



Beyond 50: Livable Communities Quiz

People turning 50 today have about half their adult lives ahead of them, and each year more than four million men and women join their ranks. What do they have to look forward to? Will they be able to attain the quality of life they want in their later years?

In its Beyond 50 series of annual reports, AARP assesses the state of America's aging population in such vital and significant areas of concern as economic security, health care and community. Visit <http://www.aarp.org/beyond50> for more information about these reports.

Consider the local community in which you live. For some people, this might mean the town or village or it could be their neighborhood. For other people, it could be their subdivision or development. That is, consider your local area of the city, metro area, or county just around where you live. After each answer, you will be provided with more information and links about these various community features.

For each of the following characteristics, please grade your local community as an A, B, C, D or F, where A is excellent and F is failure.

1. How would you grade your community for having well-run community centers, recreation centers, parks, and other places where older people can socialize?

Parks, libraries, senior centers, outdoor down centers, theaters, meetings halls and a variety of other places help provide opportunities for residents to interact with one another. Indeed, many of these opportunities, such as sports centers, can also become places to promote physical as well as mental health. Some communities actively work to promote intergenerational opportunities, for instance through mentoring through some school programs. However, some communities, particularly those in outlying suburbs, may have few areas or facilities to serve as magnets for socialization.

A number of local areas maintain lists, for instance through a local newspaper or community bulletin, on a variety of nearby activities. If you would like to see more in your area, consider participating in local community meetings where parks, museums, theater and other planning decisions can be influenced. Also consider whether these places are easily accessible to persons with a variety of ages and abilities.

For more information, and for further resources, take a look at Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide. Of particular interest may be the section on "Recreation and Cultural Activities" at:

http://www.aarp.org/research/housing-mobility/indliving/d18311_communities.html.

2. How would you grade your community for having convenient places for you to participate in public meetings and events?

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Many areas offer varied opportunities to attend and participate in public events, such as concerts, sports, and other types of activities. Settings like this help to foster a sense of community among residents, and help identify the community as a pleasant place to live.

In addition, many communities offer meeting halls, either for groups and clubs who share a common interest, or for matters of public concern. Indeed, participation in public affairs is a critical method for residents to influence how their community develops and grows over time. Like voting, involvement in community affairs is generally high among older persons. Public meeting spaces that help provide forums for information, interaction, and feedback are a key element to help make this happen.

Consider why your community lacks convenient places to participate in public meetings and events. Could it be because those places and events are not well advertised in community bulletins or newspapers? Are they run down, and need to be refurbished? Does your local government have adequate facilities for public meetings? Are school facilities a possible place to hold events after school hours?

For more information on how communities have promoted places for events, meetings and other public gatherings, visit:

Project for Public Spaces: <http://www.pps.org/gps/>

In addition, the Livable Communities Evaluation Guide contains a number of ideas for recreation and cultural activities at:

http://www.aarp.org/research/housing-mobility/indliving/d18311_communities.html

3. How would you grade your community for having ample opportunities to become a volunteer?

One of the most important types of community engagement in the livable community is volunteering: people working without pay to help others in need or to enhance community life. Without volunteers, the nation would lose a major source of effort for every sort of charitable purpose, formal or informal. A large part of the nation's volunteer workforce is made up of adults age 50 and older. The volunteer activities of older adults are important not only because of their value to those who receive the services, but also because volunteering is beneficial to the older volunteers themselves. In fact, research has shown that volunteering has a favorable effect on the health of older adults.

For more information on volunteering and the types of opportunities communities can offer to promote volunteering, visit the following resources:

Independent Sector: <http://www.independentsector.org/>

Innovations in Civic Participation: <http://www.icicp.org/>

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Senior Corps: <http://www.seniorcorps.org/>

Thoughts about the types of services that a community can promote are also found in Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide, particularly the section titled “Caring Community” at: http://www.aarp.org/research/housing-mobility/indliving/d18311_communities.html

4. How would you grade your community for having dependable public transportation that you would use to get to the places you would like to go?

Dependable public transportation can be an important source of independent and affordable transportation for individuals who cannot drive or do not wish to drive. Whether public transportation meets the needs of older adults depends on whether routes connect homes with local shopping and services, the ease of obtaining scheduling and routing information, and whether vehicles are usable by individuals challenged by functional impairments or disabilities. Low-floor buses are a good example of vehicles individuals of all ages and abilities can use. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires public transportation providers to accommodate the needs of individuals with disabilities on its fixed-route buses and to provide complementary paratransit for individuals who cannot use or get to fixed-route buses.

Public transportation may look different or be operated differently depending on where it is. In cities, we are familiar with large buses and sometimes commuter rail or subways. In places with lower residential density like suburbs there may be small buses or vans that circulate between neighborhoods and local shopping and services. In rural areas public transportation may consist of demand-responsive services like dial-a-ride. Communities with high residential density, streets with high connectivity, and mixed-use neighborhoods provide an environment where public transportation can operate more productively and efficiently.

If you gave your community low grades for public transportation and if you want to know how to make your community more accessible for individuals who do not drive, follow this link:

AARP’s Livable Communities Evaluation Guide: http://www.aarp.org/research/housing-mobility/indliving/d18311_communities.html.

United We Ride: <http://www.unitedweride.gov/>

Community Transportation Association: <http://www.ctaa.org/>

American Public Transportation Association: <http://www.apta.com/>

5. How would you grade your community for having safe, well-designed sidewalks that can take you where you want to go (e.g., to a nearby grocery or drugstore)?

Walking is the second most used mode of transportation after the privately owned vehicle. Individuals who both drive and make trips on foot make the most daily trips. Barriers to walking

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include lack of sidewalks or poorly maintained sidewalks, inadequate resting places, and inadequate shelter from the weather, rain, sun, or snow.

A *walkable* community has safe, well-designed sidewalks we can use for recreational walking or to get where we want to go on foot (or by wheelchair or scooter). Many communities do not have sidewalks and even if they do the sidewalks do not connect homes with desirable destinations such as stores, restaurants, or professional services.

If you gave your community low grades for walkability and if you want to know how to make your community walkable, follow this link:

AARP's Livable Communities Evaluation Guide:

http://www.aarp.org/research/housing-mobility/indliving/d18311_communities.html

The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center: <http://www.walkinginfo.org/>

6. How would you grade your community for having roads designed for safe driving, with clear and unambiguous signage, traffic stops, and pedestrian crosswalks?

As we get older the conditions under which we drive get increasingly more important. Individuals regulate their driving behavior to keep themselves safe when challenged by normal age-related changes to vision and reflexes. The likelihood of dying in a car crash is much greater for people 65 and older than for younger people. The greatest portion of car crashes involving older people occurs in intersections, particularly when people are making left turns.

It is possible to make roads and intersections safer for everyone. A key improvement is having street signs with large letters and high contrast that are easy to read at a distance. Left turn signal lights and properly designed left turn lanes are another safety measure. Pedestrian signal lights, clearly marked crosswalks, and well lit intersections improve safety for pedestrians and drivers alike.

If you gave your community low grades for drivability and if you want to know how to make your community drivable, follow this link:

AARP's Livable Communities Evaluation Guide:

http://www.aarp.org/research/housing-mobility/indliving/d18311_communities.html

“Designing Roadways to Safely Accommodate the Increasing Mobile Older Driver,” a report prepared by the Road Information Program:

<http://www.tripnet.org/OlderDrivers2003Study.PDF>

US Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, “Highway Design Handbook for Older Drivers and Pedestrians”:

<http://www.tfhr.gov/humanfac/01103/coverfront.htm>

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7. If you have difficulty walking or driving, how would you grade your community for having safe and convenient transportation options available to you, such as rides from friends or family or public transportation?

Many of us have to deal with challenges that make it necessary to stop or limit our driving, or impair our ability to walk to achieve our goals. To stay connected to our communities and to the people and activities that support our quality of life we need mobility options. In many communities these options may be very limited; in others there may be a wide range.

Community mobility options may include public transportation, transportation service for clients of human service agencies such as an area agency on aging, taxis, subscription car services, or demand-responsive services like dial-a-ride. Volunteer drivers who either provide rides in their own vehicle, vehicles owned by a sponsoring agency, or in a vehicle owned by a rider, may also be available. A broad range of choices assures riders of finding the option that best fits their needs and preferences.

If you gave your community low grades for community mobility options and if you want to know how to make your community accessible to residents who do not drive, follow this link:

AARP Livable Communities Evaluation Guide:

http://www.aarp.org/research/housing-mobility/indliving/d18311_communities.html

United We Ride: <http://www.unitedweride.gov/>

Community Transportation Association: <http://www.ctaa.org/>

Easter Seals ProjectACTION: <http://www.projectaction.org/>

American Public Transportation Association: <http://www.apta.com/>

8. How would you grade your community for security and safety?

Older people experience the lowest rates of violent crime among all age groups, and AARP's Beyond 50.05 survey shows that around seven percent of persons age 50 and older grade their community a "D" or "F" for "having safe neighborhoods." Nonetheless, fear of crime has been shown to adversely affect the behavior of many older people, and national surveys show that older people protect themselves by leaving their homes less often than younger people. Thus, fear of crime can have a dampening effect on people's willingness to go out into the community and participate in social and civic life.

There are a number of ways that communities have worked to improve safety and security. Improving maintenance of the physical environment is one method. A community that is poorly maintained may send a signal that a place is no longer controlled by those who live or work there. Community programs to clean up refuse, graffiti, overgrown lots and parks, may help

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send positive signals. In addition, removing overgrown bushes, improving street lighting, and improving open sight lines can help reduce opportunities for crime.

Some communities also develop crime watch programs, enlisting the participation of residents in neighborhoods (e.g., through a homeowners association). In addition, communities have helped expand the interaction between police and residents, for instance, by having officers take walking tours with residents to identify neighborhood crime hazards and to suggest improvements.

For more information on safety and security, see:

AARP Livable Communities Evaluation Guide:

http://www.aarp.org/research/housing-mobility/indliving/d18311_communities.html

The National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NJRS) is an important resource for a broad cross-section of safety and security issues: <http://www.ncjrs.org/>

The New York State Office for the Aging provides a number of tips:

<http://www.agingwell.state.ny.us/safety/articles/crime.htm>

As does the California Attorney General:

http://www.sfgov.org/site/uploadedfiles/police/information/prevention_seniors.pdf

9. If you wanted or needed to leave your current home, how would you grade your community for having affordable housing options elsewhere in your community?

Affordable housing is a major problem in many areas of the country, particularly for renters. In 2002 and 2003, 27 percent of households headed by someone age 50 or older experienced a “housing cost burden,” defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as payments toward housing that total more than 30 percent of gross household income. Among renters age 50 and older, nearly half pay more than 30 percent of their incomes for gross rent. And despite the fact that most homeowners age 50 and older either own their home free and clear or have a relatively low mortgage balance, more than one of every five homeowners age 50 and older pays more than 30 percent of income for housing-related costs. Housing costs go far beyond the monthly mortgage or rent payment to include the cost of utilities, insurance, property taxes, maintenance and repair, and modifications to maintain independence. Yet, despite well-documented problems, many communities are struggling to protect and expand their stock of affordable housing for persons of all ages

The Department of Housing and Urban Development identifies six steps for renters to find affordable housing:

Step 1: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities

Step 2: Figure Out How Much You Can Afford

Step 3: Take Advantage of Special Services and Programs to Help You

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Step 4: Figure Out What You Need

Step 5: Go Shopping

Step 6: Get Ready to Move

Each of these steps is explained in more detail at: <http://www.hud.gov/renting/index.cfm>

The Department of Housing and Urban Development also identifies a number of resources for homeowners who are having difficulty making payments for their current home, or who are seeking to move to another home. These are discussed at <http://www.hud.gov/owning/index.cfm>. These options include loans for home repair and modification, loans for the purchase of a home, and an increasingly well known loan for current homeowners called a “reverse mortgage.” Each of these options has their plusses and minuses.

For additional information on reverse mortgages, visit AARP’s reverse mortgage home page: <http://www.aarp.org/money/revmort/>

However, you may find that affordable housing is difficult find, even for someone who is well informed and well-prepared. In such communities, residents should work with their community leaders to expand an affordable mix of housing options. For instance, residents can participate in community planning meetings, or open forums with their city or county council, and raise a number of possible strategies. These may include making local policy more amenable to multifamily housing, devoting more resources to the development of subsidized housing, promoting accessory dwelling, creating resources to help link older persons who may want to homeshare, etc. For more information on some of these options, visit <http://www.aarp.org/life/housingchoices/>.

10. If you had difficulty walking around or performing a physical activity, how would you grade your home for being designed in a way that would allow you to complete your daily tasks?

Having homes that are well designed for people of varying ages and abilities is an important goal. From an individual perspective, such homes enhance the quality of life for individuals by enabling them to enjoy the full use of their home, thereby maintaining personal independence. In addition, a well-designed home is important to residents who wish to prepare for everyday activities outside the home. Appropriate design is even instrumental for hosting guests with different ages and abilities. And from society’s point of view, well-designed homes are one component of a strategy to enable residents to remain in their communities (with or without home-based services) and out of more expensive and sometimes less appealing settings such as nursing homes.

The types of design options that are available depend on many factors, including whether the resident is seeking to include the design in a new home, or is hoping to modify an existing home to better meet his or her needs. There are a number of resources that can help inform the process, ranging from design features and financing to community programs.

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Here are some links for further information:

AARP's home page for home design information: <http://www.aarp.org/life/homedesign/>

The Universal Design Alliance: <http://www.universaldesign.org/>

The Center for Universal Design: <http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/>

EasyLiving Home program: <http://www.easylivinghome.org/>

In addition, you may find useful AARP's Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide, particularly the section on Housing:

http://www.aarp.org/research/housing-mobility/inliving/d18311_communities.html