

Livable Communities of Oneida County



Progress Report 2019-2024

Executive Summary

On behalf of the County of Oneida, I am pleased to present the Livable Communities of Oneida County Progress Report for 2019 through 2024.

Oneida County recognizes the importance of promoting age-friendly planning and policies to address changing demographics and enhance independent living. In 2016, our County applied for membership to the AARP Network of Age-Friendly communities, an independent affiliate of the World Health Organization Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities. In 2019, we completed a needs assessment process that included a comprehensive community survey and hosting focus groups throughout the County.

In 2021, the Livable Communities of Oneida County Action Plan was completed with the input of leaders from diverse communities, government bodies, and organizations serving residents from across the County. This Progress Report reflects the Action Plan's two years of assessment and development followed by three years of implementation. It highlights our age-friendly work across eight domains of livability: civic engagement; social participation; outdoor spaces and public buildings; health and community services; housing; transportation; communication and information; and respect and inclusion.

Livable Communities of Oneida County will continue as a collaboration between its three lead partners (The County of Oneida, The Community Foundation of Herkimer & Oneida Counties, and 50 Forward Mohawk Valley) working with many community partners to grow this important age-friendly initiative. The next step will be to develop a new three-year action plan, which will further develop many of the programs and projects already in place as well as add new goals in response to what we have learned over the past five years.

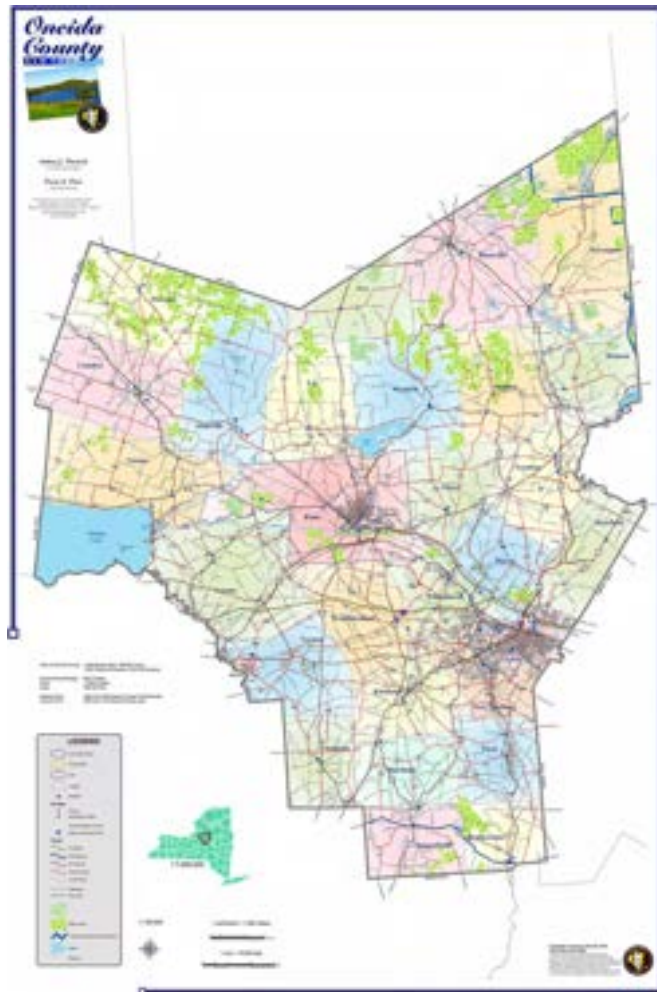


Anthony J. Picente, Jr.
County Executive
Oneida County, NY



Oneida County, NY

Oneida County is situated in the beautiful Mohawk Valley of Central New York. The county is a diverse urban-rural mixture comprised of three cities, 26 towns, and 16 villages. In 2019, the two largest cities of Utica and Rome had a combined population of approximately 96,000, or nearly 42% of the county's total population. In 2020, Oneida County's population was 232,125, and an estimated 20.3% of residents were over 65 years old in 2023 (United States Census Bureau).



Map: Oneida County Department of Planning
Images: Oneida County Tourism

Vision

We believe that communities should provide safe, walkable streets; age-friendly housing and transportation options; access to needed services; and opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities to participate in community life.

Project Development

In 2016, 50 Forward Mohawk Valley (formerly the Parkway Center); Oneida County Office for Aging and Continuing Care; Oneida County Department of Planning; and the Community Foundation of Herkimer & Oneida Counties came together to discuss the AARP Age-Friendly Community initiative and the possibility that Oneida County could become an Age-Friendly Community.

On July 26, 2016, Oneida County Executive Anthony J. Picente, Jr., submitted an application to AARP for membership in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, which was approved on November 18, 2016. Steering Committee members committed to guiding this project and included representatives from the County Departments of Health, Planning, Mental Health, and Office for Aging and Continuing Care as well as representatives from The Community Foundation of Herkimer & Oneida Counties and 50 Forward Mohawk Valley.

Steering Committee members made specific commitments to ensure the initiative's forward momentum. Oneida County committed to providing resources of staff, printing, data entry and support. In 2017, the Community Foundation of Herkimer & Oneida Counties committed to dedicating staff time to the initiative and supporting a two-year project coordinator position, which they continued to renew. 50 Forward Mohawk Valley committed dedicated staff time, resources, and supervision of the Project Coordinator.

Age-Friendly Process

The **Getting Started Phase** began with establishing eight Work Groups to address the eight domains of livability as listed in the AARP guidelines and as outlined by World Health Organization (WHO). Each Work Group was assigned co-chairs from the Steering Committee along with a community leader with a background in, or connection with, the work group's topic.

Representatives from non-profit organizations and businesses as well as community members were invited to serve on the Work Groups. Each Work Group was given the AARP guidelines for their specific domain to begin the discussions. Work Groups were asked to outline positives and weaknesses of the County in their assigned domain, to review Oneida County's "livability score" given by AARP for each area of livability, and to prepare for the next phase: Needs Assessment and Planning.



Oneida County is committed to improving and supporting active and healthy aging for our residents.

Assessment

The **Needs Assessment Phase** was completed in a two-part process: a Community Survey and Focus Groups. The Steering Committee assumed the role of developing a community survey based on the AARP Needs Assessment Survey. The survey was disseminated throughout the entire County in both rural and urban areas. The Project Coordinator held many outreach events at senior centers, local libraries, local eating establishments, senior meetings, community partner events, and health fairs, and tabled at the shopping mall. Utica University Occupational Therapy graduate students assisted in many events. Surveys were collected both on-line and via paper copies. Over 1,700 surveys were completed.



Survey

The Oneida County Planning Department provided staffing resources to analyze the data from the surveys and map the County to ensure surveys represented the entire County.



Focus Groups

A strong partnership was developed with the Utica University Occupational Therapy Program, specifically for conducting, gathering, and analyzing the data from nine focus groups.



Findings

The Community Assessment was completed in 2019. Data gathered through the survey and focus group processes were shared as full reports in the appendix of the final Action Plan.

Action, Evaluation, and Implementation

Action and Evaluation Plan Phase

The Work Groups used the Community Assessment findings to develop Work Plans for their respective livability domains. Each Work Plan contained main action items, goals, specific action items, who would be involved, a facilitator, date for completion, and performance indicators for evaluation purposes. The Work Plans were compiled into the comprehensive 2021 Action Plan.

Implementation Phase

The Steering Committee supported the Work Groups during the phase of Implementation and continued developing the County's Action Plan as a road map for age-friendly initiatives.

Our age-friendly process is designed as a cycle of continuous evaluation and improvement.



Domain 1: Civic Engagement

Our Vision for Oneida County: To expand opportunities for persons of all ages to engage in meaningful paid employment and volunteer positions free from age discrimination. We will improve the level of participation for people of all ages and abilities.



Volunteer Resource Center

In partnership with Oneida County Office for Aging and Continuing Care, 50 Forward MV created a Volunteer Resource Center to connect volunteers of all ages to services for seniors, such as a snow-shoveling program and intergenerational projects.



Job training for older adults

10 Oneida County older adults participated in the Associates for Training and Development (A4TD) program to develop employment skills in 2024.



Self-employment resources

An age-friendly flyer was developed with Mohawk Valley Small Business Development Center to promote self-employment resources available for Oneida County older adult residents.

Domain 1: Civic Engagement



ACTION PLAN GOALS	STATUS
Create a Volunteer Resource Center.	Achieved
Increase opportunities for older adults to secure paid employment.	Achieved
Post-retirement options and pre-retirement planning options are available.	Ongoing
Self-employment options for older adults are promoted and supported.	Achieved

Domain 2: Social Participation

Our Vision for Oneida County: To provide unique opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to connect and feel welcome. To encourage socialization and strengthen the greater community.



Community activities

Working with Oneida County Tourism and Sentinel Media Company, an age-friendly flyer was developed to promote print-based resources that are available to help older residents become aware of activities and cultural events.



Welcoming neighbors

In partnership with The Center, 50 Forward MV has begun offering programs for non-English speaking residents, English-learners, and refugee residents of West Utica.



Senior Theater volunteers

Volunteer-based programs like Senior Theater provide opportunities to socialize and meet new people as well as to share volunteers' artistry with older adults in assisted living communities and nursing homes through on-site performances.

Domain 2: Social Participation



ACTION PLAN GOALS	STATUS
Public is aware of the age-friendliness of events in Oneida County through the use of codes for events and activities across the county.	Re-evaluating
Bridge cultural and linguistic gaps to increase social participation of non-English-speaking individuals and English learners.	Ongoing
Increase knowledge about what events are happening community-wide.	Ongoing

Domain 3: Outdoor Spaces & Public Buildings

Our Vision for Oneida County: To improve entry points, participation, and navigation to new options and opportunities within neighborhoods, open spaces, and buildings for people of all ages and abilities.



Age-friendly zoning

Oneida County Department of Planning will provide sample zoning laws to municipalities upon request that encourage and permit a variety of housing types and accessory dwelling units as well as pedestrian-friendly requirements that connect to community services or public transportation.



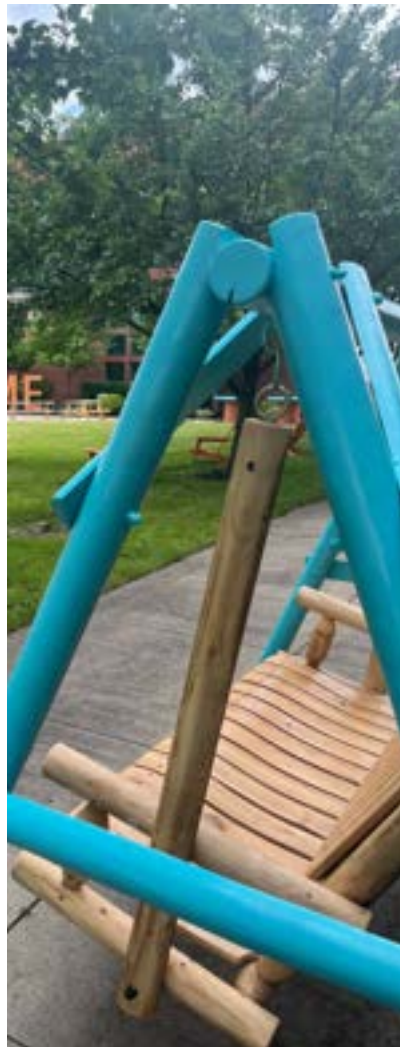
Roscoe Conkling Park

The City of Utica created a new dual-purpose ice rink and pickleball court at the Roscoe Conkling Park, which included new lighting, seating, and landscaping.



City of Rome pop-up project

In 2022, Livable Communities and the City of Rome partnered to implement a temporary installation for testing potential improvements to the Griffio Green around City Hall, with the goal of enhancing year-round programming and special events. The project remained in place all summer for community members to provide feedback.



Domain 3: Outdoor Spaces & Public Buildings



ACTION PLAN GOALS	STATUS
Implement samples of municipal zoning ordinances and design requirements that create accessible, mixed-use neighborhoods with a variety of housing types and services.	Achieved
Improve access to safe, accessible, and welcoming walkways, streets, public buildings, and outdoor spaces for all ages and abilities.	Ongoing
Build capacity for community activities throughout the county by using community centers, senior centers, schools, and other public facilities.	Ongoing

Domain 4: Health & Community Services

Our Vision for Oneida County: To promote, maintain, and restore health by engaging all people and creating an environment to improve community health and quality of life.



Education and outreach

The Oneida County Health Department has provided education on topics such as fall prevention, cancer screenings, and pre-diabetes through various tabling events and presentations within the county.



System of Care

The Oneida County System of Care is a network of services and supports organized to meet the physical, mental, social, emotional, education, and developmental needs of youth and families, including older adults, individuals with disabilities, and caregivers. Multilingual Resource Guide launched at www.oneidacountysoc.com.



Evidence-based programs

50 Forward Mohawk Valley offers eight evidence-based health and wellness preventive programs to sites throughout the county: A Matter of Balance, Aging Mastery Program, Balance & Mobility Progression, Enhance Fitness, Health Literacy, Stay Young Strong Bones, Walk with Ease, and Rock Steady Boxing.



STAY YOUNG STRONG BONES

With Bonnie Fanner

Thursday
1:00 - 2:00

A 14-week exercise program developed at Tufts University by Dr. Miriam Nelson. The program is based upon years of research on how strength training not only improves bone density but reduces falls, improves arthritis symptoms, and increases flexibility and strength

\$20.00 or \$3.00 drop in fee with your 50 Forward membership. The program is free to Silver Sneaker participants with your 50 Forward membership

For more information on membership or to sign up please call 50 Forward at 315-223-3973

I took the Matter of Balance class. Now, I am not afraid of falling so I can continue to ride. It's what I love.

A MATTER OF BALANCE

Join us for the next class
MATTER OF BALANCE
Mondays 12:30 - 2:30
September 9 - October 21
4734 Route 15, Verona Beach

Let's take the guesswork out of it & learn to be a warrior.

This class helps participants learn to:

- Slow falls and the fear of falling to control falls
- Set realistic goals for increasing activity
- Change their environment to reduce risks for falls
- Promote exercise to increase balance

Call **315-235-2029**
for more information or to register
Registration is required

50 Forward
Hempstead Harbor
www.50forward.org

Don't let the fear of falling hold you back.



Domain 4: Health & Community Services



ACTION PLAN GOALS	STATUS
Educate consumers on health and community health services.	Achieved
Promote staff training practices that address the needs of our ethnically diverse aging population including language barriers.	Achieved
Health and wellness preventive classes and information forums including alternative medicine and practices.	Achieved
Promote emergency planning that takes into account the vulnerabilities and capacities of older people.	Achieved
Increase addiction recovery and community reintegration services and awareness of existing services.	Achieved

Domain 5: Housing

Our Vision for Oneida County: To ensure access to safe, accessible, and affordable housing.



Senior housing options

A comprehensive list of senior housing options was created and is shared with the community on the Livable Communities website, to be updated regularly.



Emergency housing

An emergency housing resources list was compiled and is shared with the community on the Livable Communities website, to be updated regularly.



Helping homeless residents

15 units of housing for homeless and frail older adults were established at the Jason Gwilt Memorial Apartments, with support funding from Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI).

Domain 5: Housing



ACTION PLAN GOALS	STATUS
Support aging in place in urban and rural communities throughout Oneida County and provide information on resources to age in place.	Ongoing
Develop home repair service for seniors.	Ongoing
Wheelchair ramps install and reuse program.	Ongoing
Directory of safe and affordable senior housing available throughout the county.	Achieved

Domain 6: Transportation

Our Vision for Oneida County: To increase transportation options that connect people to social activities, economic opportunities, and medical care. To offer convenient, accessible, low-cost alternatives to driving.



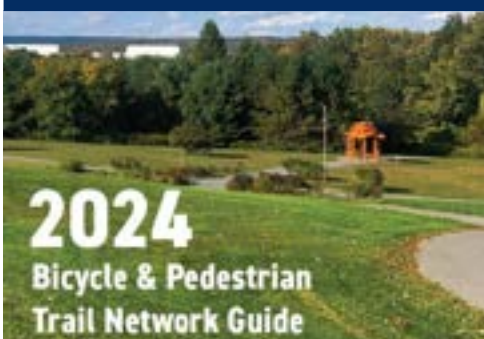
Mobility specialist

A Mobility Specialist was hired to educate, update, and advocate for Oneida County residents on transportation resources and options.



Way2Go

In partnership with the Oneida County Office for Aging and Continuing Care, 50 Forward MV provides non-emergency medical transportation to Oneida County residents using volunteer drivers.



Trail guide

The Herkimer-Oneida Counties Transportation Council developed a comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian trail guide for Oneida County.

Domain 6: Transportation



ACTION PLAN GOALS	STATUS
Educate members of the communities on transportation options and resources.	Ongoing
Work with Oneida County government agencies and community organizations to implement Complete Streets throughout Oneida County. Complete Streets is a statewide initiative to make streets safer for shared use by all transportation types (driving, biking, walking, etc.).	Ongoing
Hold a transportation fair for Oneida County providers (public, private, and volunteer) to come to an informational fair (in person or virtual) to educate the public on their services and answer any questions they have.	Re-evaluating
Facilitate collaboration to improve transportation options for the residents of Western Oneida County.	Re-evaluating

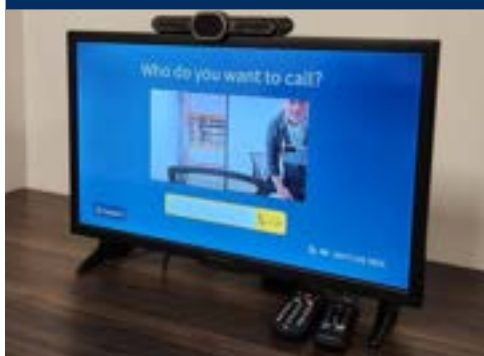
Domain 7: Communication & Information

Our Vision for Oneida County: To create communication strategies effective in engaging community residents of all ages, making sure seniors are aware of activities, services, and programs available throughout the county.



AgeNet communications

AgeNet digital information system was established by Oneida County Office for Aging and Continuing Care and 50 Forward MV. It was installed at participating senior centers to share information about community events and social opportunities.



Technology center

50 Forward West Side tech center opened to provide internet access and education on technology use for older adults.



Website and Facebook

The Livable Communities website and Facebook page were launched to share information about the initiative with partners and residents and to promote age-friendly planning and policies throughout the County.

Domain 7: Communication & Information



ACTION PLAN GOALS	STATUS
Make information and contact information for services and community events easy to access by county residents of all ages.	Ongoing
To identify and promote age-friendly businesses.	Ongoing
Continuous education of newest communication technologies, creating age-friendly communications and the use of positive aging language.	Achieved
To increase communications with older adults.	Achieved

Domain 8: Respect & Inclusion

Our Vision for Oneida County: To increase meaningful and positive engagement by older adults in community life. Needs and preferences of a diversity of older adults heard, considered, and acted upon in planning programs and events. Intergenerational bonds are strengthened.



Intergenerational activities

Intergenerational programs are offered through Utica University's Young Scholars Liberty Partnerships Program (YSLPP) and STEPS program.



Older adult voices heard

Oneida County Office for Aging and Continuing Care held annual public forums to engage older adult residents in public policy and practice and to gather perceptions of respect given to older adults in the community.



Ageism awareness

Phase one of an ageism awareness campaign was implemented through sharing social media posts on Ageism Awareness Day along with a downloadable fact sheet link from the American Society on Aging.

Domain 8: Respect & Inclusion



ACTION PLAN GOALS	STATUS
To increase and diversify involvement of older adults in decision making processes to achieve fair and effective representation of older adults in county, town, and city planning, especially transportation and housing.	Achieved
Create intergenerational opportunities to promote mutual understanding and support positive aging.	Acheived
Increase positive visibility of older adults in local media.	Ongoing
Older adults are engaged in public policy and practice.	Ongoing
Older adults are respected in the community.	Ongoing

Measuring Progress

The Livable Communities of Oneida County 2021 Action Plan established performance indicators for every goal and used this data to track and evaluate progress and community impact. The following are a few examples of specific outputs measured by the project.

Create a Volunteer Resource Center (VRC)	Volunteer outreach coordinators hired; outreach and partners expanded	2024 totals: 28 VRC volunteers; 61 outreach events; 165 RSVP volunteers at 24 stations
Increase opportunities for older adults to secure paid employment	Promoted employment-ready job training programs for older adults	10 older adults participated in A4TD job training and development in Oneida County
Promote evidence-based health and fitness classes and programs	Classes developed and promoted; instructors trained and certified	2,264 class hours and 560 unique participants at 50 Forward MV sites 2022-2024
Increase knowledge about what events are happening community-side	AgeNet digital information systems established in senior centers	AgeNet at 50 Forward Parkway, West Side, and Verona Beach; Camden Life Center; Copper City; New Hartford Square Apartments

Next Steps

In addition to continuing many of the age-friendly goals already in place, we have begun to identify several new goals to be included in our 2025-2028 Action Plan.

- 1 Increase opportunities for older adults to secure paid employment.
- 2 Identify specific causes and potential solutions for older adult residents experiencing social isolation.
- 3 Address issues affecting older adults identified in the current Oneida County housing study.
- 4 Address transportation issues identified by the Herkimer-Oneida Counties Transportation Council 2025-2045 Long-Range Transportation Plan.
- 5 Address safety issues identified by the Herkimer and Oneida Counties Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Safety Action Plan.
- 6 Implement next phases of our Ageism Awareness Campaign, including social media posts and local media articles.
- 7 Conduct outreach to municipalities to spread awareness about the Livable Communities Initiative goals.
- 8 Assist with outreach and volunteerism for the City of Utica's USDA Urban Forestry project which will plant new trees in disadvantaged city neighborhoods.

Age-Friendly Partners

50 Forward Mohawk Valley
Associates For Training and Development (A4TD)
Center for Family Life and Recovery (CFLR)
City of Utica
City of Rome
Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties
Cornell Cooperative Extension Oneida County
Emergency Planners In Inclusive Communities (EPIC)
Empowered Pathways
First Circle
GreenUtica
Herkimer-Oneida Counties Transportation Council (HOCTC)
Johnson Park Center
LIFE at RCIL
Midtown Utica Community Center (MUCC)
Mid-York 2-1-1
Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency
Mohawk Valley Housing & Homeless Coalition
Mohawk Valley Latino Association
Mohawk Valley Small Business Development Center
Oneida County Department of Family and Community Services
Oneida County Department of Mental Health
Oneida County Department of Planning
Oneida County Health Department
Oneida County Office for Aging and Continuing Care
Oneida County System of Care
Oneida County Tourism
People First
Sentinel Media Company
SCORE
The Center
United Way of the Mohawk Valley
Utica Public Library
Utica University
Working Solutions

We thank these agencies and organizations for their contributions and continued support of the Livable Communities of Oneida County initiative.

Contact

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