

## Request for Ad Hoc Senior Citizen Advisory Committee

The purpose of this request to the South Portland City Council is for an Ad Hoc Senior Citizen Advisory Committee of the Council to be established to ensure senior citizens in our community have access to services enabling them to age safely and with dignity in the community where they have roots. This is an important issue for the Council to address because Maine's population is the oldest in the country. "By 2030, it is estimated that one out of every four Mainers will be over 65". 1 South Portland's total population is 25,556. The population over 65 is 3,741 or 14.6%. These numbers will soon be increased as census data identified 3,346 fiftyfive to sixty-four year olds. While the city's median income in \$54,598, for the senior population it is \$36,000. (Data source: ACS Demographic and Housing Estimate. 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5 yr- Estimate (ZCTA504106). Those over sixty-five are an increasing component of our community.

According to the State Plan on Aging "... our aging population does not consider itself old, highlighting a distinct interest in remaining independent, regardless of physical age. The biggest concerns for Maine's older population are in fact physical limitations and loss of independence ,although other concerns include falling down, homes in need of repair, and failure to afford lifestyle as they continue growing older". 2 Retirement and fixed incomes present economic difficulties for many. As cost of living increases along with increased need for healthcare and services, people may be forced to choose between essentials such as medications, food and heat. Chronic conditions that impact functional abilities tend to increase as people age. Normal changes of aging effect all body systems impacting balance, bone and muscle strength,heart and lung function, the immune system, nutrition, elimination, hearing and vision. Physical and mental limitations can hinder the ability to safely perform activities of daily living and diminish independence. For example, if balance is poor, climbing on stools or ladders for cleaning and repairing can be hazardous. Raking leaves or shoving snow may be too strenuous for those with decreased cardiac, respiratory or muscular-skeletal function and walking on uneven or icy surfaces can be difficult. Fall risk can be increased by reactions to medications. Vulnerably to crime and injury increases with vision, hearing and mobility impairment. These changes can result in inability to continue driving. Physical and mental limitations impact an entire spectrum of self care abilities from intimate personal care, to the ability to shop and pay bills, seek medical services, socialize with friends and family and participate the life of the community. However, accommodations and services can be provided that assist people to age in their community in their homes or other housing (age in place) with safely and with dignity.

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) references eight domains of livability identified by the World Health Organization (WHO) that assist people to age in place. These include: safe and accessible outdoor space and buildings, transportation, and housing; opportunities for social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, access to communication and information and community support and health services.3 If we do not identify unmet needs of senior citizens to age in place, then, as a society, we will encounter increased health care costs and institutionalization of elders. As significantly, their contributions in terms of wisdom, judgment, skills, and knowledge will be lost. If we work to develop communities that provide supports that facilitate aging in place, senior citizens can continue to fulfill their desired roles and the city becomes a more thriving, dynamic environment for all ages and abilities.

### Goals of the Ad Hoc Committee

1. Conduct a needs assessment of those over 65 in South Portland. This will be accomplished in three ways: one, conduct a convenience survey of those over sixty five from around the city by reaching out to individuals in all voting districts/neighborhoods; two, conduct focus groups in voting districts/neighborhoods of the city and three, interview representatives of agencies and professional groups that work with the elderly to ascertain their perception of the needs of seniors.
2. Identify current programs in place that meet needs of older adults.
3. Identify gaps between needs and available services and determine partnerships and options to fill.
4. Develop comprehensive strategy for communication of available programs and aids.

5. Recommendations will be delivered to city council within 16 months of Council approval of project.

#### Reference

1. Building a Collaborative Community Response to Aging in Place. AARP, Maine. September, 2013. p 1
2. Building a Collaborative Community Response to Aging in Place. AARP, Maine. September, 2013. p 4
3. The Maine Guide: Building Livable, Age friendly Communities AARP, Maine, September 1, 2016. P 14