

Executive Summary

Overview

There is a growing need to develop age-friendly communities to meet the challenges seniors face as they age (Cerde and Bernier, 2013). By the year 2050, the population will be comprised of a greater proportion of older people (aged 60 and over) than children (aged 0 to 14) for the first time in human history (Plouffe and Kalache, 2010). The World Health Organization (WHO) is trying to encourage cities to become more age-friendly and has identified eight key themes, relating to a city's structures, environment, services and policies, which are conducive to a community that promotes active aging (WHO, 2007a). Although active aging is a complex concept and extends beyond solely ensuring that seniors remain physically active, designing neighbourhoods that promote mobility is critical since many seniors want to "age in place" (Smith, 2009). Seniors that experience fewer limitations on their mobility maintain a stronger sense of independence and control over their lives (Hodge, 2008).

Since 2012, the City of Kingston has been engaged in the process of becoming classified as an age-friendly city (City of Kingston, 2012). The City's commitment to this initiative provided the rationale for conducting age-friendly research in Kingston. Specifically, this research sought to examine the age-friendly cities concept, with an explicit focus on those age-friendly features that influence mobility. According to Hodge (2008) the primary factor influencing mobility for seniors is the availability and accessibility of transportation, whether by foot, public transit, a personal vehicle or another mode of transportation. From the eight themes identified by the WHO, the topics of "Outdoor spaces and buildings" and "Transportation" are two topics closely linked to this idea that the physical environment influences an individual's ease of mobility (WHO, 2007a).

Report Objective

The objective of this report was to investigate how two suburban developments in Kingston, Ontario promote mobility for seniors by assessing and comparing the age-friendliness of the pedestrian environment and existing public transportation infrastructure and services. The two suburban developments selected were the recently developed Walnut Grove, an 'adult-lifestyle community', and Bayridge West, an older suburban development. These developments share the commonality of possessing a high proportion of older adults (aged 55+) compared to other areas in the City, and differ in terms of their built form. In addition to comparing the age-friendliness of these two suburban developments, this report also examined whether the weaknesses uncovered through the analyses of these sites were city-wide problems, or site-specific.

Methods

This report used the comparative case study approach (Yin, 2014) to compare the age-friendliness of these two sites. The primary method of data collection involved conducting field observations using a comprehensive evaluation tool to assess different age-friendly attributes of the pedestrian environment and public transportation infrastructure and services. Field observations were conducted over four data collection periods in order to consider time-of-day and seasonal variations. Two rounds of document reviews were also conducted. Round One examined whether the shortfalls observed within the two suburban developments were city-wide challenges or site-

specific problems, while Round Two examined the current commitments of the City to plan for age-friendly communities with respect to the built environment and public transportation.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Bayridge West scored considerably better than Walnut Grove in terms of the public transportation theme, whereas the difference was much smaller in terms of the pedestrian environment. The first document review revealed considerable correspondence between the results of the field analyses and the problems identified by focus group participants for the City of Kingston in general. The second document review found that the City has various action-based and policy-based commitments, along with strategies and visions, for creating a more age-friendly city. However, these current commitments do not address all of the shortfalls identified through this research. As such, four recommendations are proposed for helping the City of Kingston achieve its goal of creating age-friendly communities:

- 1. Conduct an accessibility survey to address the observation of insufficient sidewalk widths.**
- 2. Install bus shelters with benches, route information and lighting.**
- 3. Investigate the feasibility of installing audible traffic signals at existing intersections.**
- 4. Conduct age-friendly evaluation surveys throughout the city.**