reach more adults in the Tri Town community. Others suggested that the senior bus/van service have a set route with a timetable schedule could facilitate the ability for seniors to take advantage of this service. Further, survey respondents indicated that they would be willing to pay a nominal fee—e.g., 44% of survey respondents were willing to spend up to \$5.00 for round-trip transportation services (See Question 28 in Appendix B).

*“Increase the times of service availability of the Senior Bus/Van service. Provide more readily-available information about how to use the Senior Bus/Van service.”*  
– Madison survey respondent

*“I think all ages would benefit from a down town shuttle. It would be useful for kids and cut down on parking/congestion in town. Environmentally positive. I am not interest[ed] in things that isolate older people from the community.”*  
– Madison survey respondent

## Walkability

**Need Statement 3: Seniors are deterred from walking in Madison and Chatham Borough<sup>2</sup> because of safety concerns, such as speeding vehicles, traffic, unsafe crossings, uneven pavement, and lack of sidewalks.**

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<sup>2</sup> Chatham Township is not included in this statement because it does not have a walkable downtown area.

Madison and Chatham Borough have walkable downtown areas; however, many focus group and community forum participants expressed concern about the safety of older adults walking in and around the town. Residents cited speeding, a lack of crosswalks, and poor sidewalk conditions as cause for concern. In order to remedy this, participants suggested that a greater police presence could enforce speeding and pedestrian laws, and sidewalks could be repaired by the respective towns. Seniors felt that it is important that the Tri Town area encourage walkable neighborhoods, particularly so that older adults can access community resources and downtown areas, exercise, and socialize.

*"I like to walk for exercise and fresh air, but I am concerned for my safety when I walk...People, and not just teens, drive too fast in neighborhoods. I would like to see articles in the local paper about good driving habits. I'd also like to see crosswalk rules enforced."*

*– Chatham Borough survey respondent*

*"When I stop driving, my accessibility to 'downtown' will be considerably curtailed - if not eliminated!"*

*– Madison survey respondent*

## **Communication**

**Need Statement 4: The towns need a senior-friendly, centralized source of information, such as a telephone number, mail, radio, or local television station.**

Seniors in the Tri Town community primarily receive information about town services, activities, and events through word-of-mouth, mail, radio, local television station, or local newspapers ***not*** town websites or digital resources. Since there are so many different ways to communicate, older adults in these areas stated that they are sometimes unaware of programs and services for their age group. Many of these residents reported that if communication about these events improved then these events would be better attended and increasingly utilized. Residents in the Tri Town area suggested that there be a centralized information source to transmit all of this information, such as a telephone hotline or 800-number, regular mailing of a community calendar, and radio or local television broadcasts. Ideally, this form of communication would include events, services, and programs from the libraries, YMCA, senior centers, and other locations on one document or verbal announcement. It is important to consider the method used to

*"We keep talking about going on Rosenet that's a passive way to communicate. We put things out in the Madison Eagle that's got a terribly small circulation right now. The other two are TAPINTO and Madison Patch and those are online, but they're passive so we have to somehow continue to assess how we're communicating ... as opposed to making people come to you." "It is difficult to use any "service" when the information on how and what is so poorly publicized."*

*– Madison SCAC focus group participant*

advertise community events and services as some older adults do not regularly use computers or emails and would likely benefit from a tangible flyer or newsletter being delivered to their home.

## Conclusion

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The needs assessment helped the Tri Town 55+ Coalition to zero in on the primary concerns of seniors in their towns. Overall, the survey response was adequate for drawing conclusions about the data and well-represented the ages and demographic composition of the towns (as shown in Appendix A). In addition, participants engaged in lively conversation during the focus groups and community forums and readily shared their ideas for solving the community's challenges, which suggests that their feedback was both honest and genuine. The coalition worked together to identify the "low-hanging fruit" from this needs assessment; that is, they have prioritized the actions that can be undertaken quickly and easily and may be a first step in addressing the larger needs of these three communities.

## Recommendations

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CREEHS submits the following recommendations to amplify the assets and address the actionable needs in the Tri Town community. These recommendations are presented in bold font and sub-bullets identify suggested actions for implementing these recommendations:<sup>3</sup>

- 1. Each of the three towns should create a senior-friendly, centralized source of information, such as a telephone number, regular mailing, or local radio or television broadcast that could share news and resources, as well as advertise community events.**
  - Create hotlines (e.g., 800-numbers or local phone numbers) staffed by interns or other staff
  - Advertise the hotlines to the community using print advertisements in local newspapers or inserted into town mailings, or local radio or television commercials
  - Identify a local television or radio station that could regularly broadcast necessary information for seniors a few times a day
  - Create a resource guide that could be mailed to seniors
  - Generate a living frequently-asked-question list for the staff of the hotline

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the implementation of these suggestions are subject to the approval and fiscal ability of the three towns.

- 2. Each town should consider expanding its senior bus or van schedule to accommodate a greater number of available hours per day and per week.**
  - Provide a shuttle or circulator bus that runs a standard loop or route
  - Make information about taxis and Uber services more readily available
  - Increase the amount of days/times the current senior bus runs
  - Expand the existing route to include surrounding towns as well, not just Madison and the Chathams
  - Utilize idle school buses during school hours in order to increase bus services for seniors
  - Charge a moderate fee (up to \$5), as needed, for transportation beyond the standard hours of the senior bus and van service
  - Review transportation plans from other towns that have been successful in this area
- 3. The three towns should collectively create a position for a Senior Coordinator who could oversee the implementation of action steps emerging from this needs assessment. Further, this staff person would be responsible for advocating for the needs of seniors, including housing, walkability, and transportation.**
  - Explore what is available on the local, state, and federal levels, public and private, for funding of subsidized housing
  - Advocate for the building of affordable townhouses within walking distance of the center of town
  - Research the possibility of shared housing or senior village sites
- 4. Madison and Chatham Borough should address safety concerns that deter seniors from walking in town, such as speeding vehicles, traffic, unsafe crossings, uneven pavement, and lack of sidewalks.**
  - A Walkability Audit currently is being performed by the Madison Area YMCA. The Tri Town 55+ Coalition has agreed to table any action on walkability until the audit is complete