

An aerial photograph of a coastal city, likely Reykjavik, Iceland. The image shows a dense urban area with various buildings, including a prominent white building with a red roof in the foreground. The city extends to the waterfront, where a harbor with several ships and cranes is visible. The sky is overcast with dark clouds. A large white circle is superimposed over the center of the image, containing the title text in a dark red serif font.

A Strong Towns Guide to Livable Communities

Creating Strong Towns and Cities that Work for People of All Ages

The mission of **Strong Towns** is to support a model of development that will make communities across the United States and Canada more financially strong and resilient.

All across the continent, we see cities and towns of all sizes struggling to maintain their basic infrastructure and continue to provide the services their residents expect of them. Nearly every North American city has more long-term maintenance needs than it has any ability to fund. While every city's specific circumstances are unique, the underlying pattern is undeniable: our prevailing model of development for more than 70 years has left us financially fragile, producing more liabilities than revenue.

This prevailing model is a radical departure from centuries of time-tested wisdom in how to build resilient places. We used to build incrementally over time, and at a scale oriented to people on foot. Starting in the 20th century and accelerating after World War II, we began to build new development all at once, to a finished state, and usually in a spread-out fashion oriented toward car travel. The result of this Suburban Experiment has been communities that are not only financially insolvent, but that are less livable in crucial ways. Our modern development pattern is by turns isolating, unaffordable, and, over time, prone to decline and dysfunction.

The AARP Livable Communities program defines a livable community as "one that is safe and secure, has affordable and appropriate housing and transportation options, and offers supportive community features and services." These are places that support successful aging.

At Strong Towns, we find that the characteristics of a place that supports successful aging are, more often than not, the same characteristics that will make the place itself age successfully and remain financially strong and resilient across generations. We see a natural overlap between the change we would like to see in the world and the change that AARP promotes through its Livable Communities efforts and Age-Friendly designation.

If you're still familiarizing yourself with our work, check out these resources:

- Watch the **welcome message** from Strong Towns founder and president Chuck Marohn
- **Our About page** is a great place to start learning the basics of the Strong Towns approach to building more financially resilient communities, and our unique strategy to make our vision the default in cities and towns across North America.
- Want to dig a little deeper? **Visit our Newcomers page** to find a one-stop shop for the most essential Strong Towns reading and viewing.
- Peruse **success stories** from citizens who have been inspired by our events and content to make change in their communities.

Learn More About the Strong Towns Approach

A Strong Towns approach to city building will result in places where we can age better and live better. Here are six reasons, with further reading from our archives on each aspect of our vision.

Livable Communities are Financially Strong and Resilient. A city that can pay its bills and maintain a high level of public services is a city that can help meet the unique needs of its aging residents. When communities fall into a cycle of debt and unfunded liabilities, it is the services that residents depend on that suffer—from sidewalk maintenance and public safety to libraries and parks.

- Read: [The Real Reason Your City Has No Money](#)
- Read: [The True Cost of Debt in Atlanta's Suburbs](#)

Livable Communities are Built to a Human Scale. The increased interest in downtown living among older generations of Americans reflects a desire for community and connectedness—so much so that even planned “senior” communities often seek to re-create some of the physical attributes of a traditional town. The Strong Towns approach would be a return to building for the sense of place and immediacy that so many of humanity’s most beloved cities possess.

- Read: [Come On Baby, Let's Go Downtown](#)
- Read: [How Did We Get Used to Out-of-Scale Cities?](#)

Livable Communities Foster Connection, Not Isolation. America faces a growing epidemic of isolation and loneliness, which may be most acute among older Americans living in communities that are not designed to foster spontaneous interaction among residents. At Strong Towns, we believe that a place that is resilient and livable is one where residents casually encounter one another, where we can live among neighbors of different ages and walks of life, and where local businesses thrive and are fixtures of the community.

- Read: [The Isolation of Aging in an Auto-Oriented Place](#)
- Read: [In Defense of Public Spaces](#)

Livable Communities Have a Range of Homes for All Ages and Situations. Too many American communities lack diverse housing options. For seniors who would like to downsize to a more manageable space, live affordably near family and friends, and/or live in a place where they can easily access services, options in their community may be limited. A Strong Towns approach would change that. We advocate for all cities to allow a range of housing options from accessory apartments to duplexes, “tiny houses,” and live-work arrangements that allow residents to meet their needs.

- Read: [Does Your Town Have Real Housing Options?](#)
- Read: [Only 1 in 5 Households is a Nuclear Family. Our Housing Stock Hasn't Caught Up.](#)

Livable Communities Have Safe Streets. America's streets are a public health crisis. The number of pedestrians killed by motor vehicles has increased 50% since (year). And older Americans are the most vulnerable of people who walk, and are injured and killed at the highest rates. We desperately need to refocus our infrastructure priorities toward safety and away from enabling higher vehicle speeds over longer distances. Strong Towns has been pioneering in its advocacy for safe, slow streets.

- Read: **Slow The Cars**
- Read: **4 Reasons We Must Build Our Streets for People (Not Just Cars)**

Livable Communities Are Navigable Without a Car. With the aging of the Baby Boom generation, the number of Americans who can no longer safely or comfortably drive a car is about to reach record highs. Yet many of us live in environments in which a car is a necessary lifeline to reach work, shopping, friends, family, and essential services. The Strong Towns approach would seek to change this by fostering complete neighborhoods, where more needs can be met without driving, and by removing requirements such as mandatory parking minimums that essentially require car-dependent development.

- Read: **We Need Complete Neighborhoods**
- Read: **Making Public Transit Work for Seniors**

How We Can Help Foster Change

The goal of Strong Towns is to foster a continent-wide mass movement for change in how our cities and towns approach growth and development. We do this by publishing media, conducting speaking events, and providing platforms for communication among "Strong Citizens" who will be the changemakers in their own communities.

A Strong Towns speaking engagement or webinar for your AARP group is a chance to introduce your members to the Strong Towns approach and how it can help us create more resilient and livable places. We offer a range of presentation options and formats that cover not only the basics of the Strong Towns approach and the problems with the prevailing American development pattern, but also practical examples of bottom-up action—by everyday citizens and policy-makers alike—to address our communities' pressing problems.

We will share our **expertise** in how to bring about change on the ground, including how cities should approach public engagement and identify the highest-returning projects to pursue, and how citizens can push their own local leaders and elected officials to adopt the priorities of a livable, strong community.

We will also **foster discussion** among your group's members through interactive webinars and Q&A sessions about how to implement a Strong Towns approach in your unique community.

We provide access to **resources** including thousands of unique articles, three podcasts, and frequent Q&A webinars, often spotlighting case studies of places around North America that have taken steps back toward a Strong Towns approach to building resilient, livable communities. We can **produce new content** to meet your needs and share it with our audience of 2 million unique readers per year.

We can help you empower and equip citizen advocates to realize the goals of making their own communities more age-friendly and livable. We will connect your group with **The Strong Towns Network**, a rapidly growing community of advocates and change-makers around the world, using platforms we have created to help them connect, self-organize, and share resources on how to make their places strong. From providing **digital gathering places** to encouraging **local conversations** in your community, we're dedicated to helping you move beyond reading our content and use our ideas to take action in your unique community context.

Next Steps

Are you ready to begin scheduling your Strong Towns SWAT engagement? Michelle, our Events Pathfinder, will be reaching out to you through email to set up an initial phone call to learn about your needs and begin to plan how we can help. You can also email her at michelle@strongtowns.org.

