

# Health and Social Environment

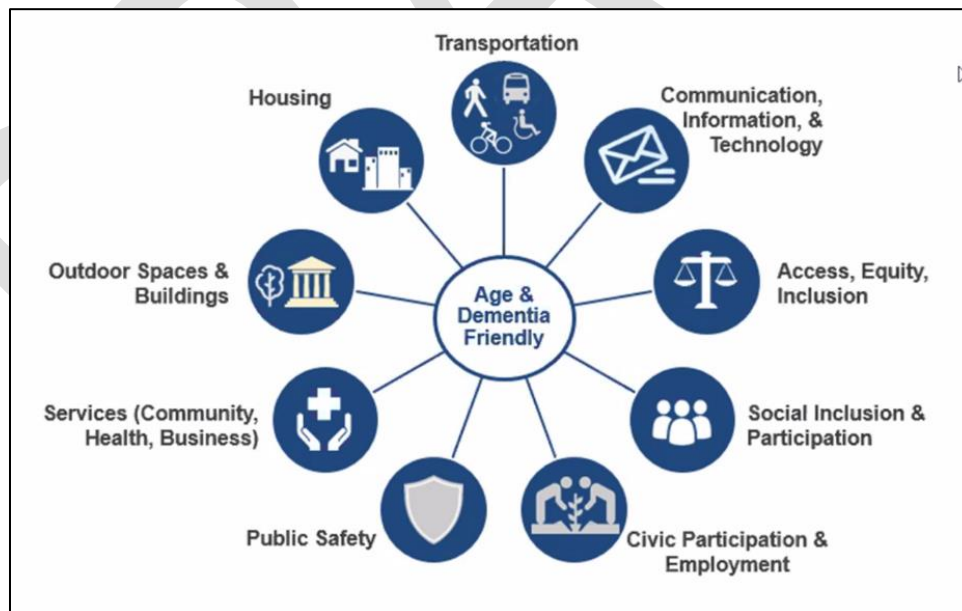
## 1. Introduction

### Chapter Overview

How a community is set up impacts how people interact with one another; whether they can access basic needs such as food, employment, health care, and places to be active; and ultimately the overall resiliency of the community in the face of climate change. Likewise, a community's ability to support and connect with vulnerable and historically marginalized populations makes it a more inclusive and welcoming place for everyone. This chapter highlights ways that the built and social environments can support the health of people of all ages to create resiliency and enable residents to lead long and healthy lives.

The Health and Social Environment chapter looks at Hatfield through the lens of the domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community, a model that was developed by the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative. As people live longer, there is a strong likelihood that they will have some form of dementia in their later years.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1 - The Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community**



Source: Mass. Healthy Aging Collaborative

<sup>1</sup> According to information from the Alzheimer's Association, it is estimated that one in three people over the age of 85 will have some form of dementia in their later years.

The “nine domains” include aspects of the social and built environments, public safety, communication, and community services that support community livability and the health of all residents, particularly those who may be living with cognitive or physical impairments that become more prevalent in older age. Providing support and removing barriers can help older adults as well as younger people living with disabling conditions to fully participate in the community and lead long and healthy lives and can also create a more livable community for people of all ages.

In order to understand the needs of older residents of Hatfield, the regional “Age and Dementia Friendly Community Survey” was mailed to all Hatfield residents over the age of 60 by the Hatfield Council on Aging. Of 650 surveys that were mailed out, there were 85 responses for a response rate of 13%. All respondents were over the age of 60 and 48% were over the age of 70. According to survey respondents, the top three areas that the Town should focus on in the next five years are:

Housing (61%)

Transportation (54%), and

Health and Community Services (52%)

As housing and transportation are addressed in other chapters of this plan, we will only highlight in this chapter the aspects of those domains that most impact older residents.

### **Connecting Themes**

Themes of resiliency, social connection and inclusion, opportunities to be active, housing, transportation and communication thread through many of the chapters of the Hatfield Comprehensive Plan. The prevalence of farms in Hatfield, and an aging population (including aging farmers) is also a theme in this Plan, and an asset to the health of the Town’s residents as fresh locally grown food is in good supply. These themes overlap with those of a healthy community, as health is affected by the physical and social environment in which people live, work and play; access to healthy food and places to be active; clean and affordable housing with accessibility features if needed; education and employment; and opportunities for social connection and civic engagement.

People over the age of 65 are the fastest growing age group in Hatfield as well as in cities and towns throughout the state and around the world due to the fact that people are living longer and having fewer children. This population is also identified as one that is highly vulnerable to extreme weather events caused by climate change, and to pandemics due to immune systems that tend to grow weaker with age. By using the lens of the domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community, this chapter highlights aspects of the built and social environments that support healthy aging, social connectivity and resilience.

Planning for an aging population is not intended to leave out younger populations, particularly youth who are experiencing extraordinary mental health challenges. The purpose for planning for the older generations is to remove the barriers that arise as people lose physical and/or cognitive capacity with age. Challenges also arise for people living in poverty, people whose first language is not English, people who are discriminated against due to race, ethnicity, religion, LGBTQIA status, etc. By addressing barriers that impact these historically marginalized communities, the whole population benefits.

## 2. Existing Conditions

Similar to most communities in the region, state, and nation, Hatfield's population is aging. Between 2015 and 2021, the share of the population 65 and older increased from 18.4% to 23.2%, while the population under the age of 18 dropped slightly from 16.9% to 16.5% over the same time period (Figure 2). People are living longer, with life expectancies rising into the 80s in many places, while at the same time younger generations are having fewer children. As people age, they have a greater chance of losing both physical and cognitive capacities which can limit their ability to participate fully in their communities.

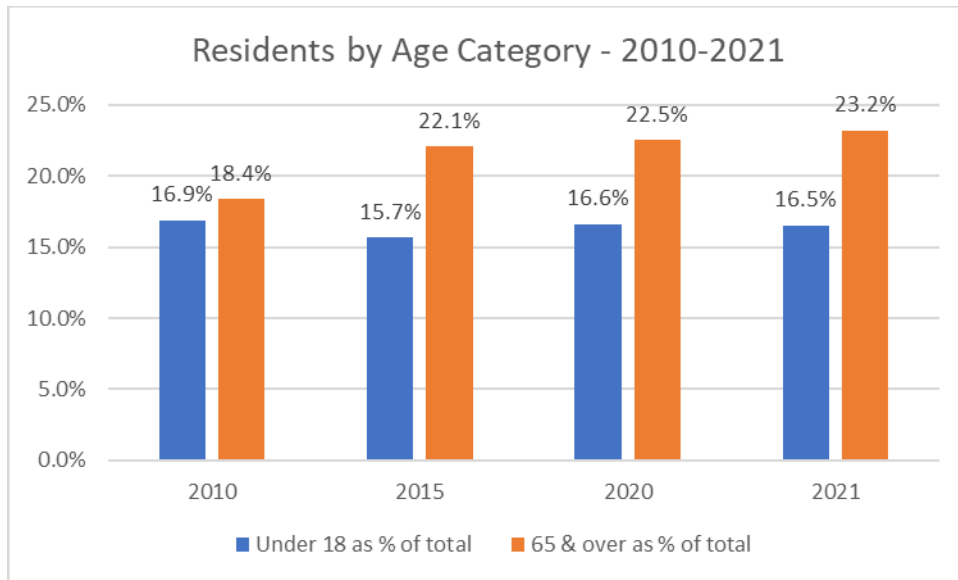
Most people with disabling conditions in Hatfield fall in the 75 and older age group, and this population also has the fastest growing number of people with disabilities (Figure 3). Barriers such as curbs without ramps or stairs without wheelchair ramps can prevent people with disabling conditions from accessing sidewalks or services, resulting in fewer opportunities to fully participate in community activities or to access basic needs such as food.

According to a data visualization map from the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) National Hospital Care Survey, of life expectancies at, Hatfield's life expectancy at birth (for the period 2010-2015) was 79, slightly lower than neighboring communities of Williamsburg and Whately, but higher than the northeastern corner of Northampton which had a life expectancy of 77.5.<sup>2</sup> These numbers likely changed after the pandemic which disproportionately caused fatalities for older age groups due to generally weaker immune systems. The pandemic also highlighted disparate health outcomes for communities of color who have faced systemic barriers to accessing health care, adequate housing, and many other factors that contribute to good health.

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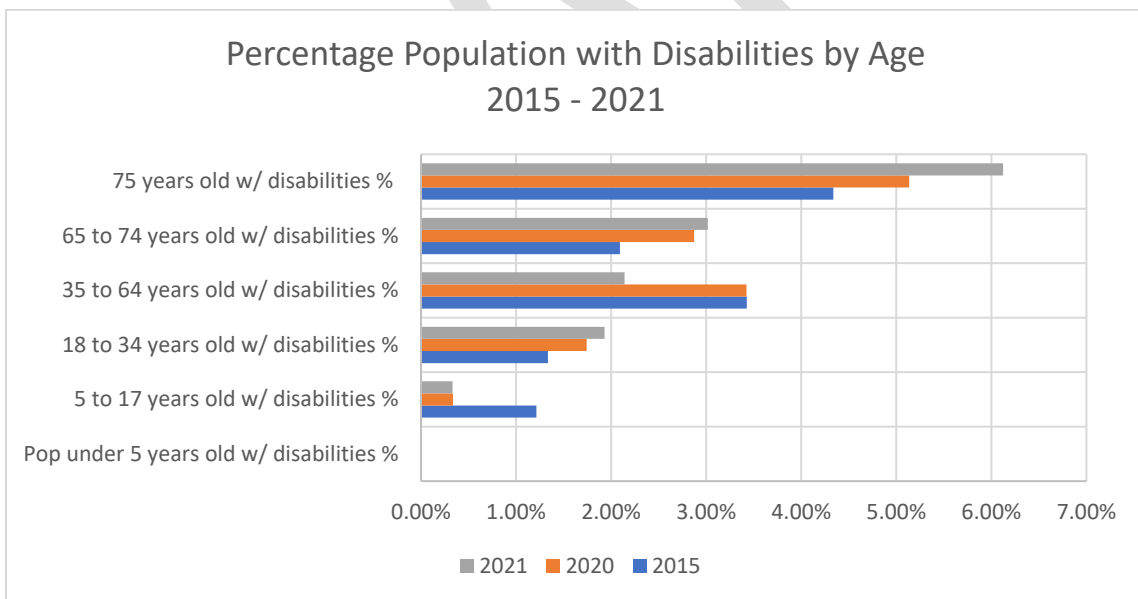
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data-visualization/life-expectancy/>

**Figure 2 – Residents by Age Category – 2010-21**



Source: US Census Table S0101: ACS 5-year estimates (2010, 2015, 2020, 2021)

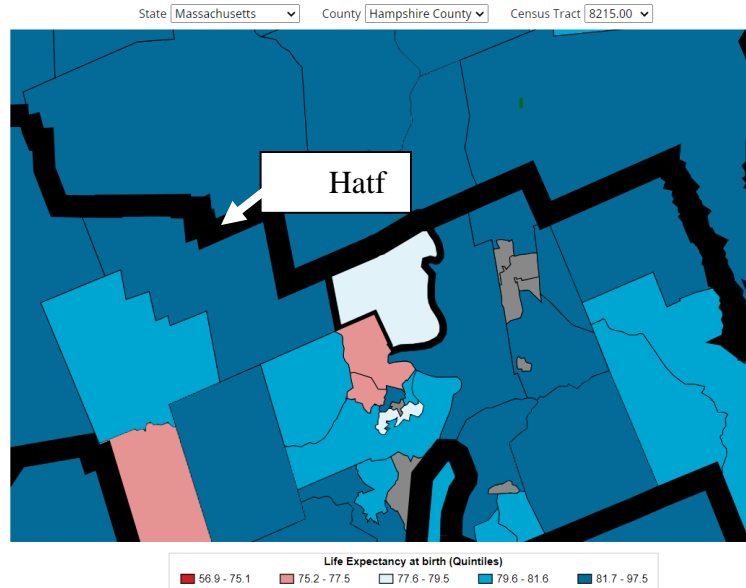
**Figure 3 - Population with Disabilities by Age**



Source: US Census Table B18101: ACS 5-year estimates (2021)

Although Hatfield’s population is primarily white, there are increasing number of residents of other races and ethnicities, and a growing number of people who identify as Hispanic living in Hatfield according to recent Census data.

**Figure 4 - Life expectancy map of Hatfield and surrounding communities**



Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data-visualization/life-expectancy/index.html>

## Housing

Past plans for Hatfield have highlighted the limited number of housing opportunities for young families and older residents who want to move into smaller and more manageable housing. As the population ages and the number of people with disabilities continues to rise, it is also important to have accessible housing available, or programs in place to modify existing housing for accessibility and safety.

The 2014 Regional Housing Plan noted “the critical need for more accessible housing to meet existing and growing demand,” and also “the need for more concerted efforts to integrate accessible housing and housing with supportive services into our planning for market-rate and affordable housing development.” The 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) for Cooley Dickinson Hospital states that “as the population continues to age, available housing will actually decrease as older people are likely to live in households of only one or two people. This will put an increased strain on housing in an area where over half of residents are “housing burdened,” which means they pay more than 30% of their income in housing costs.”<sup>3</sup> The CHNA illuminates major disparities in housing by race, and notes that these disparities appear to be worsening based on median income figures broken out by race. Rental rates continue to rise, creating further disparities. Older houses require more maintenance, need updates, and cost more to heat. In addition, older houses may have heating, ventilation, and air

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cooleydickinson.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Cooley-Dickinson-2022-Community-Health-Needs-Assessment-v2.pdf>

conditioning (HVAC) and other issues that exacerbate chronic pulmonary conditions such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).<sup>4</sup>

Seventy-one percent of respondents to the Age and Dementia Friendly Survey said that they currently live in single family homes, most (61%) said that it was extremely important for them to stay in Hatfield as they age. Sixty percent of residents said it was extremely important to be able to stay in their current homes. However, when asked if a change in circumstances were to require a move, most (51%) said that they would prefer to live in senior independent living units, and only 20% in single family homes. Life changes can come quickly and unexpectedly the older we get, including losing cognitive abilities due to Alzheimer's or other dementias, losing a spouse, vision or hearing loss, or mobility challenges due to a fall. So, although many people may want to stay in their homes they may need to move or have assistance to remain at home. Many people do not have family nearby and must rely on public or private care systems. Staff at the Senior Center shared the need for emergency housing for people who have been evicted due to rising rents, or who are not currently housed. Currently there are no temporary housing units located in Hatfield.

More than 32% of households in Hatfield are people who live alone, and 46.7% of single person households are people over the age of 65. With the increase in the percentage of the total population being over the age of 65, comes the need for smaller housing units that are more affordable and easier to maintain.

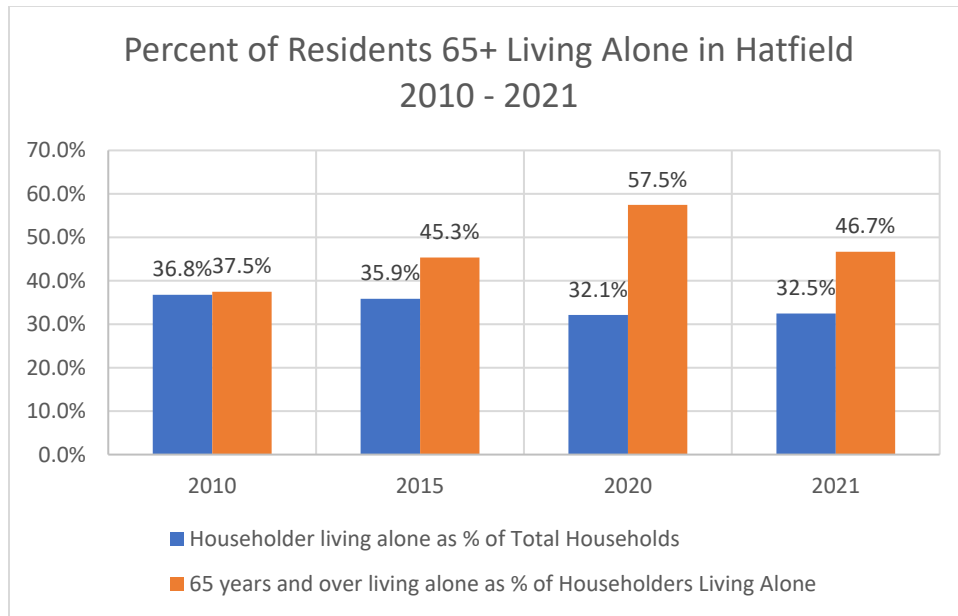
Financial worries are prevalent among older adults, with 12% of survey respondents saying that the housing that they live in now is not affordable. Forty-four percent of respondents said that their finances are OK now, but they are worried about the future. Six percent said that financial security is their biggest worry. The shortage of rental properties and the rising rents impact people on fixed incomes, as well as the people providing services, such as home health care and driving the Senior Center van.

Capawonk Housing, located in the Town Center, offers smaller affordable housing units for older adults, but is located in the floodplain along with the Town Hall and Senior Center. Participants at the listening session at the Hatfield Senior Center suggested that the facility needs to be expanded and moved (along with public buildings) out of the floodplain. They also noted that there is no generator at Capawonk, or places to park bicycles. Private rental units are scarce, and listening session participants note that landlords of some of the few rental properties in town are taking advantage of the housing market and selling the buildings, displacing renters who have nowhere else in town to go.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cooleydickinson.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Cooley-Dickinson-2022-Community-Health-Needs-Assessment-v2.pdf>

**Figure 5 - Residents Living Alone in Hatfield**



*Source: US Census Table DP02: ACS 5-year estimates (2021)*

### **Aging in Place**

If an affordable assisted living or other long-term care facility is not available or affordable, or if people have decided to stay in their own homes as they age, some additional services may be needed. When asked whether people living independently are facing any barriers, 55% say that they had difficulty finding reliable and affordable contractors for home modifications or repairs, 47% say they have difficulty finding help with yard work or snow shoveling, and 35% have difficulty finding personal care or housekeeping services.

Adapting existing homes to accommodate physical or cognitive limitations that may arise with age can help people to remain in their homes when other more accessible options are not available. According to 2019 American Housing Survey data, approximately 19.6% of all housing units in New England are “Aging Ready,”<sup>5</sup> meaning they have a bedroom, bathroom on the first level, have a step-free entryway, and have at least one bathroom safety feature such as an elevated toilet or grab bars.

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<sup>5</sup> Aging Ready Homes in the United States: Perception vs. Reality of Aging-Accessibility Needs (2019). <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2023/demo/p23-219.pdf>

## **Transportation**

Transportation often becomes an issue for people as they age and can no longer drive. Hatfield is served by the Franklin Regional Transit Authority, which provides one fixed bus route in Hatfield. The Senior Center provides van transportation with two vans that are owned by the Town. Rides must be reserved in advance and must be taken during the hours the Senior Center is open. The Senior Center also offers trips to shopping areas on designated days.

Ninety percent of survey respondents say that they currently drive themselves, but 26% also say that a family member drives them, and 20% say that they walk as a primary means of transportation, 13% use senior center vans, and 10% bike. When driving is no longer an option, 83.5% of respondents say that they would like to use senior center vans, 49% volunteer ride service, 38% fixed route bus, 32% want safe routes to walk and bike. Especially where public transportation is limited, people want to have transportation services that offer flexibility and independence when they can no longer drive.

As a member of the FRTA service area, Hatfield has the opportunity to join the Access program which provides on-demand services through a mobile application or phone reservation system. Some Village or Neighbor networks in nearby communities offer volunteer ride services that are highly popular as they provide added flexibility to destinations outside the normal service area and during hours when other services are not available.

The desire to have safe places to walk and bike is important for people as they age, for exercise as well as to do errands (if services are nearby) and as opportunities for social interaction. Participants at the listening session commented that Hatfield has sidewalks in the town center, and that the flat topography makes the town a pleasant place to walk and bike. However, 33% of survey respondents say that shoulders or sidewalks are needed on some roads for safer walking and 29% say that speed limits need to be enforced. Some participants in the listening session note areas where sidewalks are not available or where connections need to be made to the existing sidewalk network.

The Town could benefit from participating in the Complete Streets program which provides funding for communities that adopt Complete Streets policies to develop Prioritization Plans, and to build projects that are included in those plans.<sup>6</sup>

## **Buildings and Outdoor Spaces**

Accessible public buildings and spaces inside and out provide opportunities for social interaction and civic engagement. Indoor spaces that are cool in the summer and offer

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.mass.gov/complete-streets-funding-program>



programming in winter months provide opportunities for year-round fitness and social connection and can serve as warming or cooling shelters during emergencies. The current Senior Center in Hatfield is located in the basement of the Town Hall. While it has recently been renovated, participants at the listening session for older adults commented that it could benefit from a fitness room and bathrooms that are updated to improve safety and accessibility. Many survey respondents (44%) said that the Town needs a new Senior Center. The Town Hall as well as the Fire Station, Library and Police Station are all located within the Connecticut River's floodplain, making them unreliable to serve as emergency shelters during possible flood emergencies.

Survey respondents and participants at the Listening Session also commented that the library is currently not accessible. The Master Plan from 2001 also says that a new, expanded or renovated structure is needed to support the needs of Hatfield residents and to protect the collection. Libraries can be valuable gathering places and hosts for programming as well as providing access to computers and internet. Some libraries also offer training in how to use devices for people who are less comfortable with technology.

The survey asked what could be done to increase usage of public buildings and outdoor spaces in the community. In addition to wanting a new or larger senior center, 41% want benches in parks and along walking routes, 40% public restrooms, 38% signs or maps identifying trail difficulty and accessibility, and 36% want more accessible trails. In the open comments to this question, respondents call for a bike trail or extension of the rail trail, conveniently located waste containers, and public restrooms near the rail trail.

According to the 2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan there is a demand for additional, varied opportunities for passive and active recreation at a wider variety of recreational venues, as well as better maintenance of facilities. Among the potential additions are pickleball/tennis courts at Smith Academy, a bike trail between Elm Court and Damon Road, improved access to the Mill River; striping of roads for bike lanes and wider shoulders; and creation of new sidewalks with a view to expanding the Town's "pedestrian circuit."<sup>7</sup>

There is currently an accessible walking loop around the athletic fields at Smith Academy, where the addition of benches would encourage those who need to rest during walks. There may also be opportunities to link recreational or open space areas with in-town trails or better sidewalk networks, as walking/jogging on sidewalks is the activity in which most (more than 90%, according to the OSRP survey) residents participate. Better pedestrian linkages among recreational and open space resources in the village center and other areas of town also serve as opportunities to improve accessibility for

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<sup>7</sup> 2023 Draft OSRP, p. 57

Hatfield's senior and disabled residents. The addition of accessible portable restrooms or signs to public restrooms (and the hours that they would be open) would also be welcome resources for older adults.

Participants at listening sessions have noted that there is not currently a playground that people with young children can use while school is in session. A public space that includes accessible playground equipment, benches and tables that can also accommodate people with wheelchairs could serve as a gathering place for all ages and abilities.

### **Services (Health, Business, Community)**

Health and Community Services ranked in the top three areas that survey respondents thought that the Town should focus on in the next five years. Services provided by the Senior Center, or volunteer-run programs such as a Neighbors network (in place currently in Northampton, Amherst and Easthampton) can help with basic tasks that become more difficult as people age in their homes. Having access to health care is important for healthy aging as people become more likely to have multiple morbidities than younger people. Less than half of survey respondents answered the question about whether they were having any difficulty with accessing health care. Of those who did respond, many (13 respondents or 39%) had difficulty scheduling non-emergency medical appointments. Services or programs that were lacking in Hatfield (as well as other places) include home care or home health care providers, and support services for people with dementia. According to survey respondents, 18% say affordable, certified home health care providers were poor or not available; 18% say that support or programming for caregivers of people with dementia was poor or unavailable.

Educating businesses such as banks and municipal offices about the signs and stages of dementia can prevent misunderstandings and direct people to the help that they need.

Support for family caregivers or spouses of people with dementia becomes increasingly important as private caregiving services are less available, or if people don't qualify for subsidized services provided by the Area Agency on Aging (Highland Valley Elder Services for Hatfield). This support can be in the form of groups or respite care, or providing flexible work schedules for caregivers who have to take a loved one to medical appointments or prepare meals for them at home. Survey responses reflect the numbers involved in caregiving and lack of available support:

- 11% of survey respondents had either been diagnosed with Alzheimer's or other dementia or had a family member who was diagnosed
- 14% percent said they provided caregiving services to a family member, with seven saying they were the primary caregiver of an older adult while two were primary caregivers for their grandchildren, and four said that they shared caregiving services.

- Seven respondents who were caregivers said they did not have adequate access to respite services or support groups.

### **Communication, Social Participation & Inclusion**

Social participation is critical to good health especially for older people who may be living on their own. The pandemic highlighted the importance of technology – including access to computers, tablets, affordable internet service, and the knowledge of how to use technology – for social connection and civic participation. Seventeen survey respondents said that they needed training on how to use technology, and fifteen wanted training on how to use video communication platforms. Eight respondents said that they were not interested in using technology.

Survey respondents were asked about feelings of loneliness and isolation. While most (63%) said that they often felt well supported, 14% said that they rarely or never felt this way. Twenty-two percent of respondents said that they feel lonely some of the time, and 27% said that they feel left out of their community some of the time. The Senior Center serves as a center for social engagement as well as providing critical services for older residents. Many attend congregate lunches or fitness classes offered in the main function room at the Senior Center. However, the facility does not have its own kitchen and would benefit from additional space and fitness equipment.

### **Public Safety, Emergency Preparedness and Climate Change**

Social connection is also important for the purposes of emergency preparedness. Eighteen percent of respondents said they did not feel well informed about what to do in the case of a power outage. Survey respondents were, for the most part, not overly concerned with the increase in extreme heat or weather events. Eighteen percent said that their health has been moderately impacted by extreme heat, 7% said their health had been severely or very severely impacted, and 14% were extremely or very concerned about the increased number of days of extreme heat. Only five percent said that they had been very or severely impacted by increased downpours and 5% very or extremely concerned about downpours.

## **3. Challenges and Opportunities**

Historically, challenges affecting older adults and other vulnerable or marginalized populations in Hatfield have generally only come up in relation to housing. More recently, older adult vulnerability to climate change has been raised. To improve the health and longevity of all of Hatfield's residents, it is important to plan for residents of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds early in the planning process and across the range of challenges and opportunities.

## **Housing for All Ages & Abilities**

Based on waiting lists for affordable senior housing and anecdotes from people attending the listening session for older adults, there is a need for more affordable and accessible housing that can allow older residents to stay in the community when they need to downsize due to increases in housing costs such as taxes, fuel, and maintenance or a change in circumstances such as the loss of a spouse. Participants at town-wide listening sessions have also noted the desire to attract younger people to the community and how this might be coupled with needs for older adults. Smaller housing units close to services and with access to safe places to walk and bike would serve older residents looking to downsize, as well as young people starting out in careers and families. At the same time, this movement of older adults to smaller units, could open up single family homes.

Several participants at the listening session for older adults noted the large frontage requirements in the town center. Infill on existing properties, allowing detached accessory apartments such as tiny homes in back yards would allow for greater density in the town center (or possibly new town center out of the floodplain) without significantly changing the character of the neighborhood. Another approach would be to allow single family homes to be converted to two or more smaller units to allow for greater density and smaller, more affordable housing units. People at the listening session for older adults suggested moving the Capawonk housing due to its location in the floodplain and expanding it to accommodate more older residents who wish to stay in the community and age in place.

Accessibility features and energy saving measures can help people to age in their homes more safely and affordably. Home modification loan and grant programs can help people to age in place by providing low interest loans for adding accessibility features inside the home or building a wheelchair ramp. Energy audits can help to save homeowners money and make homes more comfortable by preventing heat from escaping. Helping older residents navigate solar installation contractors or programs would also promote climate resiliency while protecting residents from potential fraud. For older adults who need more support services, converting larger single-family homes into small congregate housing facilities with shared services could allow people to stay in Hatfield with some added support services. This could also be a good adaptable re-use of large historic homes located in the town center (as long as they are not directly in the floodplain).

## **Buildings and Outdoor Spaces**

According to the 2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan there is a demand for additional, varied opportunities for passive and active recreation such as building pickleball/tennis courts at Smith Academy, a bike trail between Elm Court and Damon Road, improved

access to the Mill River; striping of roads for bike lanes and wider shoulders; and creation of new sidewalks with a view to expanding the Town’s “pedestrian circuit.”<sup>8</sup>

The OSRP also mentions opportunities to link recreational or open space areas with in-town trails or better sidewalk networks. Planning linkages with universal design in mind will make networks available to residents of all ages and abilities. If all trails are not accessible, providing a map on paper and online that ranks trails by difficulty and level of accessibility can allow people to use the trails that best suit their abilities. Other amenities that would encourage use by older residents and people with disabilities include accessible public restrooms and benches that would allow for resting and socializing.

Interest in a new Senior Center as well as the need for a new school, improving accessibility of library, and general discussions about relocating public buildings outside of the floodplain could open an opportunity for buildings that allow for multiple uses and community connections.

### **Public Safety and Resilience**

Quoting from the Massachusetts State Hazard Mitigation and Climate Action Plan, the Town’s recent Hazard Mitigation Plan notes, “in most natural hazard events, the vulnerability of a population is largely dependent on local preparedness and availability of human resources for social services staffing and supplies distribution... preparing for emergencies by training a large group of public and professional responders to ensure continuity of operations during a hazard event can be a critical tool for mitigating the overall impacts of any hazard event.” As a smaller community, Hatfield may not have as many public and professional responders to a natural disaster, but keeping the community informed about emergency preparedness, and enabling community networks can reduce the impacts on the most vulnerable individuals in town. Smaller neighborhood networks or associations may already be in place for some given their living environment. Many residents of Capawonk Housing, for example, regularly attend Senior Center lunches and have the beginnings of a community network in place.

### **Access to Healthy Food**

Although most survey respondents did not indicate that food insecurity was a problem, the Town could make better connections with local farms to ensure that fresh locally grown food is served in schools and other congregate settings such as the Senior Center. Building a strong Farm to School program that teaches children how to grow food and utilizes locally grown produce for school lunches could enrich the connections between youth and the farming community. With facilities to prepare food such as a commercial

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<sup>8</sup> 2023 Draft OSRP, p. 57

kitchen, the Senior Center could also play an important role in building a stronger connection with local farms.

### **Communication and Social Inclusion**

During the Hatfield 2040 event at the schools, there was some conversation around improving communication and opportunities for social interaction in Hatfield. Suggestions included developing a printed newsletter or Hatfield website, as well as using a number of communication channels to reach diverse audiences. For older adults who may not use technology as much, printed newsletters or newspaper articles may be more effective ways of communicating about local events in addition to social media. Establishing “community hubs” was also discussed at the event in terms of developing intentional places to gather for specific populations or neighborhoods.

Access to high-speed internet and equipment and training on how to use technology can benefit older residents, as well as others living in the community who may not have the resources to access equipment or services. Many senior centers and libraries offer loans of equipment or hot spots for internet connection, training, and assistance with connection to low-cost internet services. Access to technology offers opportunities for telemedicine, participation in hybrid or remote meetings, the ability to sign up for services or contact a doctor, access to support groups that may cover a larger service area (such as the Alzheimer’s Association) without the need for transportation. Technology assistance programs are also good opportunities for intergenerational interaction as high school students can often provide assistance to older members of the community.

## **4. Examples from other Communities**

### **Opportunities for Intergenerational Interaction**

The Town of Swampscott, MA, used the need for a new high school and an underused Senior Center by combining the two into one building.<sup>9</sup> While school populations were decreasing and not as many older residents were using a senior center that was located in the basement of a municipal building, the Town saw the opportunity to combine the two needs and create something larger that benefits both the older and younger populations in the community.

### **Neighbor Networks**

The Towns of Amherst, Easthampton, and Northampton all provide strong “Neighbors” programs that allow older residents to either volunteer to help or request services from

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<sup>99</sup> <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/a-town-put-a-senior-center-in-its-high-school-offering-a-model-for-an-aging-nation/2023/03>

other residents. In addition, Northampton Neighbors is implementing “neighborhood circles” which are based in specific neighborhoods, with the goal of neighbors keeping track of other neighbors and helping where needed. This system was especially important during the pandemic when older residents were advised to stay home, and when transportation services were on hold.

The City of New Orleans is working to develop a “Community Lighthouse Project” or a network of neighborhood resiliency centers that have solar power and a back-up battery power in case of an emergency.<sup>10</sup> The goal of this project is to have these hubs in each neighborhood in case of climate emergencies. Although this is likely a larger project than would be needed in Hatfield, the goal of having places that are safe from flooding, have backup power, and are known resources for local residents would be beneficial to any community.

### **Accessory Dwelling Units and Infill Housing**

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) or accessory apartments can provide opportunities for older residents to downsize on their own property, or to offer housing for a caregiver or student who could offer assistance with yardwork or other basic tasks. The City of Northampton repealed requirements for building Accessory Dwelling Units to expand the flexibility of developing additional units on a single-family lot through “form-based” zoning. Rather than going through a special permitting process, owners of single family homes can convert them to two family homes in some neighborhoods without maximum square footage or parking requirements. Many other communities allow attached or interior accessory apartments to be developed by right in some districts, and units in detached structures such as a garage or separate “tiny home” through a Special Permit process.

### **Computer Loans and Training Programs**

Councils on Aging and libraries in many communities offer computer or tablet loan programs as well as training on how to use devices and software. A regional network called the Older Adult Digital Equity Network provides opportunities for resource providers to share training guides and ideas for engaging older residents in training opportunities.

## **5. Recommended Goals and Strategies**

**Goal 1: Provide opportunities for all Hatfield residents to continue to live in the community in their later years by ensuring the availability of affordable and accessible housing units that enable residents to downsize and foster social connections.**

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.togethernola.org/home>

- Amend current zoning to allow for the development of Accessory Apartments through modifying an existing single-family home, adding an addition; or building or modifying a separate accessory structure.
- Ensure that zoning allows for the development of additional rental housing that is located within walking distance of amenities and services and meets standards of accessibility.
  - Review Zoning for the ability to renovate existing properties to create apartments or congregate living sites.
  - Research the feasibility of prioritizing current Hatfield residents for new affordable housing units.
- Develop partnerships with agencies that can place people who are at risk of eviction or are unhoused into safe temporary housing while they wait for subsidized housing to become available. Consider locations for temporary supported housing in Hatfield.

**Goal 2: Ensure that people who are aging in place in Hatfield have access to resources and support services to ensure that their homes are safe, comfortable, energy efficient, and well-maintained.**

- Connect residents to services that provide energy audits and subsidies for improvements to energy efficiency of existing homes.
- Provide education and resources on how to screen and select reliable contractors for home maintenance, installation of solar panels, or joining community solar programs.
- Investigate the possibility of starting or joining a nearby Village or Neighbors program which would include volunteer opportunities for active elders to help people aging in place with basic tasks such as yard work, snow shoveling, etc.
- Ensure that all older homeowners are familiar with the Property Tax Work-Off Program and eligible volunteer opportunities. Expand the program as needed to enable additional participants.

**Goal 3: Pursue opportunities to expand transportation services for all community members.**

- Research the feasibility of the Town joining the FRTA Access program to expand the hours and service area of on demand van transportation for older residents while opening flexible transportation services to all members of the community.
- Research possibility of volunteer driver program to cover rides during hours not covered by Senior Center vans.

**Goal 4: Ensure that public buildings, parks, and sidewalks meet ADA standards of accessibility, and that recreation resources including shared use paths and parks are accessible for all ages and abilities.**



- Update and/or implement the Town’s ADA Self-Assessment and Transition Plan to ensure that Town-owned buildings and infrastructure meet ADA standards and are accessible to people of all abilities.
- Seek appropriate location, design and funding for a new or improved library facility or seek funding to renovate the existing facility to meet accessibility standards. Alternative sites that maintain proximity to the population center of Hatfield should also be considered for the development of a new facility.
- Develop an inventory of benches along popular walking routes and in recreational areas and seek funding to provide benches where needed.
- Develop a map of trails that includes information on accessibility, parking, and available restrooms in the area.

**Goal 5: Ensure that transportation infrastructure supports all modes of transportation and users of all ages and abilities.**

- Adopt a Complete Streets Policy and seek funding to develop a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan to access funding for implementing improvements to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

**Goal 6: Develop opportunities for activity as well as social connection and interaction through accessibility and physical connections in the built environment.**

- Require that new housing developments provide places to gather as well as on-site walking loops and connections to off-site walking routes, parks or trails.
- Develop a public playground that can be used at all times by people with young children and older adults. Ensure that equipment is accessible for all abilities, and amenities such as benches and accessible picnic tables are in place to accommodate people with wheelchairs.
- Research the cost, potential locations, and feasibility of developing a Town Community Center which would indoor recreation space and programming for people of all ages (a Senior Center as well as space for teens).

**Goal 7: Create programs and activities that encourage intergenerational connections and collaboration.**

- Develop recreational programming that can be attended by people of all ages such as walking groups (taking advantage of local hiking trails and walking routes), trivia nights or other programming at the library, or volunteer opportunities such as technology training. Involve older adults in planning for recreational and educational programs.

**Goal 8: Build on the Town’s agricultural culture and economy by connecting farms with the school and Senior Center and other institutions to promote the farming culture of the community and to improve health with locally grown fresh food.**

- Implement a Farm to School program to link local farms to schools, encourage kids to farm.
- Partner with CISA and local farms to offer senior farm shares to all older residents.

**Goal 9: Ensure the safety of all residents, including older adults and people with dementia, through multi-sectoral partnerships and programming.**

- Work with emergency personnel to develop a voluntary registry of where people with dementia or other health concerns live; keep files up to date and educate community about how to add themselves or family members to this list.
- Educate older adults about what to do in the case of emergency and about the Town's Critical Incident Management Plan.
  - Hold educational sessions, develop flyers for homebound older residents on what to do in case of emergency and locations of shelters.
- Collaborate with the District Attorney's office to have trainings on internet and phone scams.

**Goal 10: Ensure that all residents have access to information about policies and programs that provide opportunities for health and community engagement.**

- Assist older adults in acquiring equipment and training on how to use it and provide assistance with accessing low cost or free broadband service.
- Collaborate with existing community-based networks such as faith communities, civic groups, education channels, business groups, to share information and develop programming.
- Ensure that printed information – including official forms or invoices and text on visual displays in public spaces - has large lettering with main ideas in bold type; simple and straightforward sentences and simple language; and is available in multiple languages as needed.

**Goal 11: Build awareness, acceptance, and a culture of support for people living with dementia and the people who care for them.**

- Work with partners such as the Alzheimer's Association to offer and connect people to trainings on how to recognize signs of dementia and communicate with people with dementia for all leaders and staff of municipal departments, transit and volunteer drivers, library, businesses, banks, faith communities and other sectors that are public facing.
- Identify and reach out to people with dementia and family care givers to connect them with support programs and opportunities for meeting with other caregivers and people with dementia. Re-start the caregiver support program at the COA if there is interest.
- Meaningfully engage people with dementia in developing programs and services such as support groups or memory cafes at the Senior Center, Library and other locations in the community.

- Develop a Dementia Awareness committee to implement trainings and a public awareness campaign about dementia.
- Recruit volunteers to become Dementia Friends Champions who will provide trainings for community groups and neighbors.

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