

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

County identifies key age-friendly needs and priorities

Midhurst/May 24, 2017 – The County released the first phase of its Age-Friendly Needs Assessment, a foundational document that includes priorities and key areas of focus to assist in the development of our Positive Aging Strategy.

The Age-Friendly Needs Assessment Executive Summary includes a comprehensive evaluation of feedback received through public and stakeholder consultations. The document identifies high-level age-friendly needs and priorities. The County will release the full Needs Assessment Report this summer followed by the launch of the *Positive Aging Strategy* by the end of 2017. The *Strategy* will include a detailed planning framework to support regional and municipal governments and businesses in building and strengthening age-friendly communities.

“Trends show that the percentage of our residents aged 55 and over could jump from 31 per cent today to 41 per cent by 2041,” said Warden Gerry Marshall. “We recognize the importance of this shift in demographics and are working with our area partners to identify pressing needs and establish an action plan that will continue to establish Simcoe County as one of the best places in the world to live for residents of all ages.”

The first phase of the Needs Assessment report highlights age-friendly needs, priorities and opportunities for future consideration and development. While the report addresses the World Health Organizations eight dimensions, there were four predominant themes identified in the evaluation:

1. Transportation

- Improve public transportation options in and around the County including reliability and frequency
- Enhance transportation services to get to medical appointments

2. Communication/Information

- Improve access to informational overall including communication of services, programs, events, volunteer opportunities and health services
- Increase access to computer literacy training and intergenerational programming
- Increase co-ordination of information and services among service agencies (59% of respondents don't know about 2-1-1)

3. Affordability

- Develop more affordable housing to address growing waitlists (average wait list time is 3-6 years)
- Encourage development of more diverse housing options that are age-friendly
- Find ways to encourage a variety of people to come out to social events and activities including those on fixed incomes

4. Accessibility

- Improve the accessibility of transportation, public and private buildings, create more accessible parking spaces, and improve accessibility to bus stops and taxis
- Address communication needs of older citizens who may not be sourcing information on the internet

The full Age-Friendly Needs Assessment Executive Summary is available online at www.simcoe.ca/age-friendly

Age-Friendly Committee and Consultation Process

The County established the Age-Friendly Steering Committee to help guide the process. County Council has recently reconstituted the group as an ongoing Age-Friendly Advisory Committee to ensure continued focus and support of our older adults across the region. Feedback and interest in the Age-Friendly Community initiative have been tremendous. The County received 3,048 completed Age-Friendly surveys, conducted 12 informant interviews with community leaders and hosted 16 focus groups across our municipalities. These focus groups were held with caregivers, service providers, social club members, Francophones, newcomers, business owners, aboriginals and senior-living communities based on suggestions received from the Age-Friendly Community Project Steering Committee. The County also hosted eight (8) Public Consultant meetings in fall 2016. Telephone interviews were also conducted in an effort to gather information from harder to reach, isolated and low income older adults.

About the Age-Friendly Community Initiative

In July 2015, the County of Simcoe received \$50,000 in funding from the Government of Ontario as part of its Age-Friendly Community Planning Grant Program. The funding program is operated through the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat and supports local governments and community organizations to undertake strategic planning and develop local plans to address aging demographics and further enable people of all ages to fully participate in community life. For full details, visit simcoe.ca/age-friendly.

County of Simcoe is composed of sixteen member municipalities and provides crucial public services to County residents in addition to providing paramedic and social services to the separated cities of Barrie and Orillia. Visit our website at simcoe.ca.

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