

Age-Friendly Walking

8 Infrastructure Improvements to help Older Adults Age in Community

While the projects described below will be built and paid for by the municipality, community residents can get the ball rolling by talking with elected officials and staff, and by working with local community organizations or jointly with friends and neighbors.

1. Improve the safety of street crossings where older adults walk

- The Federal Highway Administration recommends an assumed walking speed of 2.8 ft/s for older adult pedestrians (vs. 3.5 ft/s for the average person walking). Longer WALK signal times give older adults the time they need to cross streets safely.
- Provide enhanced visibility and safety features at crosswalks where older adults walk – for example raised crosswalks, enhanced lighting, pedestrian refuge islands to shorten crossing distances, and effective crossing signage, such as in-street “Yield to Pedestrians” signs.

2. Provide benches along sidewalks, near civic buildings, at bus and transit stops, and in parks

- Benches have been shown to be one of the best tools to keep people walking as they age in community and plenty of benches encourage everyday walking trips. Make sure that benches are designed properly for older adults, including arms that provide support for getting up and down.

3. Make sure that bus stops and transit stops are fully accessible

- Older adults and people with disabilities can maintain independence and stay better connected to their communities when transit is accessible.
- Transit is used more and fewer specialized transportation services are needed when everyone can use public transit.

4. Improve lighting along sidewalks, at crosswalks, at transit and in civic and shopping areas

- Better lighting reduces falls and makes the community safer and more inviting for older adults.

5. Add shade trees to your streets – this makes everyone happier to walk!

- It also reduces summer heat, improves air quality, reduces greenhouse gases and slows traffic down.

6. Design municipal parks in senior-friendly ways

- Include smooth walking paths, shade, benches that allow conversation as well as people-watching, and good visibility along paths.
- Apply Universal Design principles to outdoor spaces to ensure they are usable for everyone to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation.

7. Let people know where there are publicly accessible toilets, and make sure that all civic buildings have easily available facilities

- This is often an important consideration for older adults when they are walking.

8. Create an easily understood and standardized wayfinding system

- Provide street signs that have large print and are illuminated.
- Add walking wayfinding signs in places where community members may not know about nearby civic buildings, commercial areas, and parks.