Durham County and the City of Durham 2020-2025 Master Aging Plan Implementation

Like the rest of the nation, Durham is experiencing a significant growth in the number and proportion of older adults. This increase will have a significant social and economic impact in Durham, but also presents an opportunity to embrace older adults as a vital asset who contribute their experience and leadership while continuing to add economic diversity as employers, employees, and consumers. The City of Durham and Durham County recognized the importance of developing a Master Aging Plan (MAP) that not only celebrated aging, but also meets the needs and engages the strengths of all residents toward the goal of building a safe, affordable, accessible, connected, and inclusive community for all ages, races, ethnicities, gender identities and abilities.

To achieve this vision, Durham County and the City of Durham made a commitment to join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities and the World Health Organization Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities. On January 8, 2019, Wendy Jacobs, Chair of the Durham Board of County Commissioners, and Steve Schewel, Mayor of Durham, affirmed their commitment by signing Durham's Age-Friendly Community membership application. This first step in the Master Aging Plan, confirmed a shared dedication to provide fiscally responsible, quality services necessary to promote an age-friendly community.

Development of the Durham MAP was led by Durham’s Partnership for Seniors (DPfS), a long-standing coalition of service providers and community volunteers focused on improving the lives of older adults in Durham. DPfS advocates for older adult issues, promotes and facilitates partnerships, and identifies opportunities to improve the quality of life for Durham residents. Additionally, the Durham County Board of Commissioners has mandated DPfS to serve as the advisory committee for the Home and Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG). In this role, DPfS functions as a resource to the lead aging agency (DCo DSS) by obtaining input and consensus from older adults, care partners, and providers on how to allocate HCCBG funds among aging service providers in Durham.

Durham’s MAP was developed over 10-months and engaged representatives from community organizations who work with older adults, healthcare, public health, Durham City and County government agencies, and individual older adults in the process. The final MAP included a comprehensive list of 33 goals across 9 domains, and included specific strategies and indicators to meet these goals. The nine domains include:

- Outdoor Spaces & Buildings
- Transportation
- Housing
- Social Participation
- Respect & Inclusion
- Civic Participation & Employment
- Communication & Information
- Community Support & Health Service, to include older adult hunger and nutrition
- Elder Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation
During the planning process, nine cross-cutting issues were identified and integrated into all aspects of the MAP.

- socioeconomic status
- racial equity
- LGBTQ+
- dementia
- communication and information
- intergenerational opportunities
- social isolation
- safety/emergency preparedness
- accessibility

Implementation of the Durham MAP’s phase coincided with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of this the MAP’s initial next steps have been delayed. However, many of the stakeholders who participated in the design process came together under the umbrella of the Durham Partnership for Seniors and More (DPfS+ More) to design and implement a COVID-19 response project in the spring of 2020.

The overall goals of the DPfS+ More program were to mitigate the negative impacts to social drivers of health exacerbated by COVID-19 and ensure residents in Durham who are most vulnerable remain socially connected. The main strategy employed by DPfS+ More to meet these goals was to identify, deploy, and provide continuous support to a group of 25 Community Health Promoters (CHPs), who, in turn, supported community members with support with COVID-related needs. CHPs are active members of and leaders in the communities they engaged during the project. This cohort of CHPs was multigenerational, multiracial/multiethnic, and multilingual and included older adults living in senior housing communities in Durham’s city center who volunteer with End Hunger Durham, promotoras from El Centro Hispano, individuals connected to CAARE the Healing Center, and heads of households for families living in public housing. The coordinator of the CHP efforts who is with Project Access of Durham County was also co-lead of the Master Aging Plan development.

On March 1, 2021, a presentation of the MAP was given at the Durham Board of County Commissioners’ work session. Following it, we began steps to implement the MAP. With support of Durham County and the City of Durham, we are proposing the following:

1. Identify a backbone organization or structure to manage several roles related to MAP implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Other roles required for effective implementation are funding, research, quality improvement, capacity building and measurement.

The MAP steering committee recommends establishing an independent 501(c)3 non-profit as this is key to the implementation of the MAP and Durham becoming a more age-friendly community. Our initial plan is to identify a fiscal sponsor that could apply for and accept funding on behalf of the MAP steering committee. The fiscal sponsor is needed as the steering committee formalizes into a board of directors, develops a set of bylaws and applies for 501c(3) status. We are asking for a 1.0 FTE funded by the City and 1.0 FTE funded by the County, along with discretionary funds, to guide the implementation of the MAP. (The request is for $150,000 each from the City and County for each of two years.) We are also asking for commitment from City and County agencies to support the MAP’s efforts with stakeholder engagement, information-sharing, alignment of priorities and strategies and long-term sustainability.
2. **Recruit additional Durham stakeholders to join the MAP Steering Committee.**

During the COVID Pandemic, many partnerships were forged as part of the DPfS+More COVID-Response group. Partners from this group will be tapped to provide additional expertise on the Steering Committee. Stakeholder engagement and support are essential for implementation of Durham’s MAP and to achieve the vision of an Age-Friendly community. In the design of the Durham MAP, three key takeaways were identified regarding stakeholder engagement.

- Durham becoming a more age-friendly community will require broad-based, inter-sectoral collaboration, and coordination.
- The MAP must reflect the complex needs and lived experiences of older adults who face intersecting challenges because of their race, gender identity, SES, health, and social conditions.
- Effective implementation of the MAP will be modeled after the Accountable Care Community model and will start with direct engagement with the same individuals who are the most impacted by barriers, racial and health inequities. This also means centering older adults who experience racial and health inequities in the MAP’s governance and decision-making structure. For this vision to be realized additional stakeholder engagement is required.

3. **Transition the five Livability workgroups that designed the MAP to Implementation workgroups.** The groups’ overall purpose would be to develop and monitor action plans for MAP strategies, determine the timeframe for these action plans and prioritize the implementation of these strategies based on funding and operational feasibility.

By formally entering the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities and the World Health Organization Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities, Durham signaled to these entities a commitment to successfully implement the MAP. In 2021, Durham will move out of the planning phase (Years 1 & 2) and into the implementation phase (Years 3 - 5) when the MAP is formally submitted to AARP and the World Health Organization. Both entities require a MAP evaluation report submitted to them at the end of Year 5. To successfully implement the MAP and track the data for this evaluation report, implementation workgroups will be convened at least quarterly (every 3 months) to track progress on the MAP strategies, make plans to reach indicators, share information and collaborate across community organizations. Implementation workgroup leaders will be responsible for identifying stakeholders and inviting them to become members of the workgroup, convening meetings, building agendas, assessing current goals, strategies, and indicators in light of the COVID Pandemic, engaging community stakeholders across the county, and tracking progress on the MAP goals and indicators. In addition to working group meetings, workgroup leaders will meet quarterly as the implementation team. These meetings will provide opportunities for workgroup leaders to discuss issues and successes during implementation. These meetings will also provide an opportunity to plan for biannual steering committee meetings and quarterly presentations to DPfS.