

City of Sheboygan designated as Age-Friendly Community

“A man travels the world over in search of what he needs and returns home to find it” said Irish author George A. Moore. As I was looking at Lake Michigan through the windows of the Yacht Club on a beautiful summer morning I reflected on this statement. My recent vacation to northern Wisconsin and the Mississippi reminded me that this state is beautiful but that view struck me vividly. Sheboygan is a location and a community that is hard to beat. Sometimes you need to get away to appreciate what you already have.

And it's going to get better! Sheboygan has been recognized nationally and internationally as the first City in Wisconsin to receive an Age Friendly Community designation by AARP and the World Health Organization. We join only 182 communities across the country working toward making our cities, towns and counties great places for all ages.

Darrell Hofland, City of Sheboygan Administrator, inspired me to research the process after attending a presentation addressing one of the most significant demographic trends in our nation: the aging of the population and its impact on our communities. My excitement grew as I read the application; Sheboygan is already working on many of the aspects that apply to an Age Friendly Community!

Nancy Maring, Neighborhood Development Planner for the city enthusiastically gathered the information and data needed and the three of us met with Mariann Muzzi, Associate State Director for AARP. Encouraging us to apply, impressed by the goals already identified in the city's strategic plan she put us in contact with the folks from East Lansing, Michigan who have been a helpful resource as we go through the process.

So what does it mean? AARP knows from their research that 80% of older adults want to stay in their communities as they age. By receiving this designation the City of Sheboygan has demonstrated its commitment to actively engage in an inclusive cycle of continuous improvement in the “8 Domains of Livability” as identified by the World Health Organization.

What's next? A Task Group will be formed to look at the indicators which influence the health and quality of life for older adults which include housing, neighborhood, transportation, environment, engagement and opportunity. Over the next five years we will work towards increasing Sheboygan's score on the Livability Index. The index is a web-based tool created by the AARP Public Policy Institute to quantify the degree to which a community can meet people's needs, REGARDLESS OF THEIR AGE, income, physical ability, ethnicity, and other factors.

AARP and the World Health Organization state that Livable Communities have higher property values, increased economic activity and save money. They have found that Boomers and

Millenials have similar preferences for walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods. Sheboygan is at the forefront of making sure our community is not only a great place to grow up and work, but is also a thriving area for older adults.

For more information visit: www.aarp.org/livable

Wendy Schmitz, Director

Senior Activity Center of Sheboygan