

Onondaga County Planning Federation Symposium
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 Oncenter, Syracuse, NY

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I am deeply honored to be included in the Onondaga County Planning Federation's 2014 Symposium along with those of you who make our community a great place to live. For several years, I sat at the tables with you, listening to and learning from an expert on community planning. It boggles my mind wondering how I got up here.

But, I do appreciate this great opportunity for me and for F.O.C.U.S. to be talking with planners and zoning personnel about making CNY Age-Friendly. My message today is to encourage you to make planning and zoning decisions based on what the community wants and needs and what they will support to make each place Age-Friendly.

F.O.C.U.S. believes wholeheartedly that when there is citizen input in the decision-making process there is a better end result and everybody goes away smiling.



F.O.C.U.S. is a citizen engagement organization enabling people to understand how government works, how it is structured, and how to get involved in the decision making process. However, it is YOU who shape the future of our county and our community. And, I encourage you to do this with buy-in from the citizens in your city, town, or village. Indeed I do recognize that your job is not easy - getting buy-in for complicated policies or unique and innovative plans. But I sincerely believe that by involving the citizens, better long term decisions will be made – perhaps, F.O.C.U.S. can help.

This afternoon you will be hearing from a long time civic trustee. If you think about it, the name "civic trustee" fits each one of us in this room.



I use the title Civic Trustee because I consider every resident – of every age - is entrusted with the place where we live by the generations that came before us, to preserve it and make it better than we found it. It is only on loan to us from earlier generations to pass on to future generations.

So, from one civic trustee to another, let me share my thoughts on why an Age-Friendly community is such an important element to make our communities livable for ourselves and for future generations. Planners play a crucial role.

My message will not be about why people may be leaving CNY but how with careful planning and reasonable consideration, all of us together can entice the population to stay. I will concentrate on a specific age cohort, the retiring Baby Boomer, the largest bulge in the population in the United States and worldwide.

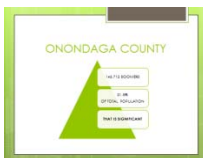
“Who are the boomers? I would wager a guess that this room is full of boomers.

The boomers are those born to the post World War II generation, between 1946 and 1964.

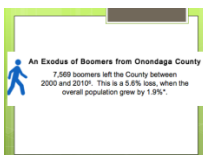
You may have heard that F.O.C.U.S. is conducting a project on what retiring citizens’ want or need in order to continue to live productive and engaging lives in CNY. We are only at the half-way mark but I can tell you that we already know a lot about the boomers from our literature research of national studies and preliminary findings from local surveys.



We know that for communities to prosper and to be economically sound they will need to retain and engage aging boomers as significant, productive citizens and taxpayers and that all sectors have a stake in the aging of this diverse cohort.



In Onondaga County alone, there are 146,712 Boomers, or 31.5% of the county’s population. That is a significant number.



Between 2000 and 2010 Onondaga County lost 7,569 boomers representing a 5.6% loss while gaining in population by only 1.9%. These also are significant numbers.



People leaving CNY were of higher income than those moving in...a 22% difference.

The need to plan for the impact of this cohort's aging is of particular concern for mid-sized local governments and metropolitan areas, especially those that have already experienced substantial erosion of their population and economic base.

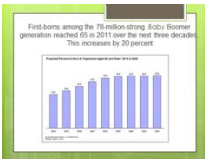


This is our CHALLENGE: To recognize that the mobility of boomers has a large impact on our community as an economic and social concern. It is imperative for CNY to retain these citizens who are at the present time home owners, taxpayers, consumers, and charitable donors, people who keep money in motion purchasing local products and services.

I'm curious: Let's do a show of hands if you were born between 1946-1964.

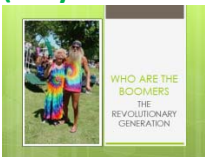
You are the folks for whom we are most concerned. We need your help in determining how to make our county and CNY Age-Friendly. We count on you to help change the way we plan that will incorporate boomers' changing life-styles.

Again, who are the boomers:

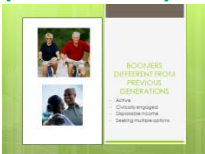


It is estimated that there are 78 million Boomers in the U.S. and that the average boomer will live to be 83 plus years old. It is also recognized that boomers are different from earlier generations, **revolutionary in some aspects**, as you will notice:

(they are different!!)



(more like it)



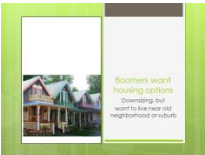
- A high percentage of boomers - 83% intend to keep working after retirement –



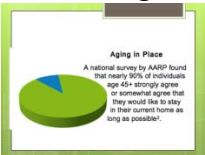
- most because they want to stay engaged and purposeful – some because they have to. But boomers want to work on their own terms – flex hours/fewer days per week/work from home. They also want to stay fresh in the tech world to navigate the internet for multiple purposes.



- It is not health or wealth that is the most powerful predictor of life satisfaction after retirement but an active lifestyle and social networks are important to boomers. It has been reported that retirees who are socially, economically and civically engaged live longer. Remember that!!



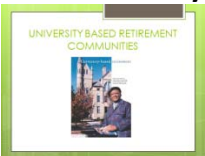
- Boomers want options and choices in their homes yet want to continue live near their old neighborhood.



- AARP reports that most boomers would like to stay in their current home for as long as possible – and that is what we are beginning to learn from our surveys.



- Boomers are seeking out communities that feature culture, activities and events. They are turning to college towns, urban environments **and smaller towns with vibrant urban or town centers. That's where you enter the picture.**



- Boomers want to continue to challenge themselves intellectually so we find that University based retirement communities are still very popular around the country.

CHALLENGE TO PLANNERS:

So, how do we plan for an Age-Friendly CNY?

Let me share with you what we are learning as we proceed with the F.O.C.U.S. Age-Friendly CNY project.

- **The most apparent need is for a greater range of attractive living, new types of housing and neighborhoods.** National Association of Home Builders indicates that builders see a boom in housing

for retiring boomers and they are ready to build a new generation of housing aimed at this age cohort. We've learned that boomers are rejecting the huge retirement golf course developments of yesteryear but asking for homes that include amenities such as walking trails, fitness centers, swimming pools, tennis courts and clubhouses to reflect a more active generation.

- Boomers want to downsize. Downsizing can mean a lot of different things to different people: For some it requires selling their big house, for others it means moving to a smaller house but staying in the same neighborhood or suburb, and others may want to leave the suburbs and try urban living downtown
- But for many, it means moving to another state, most likely to warmer weather. It is this group that we aim to try to retain in CNY.

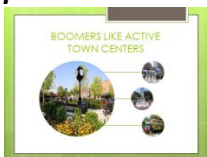
There are many innovative ideas circulating around the country for developing boomer housing. One idea that is gaining momentum around the United States is the growth of "Villages".



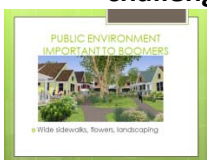
Villages take many shapes and forms. One style may be planned with small houses clustered around a shared green space. The houses may be smaller, less footage than usual, but they would have all the amenities – air conditioning, dish washers, internet, small landscaped lots, and universal design. The common element for Villages are that they are walkable, friendly, provide benches for sitting, interesting landscaping, nearby and available shopping, and services.

Developing Villages is only one housing option for retiring boomers.

Reflecting on a desire for boomers to live at home and stay in their lifelong neighborhoods whether in the city or suburbs, ***planners need to think broadly about how to retrofit town centers to make them an Age-Friendly place to live.*** Vision your own municipality as I share a couple of ideas with what we know:

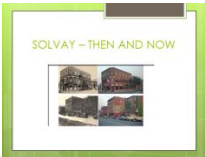


- **One thing we know is that in Onondaga County the large majority of the increasing boomer population presently resides in the suburbs. This is also where their children and grandchildren live.** We know that people who spent most of their lives in the suburbs look forward to spending the rest of their lives in the same or nearby neighborhood. **Retrofitting suburban communities and towns and villages to serve as a realistic and competitive option for boomers may become one of our major challenges and opportunities. The plans that you make are long lasting and vital.**



- The quality of the public environment is also crucial to planning such as sidewalks that are wider and navigable for walkers, strollers, and wheelchairs. Amenities like small areas for passive recreation such

as green spaces, public restrooms, strategically placed benches, and interesting landscaping with flowers everywhere.



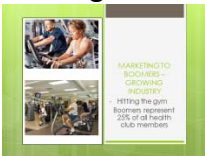
- We will closely watch the Solvay restoration pilot project that we hope will produce innovative ideas that are replicable for all towns and villages. We will monitor their progress to be sure that they incorporate Age-Friendly planning.
- ***Re directing the locus of living arrangements to focus on more compact and age-friendly small town settings may offer a way to allow retirees to remain in the communities where they raised their children and lived their lives.***

MARKETING TO BOOMERS:

Due to sheer size of boomer cohort and their wide variety of interests, many opportunities have been created for businesses - from motorcycle manufacturing to online dating (grown to a billion dollar business due to boomers).



How people spend their money is vital to how communities thrive. Boomers spend their money on trying out new things. In order to keep up with the rising demand, companies across many industries have begun offering services or products tailored specifically for boomers.

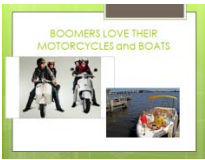


For example, boomers passion to be personally fit means they are hitting the gym and health clubs at a record rate. They represent nearly 25% of all health club members.

Boomers are also hitting the road. An increasing number of boomers are buying RVs. In fact, retired boomers make up a dominant share of RV owners in the country and that creates a demand for the truck and trailer and motor home manufacturing industry as well as development of



new campgrounds and trailer parks, probably in your own backyard – your town. Thanks to boomers, these industries are expected to grow at a fast rate in the next few years.



Boomers like to buy expensive toys, adding to the motorcycle and boating industries.

One economic goal is to encourage these growing industries that cater to boomers to settle in our communities and help build our economy. Perhaps a Harley Davidson company here???

What role does F.O.C.U.S. play with Planners to make CNY Age-Friendly?



F.O.C.U.S. is citizen centered citizen engagement organization, not for profit, to help ordinary citizens have an educated voice in decision making for the place where we live.



I mentioned earlier about our current project: Age-Friendly CNY. The project is supported by a public private partnership: County, City, CNYCF, Key Bank, Darco Mfg.



Age-Friendly CNY is an *economic issue for municipalities*. For communities to prosper, be economically sound they will need to retain and engage aging baby boomers as significant, productive citizens and taxpayers. All sectors – business, public, and service – have a stake.

F.O.C.U.S. staff and board members and SUNY Oswego Active Aging/Community Engagement program are Principal Investigators for the project. Others working closely with the project include S.U. Geography program, S.U. Maxwell School Capstone students, S.U. Gerontology Institute, and OCPL. We are especially grateful to OCPL for they are distributing surveys at each of the county libraries, providing assistance and a designated computer.



The process we are using to gather as much information as possible include an extensive Literature search, Mapping, convening of a diverse group of citizens representing various sectors in CNY to advise the project and approve the report and recommendations, focus groups, individual interviews, analysis, research, and a final report to the community.

Project will give our community a baseline of information on our local statistics – what the citizens say they need or want in order to stay in CNY, and if they plan to move, why. F.O.C.U.S. will make sure the comprehensive final report is available to everyone.

We need your help. To date we have almost 1,200 surveys submitted. Our goal is 2,000 by the end of April. You can help by taking the survey right now. It takes between 5 and 8 minutes. We also need your help to distribute surveys in your districts so that your constituents have their voices heard. Add the link to your website and leave the survey information in your village/town office. (Jenni and David + volunteers to distribute)

While you are working on your surveys, I will close in the same way I began, to remind you to be mindful of the teachings of various traditions that teach us to protect and care for the place where we live. Let us remember.

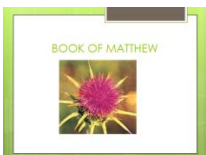
- The Great Law of the Haudenosaunee that for every decision that is made one must consider how the decision will impact up to 7 generations in the future, and



- The Hebrew blessing, L'Dor VaDor, passing on our traditions from generation to generation.



- In the Book of Matthew the question is asked, “Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?” translated to mean that “We must keep our inheritors in the forefront of our minds as we make the decisions in front of us today”.



I now challenge all the Planners here today to make decisions for your communities that are age-friendly, the place where boomers and all citizens of all ages will choose to live long and productive lives. Plan for and support an Age-Friendly CNY. Thank you for listening and filling out the survey.

