THE EVENT

This year’s Mayor’s AFC Forum was held on November 20th, 2015 and was another successful event with 86 participants. The theme was **Ageing Across the Spectrum** and residents were joined by students from the local elementary school, Keatsway Public School, and the Bluevale Collegiate Institute to participate in the event along with University of Waterloo students that facilitated the discussions.

Dr. John Lewis from the University of Waterloo and Arlene Groh, AFC Committee Chair, presented the Committee’s past achievements and future goals. After which the guests had the chance to split into round-table discussions to talk about the topics of: Accessibility and Outdoor Spaces, Housing, Transportation, and Respect and Social Inclusion.
OUTDOOR SPACES AND ACCESSIBILITY

The overarching theme of the outdoor spaces and accessibility discussion was the need to foster intergenerational interaction and a stronger relationship with the environment through promotion of the activities and facilities Waterloo has to offer.

Accessibility also needs to be improved through the creation of parks in closer proximity to housing and by better maintaining the sidewalks to increase walkability. Safety is a concern of many residents, which they believe can be mediated through education on the safe use of public spaces. Finally, enhancement of the city’s aesthetics can be achieved through the integration of public art.
The reoccurring theme in the housing discussions was the need for greater affordability and government incentives to build affordable housing, particularly in the LRT corridor. There is a high demand for intergenerational housing and neighbourhoods, rather than solely senior designated communities, as well as a mix of heights and development types. The need for broader education about affordable housing and those in need of it was expressed.

The group also identified that housing design should be accessible and catered to facilitating social interaction that develops a sense of place in Waterloo’s communities. Many indicated an interest in undertaking a pilot program like the Schegel center, which teams up retirement homes with the city’s three post-secondary institutions to create communal living spaces. Implementing daycares within retirement homes was another concept many were fond of.
TRANSPORTATION

The transportation discussions confirmed previous research that transit in the City of Waterloo must be improved in frequency and through the promotion of transit etiquette for all riders. Walkability can be enhanced and become safer through better maintenance and greater accessibility to trails and sidewalks.

Intersections were also an area of concern, which can be mediated by becoming more bike and pedestrian friendly (by extending the allotted crossing time).
Residents’ respect and social inclusion of older adults can be met with greater success once the intergenerational divides in the city are broken through the development of common spaces, such as community gardens. These spaces must spark a shift from senior’s centres to community centres to promote intergenerational programming and encourage aging adults to stay active and involved.

As well, connecting the youth and local schools with inclusive programming can spur a mutually benefiting relationship that generates greater respect between different age cohorts. One idea brought up was to take advantage of the local student population and bring the generations together around technology and digital media.
Overall, this year’s forum was another successful event with a variety of interesting discussions, from which residents walked away with new thoughts and ideas. One aspect that came up in most of the groups was accessibility. Whether in transportation, housing, or outdoor spaces in general, Waterloo’s older residents would like their city to become even more accessible. Since most really enjoyed the attendance and presentations by the elementary, high school, and university students, more intergenerational activities and programs was also something residents wanted to see more in Waterloo. As well, ageism and cultural sensitivity were identified as areas for the committee to address for the following year.

If you would like to find out more about Waterloo’s AFC Committee or to get involved, please visit our website at:
